



HAL
open science

The Waiting Zone

Chowra Makaremi

► **To cite this version:**

Chowra Makaremi. The Waiting Zone. Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies, University of Toronto Press, pp.68-89, 2011, 9781442641297. hal-03039151

HAL Id: hal-03039151

<https://hal.science/hal-03039151>

Submitted on 29 Jan 2021

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

4 The Waiting Zone

CHOWRA MAKAREMI

A sentence uttered makes a world appear
Where all things happen as it says they do;
We doubt the speaker, not the words we hear;
Words have no words for words that are not true.
– W.H. Auden, 'Words'¹

Ghislaine K. is one of the twenty thousand undocumented aliens who are held each year in the detention centre of Roissy Airport in France, in what is called the 'waiting zone' or 'Zapi 3.' She has been put in room number 56, at the end of the corridor. She will be deported back to the Republic of the Congo – from whence she came – three days after her arrival.

1. Giving an Account of Oneself

I met Ghislaine K. while I was doing a field study in the waiting zone while working as a legal assistant. In May 2004 she was 'controlled' upon her arrival at Roissy Airport and considered 'non-admitted' to French territory. She passed through the border control with family reunification documents forged by smugglers, who had also provided her with a fake passport and a plane ticket. Checking her family reunification documents, guards in the border control division contacted the man in France who, according to Ghislaine, was her father. The man denied any family link. It then became clear that she had taken advantage of the family reunification process² to enter French territory illegally. Ghislaine was interviewed for a long time in the police offices located in the airport terminal. As do many detainees, she kept a vivid

memory of this first interview in the police office. She described the initial stage of her trajectory in the waiting zone as a time of anxiety and great humiliation, remembering the annoyed and violent behaviour of the border control agents who rushed her, their irritation when they accused her of being a liar, and how they laughed at her and fiercely accused her of 'taking them for fools.' Ghislaine was then transferred to a cell where eight other people were already being held. She waited there in a room of four square metres, with no window or ventilation, cement walls, and a cement floor on which she and her fellow detainees sat. Those who were not deported within the first six hours following their detainment were transferred to the detention centre located two kilometres away from the airport, a facility with direct access to the runways. The centre is a modern rectangular two-storey building that looks like other buildings in the industrial area, except for the fact that it has a barbed-wire fence, wire-netting four metres high, and surveillance cameras. It can hold 160 people. Inside, the concrete walls are painted in white, yellow, and orange. There are two TV rooms, a garden with a view of the runway, games for the children, and a cafeteria.

As she was being transferred within the waiting zone, Ghislaine met with an officer from the Interior Ministry who asked her to explain her fraud. After this meeting, a request for asylum was registered. Later, Ghislaine was called over the intercom – which regulates detainee life in the centre – and asked to go down to the interview rooms with her police papers. Ghislaine became frightened and locked herself in her room. After several calls, police officers came up to look for her and finally brought her down. However, Ghislaine did not know that the interview she was having was about her asylum application. During the interview, she refused to speak. Although the officer in charge of examining asylum requests invited her several times to 'tell him the truth,' Ghislaine kept on telling the family reunification story her smugglers had taught her. A few hours later, she was notified that her request for asylum was considered 'manifestly unfounded' and had been refused, and that her expulsion was scheduled for the next flight to Congo-Brazzaville. The missed connections between the detainee and the authorities in charge of her asylum request play out an untold narrative which reveals the real issue surrounding the request:

GHISLAINE: I come from far away (*silence*). I come from far away (*silence*).
I come from far away ...

MAKAREMI: The officer did not want to hear you?

G: Yes. I told him, 'Okay, I will tell you everything,' but he threw me out. He said, 'Now it's enough, you are lying anyway, you take us for fools.' They did not want to hear my voice anymore.

M: What did you want to tell them?

G: Well, it's very difficult. At home we were a lot of girls, it was very difficult. My father, he took a new wife, and my stepmother did not want to see us anymore. We couldn't study anymore. I got married young; and I followed my husband to Rwanda.

M: To Rwanda?

G: Yes, my husband was from Rwanda. We went and settled in his village there. I didn't see my father anymore, he didn't even want to talk to us anymore. He died, but I only found out later. Well, one day they came to the village and everyone told you: you must leave now. You knew that they took the people and killed everybody, everybody. I was at home and I left immediately. My husband, I don't know where he was, they killed him, but I managed to leave. Well, we walked a lot. I was with neighbours, and we left, we walked and walked. We had to jump over the dead, so we put on bandanas, you know, pieces of tissue in the nose because of the smell of cadavers. I went back home.

M: To Brazzaville?

G: No, not to Brazzaville, I had no one left there anymore. I was alone, my husband wasn't there anymore, nor my son.

M: You have a son?

G: Yes.

M: And where is he now?

G: I don't know ... he's fourteen. When they came to the village, my son, he was playing with his friends, and then I don't know.

M: You don't know what happened to him?

G: No, when they arrived I left immediately, everybody told you to leave. My son was in the village with his friends, he was outside, I don't know what happened to him, I left confused ... I left for the Congo, but there again there was a war you know. With hope, I had the Lord. The Lord is good, He sees everything ... I pray to the Lord, and for them, the police, I pray for the Lord too. I stood in a church at home, I slept in the church, I cleaned the church and they gave me money. You know, ... I have God. And when they [the officers in Zapi] treat me as if I was nothing ... they don't know my value but God knows my value.

