





Life narratives of refugees: between testimony and resistance

Narrativas de vida de refugiados: entre testemunho e resistência

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ABSTRACT: Considering contemporary migratory flows as a sensitive and controversial issue, the main objective of this article is to examine life narratives of two refugees who moved to France in the light of French Discourse Analysis in dialogue with Ethno (sociology). Those narratives are part of the book La parole est aux migrants (2015) by the journalist Olivier Geai. In general, the authorities (governors, experts, media etc.) speak about and for subjects in vulnerable situations and often just transform them into numbers, percentages and statistics. Therefore the idea is to "give voice" to these subjects so that they themselves can tell their story, in the case of this work, their migratory experience. The device for analyzing the selected life narratives resumes planes from Dominique Maingueneau's Global Semantics (2005), whose focus is to carry out an integrated approach between the enunciation and the utterance. The planes are: the themes, the vocabulary, the enunciative deixis and the mode of enunciation, which refers to the rhetorical notion of ethos. A secondary objective is to discuss the notion of life narrative to verify its status (or not) as a speech genre, as well as its relationship with the close notion of testimony. The results of the analysis of the narratives show that, albeit unique and irreplaceable in themselves, there are aspects that approximate them, allowing for the construction of a common discourse: the recurrence of themes such as violence, dehumanization, xenophobia; the predominance of a self, which unfolds between a here-now (in France, in the present) and a there-then (in the country of origin, in the past); the proposition of an ethos of resilience. These findings show the testimonial content of life narratives and enable the destabilization of the official discourse as well as of stereotypes surrounding refugees (invaders, criminals, terrorists, among others), thus working as a discourse of resistance.

Keywords: Refugees. Life narratives. Testimony. Discourse of resistance.

RESUMO: Tomando os fluxos migratórios contemporâneos como um tema sensível e controverso, este artigo tem como principal objetivo examinar, à luz da Análise do Discurso de linha francesa, em seu diálogo com a (Etno)sociologia, narrativas de vida de dois refugiados que se deslocaram para a França. Tais narrativas integram o livro *La parole est aux migrants* (2015), do jornalista Olivier Geai. Assim, como, em geral, são as autoridades (governantes, especialistas, mídias etc.) que falam sobre e pelos sujeitos em situação de vulnerabilidade e, não raro, se limitam a transformá-los em números, porcentagens e estatísticas, a ideia é "dar voz" a esses sujeitos para que eles próprios contem sua história, no caso deste trabalho, sua

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experiência migratória. O dispositivo para a análise das narrativas de vida selecionadas retoma alguns planos da semântica global de Dominique Maingueneau (2005), cujo foco é realizar uma abordagem integrada entre a enunciação e o enunciado. São eles: os temas, o vocabulário, a dêixis enunciativa e o modo de enunciação, que remete à noção retórica de éthos. Um segundo objetivo é o de discutir a noção de narrativa de vida para verificar sua condição (ou não) de gênero de discurso, bem como sua relação com a noção próxima de testemunho. Os resultados da análise das narrativas mostram que, se cada uma delas é única e insubstituível, há aspectos que as aproximam, permitindo a construção de um discurso comum: a recorrência de temas como violência, desumanização, xenofobia; a predominância de um eu, que se desdobra entre um aqui-agora (na França, no presente) e um lá-então (no país de origem, no passado); a proposição de um éthos de resiliência. Essas constatações mostram o teor testemunhal do gênero "narrativa de vida" e permitem desestabilizar o discurso oficial e os estereótipos que cerca os refugiados (invasores, delinquentes, terroristas, entre outros), funcionando, então, como um discurso de resistência.

Palavras-chave: Refugiados. Narrativas de vida. Testemunho. Discurso de resistência.

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1 Introduction

The migratory flow to European countries increased significantly after 2015. According to Emmanuelli (2017), this is an irreversible phenomenon that represents a pivotal axis in our future. The idea of displacement is already in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹ (ONU, 1948) which, in general, confers to every human being the right to "freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state", as well as "to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country." (Art. 13); "to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution" (Art. 14); the right "to a nationality" of which no one shall be "arbitrarily deprived of [...] nor denied the right to change his nationality" (Art. 15).

The universal right to displacement or the freedom of movement should generate on principle a "duty of hospitality." Nonetheless, policies of hostility are not uncommon in Nation States, which include the closing of borders, the extradition of

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 $^{^1}$ Available at: https://www.unicef.org/brazil/declaracao-universal-dos-direitos-humanos. Access on: 20 May 2024.

migrants, interdiction of roads to certain nationalities not to mention the precarious camps, xenophobic manifestations and political controversies due to migration.

In general, authorities (media, governmental institutions etc.) speak about and for subjects in vulnerable situations. However, I aim to give such subjects a say to enable them to tell their own stories, to compare these stories, afterwards, in search of shared features. Therefore, I intend to destabilize official discourses that always attempt to naturalize and impose their version of the facts by proposing the possibility of a different listening: one for those who are not invited, in general, to express themselves publicly, for those whose discourses are marginalized and silenced (Pollak, 1989; Mariani, 2021).

