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DIS/PLACEMENT: REFUGEE NARRATIVES AND HOSPITALITY IN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY LITERARY PROSE IN ENGLISH

Belo Horizonte
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Tese de doutorado apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Estudos Literários da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Doutor em Letras: Estudos Literários.

Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa

Linha de pesquisa: Literatura e Políticas do Contemporâneo

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FOLHA DE APROVAÇÃO

Tese intitulada *DIS/PLACEMENT: REFUGEE NARRATIVES AND HOSPITALITY IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY LITERARY PROSE IN ENGLISH*, de autoria da Doutoranda MARCELA DE OLIVEIRA E SILVA LEMOS, apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras: Estudos Literários da Faculdade de Letras da UFMG, como requisito parcial à obtenção do título de Doutor em Letras: Estudos Literários.

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Belo Horizonte, 12 de julho de 2022.

To Daniel. Unconditionally.

"The consul banged the table and said,

'If you've got no passport you're officially dead':

But we are still alive, my dear, but we are still alive."

W. H. Auden, "Refugee Blues"

Resumo

Este trabalho de doutoramento mapeia as posições e efeitos de histórias de refugiados em quatro obras: o romance *What We All Long for*, de Dionne Brand (2005), o conto "The Embassy of Cambodia," de Zadie Smith (2013), o romance *Exit West*, de Mohsin Hamid (2017), e o romance *The Boat People*, de Sharon Bala (2018). Abordo esse corpus literário através de quatro questionamentos principais: (a) que lugar ocupa a narrativa ou voz narrativa do refugiado em relação a histórias e perspectivas de não refugiados em uma mesma obra? (b) que efeitos, se é que há algum, a história do refugiado provoca em outras narrativas e no texto literário como um todo? (c) como esses efeitos são construídos textualmente? (d) o que as histórias de refugiados e a estrutura textual analisada podem revelar sobre o tratamento da noção de hospitalidade nessas obras literárias? Primeiramente, traço uma genealogia dos significados discursivos de refugiado no que diz respeito à *Convenção relativa ao estatuto dos refugiados* das Nações Unidas (1951) e ofereço uma revisão da noção de hospitalidade em sua relação com uma filosofia da linguagem. Em seguida, proponho que as histórias de refugiados em *What We All Long for*, "The Embassy of Cambodia," *Exit West* e *The Boat People* parecem ocupar uma posição paralela e marginal de onde subvertem a autoridade da narrativa, supostamente central, que inicialmente as hospeda. Essa ruptura é textualmente alcançada por meio de estratégias narrativas que ocasionam uma suspensão da linguagem, como interrupção, fragmentação, repetição e omissão. Também afirmo que o lugar e o papel das histórias de refugiados no corpus selecionado envolvem um sentido de hospitalidade que se aproxima da visão de Jacques Derrida de um acolhimento hiperbólico e incondicional que pode, na verdade, exigir a suspensão da linguagem. As leituras que desenvolvo contribuem para a formulação de uma tese conclusiva, embora não definitiva, sobre o impacto das narrativas de refugiados nos conceitos e discursos naturalizados de nação, fronteiras e migração. Esse efeito, embora revelado no corpus selecionado, pode indicar uma tendência mais geral, na literatura

contemporânea, a imaginar o refugiado como um complexo paradigma da existência contemporânea sem desconsiderar a materialidade dess condição.

Palavras-chave: literaturas em inglês no século XXI; deslocamento; refugiados; hospitalidade.

Abstract

This doctoral dissertation maps the positions and effects of refugee stories in Dionne Brand's 2005 novel *What We All Long for*, Zadie Smith's 2013 short story "The Embassy of Cambodia," Mohsin Hamid's 2017 novel *Exit West*, and Sharon Bala's 2018 novel *The Boat People*. I approach this literary corpus with four main questions: (a) what is the place of the particular narrative or narrative voice of the refugee vis-à-vis non-refugee stories and perspectives within a same work? (b) what effects, if any, does the story of the refugee carry towards other narratives and the literary text as a whole? (c) how are these effects textually achieved? (d) what do the refugee stories and the textual structure analyzed reveal about the treatment of the notion of hospitality in these literary pieces? I first trace a genealogy of the discursive meanings of refugee in regard to the United Nations' 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* and provide a review of the notion of hospitality in its relationship with a philosophy of language. Then, I argue that the refugee stories in *What We All Long for*, "The Embassy of Cambodia," *Exit West*, and *The Boat People* occupy a parallel, marginal position from which they subvert the authority of a supposedly central narrative that initially houses them. This disruption is textually achieved through narrative strategies that perform a suspension of language, such as interruption, fragmentation, repetition, and omission. I also claim that the place and role of refugee stories in the selected corpus entail a sense of hospitality that approximates Jacques Derrida's view of a hyperbolical, unconditional welcoming that may actually demand suspension of language. The readings I propose contribute to the formulation of a concluding, although not final, statement about the impact of refugee narratives on naturalized concepts and discourses of nation, borders, and migration. This effect, while revealed by the selected corpus, might indicate a more general tendency in contemporary literature to imagine the refugee as a complex paradigm of contemporary existence without disregarding the materiality of this condition.

Contents

Introduction

The United Nations' (UN) International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates in the *World Migration Report 2022* that there were 281 million international migrants globally in 2020. Although this number corresponds to only 3.6% of the world's population, it has increased 87.3% since 2000 (the year of the first IOM report), when it represented 2.8% of the global population, and 3.3% since 2019 (the year of reference for the 2020 IOM's report), when it corresponded to 3.5% of the global population. The *World Migration Report 2022* further claims that there were 26.4 million refugees and 4.1 million asylum seekers by the end of 2020. If this figure is smaller when compared to other categories of mobile people, these subjects' needs and vulnerability are usually greater, given the often unplanned, violent, and poor circumstances of their displacement. According to the IOM, the majority of these refugees come, as of 2020, from war-stricken states in the Middle East and East-Central Africa, such as the Syrian Arab Republic (6.7 million refugees), Afghanistan (2.6 million), and South Sudan (2.2 million). Their neighbors, as a consequence, comprise the list of main host countries. Turkey, for example, had already received at least 3.6 million Syrian refugees by 2020. The United States, Canada, and Australia, in turn, continue to feature among the main resettlement countries for refugees. There was, nonetheless, a significant decrease from 107,700 refugee resettlements in 2019 to 34,000 in 2020. According to the IOM, this decrease of 68.2% in resettlements is mostly due to mobility restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the one hand, migrants and, more specifically, refugees receive aid and support from international agencies such as the IOM, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). On the other hand, the increasing flow of people has encountered negative responses around the world, especially in economically privileged countries in Europe and North America. Since the past decade, the world has witnessed an invigoration of far-right

politics that both profit from and further encourage the expression of the xenophobia observed in the 2011 lone-wolf terrorist attacks in Norway, the Brexit process, the election, administration, and failed reelection campaign of the former United States president Donald Trump, and several other recent events. Additionally, some low-income countries have followed in the footsteps of their previous colonizers, in what appears to be sheer denial of their own vulnerable condition. Brazil, for instance, elected as president in 2018 a politician who had publicly called immigrants "the scum of the world."[1] In 2019, the first year of his presidency, Jair Bolsonaro withdrew Brazil from the UN's Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, in a "return to the national security paradigm" (Mendes and Menezes 304) that aligned with Trump's positioning.[2] At this point, it is important to highlight that I mention these xenophobic responses as reactions migrants have encountered, not provoked, to assure that no blame for the strengthening of the far right and the rise of neofascist movements is assigned to them. On the contrary, my research discusses, among other things, the triggering of hostility through fear as one of the mechanisms that have helped preserve the borders of states.

Contrarily to what one might think when confronted with news about migrant waves, mobility is not exclusively a contemporary phenomenon. The historical and literary texts of classical antiquity, for instance, already abound with travelers and journeys. Celebrated epic poems from Homer's *Odyssey* to Virgil's *Aeneid* and plays such as Aeschylus' *The Suppliant Women*, Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, and Plautus' *Mercator* depict the travels and travails of homecoming heroes, fugitive brides, victims of war, and merchants. These texts seem in accordance with Elena Isayev's assertion that "in the last two millennia BCE, and for centuries beyond, mobility was the norm and its hindrance the exception" ("Mediterranean Ancient

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[1] Interview for *Jornal Opção* on 18 September 2015. My translation.

[2] "A retomada do paradigma da segurança nacional." My translation.

Migrations, 2000-1 BCE" 1). To the historian, classic texts recreate a context of largely unmapped ancient societies, without the concept and the restrictions of geopolitical boundaries, and with a general perception of movement as a prerogative regardless of one's hierarchical level. Respect and hospitality seem to have once been standard attitudes towards the foreigner, of whom reciprocity was expected in an eventual inversion of host and guest roles. In times of a so-called "migrant crisis," reported daily by worldwide media, on the other hand, narratives of various diasporas increasingly portray fearful, segregating, and hostile responses to some newcomers.

Anthropological and historical sources such as Adrian Favell's "Rebooting Migration Theory," and Isayev's "Mediterranean Ancient Migrations, 2000-1 BCE" and "No 'Migrants:' Mobility before Borders" lead us to observe that, from antiquity to the present, the conventions and practices that reaffirm the limits of nation-states continuously denaturalize human mobility. Consequently, as Diego Segatto puts it, we find ourselves in a moment in which "borders have never been so open and so closed at the same time … Combining the relative openness of borders and the transport infrastructure on the global scale, perhaps it has never been so easy to move around the planet for such large numbers of people in history. But not for all" (139). In our interconnected, technological, and globalized world, travelling is much faster, safer, and easier than ever. However, states have also developed mechanisms to control mobility and to determine its entitlement. Visa bureaucracy, border patrols, and subtle, internalized categorizations of movement are some of the attempts to circumscribe mobile subjects. If ancient Latin lacked words equivalent to, for example, "local" and "migrant" (Isayev, "No 'Migrants'"), contemporary English allows the classification of individuals into native, tourist, exchange student, expat, legal or illegal immigrant, temporary resident, working traveler, asylum seeker, and refugee, to cite but the main terms. While some of these subjects are deemed "citizens of the world," others, such as the refugee, frequently have no land of their

own, expelled from their home and left suspended in the in-between. This often ignored and marginalized figure in literature is the main focus of my doctoral research.

In my master's thesis, I analyzed three autobiographies by war-displaced women: Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003), Miriam Katin's *We Are on Our Own* (2006), and Atka Reid and Hana Schofield's *Goodbye Sarajevo* (2011). Back then, I addressed these autobiographies within the field of contemporary war literature written by women, but the last two works are noticeably refugee narratives as well. In this regard, during my master's studies, I observed what I would later describe, in my doctoral dissertation project, as an alarming lack of academic interest in literary depictions of hospitality and hostility towards war refugees. At this point of my doctoral research, I can state that this scenario is already remarkably different. The emerging field of Critical Refugee Studies, for instance, has counted with numerous contributions across disciplines to demystify narratives that objectify the refugee as a problem, a question, or an issue in international law and politics, focusing instead on the problems, questions, and issues displaced subjects encounter in border crossing. What might look like a simple rephrasing is, in fact, a significant change in paradigm: attention shifts towards refugee epistemologies, while discourses that attempt to speak for and about refugees are exposed. The present doctoral dissertation aims at contributing to this conversation with a focus on refugees in instances of 21st-century literary prose. I depart from the premise that literature is, as Maria Zilda Cury and Gleidston Alis put it, "a privileged space to contemplate the paradoxes of our contemporaneity" (187).[3] Literature, as Jacques Derrida suggests, is "the most interesting thing in the world, maybe more interesting than the world" ("This Strange Institution Called Literature" 47), because its discourse takes language to the extreme and is thereby able to say anything and everything, while also exposing the structurality, materiality, and inescapability of language in the relations we construct.

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[3] "[E]spaço privilegiado para reflexão sobre os paradoxos de nossa contemporaneidade." My translation.

In this doctoral dissertation, I propose to map the positions and effects of refugee stories in four primary sources: Dionne Brand's 2005 novel *What We All Long for*, Zadie Smith's 2013 short story "The Embassy of Cambodia," Mohsin Hamid's 2017 novel *Exit West*, and Sharon Bala's 2018 novel *The Boat People*. I approach this literary corpus with four main questions: (a) what is the place of the particular narrative or narrative voice of the refugee vis-à-vis non-refugee stories and perspectives within a same work? (b) what effects, if any, does the story of the refugee carry towards other narratives and the literary text as a whole? (c) how are these effects textually achieved? (d) what do the refugee stories and textual structure analyzed reveal about the treatment of the notion of hospitality in these literary pieces?

As an answer to my research questions, I argue that the refugee stories in *What We All Long for*, "The Embassy of Cambodia," *Exit West*, and *The Boat People* occupy a parallel, marginal position from which they subvert the authority of a supposedly central narrative that initially houses them. This disruption is textually achieved through the fragmentation, interruption, and suspension of language performed by refugee narratives. I also claim that the place and role of refugee stories in the selected corpus foreground a sense of hospitality that approximates Derrida's view of a hyperbolical, unconditional welcoming that may actually demand suspension of language (*Of Hospitality* 135). The readings I develop in the subsequent chapters reveal the subversive stance of refugee narratives towards naturalized concepts and discourses of nation, borders, and migration. This positioning, while revealed by the selected corpus, might indicate a more general tendency in contemporary literature by and about migrants and refugees.

The narratives that compose the literary corpus of my doctoral dissertation picture refugees amid a meshwork of mobile subjects made up of generations of migrants of different backgrounds. In Brand's *What We All Long for*, Tuyen, Oku, Carla, and Jackie, children of migrant parents, face the desires and difficulties of young adulthood and immigrant life in the

multicultural city of Toronto. In particular, Tuyen resents her parents' endless sorrow for the loss of a son during their escape from the Vietnam War in the 1970s. The possible story of that boy, Quy, interrupts the third-person narrative of present-day life in Toronto with a first-person account of his journey through refugee camps. Although set in Vancouver, Bala's *The Boat People* shares with Brand's novel the focus on Canada as a country commonly regarded as proudly multicultural and welcoming, especially when compared with its neighbor, the United States. Bala's novel challenges this positive image by juxtaposing the perspectives of several citizens of migrant background who strive to either bridge or reaffirm their differences to a group of Tamil refugees recently arrived at Vancouver Bay on a rusty cargo ship.

Like *The Boat People*, "The Embassy of Cambodia" and *Exit West* were published in the 2010s and embody the escalating tensions surrounding human rights discourse and refugee policies. Smith's "The Embassy of Cambodia" is a short-fiction piece with a first-person plural narrator who speaks for an upper-middle-class, Arab neighborhood in North London, as they observe the Ivorian maid Fatou walk past the newly established embassy of Cambodia. In this scenario, subtle clashes emerge between different but overlapping classes of mobile subjects, such as the economically privileged Arabs, the exploited black migrant, and possible Cambodian asylum seekers. Finally, Hamid's *Exit West* is set in an unidentified but most likely Arab country in the Middle East that is torn apart by a war between governmental and rebel forces. In a context of extreme violence and fear, a fantastic, nearly *deus-ex-machina* solution appears: doors – simple doors that once opened to another room, a closet, or the outside – become portals to random parts of the globe. When they pass through one of these doors, the protagonists Nadia and Saeed, as well as countless anonymous others, find refuge and conflict, hospitality and hostility in a world where borders are obsolete and the geopolitical concepts of nation, national identity, and migrant are either abandoned or reconfigured.

The novels and the short story that compose the corpus of the proposed dissertation are some among many examples of contemporary prose on forced migration. Within this expanding field, there are several pieces of refugee life writing, such as Thanhhà Lai's *Inside out and back Again*, Reid and Schofield's *Goodbye Sarajevo*, and Thi Bui's *The Best We Could Do*. Nevertheless, I choose to study only self-proclaimed fictional narratives to better understand the place that the refugee currently occupies in our cultural imaginary. This choice does not mean to imply that autobiographies, memoirs, and testimonies are not, to some degree, fictional. In fact, I subscribe to claims that life writing and historical narratives are inevitably articulated through what Jacques Rancière calls "the logic of fiction" (35), that is, that every story is inescapably intertwined with a subjective perception of reality and ordering of events, with the imprecision of memories, and with the limitations and arbitrariness of languages. Still, it is necessary to acknowledge that, even if for reasons related to publishing and selling, life writing is a literary genre marked by certain authority of the author function, which often threatens to limit the meaning of the text. As I discuss in the third section of Chapter 1, there is in fact a lack of studies that privilege the literary aspects of refugee narratives over their documental value. There are, of course, exceptions to this tendency of scholarly works, some of which will be reviewed in the specific chapters that discuss each of the narratives in the literary corpus. Nevertheless, to date and to the best of my knowledge, no other study has analyzed the positions and effects of refugee stories, the textual construction of these effects, and their relationship with the notion of hospitality in "The Embassy of Cambodia," *Exit West*, *What We All Long for* and *The Boat People*.

Chapter One, "Refugee Genealogies and Languages of Hospitality," charts two intricate and interrelated terms essential to the analyses developed in the subsequent chapters: the definition of refugee and the notion of hospitality. I first unpack the meanings, antecedents, and impacts of the United Nations' definition of refugee in the 1951 *Convention Relating to*

the Status of Refugees in relation to judicial, political, and mediatic discourses. Then, I address the treatment of the question of the refugee (or the refugees' questions) in the humanities, more specifically within the field of critical refugee studies. This overview serves as a bridge towards a discussion of the notion of hospitality from ancient Greece to the contemporary philosophy of language, with reference to works by Immanuel Kant, Emmanuel Levinas, and mainly by Derrida.

Chapter Two, "A Game for Many Players: Multiculturalism, Silence, and Hospitality in Zadie Smith's 'The Embassy of Cambodia,'" identifies, in Smith's short story, a central narrative that corresponds to the myth of multiculturalism constructed by "we, the people of Willesden" and marginal tales unfolding the fates of Fatou, Cambodians, and, by extension, every person in the world as a potentially rightless individual. These stories disrupt the authority of the narrator's myth of multiculturalism by hunting the narrative as a silent shadow and by defining the structure of the text. Chapter Two also offers an interpretation of how "The Embassy of Cambodia" relates to the concept, categories, and language of hospitality.

In Chapter Three, "'Like a Beginning and an End:' Doors, Ambiguity, and Hospitality in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*," I first analyze the role of the refugees' door-crossing stories that, happening simultaneously to Nadia and Saeed's main narrative, interrupt the latter. I argue that these stories function, at a structural level, like the very doors that, at plot level, transport refugees across space. By prompting the dismantlement of the center-margin, interior-exterior hierarchy between stories in *Exit West*, Hamid's doors, be they textual gateways to other narratives or portals transporting characters, engender a normalization of migration in relation to paralysis and a disruption of the traditional home in the novel. In this way, they also introduce a sense of ambiguity that echoes, once more, in the events of the plot as well as in Hamid's writing style. This ambiguity, as I intend to finally demonstrate, informs a notion of hospitality in the novel as a potential in the sense of the term discussed by Giorgio Agamben.

Chapter 4, "'Otherwise, what else?': The Refugee Paradigm and Hospitality in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long for* and Sharon Bala's *The Boat People*," juxtaposes these two novels as narratives addressing hospitality to migrants in general and refugees in particular in the Canadian urban centers of Toronto and Vancouver. I argue that the two novels question these centers' status as cultural mosaics and welcoming resettlement places. I also propose that these novels construct refugeehood as an encompassing paradigm of contemporary existence, a notion that emerges at both plot and structural levels as a consequence of the relationships between characters, spaces, and narrative strategies.

Given the significant number of narratives depicting migrancy in contemporaneity, the investigation I envision could be conducted in relation to mobile characters that do not necessarily identify as refugees. Nevertheless, I study this particular figure because they seem to unwillingly embody the fear of otherness and consequent hostile attitudes towards the stranger, especially the dispossessed, who cannot reciprocate hospitality. Hence, the relevance of this research is, besides charting the dis/place of the refugee in our contemporary imaginary, to consider through literature a condition often considered so foreign, so estranged that it causes the washing up of dead children on distant beaches at the same time that it is used as justification for political actions and campaigns fueled by hate speech.[4] Addressing the encounter "between the history of culture and of mass violence, between literature and lives lived in conditions of destruction" (18),[5] the French critic Marielle Macé argues that contemporary cultural products speak both about and to our vulnerability as "human being[s] of a precarious humanity, people as subject to mutilation, exile, and loss as [our] books" (19).[6]

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[4] Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian refugee boy found dead on a Turkish beach in 2015, is perhaps the most emblematic example of the brutality of the so-called refugee "crisis."

[5] "Entre a história da cultura e das violências de massa, entre a literatura e as vidas vividas em condições de destruição." My translation.

[6] "Um homem de humanidade precarizada, alguém tão mutilável, exilável e perdível quanto [nossos] livros." My translation.

This dissertation is metaphorically located at the point of encounter Macé envisions and the chapters that follow are thus an attempt to explain and exemplify how literature performs an opening to vulnerability that may resemble unconditional hospitality.

Chapter One – Refugee Genealogies and Languages of Hospitality

> "The life of a refugee, following the moment of the collapse of trust ... is itself rarely a simple narrative that leads to one truth. It too is a genealogy."
> E. Valentine Daniel, "The Refugee: A Discourse on Displacement"

> "An act of hospitality can only be poetic."
> Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*

A frequent and challenging task in my research has been to deal with the meanings and implications surrounding the word "refugee," as if something about this term made it particularly hard to define at the level of precision for which academic scholarship should strive. The process of choosing a title for this chapter exemplifies this difficulty. My first thought was to go along with Emma Cox et al.'s book *Refugee Imaginaries* and name the chapter "Imagining Refugees," as one of my main goals here is to discuss discursive constructions of the "refugee." One could argue, however, that this choice of words would flirt with abstraction to detriment of the materiality of the refugee condition. Cox et al. disagree. To them, refugee imaginaries are "neither simply ... imaginings about people who find themselves in the category of 'refugees', immutably human or otherwise, nor only ... imaginings of people forced on the move, but ... the whole complex set of historical, cultural, political, legal and ethical relations that currently tie all of us – citizens of nation-states and citizens of humanity only – together" (3). In spite of this compelling explanation, other scholars have preferred a seemingly more practical option of title, one that asks, instead, who a refugee is, as in the case of Serena Parekh and Gil Loescher's recent books, or what a refugee is, as in William Maley's work. These direct questions are not, however, unproblematic, as they usually stem from the authority of a non-refugee position and entail a sort of normative violence. These inquiries refer, nonetheless, to issues with which a researcher often grapples when attempting to approach refugee studies and literature.

In the sections that follow, I depart from these practical concerns to arrive at notions of refugee imaginaries and paradigms that often inform, in turn, whoever asks the who/what questions. I also consider the implications of those notions to a theory of hospitality in its relation to literature. This investigation accounts for the chosen chapter title, "refugee genealogies," which, to Lyndsey Stonebridge, are "[t]he ways in which refugees have been made to mean" ("Refugee Genealogies" 15), and, according to Arthur Rose, constitute "a subversive form of history" (53). Peter Gatrell states that "the history of refugees is in part a history of categorisation and labelling" ("Refugees in Modern World History" 19). Both Gatrell and E. Valentine Daniel further argue that the history of the concept of refugee pertains to Western historiography and is thus inserted within a European model of state sovereignty, colonialism, and knowledge. By contrast, alternate histories yield different significations for similarly mobile people, as in the case of the Islamic *mujahirin*, a term which, signifying "those who leave their homes in the cause of Allah, after suffering oppression," "has not been assimilated into the history of the term *refugee* and therefore does not carry the latter's menacing meanings" (Valentine Daniel 274). Reading "refugee" here in a genealogical sense does not entail an effort at fixating meaning. It implies, instead, an attempt at describing discursive uses of the term with attention to their shortcomings and effects.

1. The Refugee before 1951

The year of 1951 is a landmark for refugee genealogies because the *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* was then adopted by the 26 states in the UN Conference of Plenipotentiaries. This convention establishes the states' duties towards refugees and the refugees' rights and responsibilities in the receiving country. Working as a pre-contract of hospitality between sovereign states, or the "high contracting parties" (13), and an incoming

foreign individual, the convention proposes a definition of refugee that is, to date, the most important effort at systematizing what the term "refugee" means, who the people to whom it refers might be, and who grants these people permission to be refugees. These answers are found in Chapter I, Article I of the convention, which reads:

> [T]he term "refugee" shall apply to any person who: (1) Has been considered a refugee under the Arrangements of 12 May 1926 and 30 June 1928 or under the Conventions of 28 October 1933 and 10 February 1938, the Protocol of 14: September 1939 or the Constitution of the International Refugee Organization; ... (2) As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (14)

Such a systematization is particularly important because it has informed Western discourses and imaginaries by and about refugees for over 70 years. The period following 1951, however, is a topic for the second section of this chapter. For now, I am concerned with the way the UN's definition reflects and/or neglects notions of "refugee" that precede 1951.

As indicated in the excerpt of Article I quoted above, the 1951 convention was not the first document relating to the status of refugees in international law. Previous arrangements, conventions, protocols, and constitutions adopted by the League of Nations, the UN's predecessor, and other organizations contained their own definitions of refugee, which are, as we shall see, reflected in the concept proposed in 1951. In the 1966 report to its 8th reunion, the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization (AALCO) points out that those definitions "dealt with specific groups of refugees and with limited matters, such as the issue of travel

documents" (23). It is the case, for instance, of the League of Nations' Arrangements of 12 May 1926, which, aiming at regularizing the issuing of identity certificates for Russian and Armenian refugees, defined Russian refugees as "[a]ny person of Russian origin who does not enjoy or who no longer enjoys the protection of the Government of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics and who has not acquired another nationality" (1). Similarly, the Arrangement considered Armenian refugees to be "[a]ny person of Armenian origin formerly a subject of the Ottoman Empire who does not enjoy or who no longer enjoys the protection of the Government of the Turkish Republic and who has not acquired another nationality" (1). On 30 June 1928, the League of Nations extended the measures taken on behalf of Russian and Armenian refugees to Turkish, Assyrian, Assyro-Chaldaean, and assimilated (Syrian and Kurdish) refugees. In regards to the definition of refugee, the 1928 arrangement makes simple substitutions in its previous formulation to accommodate different origins and countries, considering, for example, that Assyrian, Assyro-Chaldaean, and assimilated refugees are "[a]ny person of Syrian or Assyro-Chaldean origin and also, by assimilation, any person of Syrian or Kurdish origin who does not enjoy or who no longer enjoys the protection of the State to which he previously belonged and who has not acquired or does not possess another nationality" (AALCO 25). Although references to fear and persecution are not yet explicit in this repetitive formulation, these two arrangements (1926 and 1928) show an understanding that "refugee" is a distinct status because this individual lacks the State protection supposedly warranted by nationality. These documents seem, therefore, to imply a binary distinction between the protected national subject and the vulnerable, foreign refugee. This is a notion that would later inform the 1951 convention.

The League of Nations' convention of 28 October 1933 follows the definition of refugee set out by the arrangements of 12 May 1926 and 30 June 1928. Nevertheless, perhaps because it claims to relate to "the International Status of Refugees" (1) instead of addressing

specific groups, the 1933 convention states that its concept of refugee is "subject to such modifications or amplifications as each Contracting Party may introduce in this definition at the moment of signature or accession" (2). The subsequent provisional arrangement of 1936 and the convention of 10 February 1938, in turn, shift the focus back to particular groups as they center on German nationals attempting to escape growing tensions within the Reich. This is an interwar moment in which the League of Nations, instead of dealing only with the human cost of past revolutions and wars, begins to manage a situation of displacement that would worsen in the following years with the Holocaust and World War II.

The 1938 *Convention concerning the Status of Refugees coming from Germany* establishes an important turn in the legal definition of refugee. Stating that the term shall apply to "[p]ersons possessing or having possessed German nationality and not possessing any other nationality who are proved not to enjoy, in law or in fact, the protection of the German Government" (2), it is the first treaty to require that the refugee prove their vulnerability, even though it does not specify how this condition is to be demonstrated. Furthermore, the formulation "possessing or having possessed German nationality" marks a change in previous settlements, which implied that the refugee still possessed the nationality of the State whose protection they no longer enjoyed. What seems to matter the most at this moment is rather that the refugee shall not have acquired a new nationality. The 1938 convention is, in fact, one of the first of the League of Nations' agreements to touch upon the issue of statelessness, accounting for "[s]tateless persons not covered by previous Conventions or Agreements who have left German territory after being established therein and who are proved not to enjoy, in law or in fact, the protection of the German Government" (2). In this sense, it is possible to say that, as far as the 1938 convention goes, the meaning of refugee now overlaps with statelessness, but it is not limited to it. It is also noteworthy that the *Additional Protocol of 14 September 1939* extends the measures of the 1938 convention to refugees coming from Austria,

maintaining both the requirement of proof of vulnerability and the disregard for whether or not the individual still has Austrian/German nationality. These two agreements (1938 and 1939) include another relevant clause: "[p]ersons who leave the territories [of Germany or former Austria] for reasons of purely personal convenience are not included in this definition" (2). There is here an attempt at limiting the meaning of refugee to persons whose lack of protection is not only felt but recognized. The status is thus more clearly taken away from those who experience the condition and put into the hands of national and supranational authorities who may judge their case.

At last, the 1951 convention mentions the constitution of the International Refugee Organization (IRO), an intergovernmental organization founded in 1946, one year after the establishment of the UN, of which it became a specialized agency in 1948. In 1952, the IRO was replaced by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). During its active time, however, its main objective, as per the constitution, was "to bring about a rapid and positive solution of the problem of *bona fide* refugees and displaced persons" (12). It calls attention that the IRO, following the language of previous arrangements and conventions, treats the refugee as a problem that member states acknowledge and wish to solve. It is also noteworthy that the refugees these states contemplate are those "in good faith" (*bona fide*), a subjective measure that opens claims for asylum to interpretation of motives and intentions. The main solution the IRO suggests for the refugee "problem" is repatriation. Objections to this solution would have to be due to "persecution, or fear, based on reasonable grounds of persecution because of race, religion, nationality or political opinions, provided these opinions are not in conflict with the principles of the United Nations" (13). The "reasonable grounds" for fear to which this article of the IRO constitution refers would later morph into a "well-founded fear" in the 1951 convention. The onus, however, was already placed on the refugee. In relation to the definition of refugee, the constitution stated that: "the term 'refugee' applies to a person who has left, or

who is outside of, his country of nationality or of former habitual residence, and who, whether or not he had retained his nationality, belongs to one of three categories:" victims of Nazi-Fascist and/or allied regimes, Spanish Republicans and other victims of the Falangist Regime, and persons considered refugees before WWII (covered by previous arrangements and conventions) (12). Additionally, the constitution stated that the term also applied to a displaced person "outside of his country of nationality or former habitual residence, and who, as a result of events subsequent to the outbreak of the Second World War, is unable or unwilling to avail himself of the protection of the Government of his country of nationality or former nationality" (13), in a formulation that might have begun to look at displacement outside even if still related to events in Europe.

With the exception of the provisional arrangement of 1936, the definitions of all of the above-cited documents were declared valid by the same convention that, in 1951, replaced them. The 1951 definition, in fact, incorporated those documents' gradual development of a disregard for the refugee's maintenance of previous nationality and a requirement for the refugee to convince asylum-granting authorities of their well-founded motives and good intentions. The pre-1951 arrangements and conventions contributed, moreover, to a twofold association between the meaning of refugee and vulnerability: on the one hand, the refugee is constructed as a person who has lost state protection, who is persecuted, who is afraid; on the other, they seem to allow the vulnerability they embody to penetrate states and spread within the institutions that have created them in both a practical and legal sense. Perhaps because of this possible threat, the League of Nations and the UN, composed by the very "high contracting parties" whose whims prompt refugees into movement, began to distinguish between *bona fide* and undeserving refugees. They also emphasized refugeehood as an unnatural, exceptional, temporary state, even if the short intervals between these documents suggest, as do the several

refugee "crises" following the 1951 convention, that this condition had become much more common than national states were willing to admit.

The construction of the refugee as a vulnerable but temporary byproduct of conflict observed in the documents of the League of Nations, IRO, and UN was underway in related fields as well. Scholarly works in History and Sociology in the first half of the 20th century already used the term "refugee" to refer to the displaced in the contexts of the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922), the Russian Revolution (1917), and, of course, WWI (1914-1918). Gatrell points out that the term "gained currency" during WWI, even though the earliest use he cites is Avram Kirzhnits's, who, in 1927, employed the word to retroactively summarize displacement during the Russian Revolution. Gatrell indicates other such uses prior to the 1951 convention, namely, Sir John Hope Simpson's survey of what he described as the "refugee problem" (Gatrell, "Refugees in Modern World History" 23) in 1939 and Carlile Macartney's entry on refugees in the first edition of *the Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* in 1935. In regard to the latter, Gatrell explains that Macartney also "referred to large-scale refugee movements in the era of the Roman Empire as well as the Middle Ages when 'the persons involved were more or less at the mercy of those receiving them'" (Gatrell, "Refugees in Modern World History" 23). This passage calls attention to a common trait of genealogical efforts such as Gatrell's, Macartney's, Jérôme Elie's (in the *Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*) and Terje Einarsen (in the series "Oxford Commentaries on International Law"): these efforts most often result in a genealogy of the condition of forced displacement, but not of the use and meanings of the term "refugee," regardless of the language. For instance, Einarsen provides valuable commentary on what he considers to be the concern of "[t]he theoretical founders of modern international law, ... such as Francisco de Vitoria (1480–1546), Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), Samuel Pufendorf (1632–1694), Christian Wolff (1679–1754), and Emerich de Vattel

(1717–1767), ... with the issue of asylum for refugees" (40). Nevertheless, while Einarsen paraphrases these concerns with the use of the word "refugee," none of the passages he cites from those early authors seems to contain it. When then did the term "refugee" begin to be used in the sense later adopted by the UN? According to Loescher, it is likely that the first use of the word in the English language happened in 1685, when, nearly 40 years after the Peace of Westphalia ended the religious wars in Europe, "Louis XIV of Catholic France revoked the Edict of Nantes that had allowed Protestant Huguenots to practise their religion openly" and persecuted the Huguenots in France. Loescher explains that "200,000 Huguenots fled France with their belongings to seek safety in neighbouring European Protestant countries, particularly England" (43). The English term "refugee" would then have been used to describe those who fled. Supporting evidence to this claim is the fact that the Oxford English Dictionary states that the word "refugee" is formed in English by derivation ("refugee" as derived from "refuge") and modelled on a borrowed Middle French lexical item (*refugié*). Furthermore, the meaning of the earliest use of the word listed by the Dictionary is exactly "[a] Protestant who fled France to seek refuge elsewhere from religious persecution in the 17th and 18th centuries, esp. following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685." It is important to highlight that the concept of refugee that the UN would later adopt and reproduce emerged in the English language, in which the 1951 convention was drafted, from the developments of the Peace of Westphalia. The Treaties of Münster and Osnabrück that make up the Peace of Westphalia established a principle of non-intervention within the borders of states and paved the way, even if more implicitly rather than explicitly, for the notion of Westphalian sovereignty, which underlies the modern international system of sovereign states. The notion of Westphalian sovereignty, in turn, is relevant to the present discussion because Hannah Arendt's critique of the international system of sovereign states and the premises of human rights resulted in an alternative meaning of refugee that complicates the 1951 definition.