At this point our interview was interrupted by a judicial assistant from the Anafé, the Migrants' Rights Defence NGO working in the waiting

zone. The judicial assistant volunteer had worked before for the International Penal Court in Rwanda and had spent several months in the country. She told me Ghislaine was Rwandan. I asked Ghislaine and she admitted the fact: she was a Tutsi from Congo, of Rwandan citizenship. She had not wanted to reveal her true citizenship because the smugglers had advised her to keep her identity hidden. Moreover, after her past experiences in the Congo, Ghislaine was convinced that if she was known as a Rwandan, she would immediately become undesirable to the French authorities. While she knew that refugees from Rwanda and Tutsi minorities suffer from segregation in the Congo, she was unaware that the French administration employs an affirmative action policy in favour of asylum seekers from Rwanda. However, Ghislaine's narrative did not reach those in charge of administrating her claim.³ She was deported back within the following days.

In the waiting zone, the personal narrative of Ghislaine K. – somehow dislocating the linear coherence of her autobiography – and the story that it tells are disconnected from her administrative file, which looks like a typical case of an illegal migrant abusing the family reunification system through smuggling networks. How has this situation been produced? What do these significant discrepancies teach us about the apparatus of border detention? The experiences of Ghislaine K., like those of many other asylum seekers facing deportation, invite us to consider issues of memory and migration within the national and political framework of controlling borders and mobility, which has been the dominant migration policy in Western democracies in the last thirty years. The present chapter will explore how memory is embedded in the power relations that shape migration control, relations built from issues of narration, 'mis/trust,' and identification.

2. Migration, Narration, Control

The waiting zone is an extra-territorial zone of detention, where undocumented aliens are held from a few hours to several weeks while they await decisions on their entry to a given territory or recognition of their refugee status. In response to security concerns – and the tension between the movement of human capital and the will of Western welfare states to control migration at their borders – new control devices have emerged in the European Union in the last twenty years.⁴ The camp of 'Zapi 3,' in which I conducted field research in 2004, 2005, and 2007, is the heart of a system of alien deportation at the border, based on

a persistent consensus in matters of immigration in the global North that is best summed up by the famous French expression: 'We cannot welcome all the misery of the world.'⁵ The waiting zone is part of a wider policy across the EU, which consists, on the one hand, of ever-stricter control of illegal flows of migration deployed as an electoral matrix of migration policies, and, on the other hand, a shift from reception to control structures, from control to detention – and to a denial of basic rights where the real 'borders' of our democracies are being drawn.⁶ The waiting zones are the result of legal evolutions in modern rules of law, technical adjustment in the disciplinary management of alien populations, and evolutions in the political speech about migration, which is now commonly referred to in terms of a control of 'stocks and flows.'⁷

In France, the Interior Ministry applies the sovereign prerogative of the state over its borders, and complies with EU migration policies through a set of material facilities, administrative procedures, and legal provisions that organize a system of deportation in real-time at the country's borders. However, this deportation policy is restricted by international law and the general presumption to a right of asylum, to which the French state is obligated as contractor of the Geneva Convention (1951). Undocumented aliens registered as asylum seekers at the borders cannot be deported back before their claim is reviewed. In this context, the asylum procedure is a key issue in border detention, as the site where the power of the state has a grasp over refugees who still remain 'outside' – within an exceptional space beyond the normal national legal and administrative frameworks – by making them enter specific administrative classifications and identification processes. At the heart of this decisive moment lie refugees' personal narratives, while their oral audition for state agents is the actual basis of the procedure.⁸ The conditions of the possibility of migration are thus being negotiated in this space of power and language where the 'hosting' national community is being redefined – literally, through a process of filtering and exclusion of those who do not belong, and figuratively, through the affirmation of the rationality and the moral values on which national identity stands, such as democratic assistance or protection of the welfare system against abuses and 'fakes.' For those experiencing this exclusionary relationship at the border, issues of control and resistance adhere to the critical work of 'giving an account of oneself,'⁹ of putting one's memory into words. However, this narration is itself determined by a refugee's immediate situation and the administrative

context of the border detention procedure. Here, the issue of memory is double-sided. On the one hand, these are the narrations drawn from – or not, as a result of mistrust – the personal memory of the migrant: the structure and formulation of these narratives anchor their cultural, social, and psychic condition, including their experiences of border detention. On the other hand, these narrations of memories evoked by border discourses have to confront, fit, avoid, and decode a national memory belonging to the ‘hosting’ country, which is at play in practices and power relations that institute the administrative world of border control and ‘production of indifference’ towards those subjected to it.¹⁰

3. Mis/trust

To understand the mechanism of the denial of personal narrative, we first have to place it in context: the administration of asylum in border detention. At the border, the encounter between the rationality of control bureaucracies and the migrant’s world relies on the notion of trust, or rather mistrust. Valentine Daniel and John Knudsen have opened a critical path to an anthropological outlook on (forced)-migration by putting in perspective the existential experience of disruption that operates within the techniques of movement control and restrictive policies of asylum in the West.¹¹ This anthropological outlook synthesizes the experience of refugee-ness as a ‘process of the breakdown of trust’ in which ‘the refugee mistrusts and is mistrusted.’¹² This sense of mis/trust is the one that appears spontaneously in Ghislaine’s narration about her detention. The power relation between state agents and migrants, within the process of refugee determination, is based on an exercise of mutual mis/trust about the identity of the detainees, their stories, and their origins. However, Daniel and Knudsen use the word in a given meaning, opening the double-sided experience of disruption and of control to another level of understanding: ‘By trust we do not intend a largely conscious state of awareness, something akin to belief, but rather its opposite ... what Martin Heidegger called “being-in-the-world.”’¹³ It is the breakdown of this familiar way of *being-in-the-world* that Ghislaine experiences in the waiting zone, when she locks herself in her room in fear of being tortured after she is called for her asylum interview – not knowing that it is her only chance of negotiating a way out of the zone.