Considering the main aim, I report two life stories (or life narratives) of refugees in France², to assess how they position themselves toward the experience of migration. After all, what motivated them to cross borders? How did they get to France? How was the welcome in French territory? The analysis of the narratives will be conducted in the light of French Discourse Analysis (FDA), resorting, in particular, to some of the planes from Dominique Maingueneau's Global Semantics (2005), as I explain later.

A secondary aim, derived from the first one, is to characterize the notion of life story – key to my research – to discuss the possibility of conceiving it as an autonomous discourse and to assess its relationship to the testimony and to the discourse of resistance.

Before proceeding, it is advisable to present a brief description of how **refugees** are conceived and to distinguish them from **migrants**, since these terms/categories are often taken as equivalent. As I have verified in Lara (2021), **refugee** from a legal standpoint means everyone who changes countries to escape armed conflicts, persecution (political, ethnical, religious etc.) or violation of human rights. Unlike

² These life stories are part of the *corpus* in the research *Refugiados no Brasil e na França: discursos e imagens* [Refugees in Brazil and in France: discourses and images] (CNPq Reasearch Productivity Grant– Process n. 306331/2022-5).

refugees, migrants choose to move, to escape poverty or hunger, or to search for better living conditions (work, education etc.). Whereas refugees find welcome in the Geneva Convention (1951) and the guidelines of the European Union to find asylum, migrants do not have the right to asylum.

In reality, however, the boundaries between the words **migrant** and **refugee** as well as between the categories of individuals to which they refer are blurred and subject of fluctuation, which has led Bartram, Poros and Monforte (2014) to propose a *continuum* between forced and voluntary migration, since compulsion and various motivations can have bigger or smaller roles in migratory flow.

In the next section, then, I shall discuss the notion of life story. Then, I will present the analytical categories and the narratives in the corpus, to finally hear the "voices" of refugees as is my primary aim.

2 Reflecting on life stories

Firstly, I shall recall that my base theory – FDA – is constitutively transdisciplinary, which allows analysts to propose its dialogue with other disciplines/authors. Such is the case of this article, in which I aim to integrate a concept from (ethno)sociology to FDA, as well as to establish dialogues with authors from psychoanalysis, history, literature, semiotics etc. regarding issues of common interest.

Hence, the expression "récit de vie" – which I translate into "life story" in accordance with the research of Machado (2020; 2021) – was introduced in France in 1976, by the sociologist Daniel Bertaux. In his understanding, there is a life story when a subject tells someone (a researcher or not) any episode of their experiences in life, and the discursive production of the subject takes the form of a narrative. (Bertaux, 2005).

According to Bertaux (2005), who aligns himself with a realistic perspective, life stories constitute an approximate description of a lived story (objectively and subjectively), thus distinguishing a real-life story from a narrative based on reality.

Therefore, there is some tension between reality and fiction, since the one telling the story collects pieces from the past, granting them cohesion and context to tell oneself in the here-now. In other words, life stories are not bound to the "truth," in the sense that researchers must account for a reality outside of language, which allows us to conceive it as a verbalization of either lived or imagined events (Canut; Sow, 2014). A similar position is assumed by Charaudeau (1992, p. 712-713), for whom there is no guarantee that a certain narrative is the "faithful reflex of a past reality", even though it has been lived by the narrating subject. In summary, one's memories are always reconstructions, hence, stories that swing between effects of the real and effects of fiction.

Thus, the *I* who speaks/writes in the present instance of the utterance, in the here and now, (re)creates another event from certain experienced events, from the there and then, granting through language a better shape to life experiences. That is done, however, without losing sight of the social dimension in which the subject is, and which constitutively crosses what he says. The result is the "production of a complex story, at the same time, singular – since each subject is unique – and shared – since it resumes other experiences already lived (and to be lived)" (Lara, 2021, p. 120)³.

From that perspective, Bertaux (2005) explains the relevance of life stories is formed when, in relating several reports on a lived experience in one same social situation, it is possible to overcome their particularities and reach the collective components in this situation. The present article, for example, enables the collection of common traces in individual narratives that characterize, generally speaking, the discourse of refugees in France.

That author also assumes, in the case of life stories, a minimalist conception which distinguishes it from a closer genre – the autobiography – that befalls on the totality of one's story, which would make it a complete life story. In (ethno-

³ In the original: "produção de uma história complexa, ao mesmo tempo, singular – já que cada sujeito é único – e compartilhada – visto que retoma tantas outras experiências já vividas (e a se viver)".

sociological) life stories, the subject is invited to consider their experiences only partially according to the researcher's interest (Bertaux, 2005).

If a life story is a result of one's retrospective narrative of their experience(s), that is, a **self** who (re)tells, restates what they have seen, heard, lived, life stories become closer to testimonies.