Before passing on to Arendt's view, however, and in order to keep an open mind to the meanings she suggests, it seems productive to point out that, while the first uses of the term refugee in English date from the 17th century in a denotation of suffering and displacement, the words from which it is borrowed and derived may bring different insights. The French *refugié*, *refugier*, and *refuge* come from the Latin *refugium*, a unit formed by the combination of "re" (back or again) and "fugere" (to flee) with a neutral ending, *ium*, possibly with the sense of "a place for." In periphrasis, the Latin *refugium* can therefore be read as "a place to flee back to." This reading, in turn, would imply that the individual taking refuge is unlikely to be foreign or unknown because they are fleeing back, returning to a place. In this sense, the place of refuge could initially have been seen as one's home, where a contract of hospitality would not even be necessary because there would be no hosts and guests and the refugee would also be the master of the house. Even if this notion appears to be completely lost in contemporaneity, one may still see its remnants in the association between the refugee and the revenant, as it appears, for instance, in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long for* and Sharon Bala's *The Boat People* (see the conclusion to Chapter Four): in the apparently exterior figure of the refugee, the master of the house recognizes itself, as if in a return to a previous state of consciousness, as a refugee. The foreign refugee embodies, in this sense, a condition citizens share and suppress, but to which they can easily return.

To arrive at the meaning laid down in 1951, nevertheless, the term "refugee" appears to have progressively lost the idea of return to be more often associated with the foreign, the stranger, whose threatening connotations descend to us from antiquity. It may be argued, on the one hand, that there is nothing necessarily implying threat or fear in the Latin forms *extranĕus*, which, signifying "from the exterior," possibly developed into the English word "stranger," and *foraneus*, or "exterior," which seems to have evolved into "foreign." A look at the Greek form *xenos*, however, may begin to indicate otherwise. *Xenos* seems to have been

used in a variety of meanings in classical texts, including "stranger" and "foreigner," but also "host" and "guest." Besides, according to Elena Isayev, the relationship between host and guest, "guest-friendship" (*Migration, Mobility and Place* 80), received the name of *xenia*. On the one hand, the use of the same term to designate the parts of that relationship may indicate a sense of equity between them. It is also true, in that regard, that *xenia*, according to Derrida, was not a type of contract of hospitality established between a host and any new arrival, but only with one that could reciprocate, that could be called by their name into this law (*Of Hospitality* 21). On the other hand, the very existence of this contract entails a possible need to contain a threat, to reaffirm a position of authority within the house where a roof is offered if the *xenos* abides by the contract. According to Derrida's analysis of Plato's dialogues, the menace to be contained is the foreigner's threat of parricide. The foreigner, Derrida explains, comes from the outside of the house but also from the outside of the house's language, its *logos*, the discourse or speech of the father in Greek philosophical tradition. In this sense, the foreigner resembles a Sophist, "someone who doesn't speak like the rest, someone who speaks an odd sort of language" (*Of Hospitality* 5), and who threatens the paternal authority of the *logos*. It is, in this regard, aporistic that the threat of parricide, which in itself signifies the killing of the father by his son, comes from the outside. As Derrida puts it, "[l]ike any parricide, this one takes place in the family: a foreigner can be a parricide only when he is in some sense within the family" (*Of Hospitality* 6). I will return to Derrida's discussion about *xenia*, language, and violence in the last section of this chapter. For now, I want to call attention to the fact that, as in the cases of the etymologies both *refugium* and *xenos*, aporias and paradoxes seem to abound in every step of a genealogy of the term refugee. This is also the case in Arendt's theorizations about the human, the citizen, and the refugee.

As the League of Nations and, later, the UN drafted legal definitions of refugee, Arendt, herself a refugee according to the *Provisional Arrangement of 1936*, began to reflect and

publish about the notion and the condition of the refugee from the perspective of human rights. As a Jewish intellectual, Arendt fled Nazi Germany in 1933 and settled in Paris. Upon the Nazi invasion of France in 1940, she was detained in the internment camp of Gurs as an enemy alien, even though she had lost her German nationality in 1937. Her liberation papers came about a month after internment and she finally escaped Europe towards New York, where she would write of the refugee, in 1943, as "a new kind of human beings – the kind that are put in concentration camps by their foes and in internment camps by their friends" ("We Refugees" 265). Arendt's experience of antisemitism, imprisonment, and refugeehood affected her theoretical work. In her most important texts, such as *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt identifies an "impossibility of legislating for human rights in a world of sovereign nations" (qtd. in Stonebridge, *Placeless People* 4). She attributes this impossibility to the fact that, without a structure that guarantees accountability, sovereign nations have little to no incentive to secure human rights to anyone but the citizen, who abides by the rules and limits of the state. Arendt observes, in this regard, a practical coincidence between the rights of man and the rights of the citizen that results in an equivalence between human and national subject. In a reading of "We Refugees" that relates Arendt's discussion to the concept of *homo sacer*, Giorgio Agamben argues that

> [T]he Rights of Man represent above all the original figure of the inscription of bare natural life in the legal-political order of the nation-state. That bare life (the human creature) which in the *ancien régime* belonged to God, and in the classical world was clearly distinct (as *zoē*) from political life (*bios*), now takes center stage in the state's concerns and becomes, so to speak, its terrestrial foundation. Nation-state means a state that makes nativity or birth (that is, of the bare human life) the foundation of its own sovereignty. ("We Refugees" 116)

To Agamben as well as to Arendt, at the moment of birth – which is, etymologically the meaning of *natio* (Agamben, "We Refugees" 117) –, bare human life fades into the legal and political life of the citizen, who is the true subject of rights. This process of inscription, Agamben suggests, is implied in the very title of the "*Declaration des droits de l'homme e du citoyen*, in which it is unclear whether the two terms name two realities, or whether instead they form a hendiadys, in which the second term is, in reality, already contained in the first" ("We Refugees" 116). In this regard, when Arendt suggests that refugees are "a new kind of human beings," she underlines their existence as bare life, *zoē*, "people who had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships – except that they were still human" (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 299). Likewise, to Agamben, the figure of the refugee marks a return to the barely human that threatens the narrative of the nation state by breaking up the identity between man and citizen.

Out of place, refugees are also out of the law and of the reach of human/citizen (the human as citizen) rights. They are rightless. It may be argued then that the 1951 convention is an attempt at extending the human/citizen rights to the barely human. The convention is, however, premised on human rights, as stated in its preamble. What it accomplishes, in this sense, is an aporia: granting rights to individuals who are stripped of a right to have rights, who are discursively located beyond the reach of the law. In the end, it is as if the convention could only secure refugee rights to those who are already contemplated with citizen rights and who, therefore, do not need them. If these citizens became refugees, however, they would no longer enjoy human rights, nor have, as a result, access to refugee rights. The subject of the rights laid out in 1951 remains, in any case, void. Needless to say, the concept of the refugee as "a new kind of human being," or a return, as Agamben supposes, to bare human life beyond the nation, is a connotation that the UN convention relentlessly excludes, perhaps because of the challenges it poses to its own text.

That Arendt conceived of refugees as rightless does not mean that she thought they were powerless. Quite on the contrary, Arendt and, with her, Agamben seem to consider refugee existence potentially revolutionary in its questioning of the system of nation states. In this regard, Agamben suggests that the temporariness attributed by legal definitions to the condition of the refugee is perhaps an unconscious attempt at containing a threat, for "[a] permanent status of man in himself is inconceivable for the law of the nation-state" ("We Refugees" 116). As "man in himself," the existence of the refugee emerges as an alternative, as forced as it may be, to the fiction of the nation-state subject. Perhaps even more than an alternative, as Arendt argues, "[r]efugees driven from country to country represent the vanguard of their peoples – if they keep their identity" ("We Refugees" 274). To her, it is as if this type of existence were inevitably to come after that of the citizen, either forcefully, as a result of conflict, or once the nation state system crumbled into the ruins she considered certain. Arendt prophetically stated, in 1941, that "[f]uture historians will perhaps be able to note that the sovereignty of the nation-state ended in absurdity when it began to decide who was a citizen and who was not" (*The Jewish Writings* 139-140). Even though the nation states are still a reality today, the unstoppable refugee "crises" following 1951 might indicate that we are slowly walking the path Arendt envisioned. As I will show in the following chapters, in literature at least, this scenario has also been gaining intense colors in contemporaneity.

2. The Refugee after 1951

Whereas the 1951 convention supplants a series of preceding documents, it would only be supplemented, at least in the second half of the 20th century, by the *1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees*. The Protocol brought a necessary amendment to the convention, according to which one could be a refugee only as a result of events occurring before 1 January

1951. After all, between 1951 and 1967, several events continued to generate mass displacement. According to Gatrell, during this period, some 200,000 Algerians fled to Tunisia and Morocco during the Algerian war for independence, nearly 120,000 mainly Tutsis escaped Rwanda, and displaced people "from the fighting in North Korea swelled the population of South Korea by at least one-fifth" (*The Making of the Modern Refugee* 170). The protocol modified the text of the convention by stating that "the term 'refugee' shall ... mean any person within the definition of article I of the Convention as if the words 'As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and...' and the words '...as a result of such events', in article 1 A (2) were omitted" (1). In this manner, the UN intended to address the "new refugee situations" (*1967 Protocol* 1) that had been arising since the convention was adopted.

Despite its contradictions and the exclusions it promotes, or perhaps exactly because of them, the definition of refugee that the 1951 convention and the 1967 protocol established has informed refugee law for 70 years in the 145 states that are parties to the convention and the 146 that abide by the protocol. In this manner, the United States Refugee Act, the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, and the Australian Migration Act, to cite a few examples, refer to the UN definition in order to regulate claims for asylum within their territories. According to these documents, one becomes a refugee when presenting oneself to the legal authority of a sovereign state and this state has recognized one's well-founded fear of persecution and/or inability or unwillingness to avail oneself of the protection of one's country of current or former nationality. Before that happens, this person can be categorized as an asylum seeker once they request the protection of a foreign country. Notably, although the convention and the protocol state that the refugee is outside their country of nationality or former residence, the asylum seeker does not have to be. In this sense, the governments of economically privileged nations often expect that asylum seekers will apply for refugee status while still in their countries or camps. Of course, this requirement ignores the fact that lingering

behind in a place where one is persecuted could be fatal. It is also erroneously premised on the assumption that the persecuted have the means to enter a bureaucratic process while in frequently miserable conditions. Caught in yet another legal conundrum, numerous people flee to countries where their claims for asylum have not yet been processed or, many times, even submitted. As a result, when they arrive, they may be jailed as illegal aliens and spend from months to years in prison trying to prove their eligibility to refugee status. As we will see in Chapter Four, this situation is illustrated in Bala's *The Boat People*.

The relative stability of the 1951/67 definition is, moreover, incompatible with the changing specificities of the refugee condition in the second half of the 20th century and first decades of the 21st century. In this sense, this stability more often suggests a stubborn attempt, on the part of the UN high contracting parties, to contain a challenging contemporary reality within the obsolete frames of the nation state. To exemplify such an incompatibility, Maley points out that the 1951/67 definition is outdated because its use of male pronouns, the norm at the time it was drafted, performs a further marginalization of refugee women and non-binary individuals. The author also observes that the term "persecution" is not defined in the text of the convention despite its importance to the concept of refugee. The persecution to which the convention refers, furthermore, is limited to reasons of race, religion, and membership to a particular group or political opinion. Even if these reasons covered all the possibilities of persecution before 1951, which is already unlikely to have been the case, they certainly do not encompass the various grounds for persecution these days, leaving, for instance, the matter of gender identity and sexual orientation open to the interpretation of what "membership to a particular group" means. Still according to Maley, the convention/protocol's focus on persecution notably excludes several forms of human suffering, such as natural disasters, environmental threats, and, perhaps the most unbelievable omission, warfare. To Maley's critiques, I would add that, because it treats refugee status as a temporary condition, the 1951/67

definition takes into account the phenomenon of transitioning from citizen to refugee while disregarding that, since 1951, millions have been born into the latter condition, the most prominent case being the generations of Palestinians that lived entire lives in statelessness.

In his critique of the narrowness of the 1951/67 definition, Maley refers to Egon F. Kunz to list categories of *de facto* refugees unrecognized by the UN, such as the anticipatory and the economic refugee. While, to Maley as according to Kunz, the term acute refugee "probably most closely matches popular understandings of the term [refugee]," the anticipatory refugee is someone who "leaves his home country before the deterioration of the military or political situation prevents his orderly departure" (7). Considering that economic crises are a common symptom of this deterioration, anticipatory refugees often overlap with the so-called economic migrant, giving rise to the economic refugee, as they attempt to escape other forms of human suffering disregarded by the convention/protocol, such as hunger and rural and urban violence. In regard to the economic refugee, Maley reminds us that

> The Nazis routinely used the label *Wirtschaftsemigranten* ('economic migrants') to refer to refugees who had fled Germany, especially if they were Jewish. The Nazi origins of the expression should serve as warning to those who blithely apply the term [economic migrant] to refugees in the twenty-first century. Most people want a better life; this does not mean that they cannot be refugees. Nor are refugees necessarily 'tired, poor, huddled masses' with their hands stretched out for assistance. (8)

In this passage, Maley seems to be advocating for a reading of economic refugees that is not necessarily tied to the notion of vulnerability. In his view, while the economic refugee often comes from the poorer sectors of a society, they may also belong to a middle class or elite that has partially lost its privileges, because, for example, of political conflicts, and decides to leave.

Another specific instance of displacement that sometimes coincides with Maley's anticipatory refugee is the case of the increasing number of people on the move as a

consequence of climate change. First termed "environmental refugees" in 1985 by Essam El-Hinnawi and acknowledged as such by the *World Migration Report 2020*, these individuals, lately also called "climate refugees" (Ayazi and Elsheikh 3), come, for instance, from the lands swallowed by the rising sea in Tuvalu and the areas undergoing desertification in Yemen. Even though these people are not recognized as refugees by the UN (Ayazi and Elsheikh mention, for example, a Tuvalu family that fought to obtain refugee status in New Zealand in 2014 based on climatic events but was denied), they are often aided by the UNHCR. The agency states on its website that it deploys teams to assist relief efforts in areas struck by natural disasters, even though it does not endorse the term "climate refugee," preferring "persons displaced in the context of disasters and climate change" instead. Despite this lack of endorsement, climate refugees count towards the number of world refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP) in *The World Migration Report*. Corresponding then to Edward Said's view of refugees as "the uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been created" (175), these individuals further complicate the 1951/67 definition by being simultaneously excluded and included by the UN. In the end, as Maley puts it, "a person can be a refugee without being stamped as such by a state" (9), even though we cannot minimize the role of the system of sovereign states in giving rise to and maintaining the phenomenon of refugee existence.

As a response to the growing number of refugees and "refugee situations" in the 21st century, the UN General Assembly adopted, on 17 December 2018, the *Global Compact on Refugees*, with 181 favorable votes and 2 unfavorable, notably, Hungary and the United States (then under the Trump administration). The compact does not introduce any changes to the UN's definition of refugee. Rather, it uses the language of "burden and responsibility sharing" (2) to propose as one of its main objectives the easing of pressure on refugee host countries and the pursuit of "durable solutions" (48), a choice of words that awfully resonates with the Nazi "Final Solution" to Jewish genocide during WWII. The compact claims to be a result of the

UN's intensive consultation with states and all relevant stakeholders (a generic group within which refugees are included) following the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. Adopted in 2016, this declaration, which would be an integral part of the global compact signed two years later, falls back, in turn, to the 1951/67 definition of refugee. In addition to repeating the formulation, the declaration states that the 1951/67 definition

> [H]as broad and enduring scope. It encompasses those who flee individual persecution, as well as those fleeing armed conflict or violence associated with one or more of the above-noted grounds. It includes those fleeing State and non-State actors and has been the basis for providing protection, amongst others, for those escaping war, conflict, human rights abuses, gang violence, domestic abuse and other forms of harm. (3)

It is certainly true that some people in the above-cited situations found protection in host states as refugees. Nevertheless, the declaration itself contends that "[t]here may also be persons who are forced to flee or are displaced across borders in the context of sudden- or slow-onset disasters, or in the context of the effects of climate change, who are not refugees" (3). It is unclear, in this sense, how the declaration distinguishes between this group and, say, "those fleeing armed conflict," considering that neither are, in fact, completely covered by the 1951/67 definition. Adopting a practical and remedying approach, the 2016 declaration and the 2018 compact do not revise their own problematic premises, which, as I have argued, raise the question of whether a solution to "refugee situations" is even possible within a system of sovereign states.

The years between 1951 and today saw an intense transference of the meaning of refugee fostered by the convention/protocol from judicial to political discourse. As described in Arendt's "We Refugees," refugees were regarded with either pity or suspicion before 1951 too and, because of this, according to her, they hated the denomination. It was, however, during the Cold War, when millions were displaced in the proxy wars between the United States and

the Soviet Union, that refugees became, according to Gatrell ("Refugees in Modern World History"), a more frequent figure in the capitalist state rhetoric of the Red Scare. In that context, Western governments and media often encouraged a mistrust of refugees' true motives and intentions, so that their well-founded fear of persecution became even harder to prove. The US Committee for Refugees (USCR), stated, for example, that "escapees from communist-controlled countries ... a needless waste of humanity ... may have a powerful and dangerous impact on the society" (Gatrell, "Refugees in Modern World History" 28). This discourse finds its contemporary echo in far-right political campaigns that build on the refugee as a foreign menace from which only a patriotic government can protect its citizens. It is true that these campaigns target immigrants in general, but, perhaps because the definition of refugees is so tied to conflict and persecution, they discursively treat them as an acute symptom of ethnonationalist decay. For example, as mentioned in the Introduction, the current president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, referred to Haitian, Senegalese, Bolivian, and Syrian refugees as delinquents and scum.[1] Likewise, in his 2016 campaign, which was heavily based on the construction of a wall along the Mexican American border, Donald Trump accused Hillary Clinton, via Twitter and without proof, of pushing an increase of 500% in the number of Syrian refugees admitted to the United States. Finally, Hungary's prime-minister Viktor Orbán's agenda includes strict anti-immigration measures against those he sees not as Muslim refugees, but "Muslim invaders," who supposedly put a Hungarian Christian majority at risk.[2] It is interesting to notice that far-right discourse pictures the refugee as a national security threat while, ironically, disregarding the type of instability that the existence of the refugee does, in fact, represent to the system of sovereign states. Often drawing from isolated terrorist attacks, this type of discourse represents the refugee as if they were part of purposeful and belligerent

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[1] Interview to *Jornal Opção* on 18 September 2015.
[2] Agerholm, Harriet. "Refugees are 'Muslim invaders' not running for their lives, says Hungarian PM Viktor Orban." *Independent*, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugees-muslim-invaders-hungary-viktor-orban-racism-islamophobia-eu-a8149251.html. Accessed 13 December 2021.

attack against the state, whereas, as I have argued, their challenge to institutions seems to work on a more conceptual level.

Other common elements in political and mediatic discourse about refugees are the notion of crisis and the water or liquid imagery. The notion of crisis simultaneously follows and reinforces the premise, fostered by the convention/protocol's definition of refugee, that this condition is an exceptional and temporary problem to which a solution must be found. To illustrate, saying that the world is experiencing an environmental crisis implies that we are going through a moment of deterioration of a scenario that has been better before and can be improved if certain measures are implemented. By analogy, a refugee crisis entails a similar sense of change and possibility. From what I have been discussing, however, it is possible to say that the 20th and 21st-century history of displacement does not quite support a rhetoric of crisis, at least not since WWI, for one would hardly find a moment without mass displacement. It becomes likewise hard to believe that this scenario can be improved (whatever that may mean) through the same measures that have failed for so many years. As Cox puts it, "the idea of 'crisis' is inversely proportional to how long the intolerable has continued" (287). In cases such as these, when the intolerable has continued for so long, the word crisis does not seem to be very appropriate. Why, then, does it continue to be used? Gatrell ("Refugees in Modern World History"), Agnes Woolley, and Lilie Chouliaraki and Myria Georgiou seem to agree that calling refugee movement a "crisis" is a Eurocentric discursive strategy: no matter how many Syrians, for example, had escaped to neighboring countries, the idea of a crisis only emerged when refugees began to arrive at the borders of high-income European countries. To Gatrell, this approach "validates intervention by states and humanitarian aid organisations that seek to regulate and manage refugees, with no opportunity for refugees to hold those in authority to account" ("Refugees in Modern World History" 30). It also creates a sense of urgency and exception that discourages civic questioning. The term, Chouliaraki and Georgiou

argue, puts emphasis on the number of arrivals instead of on the causes for it, as if refugees, not the conflicts from which they flee, were responsible for the "crisis" of which the Global North is nothing but a victim. If the notion of crisis, on the one hand, aligns with the meaning of refugee established by the convention/protocol, the constant reference to a "refugee crisis" in political and mediatic discourse, on the other hand, expands the denomination to people who would not be considered refugees or even asylum seekers by the UN. Perhaps because of this, according to Hakim Abderrezak, "the 'refugee crisis' has often been named the 'migrant crisis' by the very same sources [mass media and politicians]" (375). The conflation between migrant and refugee, in turn, "minimises what sociologist Helen Fein calls the 'universe of obligation', which reinforces Europe's duty to welcome refugees as laid out in the United Nations' 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol" (Abderrezak 375), better serving these states' interests.

In addition to crisis, the other common element I identify in political and mediatic discourses about refugees is water imagery. What I here call water imagery is a reference to refugee movements in terms of waves, flows, floods, swamping, and inundations, which appears in headlines such as "Jordan Struggles Under a Wave of Syrian Refugees" (*The New York Times*) and "Regional rivals vow to halt refugee flow" (*The Times*). Of course, this metaphorization may simply imply that these people, like water, move. It calls attention, however, that the implicit comparison is not just with water, but with violent, overwhelming amounts of it. Cox et al. consider the violence this metaphor imposes on refugees: "Whether it is the 'sea of death' pronounced by former Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta following the drowning of more than 350 people on 3 October 2013, or journalistic references to 'the flow of desperate individuals [that] is a drop in the sea of African poverty,' too often the stories of migrants and refugees are dissolved in the medium they move through" (7). In a similar line of reasoning, Joseph Pugliese argues that refugees are discursively reduced to "bodies of water"

(358), that is, again, a type of pure life without any specificity that could help distinguish it from its environment. The fact that these "bodies of water" are often referred to in numerous groups additionally produces, according to Cox et al., a naturalization of the vulnerability with which the refugee is already associated. I will return to this discussion about the symbolism of water in relation to the refugee in the next chapter's analysis of Smith's "The Embassy of Cambodia."

As we transition to the next section of this chapter, it is important to emphasize that mediatic and right-wing political discourse is not the only vein to rely on the 1951/67 connotations of refugee while simultaneously reinforcing them. Whereas it avoids representing refugees as a threat, humanitarian discourse often emerges, too, as a caring response to a crisis or waves of refugees. Mai-Linh K. Hong argues, furthermore, that humanitarian narratives complement protectionist ones in the making of "a global refugee regime," her term for a "global infrastructure of international and domestic laws, institutions, and legal processes that contour refugee flows – serves mostly a gatekeeping function for wealthy nations" (34). While protectionist narratives pose the refugee as a threat to the nation, humanitarian narratives focus, according to Hong, on states and/or organizations as redeeming "rescuers of refugees" (34). Notably, Hong's critique is not to humanitarian actions *per se*, for they undoubtedly represent a vital intervention in the areas where they are allowed to take place. Her point, rather, is that "the regime masks and sustains itself through humanitarian narratives that valorize the regime as care while reinforcing the structures of refugee vulnerability" (35). In other words, humanitarianism unconsciously contributes to the violence from which it attempts to protect refugees by remediating rather than transforming their situation. By contrast, I now turn to works like Hong's, that is, to those that contribute to efforts, especially in the humanities, to denaturalize the meaning of refugee in judicial, mediatic, political, and humanitarian discourses.

3. Refugees in the Humanities

In the previous sections, I quoted from several chapters in Cox et al.'s book *Refugee Imaginaries: Research across the Humanities* when discussing, for instance, the history of the definition of refugee and legal, political, and humanitarian discourses about the refugee. This indicates that, as we well know, the "humanities" in Cox et al.'s title refers to a broad spectrum of disciplines that do not necessarily have a homogeneous approach to the question of the refugee. *Refugee Imaginaries*, nonetheless, seems to participate in a particular trend in the humanities within which I would situate this dissertation as well: critical refugee studies. In this section, I provide an overview of this area of studies to arrive at its treatment of refugee literature and of the refugee in literature.

Even though the field of critical refugee studies is described by their own scholars as a recent trend, it can be traced back to Arendt's reflections about refugees in order to advance a refugee epistemology, that is, a shift in perspective according to which the refugee is no longer (or not only) an object of investigation but the lens through which one attempts to know the world. As Yến Lê Espiritu and Lan Duong put it, critical refugee studies "reconceptualize 'the refugee' not as an object of rescue but as a site of social and political critiques of militarized empires" (588). The authors thus associate the refugee standpoint with a critique of contemporary models of sovereignty that stretch back into an age of empires. In this line of reasoning, critical refugee studies would work to denaturalize not just the concept of refugee, but the stability of related institutions, such as sovereign states. As a result, the meaning of refugee in this field does not have a steady definition and undergoes constant scrutiny, erasure, and deconstruction.

Several research and educational centers participate in critical refugee studies, the most famous of which are located in institutions of higher education in English-speaking countries.

Founded in 1982, the Oxford Refugee Studies Centre (RSC), in England, was the first academic center to contribute to critical refugee studies. In accordance with the premises of the field, the RSC states on its website that it "emphasizes the understanding of experiences of forced migration from the point of view of affected peoples." Nevertheless, the center also carries out research projects that speak the potentially problematic language of "solutions" to refugee "problems" and "crises" through policy making. Still, the RSC importantly encourages researchers to work directly with refugees and/or refugee peers through participatory academic methodologies. The Centre for Refugee Studies (CRS) at York University, Canada, founded in 1988, was the second of its kind in the world and follows an approach to research by and about refugees that is similar to Oxford's participatory methodologies. The Critical Refugee Studies Collective, in turn, was formed in the beginning of the 2010s across several campuses of the University of California. It consists of a group of scholars who study refugees and have "long and deep ties, and linguistic and cultural access to refugee communities in California and beyond, particularly to African, Palestinian, Pacific Island, Somali and Southeast Asian refugee communities."[3] Differently from RSC and CRS, the Collective's projects and academic courses do not seek to find solutions to refugees through humanitarianism and policy making. Instead, they attempt to rethink refugees as subjects and sites of knowledge, inquiry, and critique. Along the same lines, the Refugee Hosts and the Campus in Camps projects propose critical approaches to research and education by fostering refugee responses in countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Palestine. It should be noted that these projects also result from local collaboration with research institutions in high-income countries, such as Queen Margaret University and Edinburgh University (Scotland), Columbia University (United States), and the University of Exeter (England).

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[3] See the Critical Refugee Studies Collective's website at https://criticalrefugeestudies.com/who-we-are. Accessed 31 May 2022.

In spite of the groundbreaking goal of advancing a refugee epistemology, I notice a privileging of disciplines such as history, law, and political sciences, which claim to deal with the "reality" of the refugee condition, in the lines of inquiry these centers and initiatives more often pursue. Less attention is given, in turn, to literature and other arts, which, when at all concerned, are more often read as direct representations of that reality and less frequently studied in terms of aesthetic and cultural aspects. In this sense, critical refugee scholars tend to give precedence to a refugee literature that is also a literature by refugees. It is granted that writings by refugees should be addressed by scholars in this field, as these writings have the refugee viewpoint that the area wants to emphasize. Furthermore, critical refugee scholars' concern with authorship certainly contributes to important debates about decentering the value and production of art. Just as important as giving visibility to the works by refugees, however, is considering the ways in which refugees are imagined in cultural products. This is not to say that autobiographies, for instance, are void of imagined refugees, but that critical refugee studies often approach them as if they were. It appears, in this sense, that the approach of critical refugee studies to literature should be guided not only by the question of authorship, but also by an interest in unravelling the possibilities for refugee thinking that literary works may open beyond the constraints of a reality always already defined by ideologies that the figure of the refugee seems to defy.

Stonebridge's *Placeless People: Writing, Rights, and Refugees* is an example of a scholarly work that addresses literary constructions of refugee perspectives in the early 20th century while also valuing these subjects' extraliterary experiences. She discusses, in this sense, the influence of Franz Kafka's fiction on Arendt's thinking on totalitarianism and the rightlessness of refugees, as well as the notion of deracination in Simone Weil's work, understood as "the tragic condition of modern times, affecting not only refugees and the dispossessed, but all who capitalism and colonialism had torn from their roots" (*Placeless*

People 96). Alongside her analyses of texts by refugee writers such as Arendt and Weil, Stonebridge examines the figure of the Jewish refugee in George Orwell's fiction. It should be noted that, with the exception of Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, an Oxford-based contemporary Palestinian poet, Stonebridge focuses on European authors writing before or shortly after 1951 and thus addresses mostly Jewish and Palestinian refugees.

Stonebridge is also one of the editors of *Refugee Imaginaries*, to which Rose contributes with a genealogy of refugee writing and Anna Bernard with a chapter on genres of refugee writing. In his genealogy, Rose proposes that refugee writing follows a particular style whose development can be traced from the first half of the 20th century into contemporaneity. This style, Rose argues, marks the transition between exile memoirs and refugee literature and is characterized by attention to three features that did not appear in the former: negative identification, pronominal shifting, and cruel optimism. By negative identification, the author refers to refugees' self-definition in terms of difference, that is, either in relation to what they are not or to those who are not refugees. Pronominal shifting, in turn, would be the writer or narrator's movement between plural and singular first-person pronouns, "a tension between the authoritative, public 'we', claiming to speak for all refugees, and the doubting, intellectual 'I' that registers the impossibility of this claim" (Rose 52). Finally, Rose defines cruel optimism as "a relation [that] exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (53). Rose derives these three features from Arendt's essay "We Refugees," in which refugees' cruel optimism is framed as "the fantastical attachment to the idea that the good life might be possible, if only [refugees] were better able to merge into the host nation and/or return to the state of undifferentiated private citizen" (Rose 53). He then intends to discuss how refugee writings since 1943 have dealt with these elements. Even though Rose states that "writing the refugee requires the conscientious writer, irrespective of their biographical relation to refugeedom, to pay careful attention to [those] three features" (55), the

only writings by non-refugee he cites are Jonny Steinberg's *A Man of Good Hope* (which results, it bears noting, from Steinberg's long interviews with his protagonist Asad Abdullah, a refugee) and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. Besides, it is arguable whether Rose's analysis, as valuable as it is, can be considered a genealogy and drive such generalizing conclusions about refugee writings as it only engages with five works.

Bernard's description of genres of refugee writing is less limiting than Rose's genealogy, as she focuses on poetry, verbatim theater, and graphic novels not because they are the only genres through which refugees imagine themselves, but because she believes them to be especially conspicuous forms of refugee expression today. Bernard's analysis is nonetheless restricted to refugees' autobiographic production. Her concern with authorship and authenticity is apparent in her problematization of verbatim theater, a form of documented theater that reproduces the exact words spoken by people interviewed about a particular topic. On the one hand, Bernard seems to suggest that a verbatim theater performed by refugee artists to a refugee audience would be able to represent refugee experience more authentically or accurately. On the other hand, she states that "substitution and identification underlie all depictions of refugee experience" (67) which would include, of course, verbatim theater by, about, and for refugees.

Stonebridge, Rose, Bernard, and other authors in critical refugee studies identify and respond to an increase in "refugee-responsive artistic practices ... in recent decades, and even more markedly in recent years" (Cox 5). This increase, according to Cox, is "to a large extent ... a consequence of the high profile afforded to the 'refugee crisis'" (5). As the number of refugees rises, so does the frequency with which they appear in discourses and forms of representation by themselves and others. In literature, in particular, one observes an increase in public attention to contemporary refugee writings with the publication of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* in 2003, when the American occupation of Afghanistan following 9/11 was frequently addressed by the news. A refugee himself, Hosseini tells a traumatic story of an

Afghan refugee boy that was translated to 42 languages and adapted to film in 2007. The editorial market has since invested in stories of forced displacement, contributing to the increase in the "refugee-responsive artistic practices" that Cox and other scholars identify. Today, an internet search for refugee literature returns several works from the last two decades, among which one usually finds Dave Egger's 2006 *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng*, Dinaw Mengestu's 2007 *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, Malala Yousafzai's 2013 *I am Malala*, Viet Thanh Nguyen's 2015 *The Sympathizer*, Hamid's 2017 *Exit West*, and Dina Nayeri's 2019 *The Ungrateful Refugee: What Immigrants Never Tell You*. Of these authors, only Egger and Hamid are not refugees and Hamid is the only one to write from a perspective farther removed from the realm of experience.