The trajectory of detainees at the border is, most of the time, beyond their understanding, stuck as they are between the urgency of

administrative decisions and the indefinite time of the waiting. The first denial which Ghislaine experienced is the denial of information. Lack of information is what creates the atmosphere of psychological insecurity in this centre, where the windows have no handles. The practice of detention institutes the border control through physical isolation of the person, which is characterized by difficulty in communicating with the outside world, and intensified by the absence of information within the centre. When information is actually provided, it is in a language that detainees do not speak. Detainees do not know what their judicial status is, nor their rights and their fate. Often, they are driven to the court without being notified of the high stakes of their audience; what the appointed lawyer says in their defence is not translated to them. In the waiting zone, they have no clue of where they are being transferred under escort (up to several times a day), and thus live in the constant fear of being driven to the plane and expelled by force. These factors of insecurity and worry make the relationships between detainees and state agents difficult. This is mainly the framework in which the chaotic trajectory of Ghislaine, who came with falsified family reunification documents and was finally registered as an asylum seeker, took place.

Such a degree of incomprehension and ignorance about the French political and administrative systems can create deep psychic distress for the refugees. This is somehow acknowledged by the anti-suicide measures in the facilities: no plastic bags for garbage, no plastic knives or forks, no razors (the Red Cross humanitarian mission is in charge of shaving the detainees). The security measures are the same as in jails, and the prison environment manifests in the specific relations to time and space.

The exile experiences transit and detention at the same time, trapped in time they do not control between long periods of empty waiting, which form the everyday life of border detention, and the urgency of hearings and proceedings that set the rhythms for their administrative lives. The decision to authorize or refuse asylum seekers entry to the country is rendered by an officer from the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless People (OFPRA),¹⁴ after a hearing for the asylum seeker. The hearing takes place in a closed room, face-to-face between the state agent and the detainee. One of the consequences of this practice is that the state proceeds directly, without mediation, in a condensed time and space. Ghislaine's reaction of fear and resistance towards this bureaucratic system reveals the force of an encounter that,

in such proximity, is almost a direct physical confrontation between the state – its essential territorial sovereignty affronted – and the alien who is considered responsible for this infraction. A characteristic of the asylum process at the border is the time pressure that relates to the urgency of real-time management of human flows. Observation shows that asylum seekers who arrived at the airport at 10:00 a.m. were transferred to the holding centre by 2:00 p.m., had a hearing with the OFPRA officer by 4:30 p.m., were notified of refusal on the following day – and finally deported back by the evening. Time and urgency superimpose themselves on a fragmented space, where proximity is intensified at all levels. As Denis Salas – a magistrate working in the court division in charge of undocumented aliens – highlights, the hearings with the civil liberties magistrate in charge of watching and extending the administrative detention after seventy-two hours, take place in haste and material proximity, which results in suppressing the symbolic power of justice.¹⁵ The same contiguity applies to administrative hearings, in the offices of the police, the Interior Ministry, as well as the OFPRA, which are entirely compartmentalized areas in the holding centre. The fragmented space suppresses distance. But the devices of space and time also enclose the administration of asylum: on the one hand, it crushes subjective elements, such as the individual narrative, which is supposed to be the very basis for the judgment; on the other hand, it muzzles the proceedings' dysfunctions that could surface in an integrated process.

Migrants at the border are in a moment of exile, which is 'a vacuum form of existence,'¹⁶ with no references, no criteria of definition, nor models of identification: they exist without having any official existence. Border detention is a space of suspicion about one's name and identity, where the alien is no longer himself, identical and identifiable. Ghislaine, who came to France with a fake passport, exists in the waiting zone under a fake name and a fake nationality. This is why the administrative lists of detainees in the holding centre lack clear personal names, and registered her as: 'Ms. K ... *alias* W ... or X1.' Then, the question is: How is one's identity transformed at the instant when one becomes X1, a 'human being in general ... *and* different in general, representing nothing but his own absolutely unique individuality which, deprived of expression within an action upon a common world, loses all significance'?¹⁷

In terms of administrative practice, as well as subjective experience, this 'vacuum form of existence' involves issues of anonymity and identity. Or rather, it mixes the multiple losses of identification that

configure the aporias of border detention: the inability for the administration to identify the detainee and the inability for the detainee to identify the world he is dwelling in. Mis/trust becomes a complex and double-sided process in this situation, which brings about a 'crisis of the presence,'¹⁸ where notions such as the familiar, the identical, the identifiable lose meaning, opening the path to radical political forms of life. In his ethnographic study of ritual dances in southern Italy, Ernesto de Martino documents a psychic and cultural process of blurring of the self under socio-political situations of domination in which he refers to the danger of 'not being there anymore' versus the evidence of being there as a presence identical to oneself.¹⁹ What de Martino identifies as a 'crisis of the presence,' which offers clues for exploring further the process of a 'radical disjunction between ... familiar *way-of-being* in the world and a new reality of the socio-political circumstances,'²⁰ also acquires a second meaning in border detention. It introduces us to the desubjectifying practice of deportation – another crisis of the presence – in which unwanted asylum seekers are transported as a pack, with their hands and feet bound together and their mouths taped shut. This violence, which is the horizon of border detention, is a decisive form of mistrust: the last step in 'radical disjunction.' It is a lack of trust that expels the detainee from the space of language and negotiation, entailing the process that changes him into a body, without legal or political status, that must be taken care of and eventually deported. G: '... he threw me out. He said, "Now it's enough, you are lying anyway, you take us for fools." They did not want to hear my voice anymore.'