Before proceeding, I deem it important to discuss the genre status (or lack thereof) of life stories, since there is no consensus among researchers on the matter. Charaudeau (2015), for instance, questions whether life stories are an autonomous speech genre or (yet) another label that covers the position of an abstract speaking-subject (that is, who is outside the situational framing when telling their life). In turn, Machado (2020, 2021) admits that life stories are discursive materialities present in several speech genres. Nossik (2014), on the other hand, argues that life stories are, at once, a specific speech genre and a place of discursive freedom, a perspective I assume in my research. Bakhtin (1992) himself predicted a relative stability in/of speech genre.

Concerning testimonies, studies have been conducted in the interface with memory since the 1970s in very distinct disciplines/fields (theology, philosophy, psychology, psychoanalysis, literature theory, etc.) despite being related to the judicial field originally (Ginzburg, 2015). Currently, there are many possible definitions for testimonies: "an existing friction between the 'I-was-there' and the 'I-here-now'" in the unfolding of the experiencing subject and the recalling subject (Arcanjo, 2021, p. 421)⁴; "a past I about whom the speaker assumes full responsibility" (Amossy, 2004, § 6)⁵; an "inscription in historic memory of a happening that claims senses" (Mariani, 2021, p. 46)⁶. These definitions share the understanding that testimonies are built from a **self** (speaker) who talks of a past they have experienced (and/or their group) and for which they take responsibility.

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⁴ In the original: "uma fricção existente entre 'eu-estava-lá' e 'eu-aqui-agora'".

⁵ In the original: "um eu passado sobre o qual o locutor assume inteira responsabilidade".

⁶ In the original: "inscrição na memória histórica de um acontecimento que reclama sentidos".

In Brazil, researchers who have investigated testimonies, such as Márcio Selligman-Silva and Bethania Mariani, mostly focus on traumatic events in the light of psychoanalysis. Therefore, testimonies, as the work of elaborating and narrating social traumas are "an attempt to brush history counterweight, making room for what normally remains forgotten, repressed and moved to secondary (or last) position" (Seligmann-Silva, 2022, p. 103)⁷.

Marco (2004, p. 45) postulated "two great conceptions of literature of testimony" starting in the 20th century (considered by many the "era of catastrophes"): the reflection on the holocaust and the testimonies of Latin-American dictatorships. The author cites Manuel Galich in tracing the landscape of features testimonies share with other genres:

Testimonies differ from news report because they are more extensive, they approach their theme in greater depth, they must present a superior literary quality, and are not ephemeral like the news [...] They are different from fictional narratives because they dismiss fiction to favor faithfulness to the narrated facts. They are distanced from investigative prose in the sense they demand the author's direct contact with the environment, facts or characters that build the narrative. Testimonies are different from biographies because, while the latter chooses to narrate a life out of its own individual and singular interest, the former reconstitutes the history of one or more subjects chosen by the relevance they may have in a certain social context (Marco, 2004, p. 50)8.

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⁷ In the original: "uma tentativa de se escovar a história a contrapelo, abrindo espaço para aquilo que normalmente permanece esquecido, recalcado e legado a um segundo (ou último) plano".

⁸ In the original: O testemunho difere da reportagem porque ele é mais extenso, trata com mais profundidade seu tema, deve apresentar uma qualidade literária superior e não é efêmero como a reportagem [...] Distingue-se da narrativa ficcional porque descarta a ficção em favor da fidelidade aos fatos narrados. Afasta-se da prosa investigativa, na medida em que exige o contato direto do autor com o ambiente, fatos ou personagens que constituem sua narração. O testemunho é diferente da biografia porque, enquanto esta escolhe contar uma vida por seu interesse individual e singular, aquele reconstitui a história de um ou mais sujeitos escolhidos pela relevância que possam ter num contexto social.

In the set of features that define testimonies by comparison to other genres, three common features stand out concerning testimonies/life stories. Life stories, even if extensive, do not demand literary quality especially because they generally derive from a story that was collected orally and spontaneously (Bertaux, 2005). Moreover, life stories do not dismiss fiction since memory is flawed and subjects often resort to imagination to tell (themselves). Their value, therefore, does not lie in the possibility of proof. Life stories are interested in the lives of individuals, which are always unique and irreplaceable (vertical dimension), as they allow to reach the history of a collective (horizontal dimension), given the possibility of gathering the "small stories" to build the "great history" of a society or a time (Lara, 2021, 2023).

The requirement for "faithfulness to facts" aligns more closely to historical or judicial testimonies than actual "testimonial narratives" (Selligman-Silva, 2008, p. 71-72). The author notes that most historians dismiss this type of testimony, viewing it as a "non-faithful source." In the judicial field it is seen with suspicion because "fiction contaminates and dissolves the content of truth in the testimony," 9 undermining its role as "proof."