Claire Gallien organized, in 2018, an issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* dedicated to refugee literature. Gallien observes that "[i]f geography, political philosophy and law have analysed current 'refugee crises,' the literature and arts produced by or about forcefully displaced people have remained understudied" (735). Particularly, she explains that the field of postcolonial studies has been criticized for failing to engage with the expanding corpus of refugee literature. Gallien disagrees that refugee literature is beyond the scope of postcolonial studies, as has been suggested by scholars such as David Ferrier. Rather, she sees a re-inscription of subalternity in the figure of the refugee that serves as a point of contact between the fields of postcolonial and critical refugee studies. For the purposes of this dissertation, it is important to point out that even though Gallien argues that "refugee literature can be taken to mean not only writing by refugees, but also the publications of former refugees turned residents or nationals, as well as those who have not experienced forced displacement" (742), the majority of the studies in the journal issues she organizes addresses autobiographical writings by refugees. In this sense, to her argument about the gap in scholarship on refugee literature, I would add that there is space within critical refugee studies for discussions about

the specific contributions and possibilities brought to the field by fiction recognized as such. Furthermore, following Gallien's emphasis on the intersection between post/de-colonial and refugee studies, a glance at Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Who Claims Alterity?" lays the ground for a critique of the claims to authentic (political) representation with which works by refugees are often burdened.

In a line of reasoning similar to that laid out by her famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak argues that the pretense to produce alternative histories in the Global North often comes from subjects privileged in their own postcolonial contexts (such as the low-income country's scholar based in high-income countries' institutions). Combining a postcolonial perspective with Marxist thought, Spivak then proposes that "the disenfranchised female in the decolonized space" (60) would be the proper carrier of analysis in those contexts. The embodiment of subalternity in the figure of this disenfranchised woman is, however, discursively displayed in at least four forms of representation among Spivak's Western and former colonizing intended audience:

> Insofar as such a figure can be represented among us ... it is, first, as an object of knowledge, as a native-informant style subject of oral histories who is patronizingly considered incapable of strategy towards us, and finally, as imagined subject/object, in the real field of literature. There is, however, a rather insidious fourth way. It is to obliterate the differences between this figure and the indigenous woman abroad, and claim the subjectship of an as-yet-unreadable alternative history ... This fourth person is a "diasporic postcolonial." (60)

Inasmuch as we can consider the refugee a subaltern, Spivak's argument complicates any hierarchy between the imagined subject/object of literature and the diasporic writer who has a means and a space to speak to an audience, as both substitute and silence the subaltern through

representation.[4] This does not devalue the refugee writer's experience, but values it along with

refugee literature in a different way, by attributing to them a role similar to the one Spivak

devises for the diasporic postcolonial: "our task is to make people ready to listen" (66). She

defends, in this sense, a literary, de(con)structive pedagogy in the humanities, a careful choice

of texts that "can at least prepare another space that makes visible" (71-72). This readiness to

listen and preparation of visible spaces relate to the act of offering of hospitality that I now

discuss.

4. The Language of Hospitality, the Hospitality of Literature

In a 1997 seminar whose translation to English was published in 2002 as

"Hostipitality," Jacques Derrida states that "there is no culture that is not also a culture of

hospitality" (361). On the one hand, the assertion seems true if one considers one's own rituals

of reception, from lining up the table with a beautiful cloth and serving fresh-brewed coffee to

a guest to crying tears of joy in the guest's praise, as the Tupinambás Derrida mentions used to

do. On the other hand, the claim might produce estrangement if read against the backdrop of

xenophobic and racist reactions to immigrant and refugee flows in high-income countries.

From the start of any discussion about hospitality, there seems to be a question regarding who

arrives that conditions an either hospitable or hostile response. Derrida has dedicated several

texts, interviews, and seminars to this and other questions similarly imbricate in the issue of

hospitality.

In his 1990s and early 2000s productions about hospitality, Derrida delves into what he

calls "scene[s] of hospitality" ("Hostipitality" 373) from different cultural traditions. For

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[4] In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak distinguishes between two German words for representation: *Vertretung* and *Darstellung*. The former has a sense of substitution, that is, of stepping in and standing on someone's place, as in politics when a representative speaks for others. *Darstellung*, in turn, is a representation that has to do with re-presentation, rhetoric, staging, persuasion, and interpretation.

example, in "Hostipitality," he draws an account of the excess and substitution in pure hospitality from Louis Massignon's discussion on Yahweh's visitation to Abraham. This scene contributes to a depiction of a pure and unconditional hospitality to which I will soon return. By contrast, in *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!*, Derrida refers to Emmanuel Levinas's account of *villes-refuges*, medieval cities open to newcomers in need, where a certain sense of the sovereignty of the city allowed its members to decide upon the rules according to which they would receive others. Similarly, Derrida's discussion about the Greek tradition of guest friendship (*xenia*) lends itself to the framing of the hospitality that Western societies have inherited. This is a model that Derrida tears out and deconstructs, for instance, in Immanuel Kant's "Perpetual Peace" and Levinas's *Otherwise than Being*. This dialogue with different traditions, or with different instances of a tradition, helps make Derrida one of the main references in the study of hospitality in the humanities.

One of Derrida's main contributions to the thought of hospitality in the humanities is to have laid out the aporistic character of hospitality. Derrida derives from religious traditions, as well as from Kant and Levinas, a sense of responsibility to the other that imbues the Law of hospitality (singular, often capitalized, and also referred to as pure, true, absolute, hyperbolical, unconditional, and universal hospitality). As Derrida explains in the case of the *villes-refuges*, the phenomenological manifestations of the Law require the establishment of laws of hospitality (plural, lowercase, and also referred to as conditional hospitality and hospitality by right) in all instances of the encounter with the other, from the realm of the subject to that of the nation. The laws of hospitality are simultaneously the realization of the Law of hospitality and its subversion, for, whenever a contract is signed, parties are identified, and terms are imposed, the unconditionality of the Law is perverted. Taking a cue from Levinas's maxim that "the essence of language is friendship and hospitality" (*Totality and Infinity* 305), Derrida examines the role of language in hospitality, or of the language of the laws of hospitality, to

expose the imposition of translation upon the foreigner as the host asks "the foreigner to understand us, to speak our language .... before being able and so as to be able to welcome him into our country" (*Of Hospitality* 15). Furthermore, he considers the violence of the address, of inscribing the foreign into the law of the host through the metaphysical question "what is?" in "what is your name?". This interpellation aporistically makes hospitality possible at the same time that it hinders the unconditional, pure, and absolute hospitality.

In face of the role of language in the pervertibility of the Law/laws, Derrida wonders "whether absolute, hyperbolical, unconditional hospitality doesn't consist in suspending language, a particular determinate language, and even the address to the other" (*Of Hospitality* 135). Derrida, however, does not seem to further explore the possibility of suspension of language in this seminar. One of the main questions guiding my research has then been what can it mean to suspend language and the address to the other? If, to Derrida, this suspension is not simply, or not only, silence, can there be then a suspension of language that goes by language itself and more specifically by literary language? In what follows, I approach these questions by first further detailing the relationship between language and hospitality in Derrida's later writings but also in some points in *Of Grammatology*. This discussion will open a venue for a reading of Derrida's view on the language of literature and, finally, lead to a speculation about the hospitality of literature. This process is meant to build an argument that the highly self-referential language of literature, capable of saying anything and everything as it speaks only of itself, may perform its own suspension and thus the opening through which to glance at unconditional hospitality.

From Derrida's writings and thus in his readings of Greek, Kantian, and Levinasian texts, it can be inferred that the Law of hospitality and the laws of hospitality meet at the question of the name and of everything entailed in inquiring into the name. Hospitality as we know it (conditional) and as it should be to be called hospitality (unconditional) begins and

ends with this question. Derrida explains that as early as in the Greek tradition of guest friendship, hospitality "is not offered to an anonymous new arrival and someone who has neither name, nor patronym, nor family, nor social status, and who is therefore treated not as a foreigner but as another barbarian" (Derrida, *Of Hospitality* 25). According to his reading of Plato's dialogues, to be treated as a foreigner in Athens is to be recognized as a recipient of the right to hospitality, for the *xenos* (foreign) can only exist within the pact of *xenia*. *Xenia* designates an act of worship to the gods, who could visit one's home disguised as a stranger, as Athena does to Telemachus in the *Odyssey*. It is also a contract binding host and guest in terms of rights and obligations. This pact is often sealed, or signed, with a gift or token, which, like the *tessera hospitalis* in Ancient Rome, was passed through generations to continue to guarantee that the signatories' descendants would find refuge at each other's home. The pact thus makes families simultaneously hostages, guests, and hosts of each other. It is curious, although not surprising, to observe that the premises of *xenia* have gradually developed into the assurance of reciprocity that informs, for instance, the United Nations' 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugee*, by which states abide to supposedly protect their own citizens as well. As a right, a law of hospitality, the *xenia* offered to the foreigner is necessarily conditional. Unconditional hospitality would therefore need to go beyond the foreigner as a recognized, named, inscribed subject, opening oneself and one's home to the unknown and absolute other.

What is it to be open to the absolute other? Before attempting to explain Derrida's strenuous articulation of this inarticulable idea, I would like to signal that the question of the foreigner and of the other seems to be a Derridean instance of resistance to Kant's universal hospitality and Levinas's ethical responsibility in the face-to-face encounter. To Kant, universal hospitality is the third definitive article of a foundation on which to build perpetual peace. According to this article,

The law of world citizenship shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality.

Here, as in the preceding articles, it is not a question of philanthropy but of right. Hospitality means the right of a stranger not to be treated as an enemy when he arrives in the land of another. One may refuse to receive him when this can be done without causing his destruction; but, so long as he peacefully occupies his place, one may not treat him with hostility ... It is only a right to temporary sojourn, a right to associate, which all men have. They have it by virtue of their common possession of the surface of the earth, where, as a globe, they cannot infinitely disperse and hence must fully tolerate the presence of each other. (Kant 284)

Siobhan Kattago emphasizes that Kant's universal hospitality is first of all a negative right, as the guest is entitled "not to be treated as an enemy when he arrives in the land of another." Based on my previous considerations about *xenia*, I would moreover call attention to the fact that this right belongs to the stranger, which is another common translation for *xenos*. In this sense, Kant's universal hospitality is not directed to an absolute other but to the foreign man recognized as such. Additionally, because Kantian hospitality is not an act of philanthropy, in other words, since hospitality is not a gift, it is not voluntarily given but predicated on men's (the host's and the guest's) "common possession of the surface of the earth." If one recalls Arendt's and Agamben's argument in "We Refugees" that "man" in such contexts means "citizen" instead of "barely human," one may conclude, as Derrida does, that Kantian hospitality is more conditional than properly universal. Another factor that adds to this conditional character is that Kantian hospitality is temporary and dependent on the peacefulness of the guest.

In Levinas, in turn, Derrida sees an ethics of hospitality in "the fact of the encounter, of the relation of an I with an other" (Levinas, *Autrement que savoir* 28). The encounter is the event in which the I and the other come face-to-face and become identifiable, distinguishable,

and accountable for each other. As Ivana and Tim Noble explain, "for Levinas there is no absolute division between the I and the other, in that it is precisely the encounter that is important. Identity is constructed in and through this face-to-face meeting" (50). The I thus only becomes an I in face of the other, it depends on the other for its own constitution. Furthermore, to Levinas, the other liberates the I from its own totalizing demands. In this sense, the other may be said to set the I free from itself while simultaneously holding it hostage by demanding a response from it and imposing an ethical responsibility on it in the encounter. In regard to this response, Noble and Noble consider that:

> I cannot force the other to accept me as other, and yet at one level, if Levinas is right, that must be going on, and identity is a mutual, not an individual construct. In other words ... hospitality can never be an optional extra, for us as individuals or as a nation, since it is in the encounter with the other migrant and our welcome/rejection of her or him that we (inclusive of the migrant) discover ourselves. (50)

If the I depends on the other for its own identity, which is prompted through the face-to-face contact in which one responds to the other, then hospitality as an openness to the other is always already happening in the Levinasian encounter. This does not mean that the other will necessarily be met with a word of welcome, but that they will be met, nonetheless. A remaining question, however, might inquire into the figure of the other in Levinas. Is it more related to the foreigner in a contract of hospitality, as in *xenia* and Kant, or to the absolute other?

It might be pertinent to emphasize, at this point, that Derrida held Levinas in the high regard of the "philosopher of hospitality *par excellence*" (Noble and Noble 56). Derrida spoke eloquently on his friendship with Levinas, as well as on hospitality and the question of the name, in what was later published as his address at Levinas's funeral, under the title *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*. In this text, Derrida argues that Levinas authored a phenomenology of hospitality. Despite (or exactly because of) this appreciation, Derrida, as I read him,

extrapolates Levinas to radicalize the thought of hospitality and of the other, as one notices in the following passage. The passage is quoted at length to allow one to observe Derrida's play with language, with the very code through which hospitality is offered.

> We have a formula of the entire contradiction, which is more than a dialectical contradiction ... the difference between something like "its" other (the very Hegelian formula of "its other"), the difference, therefore, between hospitality extended to one's other (to everybody their own, their chosen and selected *hôtes*, their integrable immigrants, their assimilable visitors with whom cohabitation would be livable), and hospitality extended to an other who no longer is, who never was the "its other" of dialectics. Hospitality – if there is any – must, would have to, open itself to an other that is not mine, my *hôte*, my other, not even my neighbor or my brother (Levinas always says that the other, the other man, man as the other is *my* neighbor, my universal brother, in humanity. At bottom, this is one of our larger questions: is hospitality reserved, confined, to man, my universal brother?) ("Hostipitality" 363)

While Levinas, somewhat like Kant, thinks of the other in terms of the I, as a fellow, a neighbor, a man, Derrida conceives of hospitality as an openness to an unconceivable other. In this regard, Derrida's straining of his own language in this passage, with enumerations, negations, and ever so slight changes of meaning, performs the very impossibility of arriving at a definition of this other to which unconditional hospitality would nonetheless be open. As Derrida said as early as *Of Grammatology*, "no ontology can think this operation ... the designation of that impossibility escapes the language of metaphysics only by a hairsbreadth. For the rest, it must borrow its resources from the logic it deconstructs" (342). On that occasion, he was speaking particularly of the supplement, which, as I now show, approximates the notion of the other of absolute hospitality through a similar movement of excessive substitution.

In a discussion about the supplement in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida makes a distinction between the "other than I" and the "other than itself" that approximates the longer passage I just quoted from "Hostipitality." As he discusses the part of the "Essay on the Origin of Languages" in which Jean-Jacques Rousseau pictures a savage man mistakenly interpreting a taller man as a giant out of fear (a scene that depicts, to Derrida, the advent of metaphor), Derrida argues that "[a]bsolute fear would then be the first encounter of the other as other: as other than I and as other than itself" (*Of Grammatology* 302). This encounter is virtually impossible because "I can answer the threat of the other as other (than I) only by transforming it into another (than itself), through altering it into another (than itself), through altering it in my imagination, my fear, my desire" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 302). The openness to the other is replaced with a sort of defense mechanism, and the I receives the other not as other than I ("an other that is not mine") but as other than itself. Absolute hospitality, in turn, would be the removal of any such mechanism, the acceptance of fear:

> [T]o be hospitable is to let oneself be overtaken, *to be ready not to be ready*, if such is possible, to let oneself be overtaken, to not even *let* oneself to be overtaken, to be surprised, in a fashion almost violent, violated and raped, stolen ... precisely where one is not ready to receive – and not only *not yet ready* but *not ready*, *unprepared* in a mode that is not even that of the "not yet." (Derrida, "Hostipitality" 361)

To be hospitable seems to imply a violent overtaking, an unexpected surpassing by an other for which there is no space and yet there is an openness. This is an impossible openness or an openness that is not an openness to an other that is also not my other, as discussed above. It is then at this point that one can trace another link between hospitality and language that will be gradually emphasized throughout this section. Language is not only the vehicle of the impossibility of absolute hospitality; they (language and hospitality) may actually be said to work in similar ways: the movement of hospitality that Derrida describes approximates that of

supplementation in language because both the "other that is not mine" and the supplement perform an excessive addition and a substitution there where there is an openness.

In his discussion about the supplement in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida describes it as that which "tak[es] and keep[s] the place of the other" (341), that which substitutes the other. This description is important because it emphasizes a resemblance, although not an equation, between the supplement and the other that is not related to what they are, since neither can be an object of ontology, but to what they do, to their movement. It is interesting, in this sense, his choice of illustrating the first term (the supplement) with the second (the other), which emphasizes the linguistic structure of hospitality or the hospitable structure of language by approximating notions that resist conceptualization, that are somewhat savage, extreme, unprecedented. Much later than *Of Grammatology*, in "Hostipitality," Derrida insists on the importance of *suppléance* in the scenes of absolute hospitality in Massignon. *Suppléance* is the French term translated in *Of Grammatology* and throughout Derrida's oeuvre as supplementation, as it carries the senses of an addition and substitution to a nonetheless incomplete whole. If one examines Derrida's account of hospitality, one finds *suppléance* there in the violent overwhelming and overtaking of the host by the other that I just discussed; in his analysis of the scene in Massignon's *L'hospitalité sacrée* in which God's visitation to Abraham "begin[s] with changes of names, heteronomous changes, unilaterally decided by God, who tells Abram that he will no longer be called Abram but Abraham" ("Hostipitality" 372); and in his recognition of the messianic in hospitality, "the messianic as hospitality" ("Hostipitality" 362). These two last aspects (the supplementation of the proper name and the messianic) further suggest that, although Derrida does not openly address the suspension of language and literature in "Hostipitality," this text opens a venue for now reflecting upon these questions.

To arrive at such a reflection, I would like to point out that, in relation to the above-mentioned scene that Derrida extracts from Massignon, the "visitation of Yahweh is so

radically surprising and over-taking that he who receives does not even receive it himself, in his name. His identity is as if fractured. He receives without being ready to welcome since he is no longer the same between the moment at which God initiates the visit and the moment at which, visiting him, he speaks to him" (Derrida, "Hostipitality" 372). It can be argued that in the process of changing one's name, of fracturing their identity in this scene, there is a moment of suspension of the proper name. This moment recalls Derrida's discussion about writing as the prohibition of the proper in his analysis of Claude Lévi-Strauss's "A Writing Lesson." In this essay, Lévi-Strauss describes the Nambikwara people as a "society without writing" (qtd. in Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 118) because they did not have a system of phonetic notations that he could identify as such. He also points out that "they are not allowed ... to use proper names" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 120). Derrida contrasts Lévi-Strauss's narrow sense of writing with his own arche-writing – the arche-structure anterior to language and discourse and underlying them, inhabited by difference and absence rather than identity and presence – to argue that a society where there is a prohibition of the proper is necessarily inscribed in (arche-)writing: "[t]here is writing from the moment that the proper name is erased in a system;" "writing, obliteration of the proper classed in the play of difference, is the originary violence ... The death of an absolutely proper naming, recognizing in a language [*langage*] the other as pure other, invoking it as what it is" (*Of Grammatology* 117, 119). If there is a moment of obliteration or suspension of the proper in absolute hospitality as well, it might be possible to argue that absolute hospitality brings arche-writing forth, revealing and calling attention to this structure.

It is in a somewhat similar line of reasoning, still related to proper/appropriate names or concepts and their suspension, that Derrida speaks of "the madness of hospitality" ("Hostipitality" 372). To Derrida, as one may recall, absolute hospitality would need to consist in "[t]o wait without waiting, awaiting absolute surprise, the unexpected visitor, awaited

without a horizon of expectation" ("Hostipitality" 362). In this sense, it can be said that hospitality has a messianic aspect to it if the messianic is understood as "the opening to the future or to the coming of the other as the advent of justice, but without a horizon of expectation and without prophetic prefiguration" (Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge" 56). To Derrida, this messianic aspect "introduces deconstructive disruption or madness in the concept of hospitality, the madness of hospitality, even the madness of the concept of hospitality" ("Hostipitality" 362). Madness, deconstructive disruption, or autodeconstruction is here inherent to a concept, such as that of hospitality or of the concept of a concept of hospitality, that opens itself to its opposite, to anything future, come what may, "reproducing or producing in advance, in the rapport of one concept to the other, the contradictory and deconstructive law of hospitality" (Derrida, "Hostipitality" 362). This is, too, the language of hospitality (or what true hospitality would do to language): deconstructive, mad, where nothing "remains in place any longer" (Derrida, "Hostipitality" 364). And what other (non)concept can do this to language or can accommodate this type of mad language if not literature?

To speak of a mad language capable of anything, including its own suspension, might require an incursion into some of Michel Foucault's writings, particularly at one of the points in which he converges with Derrida and is confronted by his former student. In the 1961 preface to *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Foucault defines madness as "nothing other than the absence of an oeuvre" (xxxi). In a 1963 response to this preface, published in English in 1978 as "Cogito and the History of Madness," Derrida agrees with Foucault's definition as he states that "madness is what by essence cannot be said: it is the 'absence of the work,' as Foucault profoundly says" (51). In Foucault, the absence of oeuvre or work has three main connotations. The first relates to the poor incarcerated in the 17th century and deemed mad because they were unable to work. The second refers to the lack of a body of work that represents madness as madness, for any intellectual attempt at bridging that

gap would be subjected to reason. The third, at last, corresponds to Foucault's argument that the discourse of history carries the vestiges of what it excludes as an invisible and mute shadow. It is mainly in regard to the second and the third connotations that Foucault and Derrida simultaneously converge and diverge. Derrida's objections to Foucault's preface could in fact have provoked an important change in Foucault's perception of the relationship between madness and language. As I will demonstrate, this change further approximates Foucault and Derrida's notion of literature, according to which, as I see it, the language of literature may perform its own active and disruptive suspension and, thus, envision absolute hospitality.

In *Folie et déraison*, Foucault describes the language of madness as "all those imperfect words, of no fixed syntax, spoken falteringly, in which the exchange between madness and reason was carried out" (xxviii). This language would have been silenced in the advent of the discourse of reason (a violence that Foucault initially associates with Cartesian thought), which may address madness through a "monologue that attempts to define and categorise madness, but in applying such reasonable ways of knowing never understands madness madly" (James 386). Foucault's endeavor in *Folie et déraison* is, in this sense, to "draw up the archaeology of that silence" (xxviii), to allow madness to speak for itself, to "give madness an *oeuvre*" (James 386). He insists that such a task is possible if one resorts to a language "more original, much rougher and more matutinal than that of science" (*History of Madness* xxviii), in which madness and non-madness, reason and non-reason coexist indistinguishably. Derrida disagrees. To him, if madness is the absence of work, that which cannot be said, an impossibility, then any attempt at saying it, at producing its oeuvre, will have failed before the start by inscribing itself into the traps of reason implicit in the conduction of intellectual research. Nevertheless, Derrida still devises an instance in which Foucault's project may be said to succeed. He argues that "Foucault's determination to avoid this trap [of reason] is constant ... it is also, with all seriousness, the maddest aspect of his project." ("Cogito and the History of Madness" 40). As

Serafín James explains, "Foucault's text can only be considered a work of madness because the work is unaware of its own impossibility ... It is only because Foucault does not realise that his project must fail that it can, somewhat paradoxically, succeed. Derrida informs Foucault that he has only succeeded in spite of himself" (388). One may infer from these excerpts that Derrida's reading of Foucault as a work/non-work of madness seems to already gesture at a certain performance of madness, suspension, or autodeconstruction that both Foucault and Derrida think possible in literature.

In "Madness, the Absence of Work," a text possibly published in response to Derrida's "Cogito and the History of Madness," Foucault appears to change his interpretation of "the absence of work" as that which cannot be said: in *Folie et déraison*, the modal seemed to have the sense of an impossibility; now, Foucault emphasizes the notion of prohibition, as if madness were not simply thrown into silence but became a sort of forbidden, outlaw language beyond meaning. Even though Foucault, as James observes, moves away from an archeological tone into a messianic or prophetic standpoint in this text, I would argue that the shift from silence to prohibition still foregrounds the third connotation of "the absence of work" in *Folie et déraison*, that is, that of madness as the counterpoint, the counterwork, the shadowy non-work in any pronounced discourse such as that of history. It seems to be in this sense that Foucault redescribes the relationship between madness and language in the following excerpt. Once more, I quote from a lengthy passage that may gesture towards the excess beyond the articulation of my own reading:

> Madness has appeared not like the ruse of a hidden signification but like a prodigious reserve of meaning ... Much more than a mere supply, it is a figure that retains and suspends meaning, laying out an emptiness where nothing is proposed but the yet-incomplete possibility that some meaning or another may come to lodge there, or still a third, and this may perhaps continue to infinity. Madness opens up a lacunar reserve

that designates and exposes that chasm where linguistic code and utterance become

entangled, shaping each other and speaking of nothing but their still silent rapport.

("Madness, the Absence of Work" 295)

First, it is important to say that at this point in his text Foucault had already laid down the four

interdicts of language, that is, the codes of prohibition meant to avoid the emergence of

madness or transgression in language, namely: faults against the linguistic code that pronounce

words or structures without meaning; curse, magic, and blasphemous words; censored

discourse; and, finally, a "form of language ... subjecting an utterance, which appears to

conform to the accepted code, to another code whose key is contained within that same

utterance so that this utterance becomes divided within itself. It says what it says, but it adds a

silent surplus that quietly enunciates what it says and according to which code it says what it

says" (294). The idea of a silent surplus is key to the reading of madness in the long passage

quoted above, for it emphasizes that madness is not simply the lack of words but the lack in

words, that is, the inevitable announcement of every possibility obliterated and yet remaining

when we reasonably choose a word. Foucault reiterates that the relationship of madness and

language does not imply irony, that is, "the ruse of a hidden signification," but relates to – and

here he resorts to various terms – a reserve, a supply, a surplus, an excess, a matrix. Not too

different from the Derridean arche-writing and *différance*, this reserve is not a storeroom from

which meaning is taken, but an overflowing void in which it is suspended, in which there is

only difference and deferral but not sense. As Foucault explains, "[m]adness appears as an

utterance wrapped up in itself, articulating something else beneath what it says, of which it is

at the same time the only possible code ... it confines its linguistic code within an utterance that

ultimately does not articulate anything other than this implication" ("Madness, the Absence of

Work" 295). In other words, madness implies the inescapable implication between an utterance

that is built according to a linguistic code and its revelation of the very code onto which it folds

back. In perhaps more practical terms, the mad language would consist in the possibility of saying something else (something other, something that does not make sense, something that does not say anything) implicated in every logical, grammatical, acceptable utterance. It is at last the possibility of suspending language, the language of reason and of the laws of hospitality, through a non-language that is something other than silence.

It should be noted that Foucault does not limit the (dis)appearance of madness to any particular register. It may be there in the language of history, science, and philosophy, in his own language, as Derrida argues it was the case of *Folie et déraison*. Foucault, nevertheless, seems to have a particular register in mind as he discusses his fourth interdict, for he later indicates "that strange proximity between madness and literature" ("Madness, the Absence of Work" 296). The language of literature, or what literature does to language, seems to accommodate the movement of madness, or the absent work of madness, in that "literature had become utterance that inscribed in itself its own principle of decipherment. Or, in any case, it implied, in every sentence and in every word, the power to modify in sovereign fashion the values and significations of the linguistic code to which in spite of everything (and in fact) it belonged; it suspended the reign of that code in one actual gesture of writing'" (Foucault, "Madness, the Absence of Work" 296). Foucault, therefore, attributes to literature a potential, in the sense of both a possibility and a reserve, to suspend its own language through a sort of self-implication that spells out not only what is said, but how it is said and the infinite that is left out and beyond the meaningful. Because it relates to the language of reason as well as to that of madness, because it may let this madness that I have been discussing peak or penetrate through the cracks of meaningful discourse, literature may be said to suspend the interdict Foucault proposes, and to be thus able to say anything, and maybe even everything.

In a 1989 interview with Derek Attridge curiously entitled "This Strange Institution Called Literature," Derrida attributes his constant interest in literature and philosophy (or

philosophical literature and literary philosophy) to an adolescent desire to "save in uninterrupted inscription, in the form of a memory, what happens – or fails to happen" (34). He further distinguishes between what happens and what fails to happen by arguing that, in his view, "what happens – in other words, the unique event whose trace one would like to keep alive – is also the very desire that what does not happen should happen, and is thus a 'story' in which the event already crosses within itself the archive of the 'real' and the archive of 'fiction'" (35). Similarly to Foucault and as he had already pointed out in "Cogito and the History of Madness," Derrida envisions a turbulent excess (what does not happen) surrounding the fact (what happens). Because this excess did not happen, it consists in a fiction belonging to the realm of literature. It is perhaps in this line of reasoning that Derrida reports his first thought that literature is "the institution which allows one to say *everything*, in *every way* [*tout dire*]. The space of literature is not only that of an instituted *fiction* but also a *fictive institution* which in principle allows one to say everything" (36). The capacity to say anything and everything, or *tout dire*, relates to literature's potential to encompass both what happens (the referential, the fact) and what does not happen (the fictional, the excess). It should be clear that when Derrida calls literature "an institution," he is referring to a modern European construct posterior to many of the very texts we now call literary and made up of several laws and conventions. One of these conventions is the freedom a writer would have to, again, say anything (*tout dire*) without undergoing censorship or punishment because what they write does not necessarily make reference to the world and is not forcibly true. It is literature. Of course, one may argue that this principle is complicated by the autobiographical pact, the market of non-fictional books, or even by a contemporary interest in literature by excluded ethnic groups to whom the claim to truth and belonging is very important (e.g., the refugee, as per my discussion in the previous section). In any case, what matters the most here is that it is the premise of *tout dire*, whether implying a discourse capable of accounting for the factual

while pointing towards the excess or of establishing a writer's liberties, that seems to base Derrida's argument that literature is a counter-institutional institution and, simultaneously, the most interesting thing in the world.

In regard to the counter-institutionalism of literature, that is, to its inner contradiction or auto-deconstruction, Derrida first argues that "to say everything is also to break out of prohibitions. To *affranchise oneself* – in every field where law can lay down the law. The law of literature tends, in principle, to defy or lift the law" ("This Strange Institution Called Literature" 36). As Derrida speaks of breaking out of prohibitions and lifting laws, one may trace an association between his view of literature and Foucault's proposal that the language of literature reproduces the movements of an interdicted mad language. Later in the same interview, Derrida enhances this connection by describing literature as a "place at once institutional and wild, an institutional place in which it is in principle permissible to put in question, at any rate to suspend, the whole institution" (58). Because it can say anything through its language, literature may challenge and go beyond its own theoretical boundaries. That seems to be why Derrida considers literature the most interesting thing in the world, and perhaps more interesting than the world it both represents and creates: as a counter-institutional institution that can say any and everything, literature is "on the edge of metaphysics, literature perhaps stands on the edge of everything, almost beyond everything, including itself" ("This Strange Institution Called Literature" 47). In this sense, it is crucial to acknowledge that my very attempt, in the previous sentence and throughout this section, to describe literature, to arrive at what it is, is not necessarily mistaken, for literature can sure be all of that, but definitely fragile and bound to change at the moment it is written down. Literature is, in this manner, mad. Hence, I cannot attribute to it the definitive function of being absolutely hospitable or of providing a view of unconditional hospitality, for it may of course have this function, or another, or none at all. Nonetheless, what I can and have been trying to do throughout this

investigation of suspension of language is to unveil a certain overlap or fold between hospitality, language, and literature that passes through the view of the excess, the other, and the supplement, as well as through a notion of madness in language.

After this analysis of some of Derrida and Foucault's views on literature, it seems possible to say that literature may perform a suspension of language that takes the form of more than simply silence. This is a suspension of language that goes by literary language at moments in which this language folds back upon itself, refers to itself, and puts its own construction or code into question. To me, this is more than self-referentiality and metalanguage, although it may certainly be shaped in this manner. It is a borderline experience of what Derrida calls the possible-impossible, a play with limits, a glimpse of the excessive reserve of madness, *différance*, substitution, and otherness beyond meaning, past what is said and what makes sense. As far as my research goes, Derrida did not explicitly explore this suspension in his writings about hospitality, but he left the clues – from *Of Grammatology* to his seminars and interviews – throughout his texts as to how this suspension may work.

To propose that literature may perform the suspension of language beyond silence in which Derrida speculated that absolute hospitality would unfold is not to advocate for a kind of redeeming function of literature. That is, it is not to state that literature can offer the hospitality to the absolute other that people and nations are unable or unwilling to provide, or that it may teach us how to do it. It means, rather, that literature opens, as Cury and Alis, cited in my Introduction, put it, a privileged space to reflect upon the aporias of hospitality. Among the several questions that the present section might generate, perhaps the most intriguing has a practical character: what could this suspension of language look like in an actual literary text? I would suggest that an example may be found in Homi Bhabha's reading of Tony Morrison's *Beloved* in *The Location of Culture*, in which he emphasizes the non-language of whispers and mumbles through which the enunciations of the subaltern penetrate the main narrative. In this

line of reasoning, other forms of performing rather than thematizing fragmentation, interruption, ambiguities, lists, and even silence (constructing silence through language instead of through a removal of words) may achieve a suspension of meaning and referentiality in poetry or prose, opening the text to the sight of the absolute other of hospitality as we will see in the chapters dedicated to the literary corpus of this dissertation.

Chapter Two – A Game for Many Players: Multiculturalism, Silence, and Hospitality in Zadie Smith's "The Embassy of Cambodia"

> "Como se os rastros dissessem alguma coisa. Os rastros contam sempre uma outra história."
> Carola Saavedra, *O inventário das coisas ausentes*

> "The history of placelessness is everybody's history."
> Lyndsey Stonebridge, *Placeless People*

Before it was released as a book, Zadie Smith's short story "The Embassy of Cambodia" was published in the print edition of the February 11 & 18, 2013 issue of *The New Yorker*. Only six months before, Smith's home, London, was bursting with athletes and tourists from all over the world during the Games of the XXX Olympiad. Her story, indeed, contains several references that help set it in the 21st century and some that suggest it takes place shortly after the London-based summer Olympic Games. The narrator mentions, for example, that "[o]n 6 August, Fatou walked past the embassy for the first time, on her way to a swimming pool. It is a large pool, although not quite Olympic size" (3). They also state that "[t]his summer we watched the Olympics" (7) and that "[o]n 20 August, long after the Olympians had returned to their respective countries, Fatou noticed that a basketball hoop had appeared in the far corner of the garden" (11). One, therefore, may reasonably relate these dates with the 2012 London Olympic Games, held from July 27 to August 12, as does Beatriz Pérez Zapata in her analysis of "The Embassy of Cambodia." Zapata points out that the London Olympic Games "were heralded as both the triumph of multiculturalism and the triumph of patriotism. During the Olympics, the world ... saw an asylum seeker wrapped in the Union Jack" (526). In addition to the episode mentioned by Zapata, worldwide media reported the disappearance of Cameroonian athletes from the Olympic Village and their alleged claim for asylum in the

United Kingdom.[1] Still according to Zapata, "[i]t is in this professed celebration of multiculturalism that the story of Fatou and the history of Cambodia are told" (526) in Smith's narrative. In Zapata's article as well as in this chapter, multiculturalism is understood in terms of Charles Taylor's "politics of recognition" (70), that is, a regime of hospitality to cultural differences and equal valorization of them.