4. Subjects at the Margins

Facing several interviews, either Ghislaine maintained her version of family reunification, which was revealed to be fake upon first check, or she kept quiet. However, she also asked twice to be heard, showing the desire to 'tell everything' about her situation, in vain. First, at the very end of her interview with the Interior Ministry agent, she changed her mind and told the officer that she was ready to tell him 'all the truth.' But her hearing was over and her interlocutor asked her to leave the office. After she received her notification of refusal, once again, Ghislaine asked to be heard, as she was now willing to deliver the true version of her story; this request was left unanswered. Ghislaine had the strong feeling that narrative mediation had been

denied her. She felt that her story remained confiscated. While the migrant is reduced to a silenced body, however, her personal narrative emerges – finally. In a game of resistance and power, the alternative practice of narration – coming too late – embeds the reifying horizon of administrative control within original practices of ‘subjectivation.’²¹ Using the notion of subjectivation to understand Ghislaine’s confiscated narrative identifies relations and techniques of domination that have a structuring effect. However, these relations and techniques cannot be understood in terms of an ‘alienation,’ insofar as a subjectivity is re-defined – foremost by the subject itself – in the very moment of subordination. Individuals form themselves as moral and political subjects within the relation that subjects them to an exercise of a power. The moment of bureaucratic categorization and administrative moral judgment is also the moment of resistance and individual affirmation through the drawing of one’s singular – although reactive – moral cosmology, bound in one’s long-standing itinerary. Although Ghislaine would not put it in these words, asylum appears intuitively as a key element of her wandering. It is an extension of another ‘asylum,’ that of the church, a traditional space of ‘asylum’ in the history of the West that has long been one for her in the Congo:

I left for the Congo, but there again there was a war you know. With hope, I had the Lord. The Lord is good, He sees everything... I pray to the Lord, and for them, the police, I pray for the Lord too. I stood in a church at home, I slept in the church, I cleaned the church and they gave me money. You know, ... I have God. And when they [the officers in Zapi] treat me as if I was nothing ... they don’t know my value but God knows my value.

The exile answers to police mistrust by reminding us of her flight and refuge in a church. This narration takes place at a moment when she is confronted by administrative definitions and classification of asylum, which she discovered for the first time at the French border since she was ignorant about the ‘right of asylum.’ During her detention, like the other detainees, she kept her police papers and her refusal notification with her all the time. However, it is significant to notice how little she understood the issues at stake in her asylum request and the meaning of its refusal. Indeed, Ghislaine first told me she had not claimed asylum, nor had she been interviewed for this purpose. When I explained to her what an asylum interview looked like, she recognized that she

had gone through a similar process indeed, but she did not know who was interviewing her, or the purpose of the interview. Gathering her memories of flight in a narration that revives the historic and cultural roots of asylum in the West, Ghislaine's narration frames her own definition of refuge as an assimilation of, and a reaction to, the process of refugee determination through which she experienced the administrative exclusionary violence. Her experience of mis/trust and state control is thus an experience of subjectivation: an 'operation by which individuals and communities constitute themselves as subjects, at the margins of constituted knowledges and established powers, even if it means giving place to new knowledges and powers.'²² Through mobility and its control, populations on the move are engaged in disjuncture and recompositions of the definition of the self in its social, political, and moral dimensions.

5. Linearity and Violence

Thus, what is at stake is a moral redefinition of subjects, initiated by different elements such as self-narration, the status of the lie, standards of truthfulness of a story,²³ the disqualification of the detainee by the police officers who blame her for an abuse of the system, and the way she recaptures dignity in response by referring to transcendent values to counter the moral accusation of 'abuse.' The issue of moral definition is not a side effect of administrative categorizations; rather, I argue that it takes a great part in the very practice of categorization. The relation of the nation to the stranger, in the context of the idea of hospitality, is a key element in the moral qualification of detainees. This process of moral qualification participates in shaping the power relations at play in detention.