In the scope of FDA, however, analysts do not focus on assumed commitments to reality, to some "truth" located outside the frame of language, but rather, they focus on "truthful statements." Since "testimonies are a modality of the memory" (Selligman-Silva, 2008, p. 73) – and that memory is "gapped" – the slide reality/fiction cannot be overlooked. This prompts parallels between testimonial narratives and life stories, which constitute a distinct genre of testimonial value. Testifying means someone was there (then) and, consequently, can narrate here (and now) what they have experienced, as I have stated.

Fontanille (2007, p. 100) acknowledges that testimonies cannot be properly conceived as a discourse genre, but rather as a pseudo-genre that crosses other established genres (in the fields of the law, of literature etc.). The author thus prefers

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⁹ In the original: "a ficção contamina e dissolve o teor de verdade do testemunho".

to treat testimonies as a "regime of belief" that can be invoked by various genres (journal, letter, novel, autobiography etc.) altering their persuasive regime. Therefore, in my opinion, it is best to refer to texts or narratives with testimonial content.

It is also noteworthy that life stories such as I propose here are not exclusively related to trauma. Albeit the possibility of that being the case of refugees (for example, the beginning of war or an armed conflict etc.), there are "smaller" events (such as the death of a relative, a situation of harassment) that equally foster the emergence of narratives of testimonial nature. In that regard, I speak of subjects who (have) overcome several daily situations of oppression, violence and vulnerability.

If, as a rule, testimonies are conceived as discourses of resistance, as the ability to question, to challenge or to oppose certain discourses or narratives that are perceived as oppressive, unjust or hegemonic – and in the case of trauma, those discourses can oppose denialism (forgetting/erasing the past), censorship (silencing) – I understand that life stories can also work as gestures (and discourses) of resistance to social invisibility, to instituted power, to stereotypes associated to certain social groups (for example, invaders, criminals, terrorist in relation to refugees). Pollak (1989, p. 4) emphasizes that by preferring to analyze the "speech" of outcasts, marginalized (as is the case of refugees) individuals, it is possible to "bring forth the subterraneous memories that as integral parts of minority and dominated cultures oppose the 'official memory' [...]"¹⁰.

In this reflection I have characterized life stories as a testimonial speech genre and their nature of discourses of resistance. Next, I will briefly outline the composition of the *corpus* and the theoretical-methodological device I have employed, followed by the analyses of two narratives selected for the purposes of this article.

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¹⁰ In the original: "ressaltar as memórias subterrâneas que, como parte integrante das culturas minoritárias e dominadas se opõem à 'memória oficial'[...]".

3 Brief theoretical and methodological notes

As I have discussed in Lara (2021, 2023), FDA does not provide researchers with a methodological device: researchers build their own analytical device based on the theoretical principles offered by FDA, and guided by their object, aims and work hypothesis. Therefore, each *corpus* demands that analysts use concepts in accordance with the question(s) they elaborate, and that shall not be used by different analysts asking other questions. Analysts have the last word in choosing the categories of their analytical device.

In the present case, the analytical device is composed of planes from Dominique Maingueneau's Global Semantics (2005, p. 79), conceived as the system of restrictions that affects various planes of discourse, in terms of both the utterance and the enunciation. These are the planes: the **themes** (which can be imposed, specific, silenced, etc.), the **vocabulary** (which comprehends nominalization/designation, evaluation index, modals etc.), the *enunciative deixis* (which comprehends space-time coordinates and to which I add the category of person), the **mode of enunciation** (a "way of saying" that refers to a "way of being," which is associated in Maingueneau's other works to the notion of *ethos*) ¹¹. These four planes will be used more extensively than done by Maingueneau. Nonetheless, I do not see any significant differences between his propositions and my "reading" of these planes.

The corpus was extracted from the book *La parole est aux migrants* (Geai, 2015), a collection of ten narratives recorded by the journalist Olivier Geai in a refugee camp in Paris. Given the limitation of this article, I have selected two narrators different in sex, age, home country and education to analyze the existence of a common thread in their narratives despite the differences. I also stress that despite both home countries

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¹¹ Maingueneau (2005, p. 79-102) proposes three additional planes: *intertextuality, the statutes of the enunciator* and of the *interlocutor* and the cohesion manner. I deem the chosen planes the most productive in the analysis of life stories (see Lara, 2021, 2023).

being in Africa, one was colonized by France (Algeria) and the other by Italy/England (Eritrea) which mean different languages and cultures.

Chart 1 – Refugees in France.

Name	Sex	Home	Age	Marital	Education
		country		status	
Khadija	F	Algeria	46	Single	Higher
Aman	M	Eritrea	26	Single	Primary

Source: the author.

The selected book claims to "give voice" to refugees, but it does not convey any type of reflection about their stories, this is a gap the present article aims to bridge. In addition, as Barthes (1981), I recognize that the innocence exposed in live, immediate speech is lost after transcription – because the narratives were collected orally then transcribed/edited for publishing – since elements such as interruptions, hesitation, self-correction etc. are not recovered. I believe, however, the oral-writing retextualization in the book preserves the main ideas of each narrative, a sufficient which is sufficient for my research purposes.