Smith has repeatedly addressed multiculturalism in her writings. Similarly to the cases of the asylum seeker and the Cameroonian athletes of the London Olympics, her earlier body of works, especially the début novel *White Teeth*, was more generally perceived as an exaltation of multiculturalism because it depicts diversity in London neighborhoods. Some critics, however, go beyond this perhaps superficial reading to point out that Smith's novels, short fiction, and essays offer a critique of naïve views of cultural encounter by bringing to the fore, often through the use of irony, the hostile reception of the ethnic and socioeconomic other in high-income countries.[2] Smith herself has rejected the position of "champion of 'multiculturalism'" by arguing that "I did not understand that I was 'championing' multiculturalism simply by depicting it, or by describing it as anything other than incipient tragedy" ("On Optimism and Despair" 36). In this sense, texts such as *White Teeth*, "Two Men Arrive in a Village," and "Fences: a Brexit Diary" may actually demystify the narrative of an urban cultural mosaic by revealing the existence of displaced, rightless people at the base and on the margins of discourses of multiculturalism.[3] These texts also help one understand that what Smith calls an "incipient tragedy" is not the coexistence of differences, but the co-opting of this multiculturalism into a hegemonic discourse. As it is of interest to this chapter, "The

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[1] For more details on this case see, for example, Andrew Houhg's article "Cameroon athletes missing from London 2012 Olympics amid asylum fears," in *The Telegraph*, August 7, 2012.

[2] See, for example, Molly Thompson and Jarica Linn Watts for a synthesis of optimistic and critical readings of multiculturalism in Smith's *White Teeth*.

[3] I employ the terms "rightless" and "rightlessness" in the sense used by Lyndsay Stonebridge in *Placeless People: Writing, Rights, and Refugees*, to designate individuals who are, for various reasons, but more commonly because of statelessness, "ejected from legal and political representation" (15).

Embassy of Cambodia" seems to follow this apparent tendency in Smith's work as it portrays the dialectic confrontation between privilege and oppression in a multicultural London suburb.

Smith's short story is set in the northern London suburb of Willesden, a neighborhood accommodating "wealthy Arabs" (Smith, "The Embassy" 1), a health center whose clientele are "white, or else South Asian or from the Middle East" (Smith, "The Embassy" 4), and "a number of curious buildings" (Smith, "The Embassy" 12), such as fortress-like mansions, a Catholic nunnery, a Sikh institute, a faux-Tudor house, a dingy retirement home, and the embassy of Cambodia. This description is conveyed by a narrator self-identified as "we, the people of Willesden" (Smith, "The Embassy" 1), a plural perspective that suggests harmonious thinking and representation within a rather heterogeneous context. As I will discuss, this plural voice, with which we may be acquainted due to its frequent use in political discourse, is later contested as unrepresentative, in a critique of the possibility of social equality promised by a political ideology that advertises multiculturalism.

In addition to their portrayal of the community of Willesden, but also as part of it, this narrator tells the story of the Ivorian maid Fatou, while dialoguing with what happens inside the embassy of Cambodia and throughout the history of this Asian country. Whenever speaking about Fatou, however, the narrator momentarily steps out of the first-person plural voice into an omniscient third-person perspective closer to Fatou's actions and thoughts. This change seems to be mediated, as I will also later discuss, by the embassy of Cambodia, where invisible players, hidden behind the building's high walls, play an unstoppable game of badminton throughout the story, flying a shuttlecock back and forth and drawing the attention of both "we, the people of Willesden" and Fatou. From this other, third-person narrative voice, one learns that Fatou is a *de facto* slave to the Derawals, an Arab upper-middle class family residing in Willesden. Although her immigration status is never stated, she seems to have arrived in England through a common route for so-called "illegal aliens:" after her father takes her from

the Ivory Coast to Ghana, he organizes her "difficult passage to Libya and then on to Italy – a not insignificant financial sacrifice on his part" (Smith, "The Embassy" 16). The central Mediterranean route, particularly Italy, has been appointed as one of the main ports of entry for refugees and migrants traveling from Africa to Europe.[4] In this regard, the pull the embassy of Cambodia exerts over Fatou may be seen as a relation of identification between her and Cambodians that involves forced migration, violence, and rightlessness in the heart of a supposedly celebratory and multicultural London.

This incorporation of rightlessness into an apparent celebratory multicultural perspective is among the concerns of literary critics such as Lyndsey Stonebridge and Edward Said. In *Placeless People: Writing, Rights, and Refugees*, Stonebridge criticizes, for instance, "the sublimation of large-scale forced migration into the condition of literature itself" (8). In this regard, she compares the treatment given in modern and postmodern literature to the Holocaust and the mass displacement generated by the persecution of European Jews. According to her, "the Nazi genocide … set new terms on how literature could represent historical experience … [but,] whilst statelessness is abject, the universalizing narrative of literary cosmopolitanism has remained, for perfectly good reasons, alluring" (8). Stonebridge believes that statelessness loses its political connotation when understood as inherent to literature. Therefore, even though she acknowledges deterritorialization as a defining postmodern circumstance, she urges us to be careful about what she considers the "normalization" of displacement, which may cause one not to pay attention to the human toll this condition takes. Her argument aligns with Said's "Reflections on Exile," in which he states that "exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience" (173), and through which the critic "asks again – demands again – that we pay attention to the brute history of

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[4] The United Nations Refugee Agency's (UNHCR) 2017 report about mixed migration trends in Libya states that "[t]hree main routes bring refugees and migrants to Europe: the Western Mediterranean Route (usually via Morocco to Spain), the Central Mediterranean Route (usually via Libya to Italy) and the Eastern Mediterranean Route (usually via Turkey to Greece)" (1).

modern displacement" (Stonebridge 10). In a similar manner, in "The Embassy of Cambodia," Smith juxtaposes the multicultural discourse of the Olympic Games and of her collective narrator with the often-muted stories of the people simultaneously essential to that discourse and subjected to it. Willesden owes its multiculturalism to migrants; it, nevertheless, oppresses these people, overpowering their voices and speaking for them. In "The Embassy of Cambodia," however, these silenced, parallel stories leave traces that allow them to surface.

This chapter proposes to follow those traces to reveal the place of refugee stories vis-à-vis the narrative told by the deceptively multicultural "we, the people of Willesden." It includes a necessary discussion about how to read "The Embassy of Cambodia" as refugee literature when there is no mention of the word "refugee" in the text. In this doctoral dissertation, I investigate works of prose within which refugee stories seem to occupy a parallel and marginal position from which they subvert the authority of a central narrative that initially houses them. In "The Embassy of Cambodia," this central narrative corresponds to the myth of multiculturalism constructed by "we, the people of Willesden." In parallel, the short story unfolds the fates of Fatou, Cambodians, and, by extension, every person in the world as a potentially rightless individual. Their stories disrupt the authority of the narrator's myth of multiculturalism by hunting the narrative as a silent shadow and by acting as a structural point to the text. Parts one, two, and three of this chapter address the effects of the parallel and marginal refugee stories on the main narrative of "we, the people of Willesden." Drawing from this discussion, the last part of this analysis offers an interpretation of how "The Embassy of Cambodia" relates to the concept, categories, and language of hospitality.

1. "We, the People of Willesden"

Perhaps the best way to begin to discern central and marginal narratives in "The Embassy of Cambodia" is to investigate the narrator that is, at once, telling one story and hiding the others. In the beginning of the text, this narrator identifies itself as "we, the people of Willesden" (1) to report its surprise upon the arrival of the embassy of Cambodia in the neighborhood: "Nobody could have expected it, or be expecting it. It's a surprise, to us all. The Embassy of Cambodia" (1). In the same chapter,[5] the narrator mentions that, next door to the embassy, there is "a row of private residences, most of them belonging to wealthy Arabs (or so we, the people of Willesden, contend). They tend to have Corinthian pillars on either side of their front doors, and – it's widely believed – swimming pools out the back" (1). As if foreshadowing the conflicts that will later surface from within this plural perspective, this passage, by providing "we, the people's" somewhat stereotyped view of wealthy Arabs' residences, suggests that these Arabs are more objects of the narrator's gaze than subjects included in its voice. Nevertheless, when "we, the people" return to their feeling of surprise about the embassy of Cambodia in chapter 0-6, they make sure to describe Willesden as a multicultural space where wealthy Arabs, Catholic nuns, and Sikhs coexist along with elements of English (a faux-Tudor house) and American (Mickey Rooney, a deceased Hollywood actor) cultures.

If Willesden is multicultural, it logically follows that so should "we, the people of Willesden" be. After all, "we, the people" is a political category that implies the democratic representation of union in diversity. It suggests equity, negotiation, and representativity among

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[5] Smith's short story is divided into sections that function as short chapters. That is why I choose to refer to them as either "chapters," "sections," or "parts." As I will later discuss, the numeration of these chapters imitates a badminton score board, counting points until a maximum of 21. My references to the chapters preserve this format (0-1, 0-10, 0-21, etc.).

the several individuals that compose this collective voice. It also commonly appears in judicial and political discourses as only "the people," as in trials ("the people" versus the defendant) or speeches ("the American people do not want a war"[6]), in which the criminal and the politician, respectively, is put or places himself/herself temporarily out of the realm of "the people." Smith's "we, the people" performs a similar and hegemonic move as this narrator homogenizes and ultimately denies their alleged multiculturalism by excluding the very voices they should encompass. This maneuver, however, does not go unnoticed. It is revealed through both subtle ironies and open contestations.

As in the case of the wealthy Arabs' residences addressed above, the narrator ironically ejects individuals from the supposedly democratic perspective by placing them under an objectifying, scrutinizing, and voyeuristic gaze. Fatou's story, for instance, is often set apart from descriptions of Willesden in chapters in which "we, the people" play the role of a third-person omniscient narrator. These sections sometimes contain no mention of "we, the people of Willesden" and depict, with access to the character's thoughts and memories, Fatou's routine at the Derawals' (chapter 0-7) and her free time swimming at the health center (chapter 0-14) or talking to her friend Andrew (chapter 0-18). In other chapters, nevertheless, this third-person narrator and "we, the people" overlap to suggest that both perspectives are conveyed, in the end, by the same voice. In chapter 0-4, for example, the first-person plural view is made evident as the narrator states that "[t]his summer we watched the Olympics," and when they admit that "we have a limited view [of the embassy of Cambodia] over the wall" (7). This voice subsequently turns from agent into observer when it reports that "[s]ince 6 August (the first occasion on which she noticed the badminton), Fatou has made a point of pausing by the bus stop opposite the embassy for five or ten minutes before she goes in to swim, idle minutes she

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[6] An instance of the former president of the United States Donald Trump's speech after the American attack that killed Qasem Soleimani, the Iranian major general of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, in January 2020. The action sparked rumors of a war between the U.S. and Iran.

can hardly afford (Mrs Derawal returns to the house at lunchtime) and yet seems unable to forgo" (9). This passage implies that watching Fatou is a voyeuristic habit for "we, the people," since they are able to provide dates and details of her weekly walk. Furthermore, the fact that they know Mrs. Derawal's schedule suggests that she, an Arab woman, is another object of the scrutinizing gaze.

Chapters 0-8 and 0-9 further the convergence between "we, the people of Willesden" and this third-person observer because, in the latter, "we, the people" reflect upon an episode narrated by the voyeur in the former: the day Fatou sees a woman with old grocery bags walk out of the embassy of Cambodia. This association of narrative voices is, moreover, hinted at in chapter 0-19, when Fatou chooses to meet Andrew far from her workplace because she "believed that the Derawals' neighbours had been instructed to spy on her" (56). The association is then finally confirmed on chapter 0-21, as "we, the people" observe Fatou after she is fired by the Derawals: "Many of us walked past her that afternoon, or spotted her as we rode the bus, or through the windscreens of our cars, or from our balconies. Naturally, we wondered what this girl was doing, sitting on the damp pavement in the middle of the day. We worried for her. We tend to assume the worst, here in Willesden. We watched her watching the shuttlecock" (69). This excerpt sheds light on the opposition between "we, the people" and Fatou built throughout the text. There is a clear separation between "we" and "she," "us" and "her" implied not only by the use of these words, but also by the contrast between "the people's" movement and Fatou's paralysis, as they move around her circumscribed and excluded space without ever approaching her. This separation is enhanced by the tangible barrier represented by the window of the bus, the windscreen of cars, and the balconies elevated in relation to the damp pavement. Even though Fatou is sitting right in the middle of a self-proclaimed multicultural neighborhood, she is not part of "we, the people of Willesden."

The coincidence between "we, the people of Willesden" and the third-person omniscient narrator of Fatou's story implicates that all access readers may have to this character's memories and experiences is mediated by someone who has a limited view of her, only actually seeing her whenever she passes the embassy of Cambodia once a week on her way to and back from the health center. In this line of thought, it can be inferred that everything readers know about her, her past, her work conditions, her relationship with Andrew, is, in fact, "we, the people's" fabrication. Whenever Fatou speaks in the story, in this case, it is through this narrator's words, not with her own voice. Smith's narrator performs, in this way, an underlying, ironic hegemonic move as they profess their multiculturalism while dehumanizing those who would make it possible, overriding their voices with claims of democratic representation.

It is interesting to notice that "we, the people's" depiction of the embassy of Cambodia follows a similar path, even though the embassy is not an individual in that community, but a personified institution that could contribute to Willesden's narrative of multiculturalism. Like Fatou and the Arabs, the embassy is subjected to the scrutinizing gaze, limited view, and speculation of the narrator and of Fatou, as told by the narrator. By extension, so are the country and citizens they represent. The sense of distance and exclusion I discussed in regard to the story of Fatou is echoed in the description of the embassy, as the narrator deems the establishment of the embassy of Cambodia in Willesden a surprise, but "not the right sort of surprise, somehow" (14). It is not the appearance of the embassy that provokes such an unpleasant surprise, for the building, "we, the people" explain, "is not very grand. It is only a four- or five-bedroom north London suburban villa, built at some point in the 1930s, surrounded by a red-brick wall, about eight feet high" (1-2). If not materially unfit, the embassy might then seem strange in a symbolic way, not because of how it looks, but because of what it signifies to Willesden.

The embassy of Cambodia, as portrayed by "we, the people of Willesden," is mysterious and silent. "[T]wo unseen players" (Smith, "The Embassy" 5), hidden behind the high walls, engage in an uninterrupted game of badminton: "The shuttlecock floats in a wide arc softly rightwards, and is smashed back, and this happens again and again, the first player always somehow able to retrieve the smash and transform it, once more, into a gentle, floating arc ... Pock, smash. Pock, smash" (Smith, "The Embassy" 5). Despite the physical effort the continuous game requires, "the players in the garden of the Embassy of Cambodia," if they are indeed in a garden, "are silent" (Smith, "The Embassy" 7). "We, the people" do not know if the players are Cambodian, men, women, children, refugees, or diplomats. It adds to the enigmatic character of the embassy that nobody ever enters or leaves, except for the young white people looking for tourist visas and the woman Fatou and the narrator spot one day. Throughout the short story, therefore, although the embassy is a constant object of the narrator's focus, "we, the people" have only a limited view of it. This limitation, clear in the narrator's admitted inability to see beyond the wall, is also read in the narrowness of the symbolic meanings they attribute to the place:

> When the Embassy of Cambodia first appeared in our midst, a few years ago, some of us said, "Well, if we were poets perhaps we could have written some sort of an ode about this surprising appearance of the embassy." ... But we are not really a poetic people. We are from Willesden. Our minds tend towards the prosaic. I doubt there is a man or woman among us, for example, who – upon passing the Embassy of Cambodia for the first time – did not immediately think: "genocide." (Smith, "The Embassy of Cambodia" 6)

In this passage, the first-person narrator contradictorily assigns rather inflexible traits to a supposedly pluralistic, multicultural group: the people of Willesden are invariably prosaic, devoid of a poetic imagination and empathic creativity. This rigidity informs the way they

interpret the objects of their gaze. The embassy, in this manner, stands for nothing other than the common sense, most likely built by Western media and pro-capitalist history, that considers Cambodia an example of the failure of communism and reduces it to the Khmer Rouge genocide of 1975-1979, which is estimated to have killed 1.5 to 2 million people and forced refugee outflows into neighboring and first-world countries.[7]

Although the genocide happened more than thirty years before the events of the plot, "we, the people" often resort to this stereotypical view of Cambodia throughout the narrative. They evoke, for instance, the Khmer Rouge motto "To keep you is no benefit. To destroy you is no loss" (Smith, "The Embassy" 39) immediately after the chapter in which Fatou embarrasses her employers by saving their daughter from choking, suggesting that the Derawals, similarly to the Khmer regime and not unlike Willesden's multiculturalism, depend on individuals they nonetheless despise. The narrator, moreover, frequently mentions the concepts of "old" and "new" people in communist Cambodia,[8] for example, in an attempt to classify the only woman they see at the embassy and to apply, unsuccessfully, that categorization to the people of Willesden. It is important to point out that, as in the case of Fatou's story, it is once more this narrator's hegemonic discourse that reproduces the history of Cambodia the way they imagine it, be it in their reflections and descriptions or in Andrew's conversations with Fatou. The embassy, by contrast, stays silent in the simultaneous attraction and repulsion it exerts over "we, the people." Behind the high wall, this inscrutable other does not satisfy the narrator's curiosity, resisting their scrutinizing gaze and remaining unknown, uncanny, and beyond the reach of their multicultural myth.

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[7] According to Philip Spencer, "[a]lmost the entire Vietnamese population (20,000 people) of Cambodia was wiped out, along with half of the Chinese (215,000) and around a third of the Cham (90,000), of the Thai (8,000) and the Lao (4,000). The overall figures were stunning – around 1.7 million out of a total population of about 8 million" (69). It is difficult to establish a definitive number of victims of the Cambodian Genocide because there were numerous deaths by starvation in addition to the executions.

[8] Smith's narrator distinguishes between the new and old people of communist Cambodia: "New People, those city dwellers who could not be made to give up city life and work on a farm. By returning everybody back to the land, the regime hoped to create a society of Old People – that is to say, of agrarian peasants" (39).

Perhaps as an effect of a story that lies outside the reach of "we, the people," it is exactly during a discussion about the Khmer Rouge's categories of "old" and "new" Cambodians that the narrator's plural perspective is finally contested:

> In Willesden, we are almost all New People, though some of us, like Fatou, were, until quite recently, Old People, working the land in our various countries of origin. Of the Old and New People of Willesden I speak; I have been chosen to speak for them, though they did not choose me and must wonder what gives me the right. I could say, 'Because I was born at the crossroads of Willesden, Kilburn and Queen's Park!' But the reply would be swift and damning: 'Oh, don't be foolish, many people were born right there; it doesn't mean anything at all. We are not one people and no one can speak for us. It's all a lot of nonsense. We see you standing on the balcony, overlooking the Embassy of Cambodia, in your dressing gown, staring into the chestnut trees, looking gormless. The real reason you speak in this way is because you can't think of anything better to do.' (40)

This excerpt contains several points that contribute to the analysis of Smith's narrator developed here. On the one hand, it is almost comic that this narrator insists on reaffirming their plurality even when contested. They continue, for instance, to use first-person plural pronouns, and even include Fatou within the collective "some of us," despite the several circumstances in which she is ejected from that group. They also picture Willesden as a space where, contrarily to communist Cambodia, new and old people can coexist. The narrator, moreover, attempts to reassert their multiculturalism by claiming that the people of Willesden, "we, the people," come from various countries of origin. On the other hand, this plurality paradoxically becomes singularity when "we" turns into "I" who speak of and for others. By the same token, the notion of democratic representation entailed by "we, the people" emerges as autocracy as the narrator reveals that they speak out of its own volition and power to do so,

not having been elected to that position. It is noticeable, in addition, that the narrator would justify such a power on the basis of, if anything, autochthony, of having been born there, not of multiculturalism. By contrast, the people that contest this voice in the passage, although still combined within the first-person plural pronoun, are potentially more democratic and multicultural precisely because they deny unit and homogenization, and dispute the possibility of political representation, stating that "no one can speak for us." These people, furthermore, individualize the narrator, exposing this voice as belonging to one of the "distressed souls, barely covered by their dressing gowns, standing on their tiny balconies, staring into the tops of the chestnut trees" (Smith, "The Embassy" 13), who appear earlier in the narrative. The revelation of this identity confirms that the narrator has, indeed, a limited view of Fatou and the embassy, which they only see from their balcony. They have, too, plenty of time for speculation.

It is possible to say that, notwithstanding the force of this contestation, which emerges in chapter 0-13, Smith's narrator remains relatively undisturbed throughout the short story. Regardless of whether their prerogative derives from citizenship, age, class, or a combination of these factors, they continue to exercise their power of speaking of and for Fatou, the embassy of Cambodia, and the people of Willesden. The above-quoted passage, nevertheless, may retroactively bring to the fore, if they are not evident yet, the narrator's more subtle hegemonic moves, which I have pointed out earlier. After all, from this chapter on, it is clearer that, while often asserting their suburb's multiculturalism, the narrator recurrently homogenizes the people of Willesden as patronizing and white (chapter 0-2), prosaic (0-3), self-centered (0-9), and pessimistic (0-21). Furthermore, the attempted omniscience with which they tell the story of Fatou and the history of Cambodia can be read as a sort of ontological violence. When discussing the silencing of the subaltern, Gayatri Spivak argues that "the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other ... is also the

asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subjectivity" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 280-81). In the process Spivak describes, the privileged colonizer projects on the colonial subject an identity built in opposition to the former. The colonial subjects are then stripped of any other form of imagining themselves, adopting the role of other imposed on them. In "The Embassy of Cambodia," a powerful narrator likewise draws a contrasting and inescapable identity for the other of their discourse. Fatou, the embassy, Cambodians, and the rest of the people of Willesden must occupy that position because they have no other left in "we, the people's" story. The alternative to this "asymmetrical obliteration" is void, silence. It is, then, perhaps in that silence that one may find the obliterated trace of that other.

2. Unseen Players

The individuals currently considered under the category of refugee often undergo, in international and domestic law, political and mediatic discourse, a hegemonic process of obliteration analogous to the silencing of the multicultural other in "The Embassy of Cambodia." As discussed in Chapter One, while the notion of refugeehood in international law has remained somewhat stable in the last seventy years, the global scene has constantly fluctuated and produced more refugees. In regard to these changes, it is observable that, although the Palestinian exodus, for instance, had already taken place when the UN's 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* was established, this document is mostly a response to the displacement of European subjects during the first half of the twentieth century. The end of that century and beginning of the next, by contrast, require attention to migration in the opposite direction, as war, extreme poverty, dictatorships, and natural disasters push people from low-income countries into the high-income world. Although this movement is, in large part, a result of their own neo-colonialist practices, high-income nations do not seem to

respect, relatively to their subalterns, the principle of reciprocity, which, according to Maley, historically inspires obedience to international laws. It is as if there were no concerns that their citizens might experience similar hardships. In this sense, world powers envision the refugee as the distant and homogenized object of a hegemonic discourse that speaks of and for this individual, projecting on them the rather fixed identity of the other of the nation.

When I criticize this hegemonic process of silencing, I do not intend to imply that refugees around the world do not, in any circumstance, speak for and about themselves. In Chapter One, I mentioned initiatives that promote refugee voices, such as Campus in Camps, an experimental educational program in Palestinian refugee camps, and Refugee Hosts, a project collecting responses to displacement from Syrians and their neighboring hosts. It is noteworthy, however, that such initiatives are mediated by intellectuals and/or sponsored by universities or research agencies. By no means is this comment a condemnation of these projects. It is, rather, a claim for the humble acknowledgement of the degree of reproduction of hegemonic structures involved in nearly any instance of discourse whose object is the refugee, including this dissertation. The recognition of this process of obliteration seems like an ethical first step to approach the silence in which the refugee is left, as it is the focus of this research, in the short story "The Embassy of Cambodia."

There is no mention of the term "refugee" throughout Smith's text. If the narrative of "we, the people of Willesden" is central, the word "refugee" lies in its margins, literally excluded, removed from it. From the shadow of this ex-centric position, it nevertheless haunts the story. The word "refugee," symbolizing the familiar risk of displacement shared, after all, by all individuals subjected to the whims of nation states, is buried under the surface of the story as if pushed towards a subconscious level by the manipulative mind of Smith's narrator.

At times, however, this hidden notion threatens to resurface from its marginal standpoint by luring, puzzling, interrupting, or disturbing the narrator's tale.[9]

As much as "we, the people" speculate about it, the embassy of Cambodia is immersed in an inscrutable silence that seems to constantly whisper the notion of refugee. It is as if there were traces of this absent referent in such a silence, suggesting that stories hang untold, out of reach. A moment worth remembering, in this regard, is the narrator's suspicion that all of the prosaic people of Willesden will think "genocide" (Smith, "The Embassy" 6) when they first pass the newly established embassy of Cambodia. Implicit in this stereotypical image is the fact that approximately 200,000 Cambodians fled their country during its humanitarian crisis.[10] The abstractness of these numerous refugees becomes materially inscribed in the housing of an embassy in the London suburb: Willesden hosts not a Cambodian restaurant or market, but an institution that stands for refuge on foreign soil under international law and for the premises of universal human rights (as much as these might actually entail citizen rights). It reminds the host, in this sense, of the "responsibility to protect" with which it has been entrusted.[11] This symbolism might, in fact, be among the reasons why the establishment of the embassy of Cambodia in Willesden is not "the right sort of surprise" (Smith, "The Embassy" 14) for the "the people of Willesden," since it recalls the entitled narrator's supposed duties to displaced humans.

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[9] Although this is not the focus of this dissertation, the short story seems to welcome a Freudian reading of the uncanniness of silenced refugee perspectives in relation to the dominance of "we, the people of Willesden's" myth of multiculturalism.

[10] This humanitarian crisis is a generic name for a period, between 1969 and 1993, that comprehends several events, including the Cambodian Civil War, the Khmer Rouge rule, the bombing of Cambodia by the United States during the Vietnam War, and the Vietnamese invasion and control of Cambodia until the 1990s. The estimated number of refugees varies according to the source. The number presented here is estimated by the UNHCR.

[11] According to the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and The Responsibility to Protect, "[t]he responsibility to protect embodies a political commitment to end the worst forms of violence and persecution. It seeks to narrow the gap between Member States' pre-existing obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law and the reality faced by populations at risk of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity." This principle was only adopted by the UN Member States at the 2005 World Summit.

The individuals somehow involved with the embassy are not only silent, but pushed towards invisibility in the story, as they are rarely ever seen by "we the people of Willesden." The narrator can only report hints of the presence of Cambodian subjects inside the embassy, namely, the country flag, the assumed person that "buzzes in" potential visa candidates, the basketball hoop, the unstoppable game of badminton, and the two unseen players. This invisibility and consequential metonymic replacement of people for related objects may indicate a degree of depersonalization of refugees in international law and other discourses, which ultimately homogenize and dehumanize individuals by transforming them into a category of mobility.

In addition to the scruffy "[y]oung white people carrying rucksacks ... wearing sandals, despite the cool weather ... and likely looking for visas" (Smith, "The Embassy" 9), the only person ever seen leaving the embassy of Cambodia is a woman that Fatou and "we, the people" spot one day:

> The woman exiting the Embassy of Cambodia did not look especially like a New Person or an Old Person ... Nor did these terms mean anything to Fatou, who was curious only to catch her first sighting of a possible Cambodian anywhere near the Embassy of Cambodia. She was particularly interested in the woman's clothes, which were precise and utilitarian ... just as if she were a man, or no different from a man. Her straight black hair was cut short. She had in her hands many bags from Sainsbury's, and this Fatou found a little mysterious: where was she taking all that shopping? It also surprised her that the woman from the Embassy of Cambodia should shop in the same Willesden branch of Sainsbury's where Fatou shopped for the Derawals ... But, looking again at the bags the Cambodian woman carried, Fatou wondered whether they weren't in fact very old bags – hadn't their design changed? The more she looked at them the more convinced she became that they contained not food but clothes or something else again,

the outline of each bag being a little too rounded and smooth. Maybe she was simply

taking out the rubbish. Fatou stood at the bus stop and watched until the Cambodian

woman reached the corner, crossed and turned left towards the high road. (21)

The report of Fatou's distant and, once more, silent encounter with this woman begins with one of the narrator's several references to the politics of the Khmer Rouge regime that led to the Cambodian genocide and mass displacement. Even though the word is not there, the also stereotypical image of the refugee echoes in the woman's anonymity, humble clothes, and in the donations she might have just received from the embassy, all of which imply a sense of loss and need for assistance. Her silent story, moreover, lingers in the narrator's unanswered questions as to where she came from, where she was taking all that shopping, who she was, what she had in the bags, and where she would go after turning left towards the high road. Furthermore, in spite of the doubts it raises, this excerpt draws a point of convergence between the woman and Fatou that may contribute to a deeper understanding of the Ivorian maid.

The first and most explicit instance of approximation between the woman at the embassy and Fatou may initially seem trivial: they appear to shop at the same supermarket. It is true that the bags the woman carries are probably reused and filled with donations, entailing that she might not have ever been to Sainsbury's. The possibility that she did, nevertheless, is enough to allow for other coincidences between the two women to emerge. It is evident, for example, that both inhabit a foreign urban space in a condition of socioeconomic vulnerability. The probable refugee, on the one hand, needs assistance from her embassy. Fatou, on the other, is plausibly a contemporary slave, since "she had not seen her passport with her own eyes since she arrived at the Derawals', and she had been told from the start that her wages were to be retained by the Derawals to pay for the food and water and heat she would require during her stay, as well as to cover the rent for the room she slept in" (Smith, "The Embassy" 16). These facts ironically contradict Fatou's conclusion that she is not a slave because, by controlling her

passport, the Derawals metonymically strip the maid of her identity and rights. Besides, similarly to slave masters, in exchange for her service and instead of a wage, the family provides Fatou only with the means to subsist and continue to work. Such a dehumanizing process is among the main concerns of human rights activists in regard to refugees and migrant domestic workers but does not seem to be shared by "we, the people of Willesden." According to the organization Anti-Slavery International, the exploitation of migrant workers is disturbingly present in the United Kingdom, as their survey indicates that 77% of migrant workers undergo some kind of abuse, 51% reported a situation of hunger, and 61% were not given their own space in employers' houses.

Although they occupy the space of Willesden in some sense, the woman at the embassy and Fatou lie outside the "narrow, essentially local" circle "we, the people" draw around themselves in order to "live our own lives or to apply ourselves to our necessary tasks ... [or] indulge in occasional pleasures, like swimming" (Smith, "The Embassy" 23). Ejected from that realm, these women become, along with their point of encounter, the embassy of Cambodia itself, the already discussed objects of the narrator's gaze and discourse. Since the parallels between these two characters develop from the moment Fatou watches the woman in front of the embassy of Cambodia, I would suggest that the embassy, especially during this encounter, functions as a mirror of her own condition. This could, in fact, be the reason why Fatou is so drawn to it: whenever she looks at the embassy, it appears to look back at her. This dynamic may, moreover, be symbolized by the game of badminton, in which the shuttlecock is repeatedly exchanged between players. In this line of reasoning, if the embassy and the woman seen there trace back to the refugee, there should be echoes of this unpronounced notion in Fatou's story too, even if it is, as one should keep in mind, mediated and possibly fabricated by "we, the people."

One factor contributing to the reading of a relationship between domestic workers like Fatou and refugeehood is the route through which the maid arrives in London. Fatou and her father leave the Ivory Coast for Ghana for unstated reasons. While she is still underage, both work at a hotel in Accra, the father as a server and the daughter as a chambermaid. They withstand abuse, including the rape of Fatou by a guest, until she turns eighteen and crosses over to Europe with her father's meagre financial support. The fact that, as a teenager, she helps support her family instead of attending school and, once reaching legal working age, she emigrates to a country that illusorily offers better life opportunities suggests that Fatou is also an economic migrant. According to a UNHCR 2017 analysis of mixed migration trends, most nationals of West and Central African countries, such as the Ivory Coast and Ghana, "report having left for economic reasons" (3). The UNHCR report also states that, similarly to Fatou, these migrants are "young and vulnerable to ill-treatment" (3). The course they take, the passage across the Mediterranean Sea from Libya to Italy, coincides with an escape route from conflict and persecution for Syrians, Palestinians, Iraqis, and East African nationals. As these people merge, so do the previous clear-cut meanings of categories of migration. After all, as Maley argues, refugees are also, in a sense, economic migrants. By contrast, economic migrants may be "anticipatory refugees" (Maley 7), that is, victims of financial crises that usually precede conflicts. They are, as well, displaced in what Spivak terms "the new diaspora ... determined by the increasing failure of a civil society in developing nations" ("Diasporas Old and New" 249). By proposing the degree of refugeehood involved in the economic migration, I do not mean to homogenize displaced subjects, but to indicate once more the contradictions and utter insufficiency of the language of international law.