The interviews that mark out the asylum process in detention are all based on specific administrative rationalizations, which participate in this dehumanizing situation of confusion. Reasons for refusing asylum claims include the argument of a 'manifestly unfounded' (*manifestement infondé*) request, the denunciation of 'stereotyped narratives,' and of inaccuracies 'capable of throwing doubt' (*de nature à jeter le doute*) on the authenticity of the claim. Such arguments are built on two fictions: first, the good faith of the OFPRA officer, who works under the pressure of restrictive rates of admission;²⁴ and, second, the ability of the asylum seeker to recapture an autobiographical linearity and to relate, in a perfectly coherent way, a relevant version of his or her life story in a short

amount of time – an average of ten to twenty minutes. Ghislaine's trajectory in the waiting zone is regulated by succeeding interviews, which are characterized by a proliferation of interlocutors, brevity, and the repetition of misunderstandings between administrative officers and the detainee. During her detention, Ghislaine has, in total, four interviews of ten to fifteen minutes each; she is invited several times to 'tell her story.' The personal narrative is the basis on which the administration examines asylum demands. Indeed, the narrative – in its coherence and its credibility – is what determines the 'good faith' of the asylum seeker. The autobiographical narrative also establishes whether the personal case of the asylum seeker fits into the receiving country's asylum criteria, set up after the Geneva Convention on Refugees of 1951. These criteria, in the case of France but also allestern countries in general, are evolving towards an ever more restrictive interpretation of the Geneva Convention. Moreover, norms of narration do not accept temporal voids: the 'truthfulness' of the claim requires all events to be in a line, strictly following each other from the threat, to the flight, to the arrival. In contrast, Ghislaine's story seriously challenges these standards of linearity. What did she do between the early years of 2000 to 2005 when our meeting took place? Why would the French state offer her asylum for a danger she suffered several years ago – as numerous decisions of refusal argue? Ghislaine, after she learned that one of her cousins was living in France, planned to join her, and spent the last eight years earning and borrowing the money to pay the smugglers. In fact, intolerance to suspensions in the trajectory of the autobiographical narrative ironically overlooks a critical reality of migration: exiles have to find ways of getting out and reaching well-protected, safer countries – mobility is expansive. In contrast, narrative standards of bureaucracy dismiss the unequal conditions of mobility in favour of more control. The asylum seeker is required to tell in a linear form the reason why her life has taken the path it has, to report the succession of her flights in the right order and to explain the reasons for them, to distinguish different types of violence she lived through – the one during the genocide and the one that burst out later in Congo, each of which would subsequently be classified as either fitting the French interpretation of the Convention or not.

Facing her interlocutor's demands for narration, not only does Ghislaine keep quiet, but also, when she finally does tell her 'story,' it is marked by suspensions and digressions. She described again her husband's death and her escape from Rwanda in detail. She remained

vague and became confused when she talked about the civil war in Congo from 1998 to 2000. In contrast, she came back several times to the massacres in Rwanda, yet showed difficulty in seizing a linearity in her autobiography of the past ten years, from her escape to the Congo to her arrival in France. As I suggested earlier, this non-linear narrative is a subjective reappropriation of the experience of forced migration and its control. It recaptures a voice that '*they* did not want to hear anymore' and opposes both her exclusion from the space of language, and the submission of her language (her narrative) to the linearity that is forced on asylum seekers. In this context, Judith Butler offers precious insight on the specific, 'ethical' violence implied in a process of refugee determination based on coherent narration, and helps us reread the confiscated narrative of the detainee: if we (violently) require that another do a certain violence to herself, and do it in front of us by offering a narrative account or issuing a confession, then, conversely, if we permit, sustain, and accommodate the interruption, a certain practice of non-violence will follow.²⁵

At the margins of bureaucratic hearings, moments of self-narration play an important role in the social life of the border camp. They carry on another function of the camp that opposes bureaucratic purposes: a process of re-socialization after the journey. This alternative, non-linear narration plays on a *minor modus*, opening spaces of intimacy within the housing facilities where the administration of the detainee population performs a confiscation of intimacy. While the main Red Cross office stands as the key centre of everyday life in the camp, Red Cross workers report that a small office at the end of the corridor – the 'second office' – is in fact more important. Personal stories and confidences are told there, announced by the ritual question 'Can I see you in the second office?'²⁶ These narrations between detainees or with non-bureaucratic actors allow refugees to tell their stories in ways that can freely diverge from the standards of linearity and truthfulness set by the refugee determination procedure. Narrators take the liberty to detail some facts extensively and to silence others. They can insist retrospectively on certain important elements of their personal autobiography, which have been key elements in constructing the trajectory that brought them to the border, even if the link does not clearly appear to the auditor:

M: What did you want to tell them?

G: Well, it's very difficult. At home we were a lot of girls, it was very difficult. My father, he took a new wife, and my stepmother did not want to

see us anymore. We couldn't study anymore. I got married young; and I followed my husband to Rwanda.

I remember an Eritrean asylum seeker, who had escaped the army that had abducted her, sitting on her bed in the waiting zone, describing in detail for a long time the summer afternoon when she went to the train station and waited anxiously for her two brothers who were engaged in the war at the Ethiopian border, ten years before she herself was abducted. She told how for hours she went from groups of officers to boards with lists of names, until she eventually found out that her brothers had been killed, and fainted. Resistance is performed through techniques of an autobiographical re-conquest: telling the personal story that lies beyond the one taught by the smugglers – the one linked with a name that then is kept silent. In these moments that interrupt imposed linearity, the narrator looks back on his journey and possibly gathers information: she inserts the conditions and effects of her detention within her narration. Her actual experience at the border is being embedded in the trajectory of her exile. The narration reintegrates a crucial issue dismissed by asylum administration: the way border control emerges within a larger migratory trajectory and the way it will influence it – particularly through the impact of deportation. Emerging and confiscated narrations at the borders inform the ways that migrants detained at the border experience subjectivation and – temporarily – occupy a *place* again, be they assigned to it or claiming it, be they confronting it or resigned to it, be they wanting to go around it or to avoid it.