4 Refugees in France and their stories

According to Bernardot (2019), migration modeled French demographics in the 19th and 20th centuries to the point that one out of three French citizens have a foreign grandparent. Data published in 2022 by the *Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides* (OFPRA) informed that there were 2022, 547.102 refugees in France by 31st December 2022, most of whom came from former colonies. According to Bisiaux (2021), the most targeted migrants come from Africa and follow the religion of Islam, an issue that is frequently brought up by political groups of extreme-right, which sponsors discriminatory and xenophobic attitudes and discourses.

Hence, I repeat my goal of "giving voice" to refugees so they can tell their own stories and to shed new light on their migratory experience. Concerning the themes, a first reading of both narratives was conducted in accordance with the questions posed in the Introduction, which enabled the observation of three guiding thematic axes: TA1: life in the home country and reasons to cross borders; TA2: the displacement to French territory; TA3: welcome and regularization in Frace. In each axis, I shall search for smaller themes, either imposed or specific¹², to be grouped at the end of the analysis. The plane of **vocabulary** will be analyzed with the other planes (especially, **themes**). I shall start the analysis with Khadija, the only woman in the group of ten refugees interviewed by Olivier Geai.

4.1 Thematic Axes

4.1.1 Thematic Axes in Khadija's narrative

Regarding TA1, Khadija tells she was born in Algeria. At the time of the interview, she was 46 years old, single and childless. She graduated in English Literature (1989), which allowed her to work for six years at university until she refused to accept an attempt at corruption, after which she was fired. In 2000, she was recruited by a French audiovisual company in the northern region of the country. She resided there for four years, but she left due to terrorism, as well as a lack of motivation stemming from both the location and her employment. In 2005, she joined a large British group, from which she gained considerable knowledge; however, her status as a single woman did not work to her advantage. Subsequently, the same group assigned her to the southern region of the country to serve as an interpreter, but her

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¹² *Imposed themes* are mandatory for discourses to be well-accepted; *specific themes* belong to a particular discourse (Maingueneau, 2005). Despite clear in theory, the categories are often blurred in practice as seen in section 4.1.

relationship with her supervisor deteriorated. At this point, her narrative develops a prolonged passage of sexism. Let us read it¹³:

(P1) One must know that if you aren't married and decide to work amongst men, you are responsible for exposing yourself to sexism. [...] It's necessary to say that he [my superior] accused me of sleeping with men in the company. I did try to defend myself; I did try to say it was a lie, but my word as a woman was worthless compared to his [...]¹⁴ (Geai, 2015, p. 52).

In (P1), the words: **sexism**, **sleep** (with men), **lie**, **worthless** denote a patriarchal society that still see women as inferior beings at the service of men. The fact is that Khadija was unable to defend herself and found herself transferred to a position that was inferior to her professional qualifications. In 2013, her life was disrupted by her father's death and, six months later, the place she used to work at was attacked, generating feelings of unsafety. These tragic events combined to the precarious situation of women willing to emancipate in Algeria motivated Khadija to leave her country and restart somewhere else.

The Algerian woman does not explain how she left her home country and arrived in France (TA2), which makes this a silenced theme in her narrative. We can assume, then, that she possibly had the financial means to travel with some comfort. She reports having a childhood friend in Rennes, France, so she first went there. Later, she was invited by friends of her parents' who lived in Paris to meet them and discuss her future.

In Paris, Khadija hired an expensive lawyer who provided her with only vague suggestions, which made her give up his assistance in the attempt to regularize her

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¹³ The passages reproduced in the article are numbered (P1, P2 and henceforth) to facilitate referencing. I provide free translations.

¹⁴ In the original: "Il faut savoir que si tu n'es pas mariée et que tu décides de travailler dans un milieu d'hommes, tu prends alors la responsabilité de t'exposer au machisme. [...] Il faut dire qu'il [mon responsable] m'a accusé de coucher avec des hommes de l'établissement. J'ai bien essayé de me défendre, j'ai bien tenté de dire que ces mots n'étaient que des mensonges, mais ma parole de femme n'avait aucun poids face à la sienne [...]".

situation in France. Here, it is possible to observe the exploitation of subjects in situation of vulnerability by those in privileged positions. That is when the Algerian woman began her long and difficult regularization story, since her still valid visa would expire soon (TA3). In the subway she met an old lady who suggested calling 115 to request urgent housing. Her first disappointment. The clerk told her:

(P2) "Ma'am, you seem to have important culture and professional trajectory. You are overqualified for me to place you in 115. In this device there are drug users, alcoholic and thieves. If your circumstances are good, trust me, steer clear. If your visa is still valid, you cannot benefit from the device. You should know that, in France, to benefit from social advantages, you must be illegal[...]" (Geai, 2015, p. 54-55).