Fatou's crossing of the Mediterranean on a boat from Libya to Italy furthermore recalls an association between forced migration and the sea that is echoed in the symbolism of water in the story. This association lends meaning, for example, to the narrator's comparison between

the "unusually warm" (Smith, "The Embassy" 3) pool in the health center and "the rough grey sea" (Smith, "The Embassy" 4) where Fatou taught herself to swim. Implicit in this description are the dangers of the waters into which refugees thrust themselves in search of a calmer life, as well as their resilience and abilities, often overlooked in stereotypical discourses. Those perils are also implied in Fatou's reference to children washed up on beaches:

> One day, at the hotel, I heard a commotion on the beach. It was early morning. I went out and I saw nine children washed up dead on the beach. Ten or eleven years old, boys and girls. They had gone into the water, but they didn't know how to swim. Some people were crying, maybe two people. Everyone else just shook their heads and carried on walking to where they were going. After a long time, the police came. The bodies were taken away. People said, 'Well, they are with God now.' Everybody carried on like before. (47)

This part of Smith's story anticipates the tragic death of Alan Kurdi that would take place two years after the publication of "The Embassy of Cambodia." Kurdi and his family were trying to reach Europe from Turkey on an overcrowded inflatable boat that capsized, causing the boy to drown. The image of his body washed up on a Turkish beach caused international commotion and became a symbol of the fight for refugee rights. While this case became widely known, the anonymous children Fatou saw in Accra may represent the numerous nameless migrants who disappear in the Mediterranean in the twenty-first century.[12] All these things considered, it is understandable that Fatou will use the water to wash away the Derawals' ill-treatment and her traumatic memories of sexual violence. The calm, warm waters of the London suburb are her refuge.

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[12] The International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Missing Migrants Project provides data in regard to the people who have disappeared in the Mediterranean route of migration over the years.

If it is, at this point, clearer that silent refugee stories are insinuated throughout the narrative, it might be relevant, at last, to consider the meaning behind such an omission in Smith's text. This is a topic that will be most carefully addressed in the last section of this chapter. Nevertheless, after these two first sections, it is already possible to say that the short story critically exposes its own narrator in a denial of discourses that objectify and classify people. By suppressing the word "refugee," for instance, it refuses to follow traditional categories of migration, perhaps suggesting the failure of this language to convey the humanity of the referent. The story, moreover, seems to imply that resorting to that language is falling into the trap of "we, the people," that is, false transparency and illegitimate representation.

Another result of the silent traces identified in "The Embassy of Cambodia" is that, by haunting the entire story, the condition of refugeehood possibly applies not only to Cambodians or Fatou, but also to "we, the people of Willesden." This does not mean that the narrator is a refugee, but that they fear that they could, like anyone else in the world, become one. Interpreting Arendt, Stonebridge states that "[m]odern placelessness demonstrates how fragile everybody's place in the world is" (Preface and Acknowledgments).[13] Statelessness is a repressed threat to any well-established national subject, such as "we, the people of Willesden," as long as a system of states is in place. In Smith's text, these latent narratives of refugeehood are important to the point that "we, the people" end up structuring the story around the embassy of Cambodia and the game of badminton it contains.

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[13] Although Stonebridge often refers to the situation of refugees in contemporaneity, her main object of study is what she calls "modern displacement," that is, forced migration and statelessness in the first half of the twentieth century.

3. "Pock, smash"

The two previous sections analyze the relationship of both Fatou and the embassy of Cambodia with "we, the people of Willesden" and the traces of refugee narratives. This section, in turn, investigates a particularly important role the embassy plays throughout Smith's text. It has been suggested that the embassy is an object of scrutinizing gaze, discourse, interest, and abjection in Willesden. In the silent position in which it is left, the embassy helps to echo the notions and stories of refugees that haunt the narrative. It occupies a conflicting standpoint from which it repeatedly returns to the center of the text whenever ejected to the margin. Notably, this push towards the margin is not solely metaphorical, "[f]or embassies are usually to be found in the centre of the city. This was the first one we had seen in the suburbs" (Smith, "The Embassy" 6). One does not know why this embassy is located in Willesden. Perhaps it is because it represents a small low-income country without a place among more central international forces. In spite of this apparent insignificance, the embassy is essential to structure "we, the people's" narrative, for instance, through the game of badminton it houses.

The game of badminton is always happening whenever Fatou passes by the embassy of Cambodia, be it "on her way to the health centre to swim (just after ten in the morning on Mondays)" (Smith, "The Embassy" 8) or returning to the Derawals, be it alone or with Andrew, who claims to be "an excellent badminton player" who would "make [her] weep for mercy" (Smith, "The Embassy" 57). It is also going on in the afternoon when she sits on the damp pavement to watch the shuttlecock after losing her job and housing. The fact that "we, the people" refer to the match even before introducing Fatou as a character contributes to the impression that this is an unrelenting background not only to her story, but to everyday Willesden. In a similar manner, by closing the tale with another reference to the game, the narrator suggests that it will continue after Fatou departs.

The game occurs in an assumed garden hidden behind the eight-foot-tall wall that surrounds the embassy: "back and forth, cresting this wall horizontally, flies a shuttlecock" (Smith, "The Embassy" 2). It is carried out by two unseen players, whom Fatou eventually determines to be men. In this game, "[t]he shuttlecock floats in a wide arc softly rightwards, and is smashed back, and this happens again and again, the first player always somehow able to retrieve the smash and transform it, once more, into a gentle, floating arc ... Pock, smash. Pock, smash" (Smith, "The Embassy" 5). Although the players are invisible, there are several passages that allow one to imagine their character as conveyed by "we, the people." The first player, "pock," is "gentle" and "soft" (Smith, "The Embassy" 10) as he lifts the shuttlecock high in the air; the second, "smash," is "fast" and "hard" (Smith, "The Embassy" 10), hitting the shuttlecock downward. Both seem to be resilient and consistent, as they endlessly maintain the steady pattern of the game.

In light of the portrait of the players, it is meaningful that the match should happen inside an embassy, because this place presupposes diplomatic relations between opposing parties. The game of badminton mirrors, in this sense, a negotiation in which one part is conciliatory and the other is aggressive. In this line of reasoning, the references to the Olympics become even more significant, since this is an event that, similarly to the embassy, fosters fair disputes. It is also symbolic, as I will later explain, that the players are anonymous and only allow one to see the consequences of their moves, that is, the shuttlecock flying up or down. The resulting game, however, is tense: although the players are predictable, there is a constant expectation that they might change, concede, or fail, and that the shuttlecock may fall into other hands, like Fatou's, although it never does. Regardless of how close Fatou gets to the embassy, the tall wall will work as a border-control mechanism to hinder her access to the game and to the international rights that embassies usually represent. The tension between players and between the players and Fatou is, furthermore, replayed in other dual confrontations that mimic

the game of badminton throughout the story and reinforce the importance of the match to the narrative.

Mark Hengstler suggests that "[t]his game of badminton ... comes to act as central structure for Smith's story" (1). To Hengstler, the organization of the chapters serves as a first sign of this structural importance, for "the story is composed of twenty-one sections, each headed with a successive visitor-led badminton score (i.e. 0-1; 0-12; 0-19)" (1). Furthermore, the game of badminton is fundamental because those twenty-one sections

[A]re interspersed with two voices, like two players passing back and forth the shuttlecock. The primary narrative, in third-person limited, concerns Fatou ... The other voice, more complicated, begins in first-person plural ... though we eventually learn this voice is affectation ... It's an interesting move, on Smith's part, to shift frame to singular from implied omniscience. (Hengstler 1)

Contrarily to this chapter, Hengstler does not seem to understand the two voices as crafted by the same narrator. Neither does he explain what he means by primary narrative and why he considers the third-person narrator simultaneously "limited" and omniscient. It may be because, as I discussed earlier, despite the circumscribed view "we, the people" has from their balcony, they nonetheless have the power to write their speculations about others in Willesden as if they were the truth. Hengstler's text, nevertheless, provides at least two points for further analysis: one is the idea that conflicting perspectives are lobbed back and forth throughout the short story; the other is the notion of the dualism between host and visitor implicit in the numeration of the sections.

The alternation between "we, the people's" first-person plural and third-person omniscient voices textually reproduces the back-and-forth lobbing of the shuttlecock. Moreover, this alternation is similar to the game of badminton because it is also mediated by the embassy of Cambodia. While the literal match happens behind the embassy's walls, the

narrative game seems to depend upon Fatou's passing in front of them. In this sense, in the few sections that contain both narrative perspectives, the change from one to the other usually involves an encounter between the embassy and Fatou. In chapter 0-4, for instance, "we, the people" speculate about the game of badminton in first-person, as in "[w]e can't say for sure that it is a garden – we have a limited view over the wall" (7), until "Fatou passes on her way to the health centre to swim" (8). From this point until chapter 0-6, the narrator conforms to an omniscient voice that knows even the location of the health center guest passes "in the slim drawer of a faux-Louis XVI console, in the entrance hall of the Derawals' primary residence" (Smith, "The Embassy" 8). Likewise, in the last section, it is only when Fatou sits on the damp pavement to watch the shuttlecock that the first-person voice takes over and replaces the omniscient narrator that had been reporting the maid's conversations, thoughts, and feelings. These examples signal the structural centrality not only of the game of badminton, as proposed by Hengstler, but of the embassy of Cambodia itself in its relationship with Fatou. In this line of thought, it is not surprising that the title of Smith's text be "The Embassy of Cambodia," as this element is paradoxically marginal and pivotal to the story.

In addition to this narrative game, other dualistic confrontations replay the dynamics of the embassy's badminton throughout the story. This reproduction is possible because one implication of the anonymity of the players inside the embassy is that they can stand for any pair between which there is the same sort of tension. A case in point is the relationship between Fatou and the Derawals. While one may argue that Fatou is dishonest because she uses the Derawals' guest passes without their permission, she plays, most of the time, a gentle part in this relationship. It is true that this behavior may be due to her subservient position; however, she demonstrates undeserved kindness when she saves Asma (the Derawal girl) from suffocation and asks about the child after the incident. The Derawals, by contrast, are violent: they insult, humiliate, and hit Fatou on different occasions. They strip the maid of dignity and

rights, keeping her as a modern slave. Contrarily to the embassy's endless match, this tension is eventually resolved in favor of the Derawals, who "smash" Fatou's mercy towards Asma by firing the maid.

It is, of course, debatable whether Fatou is ultimately losing the game when she is fired, for she can finally leave the deplorable conditions in which she lived. Nevertheless, the fact that the last thing she does in the story is to watch the embassy's tireless badminton game may suggest that these dynamics will continue to regulate her relationship with others, "[a]s if one player could imagine only a violent conclusion and the other only a hopeful return" (Smith, "The Embassy" 69). This final passage is significant, in this sense, because it entails that, as the gentle player, Fatou, a character whose silence echoes refugee stories, is the one who expects "a hopeful return." This correspondence may indicate that the maid and, by extension, other displaced persons, long to go back to their places of departure. If one considers Smith's play on the word "return" as the reaction to a serve in a badminton game, the passage may alternatively suggest that what these people trustingly expect from their interlocutors is a gentler response, a "pock" instead of a "smash," a continuation of the game in fair terms.

In this line of reasoning, the final sentences of "The Embassy of Cambodia" also dialogue with the confrontation between host and guest implicit in the numeration of the text's sections. If these numbers, as Hengstler argues, imitate a badminton score, they indicate that the visitor wins the game, 0-21. The embassy's badminton, however, does not seem to have a winner because, since the shuttlecock never drops, no one scores, and the match carries on indefinitely. This balance appears to inform the exchanges between the narrative voices as well. Nonetheless, in the conflict between Fatou and the Derawals the maid may be said to be temporarily losing, as discussed above. Is then the player that expects the hopeful return, the gentle player, the guest? If the visiting player corresponds to Fatou and she is losing, how can the sections' numbers indicate that they are winning? By contrast, is the aggressive player the

host? Is it, finally, at all possible to identify the players hidden behind the embassy? There seems to be a confusion among categories of the discourse of hospitality in Smith's text to be addressed in the next and final section of this chapter.

4. Playing with Hospitality

To close this chapter, I want to focus on an idea that has permeated my analysis of "The Embassy of Cambodia:" the notion of hospitality and related concepts, such as hostility, host, visitor, and guest, emerge in several points of the previous sections. It is suggested, for example, in the role of embassies as institutions that represent a nation's laws within a different country, as if they served as hosts while hosted in another country. In addition to the embassy, the references to the Olympics also evoke the spirit of diplomacy and fraternity with which the host city should receive foreign delegations during these games. The ethics of hospitality, moreover, underlie the conclusion that "we, the people of Willesden" is a hegemonic narrator because of their systematic silencing of the multicultural and often foreign other. This dualism between host and visitor, finally, echoes through the conflicts that mimic the game of badminton, such as that between the first-person plural and third-person omniscient voices, Fatou and the Derawals, the central narrative and the silent traces of other stories.

As in the case of the silent refugee narratives, the concepts and roles of hospitality are not explicitly laid out in "The Embassy of Cambodia." Smith's text does not name who is host, guest, hospitable, and hostile in the relationships it portrays. As a matter of fact, the story seems to resist attempts at such classifications, perhaps suggesting the limitations or even the confusion between these roles, exemplified in the following paragraphs. By doing so, the narrative textually performs a suspension of the language of conditional hospitality and consequently opens the story to the thought of the unconditional, as discussed in Chapter 1.

In the previous section, I argued that Fatou could be equivalent to the gentle badminton player in her relationship to the Derawals. She could also be read as the visitor, the one coming from the outside, possibly expecting "a hopeful return," if considered that the Derawals and, more broadly, "we, the people of Willesden," are hosts. According to the notation of the story's sections, Fatou, as the visitor, should be winning her metaphorical clash with her hosts. The narrative, however, shows the contrary, as she is fired by one and excluded by the other. Does Fatou occupy, then, the position of the visitor? To try to answer that question, it might be useful to look at one of the only actual uses of the word "guest" throughout the story: the health center guest passes. "We, the people" state that "[i]t should be explained that it is Fatou's employers – and not Fatou – who are the true members of this health club; they have no idea she uses their guest passes in this way" (8). At the health center, Fatou is the Derawals' uninvited guest. The maid is, in this sense, subversive because she overrules her hosts by performing the role of the guest without their consent. Furthermore, when she invites Andrew to swim, Fatou temporarily plays the role of the host, in the position of the guest who has a guest. It bears noting, however, that she receives Andrew on the street, a public space dominated by "we, the people," as a reminder that she has no ground from which to host. In this line of reasoning, it is possible to conclude that Fatou does not fall under the traditional understanding of the statuses of host and guest. She is not a visitor and, hence, cannot be winning any game.

Fatou's situation leads to the question of who can, in fact, have the status of guest. Derrida reflects that "the foreigner, the *xenos*, is not simply the absolute other, the barbarian, the savage absolutely excluded and heterogeneous" (*Of Hospitality* 21). As discussed in Chapter One, to partake in a relationship of hospitality as a guest, the subject must have the capacity to reciprocate. Derrida mentions, in this regard, "the reciprocity and equality of 'for' in exchange" (*Of Hospitality* 21), that is, the underlying understanding that, when one exchanges one thing *for* another, such as favors, money for goods, etc., the elements of the

exchange are equivalent and the deal is, therefore, reciprocal. In this line of reasoning, according to Émile Benveniste's view of hospitality or *xenia*, as quoted by Derrida, "*xenos* indicates relations of the same type between men linked by a pact which implies precise obligations also extending to their descendants" (*Of Hospitality* 21). To further recall the explanation in Chapter One, this sense of equivalence and indivisibility is inscribed in the very words *xenos* and *host*. *Xenos* evokes a variety of meanings ranging from "stranger" to "enemy," but also "host" and "guest friend." This ambiguity translates, as Derrida highlights, to the French derivation of the Latin *hostis* into *hôte*, which can also be either "host" or "guest," and *hostile*, closer to "enemy." In both a social and linguistic context, therefore, host and guest seem to be two sides of the same coin, at once opposite and inseparable.[14]

It is interesting to notice that the game of badminton in the embassy relates to such a view of hospitality in the sense that, in spite of the scoreboard shown in section titles, home player and visitor are fundamentally indistinguishable. Even if one tries to attribute game styles to particular players, it is impossible to confirm any speculation based on "we, the people's" perspective. Hidden behind the walls, the players are both hosts and guests as they infinitely reciprocate lobs with blows, "smashes" with "pocks." By contrast, Fatou, the woman at the embassy, and refugees would not have the status of guests because they do not engage in balanced relationships: they either lack or are denied the power to reciprocate hospitality. When Fatou saves Asma, for example, she puts the Derawals in debt within their own house. Instead of repaying the maid, the family refuses to acknowledge her as a recipient of reciprocity and punishes her instead. It appears that the Derawals' sovereignty in their home depends on

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[14] It is interesting to point out that, according to Isayev, ancient Mediterranean societies indeed used a sort of coin or token of hospitality (*tessera hospitalis*) consisting of two contrary but complementary parts of the same object. These objects operated as "a record of mutual friendship that acted as a binding contract extending over geographic distances and generations" (*Migration, Mobility and Place in Ancient Italy* 101).

maintaining Fatou (the other) powerless and thus uncapable of entering a relation that would presuppose equality.

Even though Fatou is not, by definition, a guest, the Derawals' reaction to her attempt at entering a reciprocal relationship signals a problem that Derrida identifies as one of the aporias of hospitality by right: to receive the other as equal requires a hierarchy between host and guest, as it is the former that allows the latter to enter and feel at home. Derrida argues that "[f]rom the point of view of the law, the guest, even when he is well received, is first of all a foreigner, he must remain a foreigner. Hospitality is due to the foreigner, certainly, but remains, like the law, conditional, and thus conditioned in its dependence on the unconditionality that is the basis of the law" (*Of Hospitality* 73). The aporia here consists in the fact that the Law of universal hospitality, "the one that would command that the 'new arrival' be offered an unconditional welcome" (Derrida, *Of Hospitality* 77), is enforced through international and local laws that govern citizenship, asylum, and migration, ultimately denying the guest's total access to the home by keeping them in the position of the foreigner.[15] Derrida concludes that the perversity of the discourse of hospitality by right is inevitable as long as this relationship is established by means of that aporetic, obstructive language. After discussing the treatment of the concepts of hospitality in Smith's short story, it can be suggested that "The Embassy of Cambodia" performs a suspension of language in the ways discussed in Chapter One by playing with and ultimately emptying those notions.

Smith's story explores the limits of hospitality by language by confounding roles, omitting concepts, and rejecting fixed classifications. This approach can be related, as discussed in the second section of this chapter, to the uncomfortable notion that categories of mobility and hospitality are more fluid than most national citizens, such as "we, the people of

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[15] One should recall that, in Derrida's *Of Hospitality*, the capitalized *Law* stands for the principle of hyperbolical, unconditional hospitality, whereas the *laws* refer to the legal apparatus and the language to which both host and guest are subjected.

Willesden," would like them to be. The same strategy also serves the suspension of language suggested by Derrida, turning the narrative itself into a privileged space to envision unconditional hospitality. This is not to say that "we, the people of Willesden" or the Derawals become hospitable, but that the story performs the suspended yet not silent word of welcome Derrida imagines. This balance between different parts seems possible as it happens behind the high walls and within the pages of "The Embassy of Cambodia."

Chapter Three – "Like a Beginning and an End": Doors, Ambiguity, and Hospitality in

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*

> "The crossing of the threshold always remains a
> transgressive step."
>
> Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*

In the seminar *Of Hospitality*, Derrida emphasizes the relevance of doors to the notion of home by arguing that "what constitutes a space of controlled and circumscribed property is just what opens it to intrusion ... in order to constitute the space of a habitable house and a home, you also need an opening, a door and windows, you have to give up a passage to the outside world [*l'étranger*]. There is no house or interior without a door or windows" (61). In an attempt to unpack Derrida's claim, one may infer that the existence of circumscribed spaces, from a home to a nation state, depends on a diametrical but interdependent relationship between the notions of interior and exterior. Doors, windows, and, by extension, borders are fundamental to this relationship, first of all, because without them there can be no true distinction between inside and out. In addition to establishing the opposing sides, these passages also mediate their interdependent relationship. In that same seminar, Derrida suggests, furthermore, that technology has progressively poked holes in the fabric of the home, allowing the outside to penetrate through other and unexpected openings besides the doors. In 1997, when he held the seminar, those openings were poked by the telephone, fax, e-mail, and limited Internet; today, one can think of popularized personal computers, smartphones, mobile Internet, and user-tailored content. These apparatuses have extended one's access to the exterior while also increasing the possibility of institutional surveillance of private spaces. One of the consequences Derrida anticipates is

> [A] privatizing and even familialist reaction, by widening the ethnocentric and
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> nationalist, and thus xenophobic, circle: not directed against the foreigner as such, but,

paradoxically, against the anonymous technological power which threatens, with the 'home,' the traditional conditions of hospitality ... [O]ne can become virtually xenophobic in order to protect or claim to protect one's own hospitality, the own home that makes possible one's own hospitality. (53)

The "anonymous technological power" Derrida highlights threatens the home as it creates new and uncontrollable "doors" that blur the limits of inside and out, ultimately disrupting the sovereignty of one's roof. As we are well aware at this point of the 21st century, technological power is virtually inescapable: people will consume technological innovations in spite of and even in oblivion to any drawbacks. Their familialist reaction is then not necessarily directed towards technology *per se* or the foreigner as a particular person, but against one's own vulnerability, which presently finds its scapegoat in the figure, for instance, of the refugee.

Mohsin Hamid's 2017 novel *Exit West* enacts similar thoughts on technology, vulnerability, and hospitality in literature. The landscapes Hamid envisions are "swollen by refugees" (3) but also by technology. The unnamed city where Nadia and Saeed meet in the first chapter, for example, shelters people trying to escape a war that progressively tightens its circle around the protagonists too. In contrast with this circumscribed reality, their phones "sniffed out an invisible world, as if by magic, a world that was all around them, but also nowhere, transporting them to places distant and near, and to places that had never been and would never be" (39). The worldwide connection that was only digitally possible up to that point in the novel becomes a material reality for Nadia and Saeed because of a transformation in a device whose primacy Derrida, as discussed above, emphasizes: the door.

While the conflict between military forces and militants tears Nadia and Saeed's city apart, "[r]umors [begin] to circulate of doors that could take you elsewhere, often to places far away, well removed from this death trap of a country. Some people claimed to know people who knew people who had been through such doors. A normal door, they said, could become

a special door, and it could happen without warning to any door at all" (72). These doors bypass "the physical borders of nation states [and] the traditional bureaucratic processes of border control that the displaced face" (630), as Josephine Carter argues, and "compress space-time ... collaps[ing] the complex traumas of a transnational refugee passage to momentary physical exhaustion" (41), as Mai-Linh K. Hong adds. The doors also promote unforeseen encounters between people who would otherwise never meet, such as a pale-skinned woman sleeping in a gentrified neighborhood in Australia and a dark-skinned man escaping persecution, or wealthy tourists in Dubai and a war-torn, Tamil-speaking refugee family. The effects of such unmediated encounters range, as I will discuss, from the xenophobia Derrida predicts to a geopolitical reconfiguration of the world.

Exit West experiments with a scenario in which the potential of technology to disrupt the borders of the home is taken to the extreme. In this way, the novel allows one to imagine what would happen to categories of mobility if movement were naturalized regardless of one's nationality, ethnicity, class, and gender. It also helps envision how relationships of hospitality would unfold if entrances other than one's front door could bring in vulnerability. In this chapter, I intend to address these questions in relation to the novel's plot as well as textual structure. To that end, I will first analyze the role of the refugees' door-crossing stories that, happening simultaneously to Nadia and Saeed's, interrupt this narrative. I argue that these stories function, at a structural level, like the very doors that, at plot level, transport refugees across space. In this sense, the reader travels through several marginal narratives, in such a way that this parallel journey eventually becomes the experience of the novel itself. By the same token, the narrative of refugeehood becomes central at the level of the plot as Nadia and Saeed, initially housed in their city of birth, cross one of the black doors for the first time and arrive on the Greek island of Mykonos.

By prompting the dismantlement of the center-margin, interior-exterior hierarchy between stories in *Exit West*, Hamid's doors, be they textual gateways to other narratives or portals transporting characters, engender a normalization of migration in relation to paralysis and a disruption of the traditional home in the novel. In this way, they also introduce a sense of ambiguity that echoes, once more, in the events of the plot as well as in Hamid's writing style. This ambiguity, as I intend to finally demonstrate, informs a sense of hospitality in the novel as a potential at the doorstep, a notion in which the doorstep is understood as a figuration of a liminal or in-between space, a place of encounter where one is not yet host nor guest and thus has the possibility of becoming either one.

1. "Portals to Each Other"

Exit West follows Nadia and Saeed's steps from their first encounter in a business class all through their separation in Marin and reunion back in their hometown fifty years later. It is relevant to notice that Nadia and Saeed are the only characters who have names in the entire novel. Other individuals exist in relation to them: Saeed's parents, Nadia's neighborhood, the preacher's daughter, whom Saeed marries after finding in her father a parental figure, and the head cook of the cooperative where Nadia works, who becomes her partner. This growing web of relations seems to emphasize that, in a way, people around the world are already connected through other individuals, acting as their own "portals to each other" (Hamid 57) regardless of phones, internet access, and doors. The anonymity that surrounds most characters and some settings in the novel, moreover, allows identification with nameless people in a similar situation. It also points to an at least initial primacy of the narrative about Nadia and Saeed, as if to state that theirs is not any other couple's story but their own.

The main narrative about Nadia and Saeed is, nevertheless, interrupted since the first chapter by accounts of refugees and migrants crossing mysterious doors. I say "interrupted" because these short, fast narratives inserted after a blank space on the book page do not seem to entail a pause in the couple's story. On the contrary, as Carter suggests, they introduce "a temporality of simultaneity" (628) that establishes them, similarly to the other characters and places mentioned above, in relation to Nadia and Saeed. In this sense, these narrative snippets often begin with sentences like "[a]s Saeed's email was being downloaded from a server and read by his client, far away in Australia a pale-skinned woman was sleeping alone in the Sydney neighborhood of Surry Hills" (7); "While Nadia and Saeed were sharing their first spliff together, in Tokyo district of Shinjuku ... a young man was nursing a drink for which he had not paid and yet to which he was entitled" (29); and "[l]ater that day, in the evening, Nadia's time, the sun having slipped below her horizon, it was morning in San Diego, California, locality of La Jolla, where an old man lived by the sea" (48). These examples show that Hamid's shorter narratives are not, in fact, rigorously parallel because, as much as they unfold alongside Nadia and Saeed's, they also connect with it, already sharing a moment in time before their spaces are bridged by doors. These fast narratives, moreover, not only tell stories of people crossing doors, but dialogue, from their very first words, with the idea of movement and travel: Saeed's email reaches a customer, the couple's inebriated minds fly elsewhere, and the world goes round as the novel transports the reader to Sydney, Tokyo, and La Jolla.

Carter points out that the temporality of simultaneity introduced by the short narratives "complements the work's [*Exit West*'s] intensive exploration of the role that social communication technology plays in our era of instantaneous connectivity" (628). In this sense, with these accounts, the novel enacts in textual form the physically distant but emotionally close connections one may establish through technology. Saeed, for instance, thinks of his phone as "too powerful, the magic it summoned too mesmerizing, as though he were eating a

banquet of limitless food, stuffing himself, stuffing himself, until he felt dazed and sick" (40). This is an impression that may also be provoked by the numerous doors and anonymous migration stories amid which Hamid's readers suddenly find themselves. It is important to add that such a perception is not far removed from the notion of a mesmerizing literary world either. As a matter of fact, besides the mention of "an old man who lived by the sea" quoted above and reminiscent of Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, *Exit West* establishes several other intertextual links that suggest an interconnectedness between literary works. It seems, therefore, possible to relate phones, doors, and break-in stories in the novel as entrances to alternative and (un)imagined spaces.

Even though *Exit West* is a recent work, several scholars in critical refugee studies have already taken interest in the novel's depiction of contemporary issues. Their discussions often address the shorter or marginal narratives within the novel. I use the term "marginal" here because, as these studies suggest, these narrative snippets seem to be, at least at first, dislocated from a central plot line. Liliana M. Naydan, for instance, agrees that "Hamid addresses human interconnection in both content and form" by stretching "the concept of connectivity beyond digital contexts, telling a range of stories about human connections and disconnections through vignettes and through the main narrative of Saeed and Nadia" (434). Naydan focuses therefore on an association between the vignettes at structural level and digital technology at plot level, arguing, for example, that these marginal stories "interrupt the main narrative about Saeed and Nadia while inviting readers to contemplate the short attention spans that the digital age has fostered—the expectation of or even desire for interruption" (442-443). Likewise, Amanda Lagji and Hong emphasize the simultaneity entailed by what they consider "individual experiences of migration and movement" with "different points of view" (Lagji 225, 230) and "meanwhile scenes ... concurrent with the main narrative of Nadia and Saeed" (Hong 42). In addition, Carter states that "Hamid juxtaposes the work's central narrative of Saeed and Nadia

... with supplementary accounts" (628). I juxtapose these perspectives to propose that, through the use of words such as "main," "central," and "vignettes," these scholars establish a narrative hierarchy within the novel's content and form in which Nadia and Saeed's story is central or interior and the shorter narratives are marginal or exterior.

With this hierarchy in mind, Carter's choice of the word "supplementary" is particularly relevant to the understanding I propose for the marginal narratives in *Exit West*. That is because it evokes the Derridean idea of supplementarity discussed in Chapter One, according to which, if refugees' door-crossing accounts supplement Nadia and Saeed's story, they can be seen as both an accretion and an ultimate replacement for a center that is absent and open for supplementation. The result, as Derrida puts it, is that, within this logic, "the totality *has its center elsewhere. The center is not the center*" ("Structure, Sign and Play" 352). This de-centering perspective upsets the initial hierarchy between Nadia and Saeed's and anonymous refugees' stories, leveling them up to the same status in relation to each other. It is important to point out that this leveling is an effect that arises not only from interpreting Carter's reading of *Exit West*, but a development that can also be observed if one examines the reading experience provided by Hamid's novel, as I do next.

Some of the same scholars who discuss the question of main and parallel narratives in *Exit West* emphasize the roles the reader may play in the novel. For example, Hong argues that the narrator's frequent rendering of refugees' thoughts "may disorient but ultimately instruct the reader, who may identify more closely with non-migrants in London but here is given the perspective of the refugee as a model" (45). Hong's point is based on the premise that Hamid's audience is most likely composed by English-speaking readers in Europe and North America who, regardless of immigration status, possess the same material conditions that would allow a local to access a novel, namely, time, education, and money. The reader Hong envisions, therefore, would identify more closely with the "natives" in *Exit West*, that is, inhabitants

whose "existence here did not owe anything to a physical migration that had occurred in their lifetime" (Hamid 198). This might be the reason why Hong proposes that the novel positions its reader as a "surveillor" (Hong 45), that is, somebody who will gaze upon the refugees and their stories with interest and suspicion, asking questions such as "who are these people?," "where are they from?," "what are they doing?," and "why are they here?". It can be said, then, that Hong's reader of *Exit West* may experience through the novel's interconnected narratives the fragility of the home and nation in face of the outside(r). These narratives function, in this sense, much like a house door, as described by Derrida, or the mysterious black doors Hamid creates.

Carter seems to also trace a relationship between the shorter narratives and the black doors as she argues that *Exit West*

> [U]ses a narrative structure that makes vulnerability part of the reading experience ... Hamid's supplementary accounts contain few scene-setting clues, which places readers in the symbolic position of the displaced who, when they leave their homes, enter a new world where their established frames of navigation are thrown into disarray. In trying to make sense of a scene, readers also embody the position of a storyteller, experiencing the power of creating worlds through their acts of interpretation. (628)

Like Hong, Carter contends that Hamid's novel may lead the reader to contemplate the precariousness of the traditional home. However, she suggests that this is possible as the reader plays the role not of the surveillor but of the displaced, the door-crossing refugee, as both the reader and the refugee are removed from a narrative or geographic space and immediately inserted into another, in which they attempt to locate themselves. It is important to point out that Carter does not regard this as a victimized position. On the contrary, she emphasizes that the shorter stories in *Exit West*, even if narrated in third person, bring along refugees' perspectives and attempts at living, understanding, and (re)telling their migration. By the same

token, Carter does not read the fragility of the home and nation as a problem. The issue is rather one's (more specifically, the rights-rich neoliberal subject's) unwillingness to accept the vulnerability inherent to both humanity and the concept of private property, a reluctance that translates into efforts to protect against precariousness by exploiting the vulnerability of others.

In conversation with Hong and Carter, I agree that Hamid's readers, who may most often identify with the surveilling natives, walk in the refugee's shoes in an exercise in empathy as they pass the pages of *Exit West*, reading through stories that displace them just as the mysterious doors transport the refugees. This reading experience provides a perspective in which the refugee is neither a victim nor a foe, as in objectifying discourses of humanitarianism and protectionism, but a subject whose different world view is valued. It is in this way that I propose that *Exit West* returns to the same effect achieved when its shorter stories are seen, according to the Derridean notion of supplementarity, as "supplementary accounts." Here, any initial hierarchy between Nadia and Saeed's story and anonymous narratives is dismantled because a thorough reading of the former necessarily contains the latter. To read Hamid's text is to travel through stories that subsequently interrupt and connect with each other to the point that primacy and centrality are suspended, and this constant displacement becomes the experience of the novel itself. In this regard, it is possible to notice, furthermore, a point of contact or mirroring between form and content in *Exit West*: the apparent center-margin hierarchy is undone while not only the reader but also the initial protagonists, Nadia and Saeed, pass through a door and take on the role of the refugee.

The young couple begins their story in the position of locals relative to their country of birth, which they have never left despite their wish to visit, for instance, Latin America. At that moment, such a desire is unachievable, for traveling outside their city is banned because of the war between governmental forces and militants. In this context, they resort, as has been discussed, to smartphones and the Internet to escape into a virtual, alternative space. This

option, nevertheless, is also suspended when the government restricts mobile phone signal and Internet connectivity as "a temporary antiterrorism measure ... with no end date" (Hamid 57). After that, according to the narrator, "[d]eprived of the portals to each other and to the world ... Nadia and Saeed, and countless others, felt marooned and alone and much more afraid" (Hamid 57). They also, however, begin to pay attention to portals and passages they overlooked while immersed in digital technology: their own doors. Like other human inventions, doors were once a technical novelty, normalized with the passing of time. Their national counterpart, the border, is likewise a naturalized form of state technology without which one might not imagine the world nowadays, even if this world has existed long before such delimitations. In this line of reasoning, it is possible to say that Hamid's mysterious doors are, in a sense, technological too, functioning as an update to traditional doors that both materializes and replaces the virtual connections mobile phones used to provide in the story.