6. Memory and the State

Migration entails the loss of the social frame in which migrants were born and in which they have set up their own place in the world – the space where they once existed. However, what makes the case of these undocumented aliens singular is not the loss of their place in the world, but rather their difficulty in finding any other place. Deprived of citizenship, the undocumented alien is put aside from the human community, insofar as it is understood by a 'community of nations.' Hannah Arendt relates the aporetic refugee system to the system formed by a community of nation states, such that whoever is excluded from one of the political communities is excluded from the entire family of communities.²⁷ According to the law, the detainee who

leaves her country to come to France with a fake passport, and who is refused entry to the territory, can leave for any other destination of her choice where she would be legally admitted; however, without a passport, she will be received nowhere. Suddenly, there is no place on earth where the detainee can go. It is not a matter of available space (that there is not enough room for him on Earth), but a matter of political organization.

Despite being tied to a nation state--centred conception, Arendt's analysis reveals an essential issue: the question of citizenship and its relationship with the 'boundary.' For Arendt, there is no useful distinction to be made between refugees and people who decide not to benefit from the protection of their state: refugees are considered as *de jure* stateless, whereas the others are *de facto* stateless. While state sovereignty thwarts the full realization of the rights of man (or *because* it does), such rights cannot be protected without the sovereign state. Arendt's analysis shows, through historical cases, the tension between the *idea* of the universal and its application, which depends, in practice, on state traditions and contexts. Theoretical notions of right of asylum and humanitarian assistance are embedded in actual national practices and administrative rationalities, which reflect and give a form to a state memory. Ghislaine's trajectory shows an ambivalent process of judgment and compassion: while, on the one hand, her 'voice' is not heard and she is mocked and eventually deported back, on the other hand, the initial officer was compassionate in a manner that is exceptional in the context of the practices I observed in the waiting zone during three years of field study. In border detention, police more often than not fail to register asylum claims so as to deport the migrants immediately – which is one of the main violations of basic rights denounced by external observers.²⁸ It has to be noted, however, that the officer acted in favour of Ghislaine after this first interview, insofar as he registered an asylum request even though she had not explicitly asked for it – an exception in administrative practices. Bad will and bad faith of state officers are often denounced when external observers refer to unacceptable situations of border detention and indignant treatment in the waiting zones. However, an examination of the concrete functioning of the border and the way it shapes subjective experience shows that such abuses by the state officers are not the key elements responsible for this reality, which appear instead to be a series of misunderstandings and lost occasions. Rather, what the functioning of the border control points to is an apparatus that socially produces exclusion and the inhumane practices

of deportation. I argue that these administrative encounters are shaped by memory in three ways.

First, interactions between bureaucrats and their 'clients' presuppose that the client masters specific rationalities and convincing ways of being that in fact draw lines of national exclusion and make them effective.²⁹ At the border, administrative responses to asylum claims – based on argumentative and rhetorical tools integrated by the bureaucracy to demonstrate that the demands are ill-founded – show how the disjunction between these national terms of reference and the claimants' moral and rational systems produce exclusion. The resulting mistrust is intimately bound to national memories on both sides. For the migrants, the encounter with the administration (and the more powerful and specific administration of the police) is determined by national culture and practices, and former experiences of administrative interactions. Ghislaine's mistrust emerges from a memory of fear. Ghislaine was heard, however, several times by different officers; in her twisted trajectory, she is the one responsible for making her case nearly inaudible to the officers working in the administration of the waiting zone. As she confessed to me, she was afraid of being tortured once it became obvious that she had lied to the police. This is why she did not show up when she was notified to, and why she refused to reveal her true citizenship and to tell her personal story when she was urged to. Had Ghislaine been more informed about where she was and about what asylum meant, she would have also known that this kind of interview can in no way turn into torture. Ironically enough, her failure to address her narration to the administration in charge of asylum appears as the more 'tangent' demonstration that she needed asylum. That cultural and moral disjunctures between the detainee and the administration eventually led to the confiscation of Ghislaine's narrative, calls into question bureaucratic indifference as a means of management and control.

Second, the administrative world in charge of managing detainees is less a system of its own than it is a mirror of national myths and shared moral values forged in the public sphere. Offering complementary, although challenging, insights into the works of the Frankfurt School about the epistemic ground of administrative rationality,³⁰ and the work of Hannah Arendt on the 'banality of evil,'³¹ Michael Herzfeld argues that the process of administrative classification is an application of the nationalistic logic 'of distinguishing between insiders and outsiders, and of representing these distinctions as given in nature – as

matter of essence rather than of cultural or historical contingencies.³² Post – Second World War theories on bureaucracy tended to identify it as a somehow auto-referential machinery capable of applying, through specific hierarchies and rationalities, any national policy – including the mass killing of millions of Jews. However, Herzfeld goes further in his empirical investigation and analysis, arguing that the classificatory impulse on which administrative rationality stands is very much tied to national conjuncture since it is produced by a national memory of the inside and the outside. This national memory shapes the ‘social production of (administrative) indifference,’ which is so striking in Ghislaine’s experience with French administration; ‘the power to refuse hospitality is the basis on which indifference is built: it is a denial of common substance.’³³ In this regard, it is significant to note that, since the mandate of President Nicolas Sarkozy, bureaucracies of the Interior Ministry and Foreign Affairs have been reorganized and merged in a new Ministry of ‘Immigration, Integration and *National Identity*.’³⁴