In (P2), the clerk's utterance directed to Khadija illustrates that she is being "penalized" for being an upstanding individual: someone who has **culture** and **education**, as well as **an important professional trajectory** and also a valid visa. In other words, she was penalized for not being a drug user or a thief (the types of individuals associated with device 115) and for not being undocumented. It can be observed that, since she is not classified as a refugee (despite the attack she endured), but a voluntary migrant, Khadija is, initially, ineligible for accommodation or governmental assistance. This situation reflects a clear inversion of values.

Afterwards, Khadija met someone who indicated her an association at a popular neighborhood in Paris. She tells how she felt (un)welcome at that place:

(P3) At 8h30, a guard came out to insult us because we were not properly queued. As if his words were not enough, he grabbed a chain and forced us into a line. [...] That same man came back to abuse us some more. We should not move anymore, otherwise we wouldn't get inside the facility.

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¹⁵ In the original: "Madame, vous semblez avoir une culture et un parcours professionnel très important. Vous êtes beaucoup trop instruite pour que je vous mette dans le dispositif du 115. Dans ce dispositif, il y a beaucoup de drogués, d'alcooliques et de voleurs... Si vous êtes en bonne forme, croyez-moi, évitez. Sachez aussi que votre visa étant toujours valide, vous ne pouvez jouir de ce dispositif. Il faut savoir qu'en France, pour bénéficier des avantages sociaux, il faut être dans l'irrégularité [...]".

[...] Suddenly, three guards stepped outside and started to shout: "Come, come, run, move along, hurry up." These people treated us like cattle [...]¹⁶ (Geai, 2015, p. 56).

The verbal violence (shouting, insults, threats) with which Khadija was received at the association, ironically called *France terre d'asile* (France land of asylum) illustrates the discrimination and the intolerance natives direct toward foreigners. The word **cattle**, used by the Algerian woman to describe her feelings at the time, is very symptomatic of the dehumanization of others, evoking the lines and marches conducted by the Nazis in concentration camps during the Second World War.

That violence is later combined to negligence. Khadija was made the promise, by a clerk at *France terre d'asile*, that they would call her again the following day. They did not. After three days, she returned to the association to be subjected to the same insulting and threatening treatment only to learn she had been completely forgotten. The clerk eventually indicated a center for shelter and social rehabilitation, to which she went immediately. Let us read the description of the room in Khadija's own words:

(P4) There was a television fixed to the ceiling, a cabinet to keep things and two beds. There was no bath or shower, just a small sink. When I looked at the mattress and the sheets, I believe just the idea of sleeping there made me feel like throwing up. I had the vivid dark image of living in an unhealthy camp or prison cell. As a farewell the man at the reception desk pointed to the dog outside and told me: "Careful with it, if it doesn't recognize you, there's a good chance you'll be in trouble" [...] I was very afraid...¹¹ (Geai, 2015, p. 58).

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¹⁶ In the original: "À 8h30, un gardien est sorti pour nous insulter parce que nous n'étions pas correctement ordonnés en fille d'attente. Songeant que ces mots ne suffisaient pas, il dégaina une chaîne métallique pour nous obliger à nous aligner. [...] Ce même homme est ensuite revenu afin de nous rabaisser encore un peu plus. Nous ne devions plus bouger sous peine de ne pas pénétrer dans les locaux. [...]. Puis, d'un coup, trois guardiens sont sortis et ont commencé à crier: 'Allez, allez, courez, entrez, dépêchez-vous!'. Ces personnes nous traitaient comme du bétail [...]".

¹⁷ In the original: "Il y avait une télévision fixée au plafond, un casier por ranger des affaires et deux lits. Il n'y avait pas de toilettes, ni de douche, simplement un petit lavabo. À la vue du matelas et des draps, j'ai cru vomir à l'idée d'y dormir dedans. J'avais la sombre image de vivre dans un camp insalubre ou dans une cellule de prison. À guise d'au revoir, l'homme de l'accueil designa le chien qui se trouvait dehors et m'informa: 'Faites attention à lui, car s'il ne vous reconnaît pas, vous risquez d'avoir des soucis.' [...] J'avais si peur...".

In (P4), words and expressions such as sick, dark image, unhealthy camp, and prison cell encompass the state of the room: absolutely precarious. Moreover, Khadija feels threatened by a sort of guardian dog at the premises. The lexical net careful, chance, trouble culminating in afraid denotes Khadija's feelings toward her new accommodation.

The Algerian woman visited *France terre d'asile* again to continue the process of regularization, suffering the same humiliating treatment. She finally received a letter of registry from OFPRA. There were new bureaucratic difficulties: the explanatory documents provided by the institution were unintelligible often using many complicated words. If Khadija, who was fluent in French, had issues understanding those documents, what is to be said of a non-fluent speaker of the language?

Nevertheless, the first demand to become legal was opening an account at a postal bank. At the bank, the Algerian woman was insulted for being a woman, in a clear manifestation of xenophobia as shown by the verbs annoy and stink "these foreigners annoy us, they stink" ["Ils nous font chier ces étrangers, ils puent" (Geai, 2015, p. 59)]. And the bureaucracy continued: Khadija was unable to open the account because she did not have a permanent address. After three failed attempts, she found someone willing to listen to her and to tranquilize her, thus opening the account.