Although scholars of Hamid's work commonly relate his doors with Internet connectivity, they do not often regard them, as I do, as a possible new technology. Rather, critics such as Naydan, Lagji, Sercan Hamza Bağlama, Oana-Celia Gheorghiu, and Lona Moutafidou engage with or at least suggest an understanding of Hamid's doors as instances of magical realism. Exceptions to this tendency are Carter and Hong, the former arguing that the doors replace both the borders and the mediating narratives of humanitarianism and protectionism, and the latter contending that the new portals dislocate an entire "refugee regime," that is, "the global infrastructure of international and domestic laws, institutions, and legal processes that contour refugee flows" (34). Although none of the other researchers justify their magical realist reading, I would attribute it to the fact that, differently from what happens with the *novum* of science fiction, *Exit West* does not contain any scientific explanation for the black doors, nor does it ever indicate that they are a product of technological projects. The only mentions of "magic" in the narrative refer, in fact, to a device the Western reader considers

technological: "In their phones were antennas, and these antennas sniffed out an invisible world, as if by magic;" "[Saeed] found the antenna too powerful, the magic it summoned too mesmerizing" (Hamid 40). In this way, *Exit West* seems to suggest that there may be equity, instead of a stigmatizing hierarchy, between technology and magic, for what is technological in one world view may be magical in another and vice-versa. If Hamid's novel yields, as scholars tend to agree, the experience of a new perspective, a refugee epistemology, it seems important to avoid conforming its elements to already established categories and tendencies such as magical realism. Furthermore, perhaps more important than defining what the doors are is analyzing what they do by discussing the ways they normalize migration and disrupt the home as Nadia and Saeed's story becomes a refugee narrative.

From the moment Nadia and Saeed step into "the blackness of a door" (Hamid 103) to land in the Greek island of Mykonos, the doors contribute to normalize migration in relation to paralysis because, as I have been arguing, the apparently central narrative of autochthony merges into the once marginal or supplementary accounts of mobility. The same paradigmatic change progressively falls upon every story, even those involving people who never cross the doors. This is the case, for instance, of the maid outside Marrakesh "who could not speak and, perhaps for this reason, could not imagine leaving" (Hamid 223). This woman's daughter, having passed through the doors, "returned to visit, and each time she returned she told the maid to come with her" (Hamid 224). Although the maid continuously refuses her daughter's invitation, by the end of her story, she thinks that "[o]ne day she might go... But not today" (Hamid 226). It is noticeable, therefore, that, even though this woman does not travel through any of the doors in the time of her story, she remains a migrant in potential. In a related manner, a rich old woman in Palo Alto, who "had never moved, traveled, yes, but never moved," hardly recognizes her town and people after the doors begin to open, concluding that "she too had migrated, that everyone migrates, even if we stay in the same houses our whole lives, because

we can't help it. We are all migrants through time" (Hamid 209). Her impression is based on the fact that, throughout the years, landscapes and communities will change and provoke a sense of estrangement comparable to what one might feel when they move in space. This passage emphasizes an intricate relation between time and space to propose a view of migration as much more natural than our contemporary discourses would admit. Such a normalization, as matter of fact, is among the reasons for the criticism with which the sentence "We are all migrants through time," in particular, has been met.

Carter and Yogita Goyal warn that viewing every person as at least a migrant through time may entail a return to hegemonic universalist claims. Carter, for instance, finds it "difficult not to hesitate before such a call to resurrect a universal construction of the human. Hamid's proposal risks obscuring the very different economic, political and psychological conditions that inform various people's experiences of being migrants" (635). Goyal, in turn, accuses Hamid of naturalizing "migration in a way that evacuates the specific historical experience that generates it, rendering banal what must remain historical" (241). I would argue that one should bear in mind that *Exit West* proposes the view of humans' inevitable spatial-temporal migration not in relation to our contemporary world but to the specific context of the novel. That is to say that the narrator is not necessarily calling their readers migrants through time, but suggesting that, if mobility one day becomes as simple a matter as crossing a doorstep, then we would all be literal migrants through space, by stepping into a door, or metaphorical migrants through time, by witnessing spatial changes around us through the years, even if we never moved, like the rich old woman in Palo Alto. Moreover, while problematic out of context, Hamid's sentence is inserted within a narrative that normalizes mobility in relation to stasis without, however, homogenizing migrant experience. Nadia and Saeed's story may, on the one hand, resemble the refugee narrative commonly portrayed by the media, as they flee a war, live through camps, and face bureaucratic challenges and prejudice in attempts to reestablish themselves. This is

not, however, a universal experience, for the novel also presents, on the other hand, stories of nearly accidental travelers, as well as the tales of the accountant in Kentish Town who, on the verge of taking his life, steps through a door and self-exiles in Namibia, and of the Dutch and Brazilian old men who begin to cross the door connecting them every day, as if commuting, and eventually become a couple.

The naturalization of migration set in motion by the black doors comes alongside a disruption of the traditional home that provokes, in turn, its own backlash. That is because the new doors increase one's probability of encounter with the exterior, which was once constrained to a single and controlled entrance. If the home and one's sovereignty over this space depends, as Derrida argues, upon the existence of an approved passage to the outside world, with the proliferation of unauthorized doors, the home becomes unhomely, vulnerable, public instead of private property. The case of the house where Nadia and Saeed settle in London exemplifies such a transformation somewhat literally. As they leave the refugee camp of Mykonos behind, the couple is the first to arrive at a mansion in London, where they choose a small room to themselves and shyly enjoy a restoring bath. Soon, that and other residences fill up to become refugee colonies:

> All over London houses and parks and disused lots were being peopled in this way, some said by a million migrants, some said by twice that. It seemed the more empty a space in the city the more it attracted squatters, with unoccupied mansions in the borough of Kensington and Chelsea particularly hard-hit, their absentee owners often discovering the bad news too late to intervene, and similarly the great expanses of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, filling up with tents and rough shelters, such that it was now said that between Westminster and Hammersmith legal residents were in a minority, and native-born ones vanishingly few, with local newspapers referring to the area as the worst of the black holes in the fabric of the nation. (Hamid 129)

In this passage, Hamid's narrator puts forth a subtle but poignant critique of the abundance of space and resources in first-world countries as compared to the miserable conditions in which humans live in other parts of the globe. By placing these people within those contrasting spaces, the narrator seems to emphasize a dependence between them, as if implying that "vulnerability is an inter-relational construct: one man's security depends on another's vulnerability" (Carter 628). That is to say that the privileges the citizens of Chelsea and Kensington enjoy before the doors open is to some extent only possible through the oppression of the people who later reclaim those places. As the above-quoted passage also suggests, this domestic disruption of the home is reproduced on a national scale with the wrecking of the borders.

The same play between the individual home and the nation, the private and the public spaces, reappears as the narrator describes the transformation of the geopolitical scene:

> Without borders nations appeared to be becoming somewhat illusory, and people were questioning what role they had to play ... Reading the news at that time one was tempted to conclude that the nation was like a person with multiple personalities, some insisting on union and some on disintegration, and that this person with multiple personalities was furthermore a person whose skin appeared to be dissolving as they swam in a soup full of other people whose skins were likewise dissolving. (Hamid 158)

This passage illustrates the decay into which state limits and bureaucracy are thrown by the new doors, which not only replace but ultimately eliminate such divisions. This change is described as a painful and rather personal process, as if one were losing a constitutive part of oneself, a particular part responsible for singularity, for separating an individual from another, a nation from the others, and without which they lose identity and become the same.

This dissolution of nationalist identities, home, and country immediately provokes the familialist, xenophobic reaction Derrida foresees "[w]herever the 'home' is violated, wherever at any rate a violation is felt as such" (*Of Hospitality* 53). In *Exit West*, this reaction takes the

form, initially, of governmental surveillance of the first door travelers and attempts at door control. Notably, only "the doors out, which is to say the doors to richer destinations, were heavily guarded, but the doors in, the doors from poorer places, were mostly left unsecured, perhaps in the hope that people would go back ... or perhaps because there were simply too many doors from too many poorer places to guard them all" (Hamid 106). As the number of refugees increases in spite of those measures, the protectionist reaction escalates and affects even the very group of "natives." It is the case, for instance, of the woman in Vienna who is verbally harassed and physically assaulted for wearing "a migrant compassion badge, the black door within a red heart" (Hamid 110). The most extreme example of protectionism, however, is the operation to "to reclaim Britain for Britain" (Hamid 135). Soon after Nadia, Saeed, and other migrants occupy parts of London, the government cuts power, water, transport, and general city infrastructure in their region, which becomes known as dark London. The word dark here points out to this region's contrast with light London, where people still "dined in elegant restaurants and rode in shiny cabs, or at least went to work in offices and shops and were free to journey about as they pleased" (Hamid 146). It also calls attention to the ethnic and social difference between the people living in "the migrant ghetto" (Hamid 162), "people of many colors or hues ... but mostly falling within a band of brown that ranged from dark chocolate to milky tea" (Hamid 106), and those who called themselves natives. It is, moreover, important to highlight the utter irony, which Hamid's narrator lays bare, that, in different parts of the world, natives are not necessarily the first people of a land, but inhabitants whose presence "did not owe anything to a physical migration that had occurred in their lifetimes ... [and] tended to be drawn from the ranks of those with light skin" (Hamid 198). In London, some of these natives compose the nativist mobs that, along with governmental forces, punish individual migrants and eventually put together a military action capable of wiping out the ghetto, despite refugees' organized resistance.

After initial blood baths, the "operation to clear the migrant ghetto" (Hamid 162) suddenly stops. Instead of providing a definitive cause for the unexpected ceasefire, Hamid's narrator speculates, as the refugees expecting the attacks might as well think, that perhaps the natives and their forces

> [H]ad decided they did not have it in them to do what would have needed to be done, to corral and bloody and where necessary slaughter the migrants, and had determined that some other way would have to be found. Perhaps they had grasped that the doors could not be closed, and new doors would continue to open, and they had understood that the denial of coexistence would have required one party to cease to exist, and the extinguishing party too would have been transformed in the process, and too many native parents would not after have been able to look their children in the eye, to speak with head held high of what their generation had done ... courage is demanded not to attack when afraid. (Hamid 166)

On the one hand, native forces attack refugees to protect against a sense of precarity for which they blame the migrants. The explanation Hamid's narrator imagines, on the other hand, is premised on the natives' acceptance of their own vulnerability. After all, even though they have fight power to crush the occupation, as long as the home stands, it will remain susceptible to the exterior. The natives show themselves to be, moreover, vulnerable to love, that is, helpless in face of the possibility of losing the trust and respect of the ones they hold dear. In this way, their courageous act is, instead of fighting, embracing their own vulnerability and withdrawing in spite of fear.

This acknowledgement of vulnerability is, in my view, a port of entry to begin to address the issue of ambiguity in *Exit West*. That is because, for natives and refugees alike, to embrace vulnerability is to accept the intrinsic unhomeliness of the home, the naturality of movement, and the dismantlement of hierarchies or binary oppositions such as center and

margin, local and migrant, native and refugee. It is in this sense that, besides and perhaps through the effects of black doors and "supplementary" narratives, ambiguity emerges as another pervading concept in *Exit West*.

2. "Terribly. Yes: Terribly. Or Perhaps Not So Terribly"

Looking back at the previous section of this chapter, it is possible to notice that the shadow of ambiguity haunts most of the points that have been discussed so far. It seems that, whenever one tries to understand *Exit West* in terms of binary oppositions, the result is ambivalence, indeterminacy, both sides and neither at the same time. It is the case, for instance, of trying to distinguish between central and marginal narratives, local and refugee stories, or native and migrant characters, only to conclude that the former may appear as the latter, and the latter as the former. In addition, ambiguity hovers over the role of the reader as a simultaneous surveillor and migrant, as well as over the play between the magical and technological, the inside and out, and the private and public in the novel. It is, finally, implicit in people's acceptance of vulnerability as the abandonment of fragile and violent certainties. In this section, I draw from Hamid's critics to further illustrate ambiguity as an overarching principle in both the plot and form of *Exit West*. This discussion aims at arriving at a final analysis of how ambiguity informs the notion of hospitality that can be outlined in the novel.

Ambiguity may be said to further penetrate the plot of *Exit West* by means of what Lagji calls a "temporality of waiting" (219). Lagji reads Hamid through the lens of the New Mobilities paradigm, according to which mobility and immobility are not "diametrically opposed" but "overlapping and dependent states" (220). This paradigm, furthermore, "suggests that 'time spent travelling is not dead time'" (Lagji 220), but a period filled with waiting for document checking, transportation, arrival, reception, etc. In the case of *Exit West*, in which

time spent travelling is reduced to a brief instant, Lagji argues that the temporality of waiting and the overlapping between mobility and immobility are emphasized after arrival, when Nadia and Saeed, as well as other refugees, are simultaneously, as Brigit Haas puts it, "citizens-in-waiting and deportees-in-waiting" (qtd. in Lagji 219). The temporality of waiting, Lagji argues in her analysis of time and space in the novel, "opens up the 'space' of travel," as a domain that presupposes movement, "to include places of ostensible non-movement, such as the camp and refugee houses in *Exit West*" (221). These places of waiting, that is, these locations in which the characters experience this particular temporality, are also spaces of ambiguity, of being here-there, nowhere-everywhere, that are multiplied in the narrative.

In her reading of *Exit West*, Naydan, in turn, highlights the constant play between presence and absence in refugees' experiences in Hamid's novel. To Naydan, this play is visible, for instance, in "[t]he presence of alienating state-sanctioned and terrorist violence, and the absence of state-sanctioned existence for undocumented immigrants in xenophobic nations that seek to screen them out" (434). This situation creates, according to Naydan, "a paradox of existence for immigrants" (434) who pass through the doors, as they "enter nations as refugees who are present physically without having legal presence" (438). They are, in other words, present while absent on both sides of the door. Naydan argues that this ambivalent absent presence resurfaces, furthermore, in some refugees' feelings of nostalgia: "Hamid proposes that migrants who retain connections to home experience nostalgia, a metaphorical manifestation of being present without presence" (439). A case in point is Saeed, whose "connections to the unnamed city and the cultural and religious features that define it frequently leave him disconnected from circumstances in London and Marin" (Naydan 439). Mourning the loss of his parents, Saeed attempts to return to a lost place and time by surrounding himself with his fellow countrymen, praying, and consequently drawing away from Nadia, the only person with whom he actually shares that past.

Another token of absent presence to which Naydan calls attention is the reference to the French photographer Thierry Cohen's *Villes éteintes* collection. Saeed shows the photographs to Nadia early in their relationship, explaining that they picture "famous cities at night, lit only by the glow of the stars" because Cohen would "go to deserted places. Places with no human light ... just as far north, or south, at the same latitude basically, the same place that the city would be in a few hours, with Earth's spin, and once he got there he pointed his camera in the same direction" (Hamid 56). Naydan argues that, by superimposing a same but different sky over the cities he photographs, a sky always out of reach for those cities, "Cohen's photographs echo the uncertainties and in-between elements of Hamid's novel as a work of art ... The cityscapes that result are evocative of the pre-globalized, pre-digital, and even pre-modern world, and they present a sense of uncertainty with regard to time and place" (445). Additionally, *Exit West* seems to reinforce the impressions of uncertainty and ambiguity in its treatment of other elements of the plot, such as the already mentioned but increasingly meaningful digital screens and doors. As argued in the previous section, screens and doors in *Exit West* play several simultaneous and dialectic roles, serving, for instance, as borders that separate and protect the inside from the outside while also connecting these parts. In this section, I analyze Hamid's descriptions of screens and doors to demonstrate that the ambiguity they bring into the novel is first implied by the language that characterizes them.

Although the narrative mentions windows, computers, cameras, and televisions, the screens to which it most often refers are smartphones. In the beginning of their relationship, Nadia and Saeed use these devices to constantly communicate with each other, identify constellations together, and contact local dealers for the drugs they consume at Nadia's house. Later in the novel, their phones help them connect with news from a changing world while they become increasingly distant from each other: "before they fell asleep they often sat outside on the ground with their backs to the dormitory, on their phones, wandering far and wide but not

together, even though they appeared to be together" (Hamid 185). In addition to the ambiguity of presence and absence, connection and separation entailed by the previous passage, Hamid's descriptions of smartphones suggest an indecisiveness between fantastic and technological, utility and menace, freedom and imprisonment. An example of this play is that, one day in London,

> As Nadia sat on the steps of a building reading the news on her phone across the street from a detachment of troops and a tank she thought she saw online a photograph of herself sitting on the steps of a building reading the news on her phone across the street from a detachment of troops and a tank, and she was startled ... she had the bizarre feeling of time bending all around her, as if she was from the past reading about the future, or from the future reading about the past, and she almost felt that if she got up and went home at this moment there would be two Nadias, that she would split into two Nadias, and one would stay on the steps reading. (Hamid 157)

After the shock that makes her look around for a photographer, Nadia realizes that the woman in the picture is not her. The momentary impression, nevertheless, is uncanny: a threat to the ego posed by the double that emerges through the screen of the phone. This screen produces, moreover, an effect of *mise en abyme* that endlessly frames and imprisons Nadia within the screen on which she reads about the world. Another passage that indicates that, despite the usefulness of their reach, phone screens are also confining, is an important conversation between Nadia and Saeed that takes place "under the drone-crossed sky and in the invisible network of surveillance that radiated out of their phones, recording and capturing and logging everything" (Hamid 188). In this panoptical context, phones appear as perhaps more efficient tools of control than the drones exactly because they are deceiving and may hide their ambivalence under the disguise of utility.

Similarly to screens, doors in *Exit West* are also repeatedly described in ambiguous terms. Hong argues that this potential for ambiguity is, in fact, exterior to the novel because doors "have familiar metaphorical meanings: to 'open doors' means to create opportunities; to 'leave the door open' means to preserve a potentiality like a relationship or career path" (41). In this sense, one could state that, simply by choosing doors as a means of travel, Hamid would already be inserting this polysemy into the narrative. His descriptions of doors throughout the novel further emphasize their indeterminacy, especially in the first time that Nadia and Saeed walk through one of these passages:

> Nadia, who had not considered the order of their departure until that moment ... approached the door, and drawing close she was struck by its darkness, its opacity, the way that it did not reveal what was on the other side, and also did not reflect what was on this side, and so felt equally like a beginning and an end ... It was said in those days that the passage was both like dying and being born, and indeed Nadia experienced a kind of extinguishing as she entered the blackness and a gasping struggle as she fought to exit it. (Hamid 103-104)

The door through which the couple travels seems to synthesize, in this meaningful excerpt as well as throughout the book, several opposing notions: this and the other side, beginning and ending, dying and being born, entering and exiting. These notions are simultaneously included and denied by the dark and opaque door, which foregrounds, in its ambiguity, a potential to deny complete determination. This may be the reason why Hamid's characterization of doors is more speculative than exact and why, even though years go by in the story, there is never a concise, scientific explanation for the mystery of the doors.

I will soon return to the potential of doors in *Exit West* to address the question of hospitality in the novel. Before that and as a transition to the discussion about hospitality, I would like to indicate ways in which ambiguity and indeterminacy appear not only in what

Hamid's narrator tells us, but in how he does so. In this regard, it is relevant to return to the topic of the anonymity of all characters in the novel except Nadia and Saeed. On the one hand, as I argued in the first section of this chapter, the anonymity of most characters and some of the settings in the novel allows identification with nameless people in a similar situation. It also, on the other hand, evokes the indistinctiveness and virtual invisibility into which individual subjects are thrown in homogenizing discourses and categories such as "migrant" and "refugee." Another possible reading of anonymity in *Exit West* is that it represents a refusal to interpellate the other with a violent question: "what is your name?" To recall the discussion in Chapter One, according to Derrida, from its outset in ancient Greece:

> [T]he right to hospitality commits a household, a line of descent, a family, a familial or ethnic group receiving a familial or ethnic group. Precisely because it is inscribed in a right, a custom, an *ethos*... this objective morality... presupposes the social and familial status of the contracting parties, that it is possible for them to be called by their names, to have names, to be subjects in law, to be questioned and liable, to have crimes imputed to them, to be held responsible, to be equipped with nameable identities, and proper names. (*Of Hospitality* 23)

As it is important to remember, the right to hospitality or hospitality as a right is not offered to the "absolute other" but to an individual that is identifiable as a foreigner because he/she can answer "the question of the foreigner," addressed to the foreigner in order to mark them as a foreigner subjected to the laws of the host: "this foreigner who has the right to hospitality in the cosmopolitan tradition which will find its most powerful form in Kant... this foreigner, then, is someone with whom, to receive him, you begin by asking his name" (Derrida, *Of Hospitality* 27). Derrida then wonders if the universal hospitality Kant considers a condition for perpetual peace would not require, in fact, an "unquestioning welcome, in a double effacement, the effacement of the question and the name" (*Of Hospitality* 27). By leaving most characters

anonymous, *Exit West* refuses to pose the question of the foreigner to the several newcomers, refugees, commuters, and migrants through time affected by the doors. In this manner, the novel also focuses on what Derrida calls "the question of the question" (*Of Hospitality* 27), that is, the issue of naming, calling the readers' attention to why and to what effects we need names and may feel estranged when they are omitted.

Another way through which Hamid promotes a sense of indeterminacy in his novel is by writing long and winding sentences, which have drawn the attention of some scholars. Naydan, for example, argues that the narrator's "[a]mbiguous sentences provide an aesthetic analogue to Hamid's vignettes in that they, too, create a sense of uncertainty and also liminality ... Key phrases in Hamid's text showcase this kind of movement and in-betweenness" (444). In consonance, Lagji states that "Hamid's style throughout the novel mimics its thematic content, featuring lyrical, winding sentences whose words wander across the page, accumulating clauses until the period end point" (219). One may remember from the discussion in the previous section of this chapter that what Naydan calls vignettes are the supplementary accounts that transport the reader to different narratives. By comparing the effect of Hamid's sentences to that of the so-called vignettes, Naydan allows one to extend her analogy towards the doors: if the sentences are analogous to the vignettes and the vignettes to the doors, then the sentences are also comparable to the doors. To this point, she adds that "the circuitous logic of Hamid's sentence leaves readers not only turning over his idea in their imaginations" (445), it also "gestures toward connectivity by way of its clauses, commas, and conjunctions—by way of mechanics that make connections between words possible" (447). This observation and Lagji's proposition allow one to conclude that, from its most basic formal components, *Exit West* textually performs the movement and ambiguity it thematically introduces.

An instance of such a performance is the first supplementary account that interrupts Nadia and Saeed's story: the short narrative that features a white woman sleeping alone and

undisturbed in a safe, gentrified neighborhood in Sydney, Australia, while a man emerges from her closet door. This door is described as "dark, darker than night, a rectangle of complete darkness—the heart of darkness" (Hamid 8). As for the man, "[h]e too was dark, with dark skin and dark, woolly hair. He wriggled with great effort, his hands gripping either side of the doorway as though pulling himself up against gravity, or against the rush of a monstrous tide. His neck followed his head, tendons straining, and then his chest, his half-unbuttoned, sweaty, gray-and-brown shirt ... His eyes rolled terribly. Yes: terribly" (Hamid 9). The passage, as Hamid's critics identify, evokes Joseph Conrad's 1902 novella "Heart of Darkness" along with the impression of racism it initially provoked because of the association between savagery, madness, and horror and the African continent and people. These ideas are put forth by the narrator through the use of words such as dark, wooly hair, monstrous, sweaty, and terribly in contrast with the sobriety and vulnerability of the white, unconscious woman. This perception, however, is immediately contradicted as the sentence develops: "His eyes rolled terribly. Yes: terribly. Or perhaps not so terribly. Perhaps they merely glanced about him, at the woman, at the bed, at the room. Growing up in the not infrequently perilous circumstances in which he had grown up, he was aware of the fragility of his body. He knew how little it took to make a man into meat" (Hamid 9). Lagji sees in the reconsideration "perhaps not so terribly" "a gradual revision" (224) of Kurtz and Marlow's (Conrad's characters) certain horror to the uncertainty of Hamid's narrator in face of a similar encounter. Naydan, in turn, believes that the reconsideration is a purposeful hesitation to insert ambiguity into the narration through even the most minimal details: a word, a pair of unusually short nominal sentences. Carter, finally, argues that Hamid ambivalently recalls and "[d]estabilises the narrative assumptions of 'Heart of Darkness'" (629) by misleading the reader to expect that the dark man will violate the white woman, then presenting them both as vulnerable, respectively, sleeping and standing alone. To these possibilities brought up by Lagji, Naydan, and Carter, I would add that Hamid's riddling

sentences entail, along with the other discussed instances of ambiguity in the novel's form and content, a potentiality in the language of *Exit West* that informs an underlying notion of hospitality within this work.

By availing itself of the privileged space and possibilities of literature, Hamid's novel deconstructs the hospitality/hostility, host/guest, law/laws binaries and advances a view of hospitality that deviates from the Western tradition discussed in Chapter One. Perhaps the best way to describe this difference would be to hypothesize that the novel focuses on the trace slashing between the opposite and hierarchical sides of the binaries. In other words, one can say that *Exit West* explores the border, the limit, the doorstep between these sides. Of course doorstep would be a preferred metaphor to use in relation to a novel in which doors are paramount.

In the invitation to Derrida's *Of Hospitality*, Anne Dufourmantelle reflects that "the place in question in hospitality [is] a place originally belonging to neither host nor guest, but to the gesture by which one of them welcomes the other – even and above all if he [one of them] is himself without a dwelling from which this welcome could be conceived" (62). The slashing trace seen as doorstep corresponds precisely to the intersection where there are no hosts or guests yet, no unambiguous naming, no ground for hierarchies. This "place in question" is not only a space but also a moment, where and when those involved in the encounter are one step away from "the crossing of the threshold," which Derrida considers to always remain "a transgressive step" (*Of Hospitality* 75) that inscribes the parts into the Law/laws aporia. The doorstep represents, therefore, unconditional hospitality in potential. In this sense, by multiplying doorsteps, *Exit West* also reproduces the potentiality of unconditional hospitality.

If one recalls the passage narrating the first time Nadia walks through one of the black doors on the way from her city to Mykonos, they might notice that split-second action of

crossing a doorstep is stretched as if one were watching a scene in slow motion. This action is also described, as I discussed above, as an ambiguous experience: a beginning and an end, dying and being born, extinguishing while struggling. In this sense, similarly to the slashing trace that divides the host/guest binary, the stretched doorstep in *Exit West* is also a place and time in question for the contemplation of potentiality.

In Aristotelian philosophy, potentiality is paired with actuality to explain movement, change, and causality. Potentiality could, in this line of reasoning, be understood as a stage before actuality, or, in other terms, as what may be or could have been that precedes what is. Giorgio Agamben, however, calls attention to the implication that "potentiality is not simply non-Being, simple privation, but rather *the existence of non-Being*, the presence of an absence, this is what we call 'faculty' or 'power' ... potentiality is not a logical hypostasis but the mode of existence of this privation" (*Potentialities* 179). To Agamben, one should consider "what may be" not as "what is not," or as the underlying substance of what has not yet been actualized, but as the very existence or actualization of "what is not." To read hospitality in *Exit West* as a potentiality would, in this manner, mean that hospitality under the doorstep exists in its own absence, that is, in the absence of, for instance, the laws that actualize hospitality in sovereign spaces, while also deranging its potential.

Agamben continues his discussion about potentiality in a way that may also be helpful for the understanding of hospitality in Hamid's novel. He argues that, just as "we say of the architect that he or she has the *potential* to build, of the poet that he or she has the *potential* to write poems," one may also consider that "the architect is potential in so far as he has the potential to not-build, the poet the potential to not-write poems" (*Potentialities* 179), and hospitality the potential to not-hospitality, or hostility. In this sense, as well as in the case of the negative mode of existence mentioned in the last paragraph, the existence of non-Being or of a privation, "in its originary structure, *dynamis*, potentiality, maintains itself in relation to

its own privation ... its own non-Being" (Agamben, *Potentialities* 182). Taking this structure into account, what happens, then, with hospitality after the transgressive step is taken in *Exit West*, after one transposes the slashing trace of the doorstep? What is the actuality of this potential to be and to not-be?

Agamben offers an alternative to the apparently inescapable insertion into the Law/laws aporia that seems to apply to *Exit West*. According to him, Aristotle states that "[a] thing is said to be potential if, when the act of which it is said to be potential is realized, there will be nothing impotential" (*Potentialities* 183). Agamben interprets this apparent tautology as a view that, in the passage from potentiality to actuality, no negative potentiality (potential to not-be) is left behind: it transfers itself to actuality. "This does not mean," the philosopher explains, "that it [potentiality to not-be] disappears in actuality; on the contrary, it *preserves itself* as such in actuality" (*Potentialities* 183). In this line of reasoning, when door travelers in Hamid's novel step through a threshold, or when other "travelers through time" refrain from doing so, their actualized potential to be a host or guest, local or migrant, hospitable or hostile contains the seed of what they are not and may eventually still become. This view would perhaps help explain the ambiguities in which sentences, characters, and stories are caught in *Exit West*. Ambiguity seems to work as an echo of a potentiality that impedes conformity to the language of traditional hospitality.

It is this line of thought that I would like to conclude this chapter by interpreting Carter's assertion that:

> Hamid neither depicts the physical borders of nation states nor the traditional bureaucratic processes of border control that the displaced face. This somewhat strange omission ... signals *Exit West*'s imaginative contribution to perceptions of today's refugee crisis. Omitting descriptions of territorial borders, Hamid, instead, depicts characters' bodies as the inscribed carriers of bordering practices. (630)

Carter argues that migrants in Hamid's narrative embody bordering practices. After the discussion developed here, this possibility would entail that the characters in *Exit West* come to ultimately be the black doors the novel multiplies in so many different ways. In this sense, they carry in themselves the potentiality of the doorsteps, the slashing traces, or the "places in question" in which hospitable encounters with each other, with different stories, and with the readers never cease.

Chapter Four: "Otherwise, what else?": Misapprehension, Vulnerability, and the Hum of Hospitality in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long for* and Sharon Bala's *The Boat People*

> "A lingua franca is always apoetical."
> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

The epigraph mentioning the apoetical character of any lingua franca is part of a critique by Martinican theorist, poet, and novelist Édouard Glissant of a tendency towards a universal monolingualism that he sees as a result of hegemonic practices reaching as far back as Modern European colonialism and arriving at late capitalism. According to Glissant,

> [L]anguages lacking the support of economic power and the competitive politics that convey this are slowly disappearing. The result is that the languages of the world, from the most prestigious to the humblest, have ended up backing up the same demand, though general opinion has not caught up yet. They demand a change in ways of thinking, a break with a fatal trend to annihilate idioms. (112)

Throughout *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant identifies a resistance in languages, cultures, and arts against the transparency often attributed to them in objective readings. He metaphorizes this resistance as an opacity, that is, a refusal to surrender oneself completely to translation, homogenization, and practicality in defiance of a utilitarian mode of thinking.

The reference to Glissant's defense of "a symphony of languages" (112) seems appropriate to open a chapter about Dionne Brand's novel *What We All Long for* (henceforth *WWALF*) for two reasons. First, because Brand's roots (or, in Glissant's terms, rhizomes) also stretch back to the Caribbean: born in Trinidad and Tobago in 1953, she settled in Canada in 1970. Second, because *WWALF* may be said to grapple with hegemonic attempts at a monolingualism/monoculturalism that disguises itself as a symphony of languages, cultures, and peoples in the Canadian context. As we will see, Brand's work is not alone in this

undertaking. In this chapter, I choose to read it alongside Sharon Bala's novel *The Boat People* (henceforth *TBP*), as both pose a challenge to their context of production from the viewpoint of migrants and refugees. Bala was born in 1979 to Tamil parents of Sri Lankan origin living in Dubai. As in Brand's case, her family migrated to Canada in the 1970s and she grew up in Toronto.

It is granted that the context of publication of *WWALF* and *TBP* is not exactly the same. The two novels are separated by more than a decade in which the number of migrants and refugees increased worldwide. When Brand published *WWALF* in 2005, there were some 191 million international migrants (2.9% of the world's population) worldwide, 13.5 million of which were refugees, according to the *World Migration Report 2005*. In 2018, when Bala's *TBP* came out, the number of international migrants neared 272 million (3.5% of the world's population), with 25.9 million refugees as per the *World Migration Report 2020*. In both cases, however, Canada figured among the main resettlement countries, having admitted around 10,000 refugees in 2005 and 28,000 in 2018. Canada, in fact, was the leading country in refugee resettlements in 2018, when admissions into the United States declined as a result of Donald Trump's anti-immigration policies. As Vinh Nguyen and Thy Phu recall, on 27 January 2017, Trump signed an executive order known as the Travel Ban or the Muslim Ban, which "suspended the US Refugee Admissions Program for 120 days, placed an indefinite ban on refugees from Syria, and barred entry to anyone from seven predominantly Muslim countries in the Middle East and Africa" (3). Joining the international backlash against Trump's decision, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau then tweeted: "To those fleeing persecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength #WelcomeToCanada" (Nguyen and Phu 3). Trudeau's tweet was followed by a picture of him greeting a Syrian refugee child and helped put the hashtag #WelcomeToCanada on the world's trending topics at the same time that the United States affirmed its protectionism. This situation

exemplifies what I here refer to as Canadian humanitarian exceptionalism, the image of the country as a sanctuary evocative of Glissant's symphony, in relation to which Brand and Bala position their novels.

Evyn Le Espiritu Gandhi argues that the prevailing image of humanitarian exceptionalism often safeguards Canada from the eyes of critical refugee studies. According to Gandhi, "[s]o far, much scholarship in critical refugee studies has focused on the US context or analyzed the US empire" (135), whereas refugee and asylum seekers' conditions and perspectives in Canada and the country's humanitarian and multicultural national narrative remain relatively unexamined. In this regard, Gandhi praises Nguyen and Phu as editors of a recent volume of essays that spearheads such a debate. One may remember from the discussion about Zadie Smith's "The Embassy of Cambodia" in Chapter Two that this dissertation has dealt with the issue of a homogenizing and excluding myth of multiculturalism before. There is, nonetheless, an important difference to strike between the discourse of "we, the people of Willesden" and the narrative of Canadian humanitarian exceptionalism and welcoming multiculturalism: the latter is constructed as a state-sanctioned artifice to define and reinforce a multicultural national identity in opposition to the United States, even if the two countries are not so different after all when it comes to the treatment of cultural and ethnic differences and minorities, especially refugees.