Third, the process of claiming and attributing asylum is embedded in a postcolonial memory of national histories and relations of power. In the novel *Transit*, by Djiboutian writer Abdourahman A. Waberi, the central protagonist, ‘Harbi,’ who is an asylum seeker waiting at Charles de Gaulle Airport, goes on a long and bitter soliloquy:

I can’t wait to find some kind of peace of mind and body again. To control my brain where morbid and incongruous ideas run wild, smother this little giggling voice. Stick back together the pieces of my dislocated being. In a word, get used to my new identity. A memory firmly rooted in the nest of my mind is coming back to me. I must have been four years old, maybe five and I can see again very clearly the frightened look on the child’s face. One day, in the company of my aunt, we passed on an avenue in our neighborhood some soldiers on patrol. Just like a chrysalis about to blossom, the question came all by itself:

- Who are these people?
- They’re the French, our colonizers.
- And why are they here?
- Because they are stronger than us.³⁵

Significantly, the memory of the colonized past binds to the present situation of confinement and asylum claim in the protagonist’s free association of thought. Why is it ‘coming back’ in transit at the border? Waberi’s literary fiction evokes how a memory of colonial domination,

and its actualization in the global world, shape practices of (forced) migration and asylum. This is made clear through the administrative practice of giving more credit to certain asylum claims according to the country of origins. The French state has long applied, and still applies, an affirmative action policy towards asylum seekers from Rwanda. This policy is not without links to the ambiguous role of France in the Rwandan genocide and the catastrophic French intervention during these events.³⁶ Being aware, as an actor in the waiting zone, of these informal rules in the administration of asylum, I came to understand Ghislaine's history in border detention in terms of mis/trust, and to measure how disjuncture is reorganized as a mean of management and control when I realized she did everything to hide her Rwandan nationality to the administration. She was not aware that being known as a Rwandan would not expose her to persecution, as it would in the Congo, but would rather help her to benefit from less restrictive criteria in regards to her asylum claim.

Another example of how national political consideration is connected to both a postcolonial memory and actual power relations, while also shaping asylum devices, came in the winter 2004–5 when hundreds of asylum seekers from Ivory Coast were quickly refused entry and sent back into their country. Ivory Coast had been engulfed in violence in what was the beginning of a civil war. When French troops tried unsuccessfully to intervene, they were exposed to military attacks and denunciations of 'postcolonial domination,' and finally withdrew. On Christmas Eve, 2004, an Ivorian asylum seeker facing deportation cut his throat with a bottle of aftershave. A few days later, a Congolese refugee who had been living in a refugee camp in Ivory Coast, which he had left after the camp was attacked and the people massacred, was deported back by force. For a few months, I received his e-mails: he was terrified; he was hiding and asking for help.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the core issues of border detention practices are not the 'dysfunctions' and other unfortunate mistakes inherent to devices of control, but instead their very functional characteristics. The waiting zone is a greased machine that plays a game of denial, mapping the borders of democracy. The story of Ghislaine K. offers insight into the power practices at stake in the administration of detainees, and the treatment of asylum demands as involving a process of

denial of the asylum seeker's narrative – her memory of lifelong migrations and flight. Humiliated, confused, fiercely accused of taking the police for fools, the detainee also experienced efforts to recapture one's autobiographical integrity within an administrative trajectory made of disruption and silence in a waiting zone. What her confiscated personal narrative relates is a search for asylum, which is denied her.

Mechanisms of the seizure of individual narratives are entailed by a conjunction of different factors. These heterogeneous elements all stem from the perception by the French authorities of the migratory 'problem,' and the administration of asylum that results from such a perception, in terms of disciplinary management of flows and the fight against perceived abuses of the welfare system. Migration and its control install asylum seekers in processes of subjectivation that are articulated around issues of mis/trust. The narration of exile is the basis on which asylum procedures are administrated. Yet, this narration is opposed by bureaucratic rationalities that are anchored in national logics and memory, and by a demand for linearity as the support of truthfulness and ethical judgment, which result in the suspension of confiscated and alternative narrations – the confused work of a 'living' memory, 'something we might tentatively call the truth of the person, a truth that, to a certain degree ... might well become more clear in moments of interruption, stoppage, open-endedness – in enigmatic articulations that cannot be translated into narrative form.'³⁷ However, in defining 'living' memory, Judith Butler makes clear that her purpose is not to celebrate 'a certain notion of incoherence, but only to point out that our "incoherence" establishes the way in which we are constituted in relationality: implicated, beholden, derived, sustained by a social world that is beyond us and before us.'³⁸ The violence of border detention is in the collapsing and the illegibility of this social world. 'Mistrust' doubly binds migrants to the violence of an 'address' which constitutes them as subjects of control, and to the assignation into silence where the 'incoherence' of singular narratives becomes trapped within the evolution from relationality to the exercise of a force.

Ghislaine K. was deported back, supposedly to Congo. I know this because of two letters in front of her name on the police list, 'BE,' which stand for *Bien Embarquée*, meaning 'well-taken on board.' I do not know what became of her, as is the case for many other well-boarded asylum seekers. For them, border detention and deportation will be a memory in a long-lasting journey, of which we, on this side of the fence, know so little.