Next, she went to an employment center for refugees. Khadija was once again humiliated and mistreated. She reveals that people in line were subjected to verbal violence that became physical if orders were not followed "[...] the verbal violence would turn physical if we did not accept to submit" [[...] ces violences verbales qui devenaient physiques si nous n'acceptions pas la soumission."] (Geai, 2015, p. 61). Afterwards, she was told that the attitude meant to discourage refugees from going to the center. An association for refugees that behaves in such manner is, to say the least, contradictory. Finally, all the administrative procedures were conducted slowly and bureaucratically, revealing the inefficiency of the State in welcoming refuges, as argued by Agier (2018).

Finally, Khadija received her status as a refugee from the OFPRA. Despite everything that took place in the institution (especially the bureaucratic issues), she admits that was the only place she was treated kindly. She recognized, on the other hand, the difficulty at each new step of settling and daily life. Having the same rights of French citizens, she has not been able to leave the shelter and rent an apartment due to the lack of a guarantor, something she failed to understand since she had the financial means. She found an open-ended contract thanks to her language skills and despite ignorant of her living conditions in France, her family in Algeria saw her as the hope for a better future.

In short, among the imposed themes, I found unsafety/terrorism in TA1; unwelcome, (verbal) violence, negligence, dehumanization, precariousness, bureaucracy, xenophobia and hardship with accommodations in TA3; As for the specific themes, I cite, for example, sexism and corruption, in TA1, and hope in TA3. I stress that Khadija never mentioned her displacement to France in TA2 (silenced theme). Therefore, she exchanged the danger and sexism of her home country for the fear, humiliation and mistreatment of a new country (with few exceptions), which made her wonder at a certain point whether she had made the right decision in migrating to France. She seemed, however, confident in the future.

4.1.2 Thematic Axes in Aman's narratives

More succinct than Khadija, Aman, in TA1 tells he was born in Eritrea. He was 26 years old and single at the time of the interview. He informs that he left school (in the 6th grade) to help his father to provide for the family, since they were eight brothers. Unlike the Algerian, he discusses at length the political situation of his home country under the command of the dictator Issaias Afeworki, who prohibited opposition to his government. Aman also mentions that two of his brothers were

forced to enlist and died in combat. It is verified, then, that the absence of freedom, unsafety and violence experienced by Aman motivated his displacement. In addition, he was forced to make odds and ends to survive and help his family (carrying shopping bags, small sales etc.).

Such situation led Aman, at 11 years old (in 2000), to exchange his home country for Sudan, as he believed life there would be less harsh. That perception would prove false, as shown by his words: "In Sudan, life was not calmer, I saw violence daily" ["Au Soudan, la vie n'était pas calme non plus, je voyais la violence quotidiennement" (Geai, 2015, p. 80)].

Aman spent five years in Sudan, before he returned to Eritrea, at age 16. Understanding nothing had changed in his country in that time, he spent three years there, with his family, doing odd jobs, until he decided to leave again to Sudan. He confesses it was hard for him to live in a country without knowing if he would manage to come back home alive. It was the last time he saw his family. In 2014, Aman moved to Khartoum, capital of Sudan, where he spent a month working to prepare his migration to Europe. He reports saving enough money to pay for the trip with coyotes (passeurs).

One day, the Sudanese coyote told him he would leave in a few hours to Libya and indicated a rally point. Let us read the conditions of the first part of Aman's displacement, already in TA2, axis that encompasses a substantial part of his narrative, unlike Khadija that as we have seen silences the subject to invest in the issues relative to her regularization /integration to the new country.

(P5) Getting there, I got into a 4x4, pick-up type. There was not an inch of space. We were crowded. I was warned that if I fell off, screaming would be pointless since nobody would stop. [...] After a few days on the road, the car stopped and we had to get off. We were in the middle of the desert, where Libyans were waiting to continue the journey. [...] For three weeks, we suffered with the heat during the day, the cold at night, the thirst, the hunger, diseases and the violence of our coyotes. Several of my companions

died on the way18 (Geai, 2015, p. 81).

In (P5), the lexical net formed by **crowded**, **heat**, **cold**, **thirst**, **hunger**, **diseases**, **death** (they died) and **violence** (of coyotes) illustrate the precariousness and danger of the trip, in addition to the brutality of the coyotes. But that was not the entirety of the hardship. Upon his arrival to Libya, Aman waited a few days to find a vessel travelling to Italy. In his words,

(P6) So I got onto a boat, but I'm not sure that's the proper word. I would rather call it a "ferry." It was 700 of us who dreamed of entering such a coveted continent. We were stacked. The days passed by and the lack of water imposed itself cruelly after the third [day]. We really wondered if we would make it or if we would die first. After five days, a French boat saved us. I can't use a verb other than "saved" [...]. At each moment death looks upon you and it can catch you by surprise, at any point everything can change¹⁹ (Geai, 2015, p. 82).