The attempted distinction between the two neighbors is marked in the metaphor commonly used to refer to their engagement with diversity. In contrast with the American melting pot that would amalgamate difference into assimilation, Canadian officials and organizations push the image of a cultural mosaic, in which individual dissimilar pieces form a larger, diverse, but cohesive whole. The notion of the mosaic, which according to Richard Day was first evoked in Victoria Hayward's *Romantic Canada* in 1922, may be said to have

been integrated into state policy in 1971, when Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau led the officialization of bilingualism and multiculturalism in Canada.

Johanna Reynolds and Jennifer Hyndman call attention to the exclusionary measures that preceded and, in a sense, informed the 1971 multicultural turn:

> One cannot discuss displacement and exclusion in Canada without acknowledging the cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples ... and exclusionary immigration policies including, but not limited to, the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act, the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, and the exclusion of Jews who tried to land in Canada during this same period. (24)

After adhering to the UN's 1951 *Convention* and the 1967 *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, Canada passed its own Immigration Act in 1976, changing the criteria for immigration from place of origin to an assessment of education and skills. This act reinforced what Erin Goheen Glanville calls Canada's "luxury of selective generosity," to which the country is entitled as a consequence of "the large body of water that separates [it] from the majority of refugees in the world" (133). The 1976 Immigration Act prompted an influx of selected Asian refugees from countries stricken by conflicts related to the Cold War, such as Vietnam and Cambodia. This increase in admissions led to the Special Indochinese Refugee Program of 1979-1980, which, according to Y-Dang Troeung, "afforded an opportunity for Canada to promote its humanitarian image" (7) by allowing private groups, organizations, and religious (mostly Christian) collectives to sponsor resettlement initiatives. As Troeung argues, such a display of solidarity and hospitality overshadowed Canada's involvement in the Vietnam War through the deployment of numerous troops, provision of war material, and permission to test chemical weapons on Indigenous lands in the country. Reynolds and Hyndman add that this (conditional) hospitality counterbalanced instances of hostility in the

same period, such as when Canada imposed obstacles to accepting Chilean refugees seeking to escape Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship alleging that they could be communist terrorists.

As Nguyen and Phu conclude, the Canadian context epitomizes the refugee conundrum of simultaneously "press[ing] at the limits of and also com[ing] to define state sovereignty and nationhood" (5). These authors and other contributors in *Refugee States: Critical Refugee Studies in Canada* then foreground refugee-centered responses to the sublimation of this condition into a narrative of national identity based on humanitarian exceptionalism and multiculturalism. For example, Peter Nyers analyzes petitions and demonstrations by the Non-Status Women's Collective of Montreal, a group whose members include refugees who do not have formal status in Canada and who are thus unable to access basic services. These women understand their condition as a type of rightless non-existence that Nyers describes as "haunted citizenship" (100). In this sense, the Collective's actions include having members dress up as ghosts to linger in front of Justin Trudeau's office and drafting a sort of irregular petition, which, as Nyers explains, used non-deferential language and was signed by people who do not officially exist in Canada using at times only their first names. These initiatives place emphasis on what Troeung calls "refugee worldbuilding" (6) and Yê´n Lê Espiritu and Lan Duong consider a feminist refugee epistemology, that is, in both cases, "the labour of challenging, transforming, asserting, and carving out ways of living" (Troeung 9) and knowing the world. This perspective also emerges in literary and other artistic works that deal with refugeehood in Canada, such as *WWALF* and *TBP*.

In this chapter, I identify and discuss the position, impact, and the textual production of the effects of refugee narratives vis-à-vis non-refugee stories in *WWALF* and *TBP*. In regard to Brand's novel, I mainly focus on Quy's first-person account, which, interrupting the third-person narrative set in Toronto, traces his trajectory from refugee camps in Vietnam to Canada. In relation to Bala's novel, I concentrate on the boat people's stories, that is, the narratives

about the Tamil refugees who escaped Sri Lanka on a precarious, overcrowded boat. In both cases, refugee stories seem to occupy a parallel, marginal position from which they subvert the authority and autonomy of the supposedly central narratives they interrupt. This subversion, however, does not entail an inversion of subjugation but an operation of inclusion and equality. That is to say that refugee stories do not become central plots while marginalizing other narratives; rather, they seem to overarchingly include the latter ones, as much as non-refugee characters strive to distinguish themselves. In this manner, these novels construct refugeehood as an encompassing paradigm of contemporary existence. To say that these novels construct refugeehood as a contemporary paradigm does not imply a banalization of refugee experience. Nor does it entail what Glanville calls a "celebration of movement and displacement" (128). It means, instead, that Brand and Bala reveal a shared vulnerability of identity narratives that explains the need for, while also challenging, our definitions of national myths, immigration statuses, and other artificial borders. The openness to this vulnerability lies at the core of the notion of hospitality that these novels foreground.

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first, I depart from the notion of misapprehension that Brand introduces since her first chapter to examine the novel's openness to the narrative of the other and to other narratives. In the second, I compare and contrast *WWALF* and *TBP* in relation to the portrayal of multicultural urban spaces and the suggestion of a set of possible stories that the two works appear to advance. I also trace a connection between Bala and Hamid to discuss the role of screens and other devices in the production of what I see as a sort of background noise mimicking the positioning of the refugee stories in *TBP*.

1. "A parallel story, a set of possible stories, an exquisite corpse"

WWALF and *TBP* place their action in the Canadian cities of Toronto and Vancouver, to which, as in the case of Smith's London, several diasporas converge. In Brand's novel, however, contemporary Toronto is more than a point in space, an empty setting occupied by humans. From the beginning, Brand constructs this literary city as a character in itself. For example, she opens her first chapter by describing where the city hovers, "above the forty-third parallel" (1), the way it stands still in the winter, and how it smells when the cold ends: "Have you ever smelled this city at the beginning of spring? Dead winter circling still, it smells of eagerness and embarrassment and, most of all, longing. Garbage, buried under snowbanks for months gradually reappears like old habits—plastic bags, pop cans—the alleyways are cluttered in a mess of bottles and old shoes and thrown-away beds" (1). Additionally, later in the same chapter the third-person narrator attributes to the city the power to touch people and bring about the disruptive realization of one's commonality:

> Mornings are like that on subway trains—everyone having left their sovereign houses and apartments and rooms to enter the crossroads of the city, they first try at not letting the city touch them, holding on to the meagre privacy of a city of three million people. But eventually they are disrupted like this. Anonymity is the big lie of a city. You aren't anonymous at all. You're common, really, common like so many pebbles, so many specks of dirt, so many atoms of materiality. (3)

As the narrator portrays it, Toronto seems to break down subjective resistance and dilute the individual identities that would form the Canadian cultural mosaic. By calling anonymity the big lie of the city, the narrator feels that it is not that one's identity is unknown but that everybody is similarly unimportant as an individual to the big picture of the city. Interestingly and somewhat contradictorily, nonetheless, the narrator advances this idea as they zoom in on

a Wednesday morning subway train where the reader finds young people whose description matches that of the characters later presented as protagonists: Tuyen, Oku, and Carla talk loudly about Jackie and are overheard by every passenger including a man that appears to be Quy.

As the novel moves from this introduction of the city to the lives and dramas of these five characters, the reader is left wondering if this is a shift in perspective or a continuous zooming in and out through which one of the passengers, perhaps Quy, intervenes in the fragmented narrative they overhear. Brand's narrator raises this possibility: "Now that conversation has entered everyone's heads, and will follow them to work; they'll be trying to figure out the rest of the story all day" (3). This passage, nevertheless, simultaneously suggests the inefficacy of such an attempt at deciphering a story. Even if the passengers tried to figure out the rest of the tale, something would be left out. It bears noting that other elements in the same chapter evoke this failure of totalization as well. Two of its four last paragraphs consist of lists that try to contain the diversity and multiplicity of the city within a cohesive parallelistic structure: "In this city there are Bulgarian mechanics, there are Eritrean accountants, Colombian café owners, Latvian book publishers, Welsh roofers, Afghani dancers, Iranian mathematicians, Tamil cooks in Thai restaurants, Calabrese boys with Jamaican accents" (5), and so it goes. Still, the chapter ends in recognition of the impossibility of keeping one's story straight and of avoiding a sort of narrative chaos that makes it "hard not to wake up here without the certainty of misapprehension" (5). In this section, I discuss the ways through which this sense of misapprehension pervades scholarly interpretations of Brand's novel as well as the text itself, opening space for a reading of the relationship between narrative strategies and literary hospitality in this work.

The first scholarly interpretations of *WWALF* read the novel along the same lines as the critics who call Smith a champion of multiculturalism. They mostly focus on the portrayal of diasporas and praise *WWALF* as "Brand's most positively multicultural novel" (Goellnicht

199). Diasporic diversity is a given in Brand's novel, as the narrative follows the urban life of young adults "born in the city from people born elsewhere" (Brand 20). Tuyen is a Canadian-Vietnamese androgynous artist and photographer who detaches herself from Tuan and Cam's, her refugee parents, house, life, and infinite sorrow for the loss of their son Quy on the route to Canada. Carla and her troubled brother Jamal are Italian-Jamaican. She is phenotypically white and he is black. Oku and Jackie are Black Canadians whose parents were born in the Caribbean and Nova Scotia. This diversity has been the object of attention of several scholars, including Emily Johansen, who argues that Brand's characters exemplify a cosmopolitan citizenship and subjectivity built across axes of identity, and Chris Ewart, who focuses on the ways diaspora marks first and second-generation immigrant bodies.

By the end of the 2000s and beginning of the 2010s, the focus of scholarly works on *WWALF* began to shift from diaspora and cosmopolitanism to a reading of Brand's critique of the myth of Canadian multiculturalism. These contributions seem to follow Glanville's dissatisfaction with the celebratory tone with which diaspora studies often address refugee literature and Bhabha's cautionary note that any "emancipatory ideal—so affixed on the flowing, borderless, global world—neglects to confront the fact that migrants, refugees, or nomads don't merely circulate. They need to settle, claim asylum or nationality, demand housing and education, assert their economic and cultural rights, and seek the status of citizenship" ("Our Neighbors, Ourselves" 3). Diana Brydon, Kit Dobson, David Tavares and Marc Brosseau, and Ayoung Kim are among the critics that point out that the interaction between diasporic characters and the marginal urban spaces through which they transit contests rather than reinforces the notion of the cultural mosaic by evincing what this image lets out. Tavares and Brosseau, for example, study *WWALF* in terms of Tuyen's and Oku's "informal urban citizenship," that is, "the socio-cultural practices and processes through which [these] individuals and [their] social groups negotiate the terms of their membership within the urban

public" (14). In a similar line of reasoning, Kim's recent work considers the four friends' "affective dissonance" (40), her phrase for the alternative and cross-racial kinship these characters establish among themselves, as a challenge to national scripts of identity that privilege whiteness. These and other studies foreground the role of space and the importance of mobility in *WWALF*, highlighting practices such as Tuyen's and Oku's drifting across sites of belonging, as suggested by Marlene Goldman and Dobson (*Transnational Canada*), cycling like Carla, or bordering like Jackie. By analyzing space in the narrative, these studies, in my view, also call attention to the space of the narrative. In this manner, they may lead one to inquire into how this narrative also dissonates, drifts, or borders. Some limitations in these studies need nonetheless to be addressed. I would argue, first, that they bring *WWALF* unrelentingly back to the multiculturalism from which the novel would initially disengage. That is because these scholarly interpretations often envision negotiations of identity, urban citizenship, and diversity in Brand's work without taking into account hospitable and hostile responses to Quy. Additionally, they most often limit their analyses to the level of plot.

Quy's narrative comprises seven chapters in Brand's novel that differ from the other ones in several ways. First, they carry the title "Quy" instead of a chapter number. They do not interfere in the order of chapters so that chapter one, for instance, antecedes a "Quy" chapter and chapter two follows it. In this sense, it is as if the "Quy" chapters were not there or did not count towards the "official" narrative that makes up the novel. At first sight, they are also an interruption. For example, in chapter one, as discussed above, the reader is introduced to a subway passenger that appears to be Tuyen: "One of them has a camera, she's Asian, she's wearing an old oilskin coat, and you want to look at her, she's beautiful in a strange way" (2). In chapter two, after Quy's first intervention, the narrator ties Tuyen back to that subway passenger, now off the train, by referring once more to the raincoat: "She was still wearing the old oilskin coat, waiting for her brother Binh" (11). Between the two scenes, one begins to

notice that the numbered chapters have a third-person narrator that follows Tuyen, Oku, Carla, and Jackie in contemporary Toronto and access their thoughts through free indirect speech. The point of view and setting are remarkably different in the "Quy" chapters. These sections have a first-person narrator who identifies as Quy and tells of his journey since he gets separated from his parents in the night the family escapes Vietnam in the 1970s to his presumable assassination in contemporary Toronto, after living in refugee camps such as Pulau Bidong and other global although not celebratorily multicultural cities like Bangkok. It must be noted that this narrative is not chronological, moving from the present to memory and back again as the narrator engages in an oral-like conversation with a nameless interlocutor he treats as "you." The coincidences between this man's story and that of Tuan and Cam's family may lead one to assume that he is their lost son. I would argue, however, that the Quy chapters pose this association as possible but not necessarily true. Quy constructs his narrative as a return to Cam, Tuan, and his siblings, but he does so while also describing himself as a conman and raising doubts in regard to his own story: "I'm not a liar" (Brand 217), he states as he talks about the several people he deceives; "I'm not a person to be trusted. People always trust me though. I'm the kind of person you think you're having a conversation with, but I'm not there" (Brand 218), he asserts one page later. Quy's narrative serves as a constant source of mistrust towards what one reads, be it his own story or the other characters', be it a refugee's account or a national myth of multiculturalism. His narrative thus installs a sense of misapprehension that may be the reason it is so often avoided in Brand's scholarship.

As Goellnicht also notices, very few studies on *WWALF* focus on the plot and form of Quy's narrative. Goellnicht, in fact, only acknowledges Joanne Leow's effort to swim against the current of either celebratory or alternative multiculturalist readings. She proposes that Quy's narrative is "a kind of pessimistic ballast to the novel" (196) and argues that "Brand's interpolation of Quy in the narrative is a sustained examination of how multicultural Toronto

is implicated in a distinctively unequal form of globalization" (193). As it is of relevance to this dissertation, Leow also suggests that "the story of Quy's loss is larger than the reality of Quy himself" (203) and thus affects other narratives, as evinced by the similar fragmentation and sense of misapprehension and longing in both Quy's oral-like narrative and Tuyen's art.

To the discussion Leow raises, I would add Lee Frew's and Kate Chiwen Liu's contributions. Frew notices that Tuyen and her friends reproduce settler colonialist oppression in their relationships with their parents and in the encounter with Quy. The young friends are thrown to the margins of the nation, the educational system, and the city in relation to white Canadians. They, nonetheless, take up the position of violent settlers as they mark Quy as exogenous. This process of reproduction results, according to Frew, in locating Canadian settler subjectivity within a notion of diversity that continues to efface Indigenous people while also abnegating the exogenous. Liu adds to this discussion by arguing that Brand's Toronto may only be read as a dialogized space where existence entails an ethical encounter with the Other, that is, the act of "holding oneself answerable to the address of the Other" (70), if one acknowledges the gaps or lacunae in this interactive network into which Quy seems to disappear.

Finally, I emphasize Jenny M. James and Goellnicht among the even fewer scholars that address *WWALF* as refugee literature. James reads the reconstitution of the Vu family's traumatic refugee memories as a sort of narrative bricolage that replays itself in Quy's story and Tuyen's art. Tuyen's grand installation, the *lubaio* of Toronto's longings, is supposed to be made of discarded wood, thrown-away fabric, and construction material. Her collection and re-use of debris is thus analogous to Quy's narrative process, which puts him together as part of the human waste of Pulau Bidong. Goellnicht's study, in turn, seems to be the only existing analysis of *WWALF* informed by critical refugee studies. This critical background leads Goellnicht to reflect upon the narrative character of refugee life: "Narrative, or storytelling, is

central to the process of claiming refugee status ... indeed, the asylum seeker often has nothing but their story on which to base their claim for asylum, since they usually flee their home country without documents or other forms of evidence to support their claims" (194). Yet, the narratives that refugees have are often not compatible with the scripts into which authorities in resettlement countries like Canada want them to fit. As Goellnicht puts it, "[t]he narrative that will be 'acceptable' or convincing to a Refugee board will be built on verifiable facts, credibility, and consistency, drawing on such narrative techniques as coherence and linear chronology, together with ideological stability, all of which are considered 'essential' to 'truth telling' in this type of bureaucratic performance" (195). I will discuss how this exigency disregards the mental processing of traumatic events and non-Western notions of narrative in the next session about *TBP*. For now, I want to call attention to Goellnicht's emphasis on Quy's unreliability. According to him, through this narrative strategy, Brand ensures that her novel is "not simply a counter-narrative to the official requirement for coherent, linear, factual narratives of refugee experience," but an interrogation of "the very method of narrative required by refugee boards to determine legitimacy" (203). Goellnicht thus identifies an effect that the structure of a literary text may have on the perception of the narratives that real refugees tell boards. In a similar line of reasoning, I now want to analyze the effects this structure may be said to have on a reading of hospitality in Brand's novel.

In the remainder of this section, I argue that the shadow of misapprehension and unreliability that Quy's chapters cast upon themselves extends to the entire novel and, in this manner, signals the existence not of a hidden truth but of "a parallel story, a set of possible stories" (Brand 225) suspended in the process of putting any narrative together. This suspension has at least two important implications in *WWALF*. The first is that it affirms the refugee narrative as a paradigm for the other stories. The second is that the novel's gesture to a suspended set of stories performs a hospitable opening to the unknown at structural level.

Such an opening is also observable if one considers Brand's engagement with media that move beyond the textual form while also inserted in it, such as installations and photography. Nonetheless, it is not found in the interactions between citizens and refugees at plot level as in the cases of "The Embassy of Cambodia" and *Exit West*.

In the beginning of this section, I discussed the first chapter in *WWALF* and emphasized the inevitable sense of misapprehension arising from the narrator's attempt at imposing an order to a chaotic contemporary Toronto through lists and, I want to add, stories. I also proposed that the subsequent chapters can be read as a fabrication by one of the passengers, such as Quy, who overhears Tuyen, Oku, and Carla's conversation and wonders how it continues. Indeed, two excerpts suggest that the Vus' lost son is on the train. In the first chapter, the third-person narrator describes a man on the subway

> [W]ho hardly understands English at all, but he hears the tinkle of laughter, and it surprises him out of his own declensions on fate—how he ended up here and what's to be his next move, and how the small panic that he feels disgusts him. He rouses himself from going over the details of his life, repeating them in his head as if to the woman reading a newspaper next to him. The laughter pierces him, and he thinks that he's never heard laughter sound so pure, and it is his first week in this city. Only when he was very, very little—a boy—then he heard it, he remembers. (4)

Similarly to this passenger, the man who presents himself as Quy to Tuyen and Binh barely speaks English. This lack of proficiency, in fact, provokes the failure in communication that causes Jamal to beat him to death. In addition, it is possible to relate the seven "Quy" chapters to this man's attempt to go over "the details of this life, repeating them in his head as if to the woman reading a newspaper next to him," since, as I previously explained, these chapters resemble an oral conversation between Quy as a first-person narrator and an interlocutor he treats as "you." This excerpt seems to replay itself from a distinct perspective in the second

"Quy" chapter as the first-person narrator states: "In my heart, sometimes, I feel a lightness, a nonexistence. I feel it now riding this train. I have these moments, very dangerous, I feel scattered. But I'm here, and I feel like telling you the rest. Not because you'll get it, but because I feel like telling it" (74). It seems therefore possible to say that, if we take the subway man to be Quy and thus the narrator of the eponymously titled chapters, it is the four friends' stories that he fabricates after they get off that, like the laughter that pierces the passenger "out of his own declensions on fate," interrupt the refugee account in his mind. In this sense, one can read the stories in both the "Quy" chapters and the numbered chapters as narratives produced by a refugee. The refugee's narrative is then no longer excluded in *WWALF* but overarching, encompassing the account of refugee life in Southeast Asia and urban life in Toronto. Further evidence of this possibility is the fact that, as I mentioned before, the sense of misapprehension raised in the first chapter emerges in the "Quy" chapters as an impression of unreliability and underlies other stories in the novel to signal the existence of suspended narratives. As I state in the introduction to this chapter, to read the refugee narrative as this sort of paradigm does not imply a vulgarization of refugee experience. Rather, it suggests that, similarly to what happens in "The Embassy of Cambodia" and *Exit West*, the refugees in *WWALF* and *TBP* put citizenship in perspective by disrupting pretensions of individual and national identity. In Brand's novel, this disruption is introduced by the constant reminders of the instability and unreliability of other narratives besides Quy's.

A case in point is the Vus' trajectory. According to Tuyen, her parents would not necessarily be victims of persecution in communist Vietnam. Tuan and Cam were not involved in politics and Tuan had been able to avoid the army during the war years. In this sense, it was fear rather than tangible threats that prompted the Vu family into a boat after the invasion of South Vietnam by the Northern forces. This fear, however, needed to be shaped into the UN's

1951 *Convention*'s definition of "well-founded fear of being persecuted" (14) if the Vus were to resettle in Canada. In this regard, Tuyen ponders that

> Only when they arrived in Toronto would they fully construct their departure as resistance to communism. That is the story the authorities needed in order to fill out the appropriate forms. They needed terror, and indeed Tuan and Cam had had that; they needed loss, and Tuan and Cam had had that too. And perhaps with this encouragement, this coaxing of their story into a coherent wholeness, they were at least officially comforted that the true horror was not losing their boy but the forces of communism, Vietnam itself, which they were battling. Whatever the official story, her mother's cache of photographs told another, a parallel story, a set of possible stories, an exquisite corpse. (225)

This passage describes a process of selecting, shaping, and connecting information to present the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board with what Goellnicht calls an "acceptable," desirable, and consumable narrative. In the 1970s as well as today, narratives that reinforced Canada's ideological stance were preferred over those that contested it. It is necessary to point out that Tuyen does not disregard her parents' anti-communist story as untrue. After all, Tuan, Cam, Ai, Lam, and Quy did leave Vietnam in fear of what a post-war communist regime would mean to an economically vulnerable urban middle class. To her, however, this is only one side of a manifold, unachievable truth that remains suspended as potential, silent, and secret stories. Tuyen seems to read this manifold truth as something surreal and beyond apprehension, an exquisite corpse, as she puts it, which she can only try to make visible through her art.

In addition to the Vus', several other stories in *WWALF* seem to perform a simultaneous silencing of a set of possible stories and an indication of the existence of these suspended narratives. It is the case of Angela, Carla's mother, who jumped off her balcony leaving Carla with baby Jamal in her arms, and Fitz, Oku's father, who becomes virtually incommunicable

deep inside his working-class masculinist discourse. Both stories represent an excess, a misapprehension hovering over Carla and Oku's understanding of their parents and unsettling their own narratives. In a review of Madeleine Thien's refugee novel *Dogs at the Perimeter*, Brand states that "Thien's project is a bold and difficult one. It is the project of our age, one that resists narrative, one that overwhelms narrative; one that is ultimately impossible to narrate fully" (Goellnicht 196-197). In my view, to resist and overwhelm narrative is Brand's project in *WWALF* as well and its product is a refugee novel that is an exquisite corpse in itself.

As I have been arguing, Brand's "Quy" chapters compose an even more vivid set of possible stories or exquisite corpse because of the narrator's blatant unreliability. It is never explicit to either the characters or the reader whether this man is Quy Vu or a farse. On the one hand, he goes by the name of Quy, which, as Goellnicht tells us means both precious (quý) and demon, devil, or ghost (quỷ); he also says that he mistook his father for another man on a fateful night on the beach and followed him onto the boat that ended up in Pulau Bidong while his family journeyed to Canada. In spite of the hardships, he kept a face "like an angel or a ghost or a child" (Brand 224), similar to the baby photo Cam has of Quy and full of the innocence of which his life, his Canadians siblings, and, in a sense, Canada, robbed him. On the other hand, this man only comes across Cam's (or some other heartbroken Vietnamese mother's) story after he steals his former boss's computer and reads the numerous interactions between them. The boss, "a high-tech monk with a laptop computer, a Web site, and a dream of expansion into America" (Brand 284), extorted Cam for years by pretending to search for Quy. This long online exchange convinces the narrator that the monk was indeed Quy, who, hardened by a childhood in camps, would rather take advantage of his poor mother than return to her. At this point, the narrator puts everything one believes to be true about him in check: "But then again the subject of all this could just as well have been me, for one of the names I go by is Quy and I was lost one night in a bay, or so I've told myself" (288). The high-tech monk could be Quy,

the narrator could be Quy, and they would still not necessarily be Quy Vu. The man on the train and in the "Quy" chapters is and is not Tuan and Cam's lost son, as he plays his interlocutors in the same way as "some stupid new humanitarian" to whom he would repeat his story countless times, making "minor changes to the tale" or "fantasiz[ing] wildly" (Brand 288). In the end, Quy's tales with all their possibilities affect other scripts in *WWALF* by destabilizing any pretensions of identity. This effect resembles the impact the city of Toronto is said to have on the subway passengers of the first chapter. It also accounts for the violent hostility with which Quy is met. No matter how distinct from their parents Tuyen and her friends affirm themselves to be, they offer some resistance against this destabilization of identity and narrative. Tuyen, for instance, thinks that "[i]t was all well and good to have a tragic story in the past, but what if it returns? What if it comes back with all it has stored up, to be resolved and decided, to be answered" (300). Carla, in turn, decides to let go of her brother while, somewhere else in town, he and Bashir rob the car Quy is in and, mistaking his resignation for resistance, "beat him and kick him beyond recognition" (317). The refugee, therefore, does not find in multicultural Canada the openness that Brand's novel offers to their narrative.

In relation to the theoretical discussions about hospitality and the literary analyses conducted so far in this dissertation, I would argue that, like Fatou in Smith's short story and the door-crossing refugees in Hamid's novel, refugees such as Tuan, Cam, and Quy are subjected to a conditional form of hospitality or hospitality by right. This conditional hospitality turns into hostility in face of the impossibility of reciprocity and, as I have just argued, the instability that the new arrival brings to bear upon the host. It is noticeable that, having entered Canada in the context of the 1976 Immigration Act and the 1979-1980 Special Indochinese Refugee Program, Tuan and Cam benefited from the country's humanitarian exceptionalism and cultural mosaic politics and conversely contributed to these images.

Regardless of his motivations, when the man named Quy tries to do the same, his plight is already outdated and unable to contribute to Canada's humanitarian and multicultural narrative: "Other tragedies have overshadowed mine ... some stupid rage—I know all about that—will hack eight hundred thousand people to death in Rwanda. But nothing will suck all the oxygen out of the air in years to come as what they will call 9/11, then the Americans will rampage the globe like thousands of Vietnams, and I, I will be forgotten" (Brand 94). Differently from Tuan and Cam, therefore, this Quy falls outside the reach of hospitality by right, "beyond recognition" (Brand 317), and barely human. Once more similarly to "The Embassy of Cambodia" and *Exit West* and contrarily to its own depiction of the violence of conditional hospitality, Brand's novel nonetheless opens itself up to the unknown, the unsaid, the overwhelming in a movement that characterizes unconditional hospitality. In Smith, this opening takes the form of hunting silences; in Hamid, of ambiguity; in Brand, of a sense of unreliability and misapprehension that, drawing from the Quy chapters, underlies the structure of the novel, as I explained above, and the author's references to artistic installations and photography.

Brand's references to installations and photographs suggest through literature that other art form besides literature may perform a suspension of language and thus a hospitable opening to the other. Tuyen's *lubaio* installation is a work in progress throughout the novel. She first conceptualizes it as a wooden structure modeled after the city's old signposts, on which she would have the audience post messages. Halfway through the book, she begins to ask random people on the streets the question "[w]hat do you long for?" (150) and collect the answers in a "book of longings" (154) to be transcribed and incorporated into the *lubaio*. At last, by the end of the novel, she envisions her final project: the installation would occupy three rooms, "[i]n the middle of each room a diaphanous cylindrical curtain, hung from the ceiling, that the audience could enter" (308). The first cylinder would contain the *lubaio* with the longings of

an older generation and rubble, sand, or water on the floor. The second cylinder would be more dynamic and filled with constantly changing video projections of contemporary longings. The association between the first cylinder and Tuan and Cam's generation and the second cylinder and Tuyen's own generation is granted. The rubble, sand, and water symbolize the difficult, destructive journeys that brought the four friends' parents and so many others to Canada. The contrast between the hardness of a wooden structure and the fluid, insubstantial character of the changing images points to these generations' different values, different forms of thinking of identity. What calls my attention the most in Tuyen's installation, however, is the third room: "The last cylinder would be empty, the room silent. What for? She still wasn't quite certain what she was making; she knew she would find out only once the installation was done. Then, some grain, some element she had been circling, but had been unable to pin down, would emerge" (308). This cylinder seems to materialize the silence, the impossibility to articulate, and the excess from which the set of possible, suspended stories hang, hovering over what is in the other rooms. It is also important to highlight that the coming into meaning of this silence or suspension lies in the future, as something that is not there now but that will emerge. This element of Tuyen's installation therefore points to the messianic, to *l'avenir*, which, as Derrida observes in Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering's documentary *Derrida*, may mean the chronological future but also the arrival of the unexpected, the overwhelming, the unpredictable to which pure hospitality is nonetheless open.

The similarities between the structure of *WWALF* as I have been describing it and Tuyen's envisioned installation are striking. Like Brand's novel, Tuyen's work writes a narrative of diaspora and multiculturalism that is destabilized by the certainty of misapprehension that hangs from the suspended stories in the empty room. One could then go as far as to argue that *WWALF* is a literary *lubaio* or that the novel folds upon itself in the self-referential movement of depicting its own structure through Tuyen's art. The importance of

photography to both the novel and the installation adds to this interpretation. Mentions of photographs abound in the novel. One of Tuyen's previous installations, *Riot*, consisted of a disturbing series of photographs through which she captured police violence against Oku and others in a Black anarchist protest. It is also through the camera lens that she sees Quy. When Korea beats Italy in the 2002 soccer World Cup, Tuyen goes around the crowd in Korea Town to register the celebration. Not unlike Michelangelo Antonioni's photographer in the movie *Blow up*, she captures the encounter between her brother Binh and the narrator of the "Quy" chapters not only to document it but to make (a) sense out of it. By then, she does not know that Binh has supposedly found Quy. She is, however, anxious to see the photographs:

> [S]he had made some discovery that she was yet to understand. The two [Binh and the man] seemed both real and metaphoric. She guessed that's why she hadn't looked at the negatives yet. She was still absorbing the images, freshly. She knew that by the time she looked at the images on the negative they would acquire other significances, and by the time she printed them they would be art, open to a thousand interpretations. There was one interpretation that she needed to catch. The one that had led her memory to her mother's photographs disappearing and reappearing. (224)

Later on, Tuyen will plan to include numerous tiny copies of Quy's portrait in her installation. It is, nonetheless, in this passage and in the previously quoted excerpt on her mother's cache of photographs that Brand begins to draw connections between Tuyen's photographs, her *lubaio*, and, by extension, the novel itself. Here, it is possible to say that the narrator emphasizes once again the potential of several art forms to tell stories while also signaling to those stories that they suspend. In this sense, I reiterate that *WWALF* constantly and cohesively constructs itself as the exquisite corpses and sets of stories it portrays, open in a proximate performance of unconditional hospitality to the other, the foreigner, the refugee.

2. "The good fortune within her grasp and the bad luck hovering just behind it"

Bala's debut novel, *TBP*, is set in another diverse Canadian metropolis, the city of Vancouver. Whereas Brand populates Toronto with characters that come from all parts of the world, Bala focuses on Asian-Canadian immigrant families of Tamil and Japanese descent. Another significant difference in the authors' envisioning of urban centers relates to the role played by the cities in the narratives. As I argued in the previous section, Brand's Toronto is personified as an entity acting upon the individuals that compose it. Bala's Vancouver, in turn, is a transitional space. The reader only gets glimpses of it as the characters move, inside cars or the on Correctional Services bus, between the enclosed spaces of prisons, windowless offices, detention hearing rooms, and suburban houses surrounded by snow: "Mahindan could not understand it. Ordinary people he watched through the bus window while traveling to and from hearings, two women waiting at the corner for the light to change and one of them would have him deported" (Bala 145). This narrative strategy leads the reader to experience the city through the perspective of those whose access to it is often hindered by some kind of material boundary, such as windows, bars, and walls. These physical obstacles serve as a metaphor for the endless, Kafkaesque bureaucracy that Bala's Tamil fugitives face throughout the novel. All Mahindan wanted was for him and his son Sellian to "disembark and be free to go on their way" (Bala 27). The book ends, nonetheless, with him walking into his admissibility hearing and still in jail.

The way Bala chooses to depict Vancouver may help explain why, contrarily to *WWALF*, *TBP* has not been crowned a celebration of multiculturalism by its scarce scholarship. Of course, its publication date might also play a role in this. As pointed out in the previous section, by 2018, when Bala's work was published, most of Brand's own scholarship had already shifted its view of *WWALF* from a glorification to a critique of multiculturalism in

Canada. In this sense, it is possible to speculate that researchers in refugee literature knew better than to read praise between Bala's lines, even if the myth of an exceptionally humanitarian and multicultural Canada was still trending on Twitter. Additionally, Bala's plot censures this myth much more obviously than Brand's story as one of the protagonists, Mahindan, grows disillusioned with Canadian hospitality.