NOTES

- 1 W.H. Auden, *Collected Poems* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1976), 473.
- 2 The 'family reunification' is the process by which family members of a migrant can legally come and reside in the same state. In EU member states, the conditions under which migrants are 'authorized to bring their spouse, under-age children, and the children of their spouse' are rigorously restricted and can be submitted to 'contracts' of cultural integration, age restrictions, and DNA tests to prove family links, as is the case in France (*Loi du 20 novembre 2007 relative à la maîtrise de l'immigration, à l'intégration et à l'asile*). For further developments, see Chowra Makaremi, 'On the Spirit of Laws: Some Reflections Concerning the "DNA Law" in France,' *Eurostudia* 3, no.2 (Dec. 2007), <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/017839ar> (accessed 25 August 2008).
- 3 I addressed a letter to the office in charge of asylum, explaining Ghislaine's story and asking for another asylum audition for her. This request was left unanswered, as is usually the case in the waiting zone.
- 4 Ryszard Cholewinski, 'No Right of Entry: The Legal Regime on Crossing the EU Border,' in *In Search of Europe's Borders: Immigration and Asylum Law and Policy in Europe*, Vol. 5, ed. E. Guild, K. Groenendijk, and P. Minderhoud (The Hague / London / New York: Kluwer Law International, 2003), 105–30; Chowra Makaremi, 'Alien Confinement in Europe: Violence and the Law: The Case of Roissy-Charles de Gaulle Airport in France,' in *The Camp: Narratives of Internment and Exclusion*, ed. Colman Hogan and M. Marín Dòmine (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 39–54.
- 5 Jacques Rancière, *Aux bords du politique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998).
- 6 Étienne Balibar, *Nous, citoyens d'Europe? Les frontières, l'Etat, le peuple* (Paris: La Découverte, 2001), 191 et seq.
- 7 Didier Bigo, 'Detention of Foreigner, States of Exception, and the Social Practices of Control of the Banopticon,' in *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge*, ed. Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 3–35.
- 8 Unlike the asylum procedure that takes place on French territory, at the borders there is no option of using an asylum form or written demands; the whole process is oral and takes place in an extremely short period of time. The audition can last from ten minutes to two hours, and the answer is usually given one to three days after the claim has been registered. Asylum seekers applying from within French territory have one month to complete their written demand, which is then followed by an oral interview.

- 9 Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).
- 10 Michael Herzfeld, *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- 11 E. Valentine Daniel and John Knudsen, eds, *Mistrusting Refugees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
- 12 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Office Nationale de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides. Officially, OFPRA officers give a consultative notice to the Interior Ministry, which is in charge of the final decision. In practice, OFPRA's decisions are systematically applied.
- 15 Denis Salas, "'Incrimnés, discriminés ...': immigration illégale et pratiques judiciaires en France," *Hommes et Migrations*, no.1241 (Jan.-Feb. 2003): 78–88.
- 16 See Smaïn Laacher, *Après Sangatte, ... nouvelles immigrations, nouveaux enjeux* (Paris: La Dispute, 2002).
- 17 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 302 (emphasis added).
- 18 Ernesto de Martino, *Le Monde Magique, Oeuvres, I* (Paris: Editions Synthelabo, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1999), 151.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 95.
- 20 Daniel and Knudsen, eds, *Mistrusting Refugees*, 1.
- 21 Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité II: l'usage des plaisirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984); and 'Le sujet et le pouvoir,' in *Dits et Ecrits*, Vol II, 1976–88 (Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 2001), 1041–61.
- 22 Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparlers* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1992), 206 (author's translation).
- 23 Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
- 24 Three per cent of asylum claims at the border were accepted in 2003. The rate has risen to about 10 per cent since 2004. The admission of asylum seekers at the border had shifted towards a restrictive tendency in recent years, before the National Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless People decided in 2004 to harmonize its admission decisions at the borders with the rates of refugee acceptance by the territory, which vary from 12 to 20 per cent.
- 25 Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 65.
- 26 Chowra Makaremi, interview with a Red Cross worker, 7 July 2005.

- 27 Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 297.
- 28 Association Nationale d'Assistance aux Frontières pour les Etrangers (Anafé), 'Une France inaccessible: rapport de visites en aéroports, zone d'attente de Roissy-Charles de Gaulle' (Report of an observation campaign in terminals, waiting zone of Charles de Gaulle Airport), December 2007, <http://www.anafe.org/publi2007.php> (accessed on 10 August 2008).
- 29 Herzfeld, *Social Production of Indifference*, 158.
- 30 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1979).
- 31 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1963).
- 32 Herzfeld, *Social Production of Indifference*, 174.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 177.
- 34 'C'est parce que la France a une identité propre dont elle peut être fière qu'elle a les moyens d'intégrer des immigrants qui respectent nos valeurs et qu'elle peut organiser de façon sereine l'immigration. Telle est l'ambition de ce nouveau ministère: lutter contre l'immigration irrégulière, organiser l'immigration légale en favorisant le développement des pays d'origine afin de réussir l'intégration et de conforter l'identité de notre Nation' [It is because France has its own identity of which it can be proud that it has the means to integrate the immigrants who respect our values and that it can organize immigration in a serene way. This is the ambition of this new Ministry: fighting against illegal immigration, organizing legal immigration by promoting development in the countries of origin in order to manage integration and to reinforce the identity of our nation' (author's translation)] (from 'Missions and Function,' Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Joint Development, official website, <http://www.immigration.gouv.fr/> [accessed 10 August 2008]).
- 35 Abdourahman Waberi, *Transit* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 16.
- 36 Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).
- 37 Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 64.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 65.