Mahindan and his son Sellian are among the five hundred and three Tamils who arrive at the Canadian border in Vancouver on a precarious, overcrowded boat after escaping the humanitarian crisis at the end of the Sri Lankan civil war, in 2009. Fearing other arrivals, the Canadian right-wing Minister of Public Safety, Fred Blair, instructs Border Services to detain the passengers and stall the processing of their claims while he spreads fear of terrorism to manipulate public opinion against the migrants.[1] Blair and the Border Services' judicial team work to link these 21st-century boat people to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the militant and separatist group that fought the Sri Lankan army to form a Tamil nation.[2] To tell this story, a third-person omniscient narrator follows not only Mahindan and his fellow passengers, but also Priya Rajasekaran, a Tamil Canadian law student who unwillingly assists the pro-bono lawyer hired by the Tamil Alliance, Peter Gigovaz, and Grace Nakamura, a Japanese Canadian adjudicator recently appointed by Minister Blair to work on the Immigration and Refugee Board despite a complete lack of experience with refugee law. The chapters in *TBP* alternate between these foci, but, unlike *WWALF*, the narrative situation does not change. In addition to this contemporary perspective, the narrator also travels back to Sri Lanka in the early 2000s to trace Mahindan's trajectory to Canada through space and time.

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[1] Bala's Fred Blair is a fictional character very likely inspired by Frederick Blair, director of the Canadian Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources from 1936 to 1943. In the introduction to this chapter, I quoted Reynolds and Hyndman about the exclusion of Jews who tried to land in Canada during World War II. Blair, the historical figure, was largely responsible for this exclusion as he led the development and enforcement of immigration policies based on race. Following Blair's policies, Canada refused, for example, a ship carrying nine hundred and seven European Jews in 1939, just as Bala's Blair would like to do with the Tamil boat.

[2] The LTTE is an actual group designated as a terrorist organization by 33 countries, including Canada.

The last literary piece to be analyzed in this dissertation, *TBP* is also the narrative that most explicitly engages with the conceptualization of the refugee and the language of conditional hospitality as laid out in Chapter One. Mahindan, Sellian, and their fellow Tamil passengers are not refugees in legal terms because they were not recognized as such by a sovereign state, nor did they file claims for asylum before their arrival on Canadian shores. As is often the case, these people are foreign not only to the country but also to the peculiarities of the condition imposed on them. In a first meeting with Gigovaz and Priya, Ranga, a passenger enters Canada with a former LTTE member's documents and hangs himself when his deportation ordered is issued, is appalled to find out about his suspended status: "But we're refugees, no? Ranga asked. Otherwise, what else?" (25). Gigovaz tries to explain the process: "The first step was to prove their identity. The government would inspect their documents. There were many forms to fill. There would be a review to decide if they could leave jail, then a hearing to determine if they could ask for refugee status. And then another hearing to see if they would be given refugee status. It was a process, and the process would take time" (26). The reader subsequently follows several failed detention reviews and some admissibility hearings in which a few passengers officially become asylum seekers. The novel, however, does not portray any Refugee Board hearing so that none of the passengers is effectively granted refugee status by the end of narrative. Ranga's question thus remains a relevant one. It is difficult to decide on what to call Mahindan and the others. For a good portion of the novel, they are not necessarily Sri-Lankan citizens, for their identities are yet to be verified; neither are they officially immigrants, refugees, or asylum seekers. The notion of suspension is thus introduced by this lingering non-definition. By contrast, Gigovaz and Priya, on the Tamil Alliance's side, and Amarjit Singh, on Border Services', make every effort to situate the boat people within the limits of the law. Gigovaz and Priya attempt to demonstrate that the Tamil passengers' fear of persecution is "more than a serious possibility" (Bala 227) and as well

founded as the 1951 *Convention*, the 1967 *Protocol*, and the 2001 *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* require it to be. Singh, in turn, raises questions about the passengers' identity, their ties with the LTTE, and the validity of their fear to disqualify the claimants. It is relevant to notice that, as Priya and the adjudicator Mitchell Hurst point out, this is not the treatment that every person seeking asylum receives at the Canadian border. According to Priya, "[a]rriving at the border and requesting asylum is completely legal" (69), but, as Mitchell protests, "the ones who arrive at the airport are evaluated on their own merits and these so-called boat people are treated as a generic mass ... Why the double standard?" (174). Minister Blair would have a response. He complains to Grace that "legitimate refugees should apply for status before they arrive, at the High Commission in their country" (77). If they do not do so, Reynolds and Hyndman argue, they are deemed "freeloaders," "bogus," and/or "queue jumpers," even if this failure is due to the fact that the closest UNHCR office is in a government-controlled area to which they have no access.

The language of the law overlaps with the language of conditional hospitality in *TBP*. Alien to this language and to the English language in which legal terms are articulated, prospective refugees like Mahindan rely on lawyers and interpreters as translators. They are not, however, the only characters that need translators. Priya, for instance, does not speak Tamil despite her family background and is often unable to understand her clients. Grace, in addition, is unfamiliar with acronyms and precedents commonly referenced in her new job. By focusing on Mahindan, Priya, and Grace's somewhat exogenous perspectives, Bala begins to suggest the similarities between these characters while also causing her reader to experience an alienating position. For example, when Mahindan gets separated from Sellian after arrival, the narrator does not give the reader the privilege of understanding what Mahindan ignores: "The guard held up a hand for each of them: stop for Mahindan and come for Sellian. Mahindan could not read his expression. The guard repeated the same short word over and over then

strode toward them, impatient, and grasped the top of Sellian's arm" (13). Like the Tamil character, we can only infer that the word, if it were indeed a word, was "come," but we cannot be sure since the signifier that would match the description of the sound is missing from the text. Similarly, Grace pointlessly tries to read what the defendants are saying only to find herself "at the interpreter's mercy" (128). She also frequently needs to write down terms such as IDP, which will only be explained to mean "internally displaced persons" later when she researches it.

Some researchers address the parallels between Mahindan, Priya, and Grace's stories to denounce the reproduction of oppression between similarly marginalized groups in multicultural Canada. For example, Kara Schmidt-Fusco argues that Mahindan and Grace's life stories engage in a process of mutual resignification, as his narrative appears to be a contemporary adaptation of the displacement, dispossession, and rightlessness in her past. Grace's grandparents and their children were among the Canadian citizens of Japanese origin who lost their homes and businesses during World War II, when they were declared enemy aliens by the Canadian government and sent to internment camps such as Slocan, in British Columbia. Grace's family subsequently buried the episode in shame and refused to discuss it or seek redress. In the present of the narrative, however, Kumi, Grace's mother, becomes obsessed with this history while also fighting Alzheimer's disease. Symbolically, it is only when her memory begins to fade that Kumi understands the importance of confronting the erasure of this traumatic past. She then looks for documentation, assesses possibilities of reparations, and visits Slocan and her former home. She also engages Meg and Brienne, Grace's daughters, in this family history project in a transmission of memory to future generations. The whole endeavor distresses Grace, who learned to ignore the past and trust the very government that once deprived her family of rights. As Ru Freeman argues, albeit in a tone of critique, Kumi acts like a Greek chorus weighting Grace's decisions on the boat

people's cases against her family's experience of the fragility of citizen rights. Kumi states, for instance, that "[p]eople who forget the wrongs that were done to them perpetuate those same wrongs on others" (201). To Schmidt-Fusco, the mother's project forces the daughter to grapple with the ambiguities in an identity narrative she once had straight. It could also cause Grace to acknowledge the absurdity of demanding that the traumatized passengers keep their story straight if only the adjudicator were open to recognize the similarities between her past and Mahindan's. By contrast, the resolve with which Grace turns a blind eye to her past makes one wonder how easily the same would happen if and when Mahindan and others are granted refugee status.

Aritha van Herk agrees that Mahindan's case, representing the conditions of countless boat people arriving on the shores of high-income countries, undercuts Grace's meritocratic narrative of resolution overcoming adversity to enjoy success. While still in Sri Lanka, Mahindan strives to live by his ethical standards in face of the circumstances. On the one hand, he refuses to join the LTTE and continues to work as a mechanic and to take care of Sellian as a widower. He also carries the family's documents, including his wife's death certificate, all the way to Vancouver to attest their identity and guarantee their entrance into the new country. On the other hand, he is forced to plant bombs on buses used in LTTE terrorist attacks and led to collect dead people's money and documents, which he sells to reserve two places on the boat to Canada. The fact that his legal status is still suspended at the end of the novel thus indicates that, contrarily to what Grace preaches, the confrontation of hardship does not necessarily result in a good life in Canada. To van Herk, another way through which Mahindan unsettles meritocratic narratives is by acting as a reminder or, I would add, a harbinger of the fragility of that success, that notion of belonging: "Surrounded by Canadian characters (lawyer, translator, adjudicator) who represent the multicultural origins of so many settlers, Mahindan shadows their work, reminding them of the insecurity that they believe they have transcended"

(347). At some point, Grace even comes to ponder on "[h]ow instantly one's trajectory could pivot" (231). Like Grace's, Priya's family narrative, or the way she makes sense out of their past to arrive at the present, is thrown out of balance by the boat people. Priya is a corporate law intern suddenly drafted by Gigovaz to work at the refugee law division of the same firm. Because of her last name and phenotype, Gigovaz assumes a familiarity with the Tamil language and culture that the Rajasekarans have deliberately avoided. Her grandparents and uncle suffered anti-Tamil persecution in the 1983 riot known as the "Black July." This uncle even briefly joined the LTTE before escaping to Canada to live with Priya's parents. From then on, "[i]n Priya's family, there had always been a tacit discouragement from fraternizing with other Sri Lankans ... her parents had made friends with other immigrants ... [a]nd Priya was left with a vague distrust of other Sri Lankans. For years, they'd paid for an unlisted number. Her father's mysterious explanation: I don't want any trouble" (Bala 47). The familiarity with Tamil culture that Gigovaz assumes will only arise as a consequence of Priya's work with the boat people. For example, it is when she takes her client Hema and her two daughters to spend Christmas at the Rajasekarans' that her uncle confesses part of the family's past. After this visit, furthermore, both her father and uncle begin to volunteer at the Tamil Alliance.

From Schmidt-Fusco and van Herk's discussions, it is clear that Grace and Priya's contact with Mahindan and other passengers lead them and perhaps the reader to analyze their own stance as (Canadian) citizens. A possible conclusion is that as much as citizens, especially those deemed a model minority, try to distance themselves from refugees by buying into hegemonic narratives of multicultural belonging and merit, they remain only a few steps away from the vulnerability they so vehemently deny. While Schmidt-Fusco and van Herk focus on this realization at plot level, I want to emphasize how the structure of the novel and some of Brand's narrative strategies produce a similar effect. To me, the realization of one's vulnerability emerges not only from the contact between characters but also from the friction

between their narratives. As I have previously mentioned, the chapters in *TBP* alternate between Mahindan, Priya, and Grace's stories. At times, the events or some details in a chapter are echoed in the subsequent one even as the focus changes, as if the stories had rubbed into one another. For instance, following a chapter in which Gigovaz explains the long legal process ahead of his clients and anteceding another in which Mahindan fails his first detention review (his release delayed because his identity is still to be validated), Grace finds herself caught in a bureaucratic deadlock: to log in to her computer on her first day at work, she needs a password; to have a password, it is necessary to be registered as an Immigration and Refugee Board employee through a process that takes five to seven business days; to register as an employee, she has to fill out an online form to which she would only have access if she had a password. It is possible to say that, in a much less threatening scale, Grace experiences the conundrum she imposes upon the defendants as she, as a representative of refugee law, requires that refugees employ means to which they do not have access to be considered refugees. Another example of a sense of contamination between juxtaposed chapters is that the section about Mahindan's cousin Rama's abduction by the LTTE follows the chapter in which Priya remembers her family's resolute dissociation from other Sri Lankans. Rama, a schoolteacher, was determined to "[s]tay out of it" (Bala 47), as Priya's father advises her to do when she mentions her university's Tamil Students' Association to him in passing. The report of Rama's abduction by the LTTE resignifies the Rajasekaran family argument as if to suggest that the possibility of dissociation is a privilege that can be easily lost.

In addition to Schmidt-Fusco and van Herk, Katja Sarkowsky is another scholar who proposes that *TBP* employs refugee stories to confront narratives of multicultural belonging but refrains from analyzing the novel beyond plot level to reveal if and how similar effects are textually achieved. Still, these authors make relevant points to my discussion about hospitality in Bala's work. Quoting from Marianne Hirsch's essay "Bodies That Assemble: Some Notes

on Vulnerability," van Herk considers that Bala's novel advances vulnerability as, in Hirsch's terms, "a radical openness toward unexpected outcomes" (qtd. in van Herk 327). If one recalls my investigation of the notion of hospitality in Chapter One, it is possible to say that "a radical openness toward unexpected outcomes" is a formulation that suits vulnerability as much as unconditional hospitality in a Derridean sense. In fact, one can argue that vulnerability would be implicit in the unconditionally hospitable and significantly impossible act of opening oneself up to be overtaken, overwhelmed by an unexpected excess. Sarkowsky also touches on this notion of hospitality. First, she suggests that fiction about refugees functions to "negotiate broader notions of hospitality as well as of belonging and citizenship" (162). At this point of the dissertation, it is probably clear that I agree with Sarkowsky that contemporary refugee fiction may allow for a glimpse at unconditional hospitality by performing, as I have been arguing, an active suspension of the language of conditional hospitality. I would, nevertheless, prefer to say that refugee fiction, as far as the works in my literary corpus go, has shown the limits of the notions of belonging and citizenship rather than broadened them. In a second moment, Sarkowsky reduces Derrida's conditional hospitality to a state's laws and argues that Bala's depiction of legal procedures and of the trope of refugee innocence set her apart from "earlier fiction on refugeeism" (162), such as *WWALF*. Sarkowsky pertinently identifies innocence as one of the conditions for the granting of asylum in Canada and other countries. She then proceeds to explain how *TBP* complicates easy views of innocence through ambiguity, as in the case of Mahindan's compulsory involvement in a LTTE attack. There are, however, some problems in her discussion of hospitality. The first is that Derrida's notion of conditional hospitality of course overlaps with institutional law but is not limited to it. The laws of conditional hospitality are not simply the law of the state but, as I have argued, the rules governing any encounter with the other that goes by language. Granted, as Bala foregrounds (un)translatability and the language of the law in *TBP*, she also draws attention to conditional

hospitality, but it is important to underscore that this notion goes beyond the reach of lawyers, judges, and adjudicators. The second problem has to do with innocence. It seems to me that the fact that the Tamil passengers need to prove their innocence does not denote the workings of conditional hospitality as state hospitality, but its failure. After all, as Hurst reminds Grace, "[t]he jurisprudence directs us to presume honesty" (Bala 174). It is also important to rectify that, while Sarkowsky refers to *Of Hospitality* to declare that "[a]ccording to Derrida, the state's hospitality is conditioned on the applicant's identity (e.g., membership in a persecuted group) and their innocence, that is, their not having contributed to the very situation that drives them to seek refuge (e.g. being a civilian rather than a combatant)" (165), Derrida does not discuss the question of innocence in that text. Still in regard to innocence, Sarkowsky's discussion allows one to infer that the undefinition of innocence has the power to crash the binary logic of refugee law. Unfortunately, however, the author does not explicitly explain how such a crashing contributes to the broader notion of hospitality that refugee fiction, according to her, negotiates. Finally and in transition to my next point, I want to express my disagreement with Sarkowsky's reading of Quy and *WWALF* in relation to *TBP*. Sarkowsky uses Quy as evidence that in "earlier fiction on refugeeism" innocence or the lack thereof is ascertainable, contrarily to more contemporary works such as Bala's. As I argued in the previous section, Quy is the character that most completely embodies ambiguity, unreliability, and indetermination. It is dangerous to affirm anything about him, even that he lies, as it would require believing him as he confesses that he deceives everyone. This sense of indetermination of innocence may therefore be among the similarities between *WWALF* and *TBP*, which include what I have already discussed in relation to the urban setting and the unsettling of Canadian multiculturalism and humanitarian exceptionalism.

Evidence that the indetermination of innocence, which Sarkowsky sees as a difference that sets *TBP* off from narratives such as *WWALF*, is truly a point of contact between the novels

is the fact that Sarkowsky's discussion on this indetermination approximates Goellnicht's hypothesis that *WWALF* questions traditional narrative expectations. Both authors argue that the novel they analyze denounces the demand for an acceptable refugee narrative as an act of hegemonic and potentially ethnocentric violence. In this sense, although Goellnicht is referring solely to Brand when he states that "[h]er novel is, then, not simply a counter-narrative to the official requirement for coherent, linear, factual narratives of refugee experience; it calls into question the very method of narrative required by refugee boards to determine legitimacy" (203) (see page 143 in this chapter), his conclusion also applies to Bala. I would go as far as to argue that examples of such a questioning are in fact more prominent in *TBP*. Bala charges the simplest acts with the weight of culture difference as if to make the reader ponder that, if trivial things such as knowing where the water springs from in a shower are not obvious for people like Mahindan, how can one expect complex narratives to function the same way for every culture in the world? She also writes Grace as a character incapable of such a reflection and with whom the reader would hardly empathize. During detention hearings, Grace often complains to herself that "[t]hese people couldn't even keep their stories straight" (110). Additionally, in Hema's admissibility hearing, Grace disregards one's inability to process traumatic events and demands that the passenger faithfully relate details of the moment when she and her two daughters, one of whom was subsequently violated by Sri Lankan soldiers, crossed a lake under fire to escape the LTTE. "If the story was true, if it was hers," Grace contends, "surely she would be able to recount it in a straightforward way" (131). Yet, as mentioned in the beginning of this section, Grace's own family story is not that straightforward. As in *WWALF*, a set of parallel, possible stories signaled by means other than linear narrative (silences, ambiguities) hovers behind acceptable narratives of innocence like a background hum. One may even say that this connection between the two novels is intentional on Bala's part, as it adds to a list of inspirations she seems to draw from Brand, which includes the very

title. The first refugees to be known as the "boat people" were Vietnamese migrants like Tuan and Cam. Bala's use of the expression seems to suggest not only a connection between what Western powers deem isolated crises but also a continuous effort to tell refugee stories from Brand's to her own work.

To dive deeper into these stories, the textual reproduction of their effects, and the implications they have for an envisioning of hospitality in *TBP*, I call attention to a connection between Bala and Hamid's novel *Exit West*, analyzed in Chapter Three. In that chapter, I emphasized the numerous references to screens in *Exit West* and related them to the black doors that serve as borders and portals between places as well as to the intercommunicating narratives through which readers navigate. Screens are just as relevant in *TBP*, although not as conspicuous. They are of a different type too. Whereas Hamid's narrator is most often referring to smartphones when he talks about screens, Bala employs the television, as smartphones were not as common in the late 2000s, when her novel is set. The radio, newspapers, and magazines have the same screening function as the television in *TBP*, perhaps in anticipation of the combination of all these media in the mobile phones that Hamid foregrounds. Bala's devices are not at the forefront of scenes. On the contrary, in the at least fourteen instances in which they appear, they do so by helping compose the setting in which the main action takes place as background noise going unnoticed. For example, the radio is on during Priya's first ride with Gigovaz to meet the newly arrived Tamil passengers on the bay. As it plays Avishai Cohen, an Israeli bassist of migrant background, and switches to announce the news about the potential refugees, Priya daydreams of sleeping in instead of working. Grace glances over the newspaper headline "PM [Prime Minister] takes hard line on migrants" (38) in the office kitchen where she first meets Hurst. At a dinner night at the Rajasekarans', "[a] documentary played in the background on TV: two monkeys in side-by-side cages interacted with an unseen experimenter whose blue-gloved hands moved in and out of frame" (68). Meanwhile, Priya's uncle Romesh

cooks to the sound of a radio program in which the host and an Asian caller suggest to "[l]ock and load" the Tamil passengers who want to have it easy instead of doing the hard work of "getting higher education, learning English, and gaining work experience" (Bala 71) before immigrating. Because she does not want to hear about work in her free time, Priya returns to the living room, where, on TV, "[a] monkey flung a slice of cucumber at the researcher ... Capuchin monkeys act out when they sense an unfair advantage. They're content with the cucumber until they see another monkey receive grapes" (Bala 71). On a later occasion, the Rajasekarans play Scrabble, putting down words such as "furtive," "protect," and "zeal" while Priya and her father consider strategies for her to stop working as a refugee law intern and go back to corporate. These and other examples are buried throughout Bala's text, left there unnoticed by her characters and uncommented by the narrator so that the reader can make sense out of them. In this manner, one may conclude, for instance, that the radio host and the Asian immigrant calling him regard Canadian citizenship and refuge similarly to how Capuchin monkeys see cucumbers and grapes, that is, a privilege for which they will act out. The background noise whispers a sharp critique into the ears of those who care to listen.

Similarly to Hamid, whose telephone screens replay the function that black doors and seemingly parallel stories perform in the novel, Bala deploys her technological devices to insistently hum from the background the script of rightlessness that Mahindan and the other Tamil passengers bring into Canadians' acceptable narratives. Among the many references to television shows, radio broadcasts, and print articles in *TBP*, one stands out to me as it allegorizes the role these devices and the refugee stories play. Mahindan often watches Canadian television shows in the prison recreational room to help improve his English. As he cannot understand what is said, the narrator describes the images as Mahindan sees them, but does not reproduce the dialogues. It is thus as if the reader, like Mahindan, needed to make sense of the show without language, although the whole scene is of course conveyed to us

through literary language. There is, again, a kind of suspension of language through language here. In one of these shows,

> The boss thrust the microphone at the woman's mouth. She could have the car, but first she must say the correct combination of words. In the audience, everyone was screaming, on their feet holding up two fingers or four. The woman in the orange shirt wore a plaintive expression. When the camera came close, Mahindan saw she was breathing hard, chest and shoulders heaving with exertion. She looked confused and scared, overcome by the good fortune within her grasp and the bad luck hovering just behind it. (Bala 85)

The boss in the passage works as a symbol of authority over the woman's future that recalls the position Grace, Minister Blair, Hurst, and other government officials have with regard to the boat people. The woman, plaintive, exerted, confused, and scared, represents the passengers as they all search for "the correct combination of words" or the acceptable narrative that will guarantee a car, a release from jail, and refuge. It bears noting that everyone else around her seems to know the answer she is doubtful about. The last sentence in the description is also the most meaningful. The bad luck metaphorically hovers behind this woman's grasp as the technological devices hum in the background throughout Bala's novel; as the experience of rightlessness threatens to unsettle Priya and Grace's straightforward family stories; as the set of possible stories haunts the acceptable narrative.

At this stage of the dissertation, I acknowledge that I could have walked a different path and written an entire work analyzing the same literary corpus under the lens of hauntology. Hauntology is Derrida's neologism in *Specters of Marx* to combine haunting and ontology and arrive at a thought of existence in terms of *différance*, as a specter or, to use Derrida's different but related notions, a trace or supplement of an absent presence. It should by now be clear that, when I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter that *TBP* and *WWALF* construct the

refugee as a paradigm of contemporary existence, it is to this type of existence, haunted by the shadow of misapprehension and vulnerability and weighted down by suspended stories, that I was referring. A view of refugee literature from a hauntological perspective has much more to offer. It may address, for instance, Nyers notion of haunted citizenship and tackle the several references to Quy as a ghost in *WWALF*. It might also consider the sense of return in the etymology of the word refugee (see Chapter One) in relation to Derrida's envisioning of the specter as revenant and of the revenant character of language (i.e., the recognition that a word is only considered a word as long as it is repeatable, as it returns in discourse). Perhaps this dissertation is an initial step in that direction, since, for the purposes of the project I initially proposed, it seemed necessary to first identify the spectral, suspended nature of refugee narratives and ask what it means for a literary work to include ghost-like elements such as a character like Quy, photographs, a sense of misapprehension, or references to background noise. The answer to this last question, to me, has to do with hospitality as much as with hauntology, or perhaps with hospitality towards hauntology, an openness to the idea of ghosts and haunting in their many forms in lieu of an attempt at exorcising them. In the particular case of *TBP*, this openness takes the form of a sometimes literal, sometimes metaphorical background hum/hovering inserted in a novel that so explicitly deals with the language of state hospitality. What this insertion does, in turn, is to overwhelm, to flood language, narrative, and the possibility of meaning in a near enough performance of the movement of unconditional hospitality.

Conclusion

> "But like a refugee
> Ring the bells that still can ring
> Forget your perfect offering
> There is a crack, a crack in everything
> That's how the light gets in"
> Leonard Cohen, "Anthem"

This dissertation set out to map the positions and effects of refugee stories in four literary works: Smith's "The Embassy of Cambodia," Hamid's *Exit West*, Brand's *What We All Long for*, and Bala's *The Boat People*. The method employed in this mapping consisted of (a) identifying the place of the particular narrative or narrative voice of the refugee vis-à-vis non-refugee stories and perspectives within a same work; (b) discerning the effects refugee stories carry towards other narratives and the literary text as a whole, at the levels of both content and form; (c) describing the formal strategies through which said effects are conveyed. Once those positions and effects were mapped out, I attempted to interpret what the refugee stories and textual structures analyzed reveal about the notion of hospitality in these literary works. My analyses of textual structures considered, among other elements, narrative situation, organization of sections, repetitions, omissions, interruptions, fragmentations, references to other media, and sentence complexity. In the process of addressing my initial research questions, I repeatedly encountered issues that seem to surround the figure of the refugee, such as the narrative of multiculturalism, the notion of nation and sovereignty, and the boundaries of state law, which I incorporated into my discussion. I also simultaneously dealt with the challenge of balancing the materiality of the refugee condition and the philosophical meanings and implications of such an existence.

Chapter One (Refugee Genealogies and Languages of Hospitality) is the part of this dissertation that most explicitly faces this challenge as it follows an Introduction that lays down the growing numbers of refugees in the world with a discursive analysis of the term "refugee." In this chapter, I first traced a tentative genealogy of this denomination leading up to and

following the definition established by the UN's 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, which has bearing on legal, political, humanitarian, and artistic discourses and practices by and about refugees. Then, I provided an overview of refugee studies in the humanities to situate my research within the field of critical refugee studies, which envisions an epistemology that privileges a refugee world-building without necessarily limiting itself, in my view, to refugees' productions. From this perspective, I delved into what I consider to be the philosophical basis for the subsequent analyses of refugee narratives and hospitality in the literary corpus. I contrasted Derrida's notions of the Law of unconditional hospitality and the laws of conditional hospitality to show that their interdependency and aporia surfaces through language. I also expanded on Derrida's enigmatic notion of suspension of language as "a possibility of language" (Derrida, *Of Hospitality* 135) in literature. My reasoning is based not on a belief in a redemptive power of literature, but in an analogy between the opening of unconditional hospitality towards the absolute other and that of literature towards a maddening and interdicted language that performs its own suspension. An important reflection to add here is that, although I concentrated on a performance of unconditional hospitality in the literary corpus throughout this dissertation, I did not intend to establish or crystallize a hierarchy between unconditional and conditional hospitality. Conditional hospitality is not inferior to unconditional hospitality; it is its realization, its coming into being through language. It is also the hospitality that seems possible in our world. The fact that the laws of hospitality pervert the Law in an attempt to follow it does not mean, by the same token, that unconditional hospitality is necessarily good and conditional hospitality is bad for, as I have argued, both may entail a degree of violence or at least an openness to it.

In Chapter Two (A Game for Many Players: Multiculturalism, Silence, and Hospitality in Zadie Smith's "The Embassy of Cambodia"), I argued that refugee stories and perspectives are thrown into silence as the first-person plural narrator, "we, the people of Willesden," builds

a myth of celebratory multiculturalism and democratic representation. The narrator's hegemonic ruse is revealed, however, through both open contestations and subtle ironies, which also call attention to the relevance of silence in the story. The palimpsestic trace of the refugee may be said to threaten the narrator's illusion of stability because it animates an element (the Embassy of Cambodia) that, although initially regarded as a passive object of gaze, acts as an encompassing structure to "we, the people's" narrative. Furthermore, the silences in Smith's story, which does not explicitly name who is host, guest, hospitable, and hostile in the relationships it portrays, enact a refusal to conform to the concepts and roles of traditional hospitality. These silences, therefore, should be regarded as spaces that literary works such as Smith's offer for us to reimagine hospitality.

While Smith relies on silence to open this type of space, Hamid achieves a similar effect by means of ambiguity. In Chapter Three ("Like a Beginning and an End": Doors, Ambiguity, and Hospitality in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*), I argued that the refugees' door-crossing stories, which interrupt the narrative focused on Nadia and Saeed, function, at a structural level, like the very doors that, at plot level, transport refugees across space. Consequently, as the reader travels through several marginal narratives, this initially parallel journey becomes the experience of the novel itself. By the same token, the narrative of refugeehood becomes central at the level of the plot as Nadia and Saeed first cross one of the black doors. Other effects of Hamid's doors are a normalization of migration and a disruption of the traditional home in the narrative, both of which foreground a sense of ambiguity in the novel's plot and structure. This ambiguity fosters a notion of hospitality as a potential under the doorstep. In other words, ambiguity constantly reproduces what Dufourmantelle calls "the place in question in hospitality" (62), which I see as the threshold, the doorstep, the stretch of space and time that precedes entrance in a relationship mediated by the language of the laws of hospitality.

The last part of this dissertation, Chapter 4 ("Otherwise, what else?": Misapprehension, Vulnerability, and the Hum of Hospitality in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long for* and Sharon Bala's *The Boat People*), allowed for comparisons between the works in my research corpus. I began by returning to the myth of multiculturalism, this time, paired with the narrative of humanitarian exceptionalism in the composition of the image of the Canadian cultural mosaic. I argued that, similarly to Smith, Brand and Bala position their writings in friction with this image by depicting Canadian urban centers from the perspective of the refugee. The authors moreover tell refugee stories that serve as models, frames, or a background to read non-refugee narratives in their novels. I argued that Brand does so by expanding the shadow of misapprehension and unreliability that marks her "Quy" chapters towards other narratives, photographs, and artwork in the novel. In this manner, *What We All Long for* constantly points to a set of possible stories that hang untold like the curtains in the silent and empty room of Tuyen's installation project. An equivalent effect is produced in *The Boat People* by the background hum of television shows, radio broadcasts, and newspaper headlines that act similarly to the telephone screens in Hamid's *Exit West*. Like the Tamil boat people, whose conditions shake Canadian citizens' confidence in their own rights and identities, this hum cracks openings for silenced stories to get in the novel. In this sense, Brand and Bala seem to structure their works in a performance of a radical openness to the unexpected, the excess, the overwhelmingness of the other than I, as Derrida puts it.

My initial hypothesis stated that the refugee stories in "The Embassy of Cambodia," *Exit West*, *What We All Long for*, and *The Boat People* occupy a parallel, marginal position from which they subvert the authority of a supposedly central narrative that initially houses them. This disruption, I proposed, is textually achieved through the fragmentation, interruption, and suspension of language performed by the narratives of the refugees. I also claimed that the place and role of refugee stories in the corpus entail a sense of hospitality that approximate

Derrida's view of a hyperbolical, unconditional welcoming that may actually demand suspension of language. This last part of the argument has been, in my view, confirmed by the analyses of silence, ambiguity, misapprehension, unreliability, indetermination, and humming in Chapters Two to Four. By contrast, in order to put forth a concluding statement about the contemporary relevance of refugee narratives, it is necessary to add to the first part of my argument that the subversion of authority I proposed be seen not as an inversion of subjugation but as an operation of inclusion and equality. That is because the refugee stories analyzed do not marginalize, but overarchingly include other narratives. In other words, it is as if the works in the corpus constructed refugeehood as an encompassing paradigm of contemporary existence. From my discussions in Chapters One and Four, I judge that the notion of this paradigm would itself be aporistic. On the one hand, it approximates Arendt and Agamben's view of the refugee as the "vanguard of their peoples" (Arendt, "We Refugees" 274), a type of existence to inevitably come after that of the citizen, either forcefully, as a result of conflict, or once the nation state system crumbled into the ruins that Arendt predicts. Given the circumstances in which it was devised, Arendt's assertion is caustic and may sound pessimistic, but it also announces the refugee stance as revolutionary. On the other hand, as per my considerations on hauntology in Chapter Four, to read the refugee as a paradigm threatens to crystalize as existence a sort of spectral non-existence, a ghostly subjectivity. The very formulation of this aporia strives to keep a hold of the materiality of refugee lives while insisting on the spectral aspect of their (non)existence and the effects it brings to the structure of knowledge and our naturalized concepts and discourses of nation, borders, and migration.

To engage with these aporias is, to me, part of the work of critical refugee studies and the refugee epistemology this field proposes. In Chapter One, I identified a gap in critical refugee studies about literature, particularly in relation to refugee fiction. This dissertation helps fill in this gap as it charts an apparent tendency in contemporary literatures in English

about refugeehood to privilege a refugee perspective and imagine this subject and their narrative in the paradigmatic sense I discussed above, with all of its complications. Naturally, further studies are necessary to affirm the existence of such a tendency, if that it is at all possible. This dissertation also sought to contribute to a review and a better understanding of the thought of hospitality in its relationship with language.

In addition to highlighting contributions, I would like to conclude by pointing out paths of analysis that the dissertation did not follow, and which remain as possibilities for future studies. I hinted at or explicitly mentioned some of these options in the previous chapters, as in the case of the questions of hauntology that emerged in relation to *What We All Long for*, *The Boat People*, and, I would here add, "The Embassy of Cambodia." Another of the possible paths is a psychoanalytic reading of the characters' responses to refugees in the works of the corpus. These responses, which usually involve fear, suppression, and hostility, seem to allow a reading of the condition of the refugee as uncanny, that is, remissive of a previous stage (perhaps of vulnerability) that has been repressed, but which resurfaces in confrontation with the (un)familiar other. Finally, an analysis of the relationship between gender and hospitality within a refugee epistemology, in regard, for instance, to Fatou in the "The Embassy of Cambodia," seems productive to address the effects of this axis of identity in the openness to the other. These are paths that I intend to follow in subsequent research projects.

When I started my doctorate in 2018, Syrian refugees were still often in the news alongside Venezuelan displaced people and the Central American migrant caravans heading north on foot. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic worsened economic and living conditions in low-income countries and prompted more people to move, while also restricting where they could go. In 2021, we saw refugees crammed into planes after the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan and the subsequent collapse of the Afghan National Security Forces in face of the Taliban. As I write these words in 2022, millions of Ukrainian refugees cross

borders into neighboring countries. It does not seem difficult to predict that in the years to come refugees will remain a prevalent figure in politics, media, and the arts. It is therefore essential to continue to study this condition to provide aid and prevent suffering while also reflecting on what it may mean for different fields of knowledge.

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