Again, in (P6) there are **ferry**, **stacked**, **lack of water**, **cruelly**, **death**, **save** forming a lexical net that reaffirms the complexity and the peril of the journey in the sea. Aman's description recalls the inflatable boats filled with refugees that media often portray. It is observed that the mediatic (hyper)visibility opposes the social/political invisibility of these subjects (Agier, 2018).

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¹⁸ In the original: "Arrivé sur place, je suis monté dans un 4x4, type pick-up. Il ne restait pas un centimètre de libre. Nous étions entassés les uns contre les autres. On m'avait prévenu que si jamais je tombais, il ne servait à rien de crier parce que personne ne s'arrêterait. [...] Au bout de quelques jours de trajet, la voiture s'est arrêtée et nous avons dû descendre. Nous étions au beau millieu du désert, où des Lybiens nous attendaient là pour la suite du voyage. [...] Durant trois semaines, nous avons souffert de la chaleur la journée, du froid la nuit, de la soif, de la faim, de la maladie et de la violence de nos passeurs. Plusieurs de mes compagnons sont morts lors de ce passage".

¹⁹ In the original: "Je suis donc monté sur un bateau, mais je ne suis pas certain que ce terme soit approprié. J'aurais tendance à nommer cela 'un radeau'. Nous étions 700 à rêver de rejoindre ce continent tant convoité. Nous étions entassés. Les jours passaient, et le manque d'eau se fit cruellement sentir au bout du troisième [jour]. On se demandait vraiment si nous allions arriver à notrre but ou morrir avant. Au bout de cinq jours, un bateau sous drapeau français nous a sauvés. Je ne peux pas employer un autre verb que celui de 'sauver' […]. À chaque instant, la mort vous guette et peut vous prendre par surprise, à chaque seconde, tout peut basculer".

The French boat left the refugees in Sicily, Italy. They were immediately taken to a welcome center, where they refused to provide their fingerprints since, according to Aman, they were aware of the Dublin rule²⁰. In other words, as they did not wish to remain in Italy, they refrained from providing their fingerprints, which led to a series of violence against them: the police attacked them physically as if they were rabid animals (*animaux enragés*). Here, similar to what Khadija narrated, the comparison to animals leads to their dehumanization and consequently to violence against them.

Fortunately, many refugees were able to relocate to Milan, passing through Vintimille, still in Italian territory. Aman tried to reach Nice, France, clandestinely by train. It took him several attempts for several days to succeed. From Nice, Aman travelled to Paris by train, once more clandestinely. In Paris (TA3), his welcome was not much better than the one he received in Sicily. As Aman himself tells:

(P7) After six months in Paris, I had lived in the camp at La Chapelle for five months, then on June 8th during a police eviction I was wounded by several of them. I spent two days in a hospital for observation. Then, I joined my companions, who were expelled [from La Chapelle] at Bois Dormoy, a small park ran by an association that generously opened their doors for us. After another eviction, we spent a few days at park Éole²¹ (Geai, 2015, p. 83-84).

A new round of violence against Aman and other refugees (**police eviction**, **wounded**, **hospital**, **new evacuation**) is verified in (P7). Still at park Éole, Aman was

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²⁰ Dublin Rule was elaborated in 1990 and came into effect in 1997. The document, rewritten several times, establishes a series of criteria to identify the Member-States responsible for asylum requests in Europe. Asylum is primarily granted on the basis of family relations, followed by the responsibility attributed to the State which first received the applicant's request. Available at: https://pt.euronews.com/2015/09/10/migracao-regulamento-de-dublin-comeca-a-abrir-bechas-na-uniao-europeia. Access on: 24 May 2024.

²¹ In the original: "Depuis que je suis à Paris, environ six mois, j'ai vécu cinq mois dans le camp de La Chapelle, puis, le 8 juin, lors de l'évacuation policière, j'ai été blessé par plusieurs d'entre eux. J'ai dû rester deux jours en observation au sein d'un établissement hospitalier. Je suis allé ensuite rejoindre mes camarades expulsés au Bois Dormoy, petit parq géré par une association qui nous ouvrait généreusement ses portes. Après une autre évacuation, nous avons passé quelques jours au parq Éole".

lucky to find shelter while following procedures to request asylum, but he confesses that many of his countrymen were still on the streets. Despite acknowledging that the French do not love refugees, he hoped to remain in the "land of men's rights" living freely and safely.

In short, as imposed themes, in TA1 are oppression, violence and instability; in TA2, precariousness, danger and mistreatment; in TA3, the unwelcome, the (physical and verbal) violence, the dehumanization, the xenophobia. For specific themes I cite the description of the political situation in Eritrea in TA1; the escape and clandestinity to Paris in TA2; but also hope in TA3.

There are themes that appear repeated in both narratives (verbal and/or physical violence, unwelcome, dehumanization, xenophobia) characterizing common feature in relation to the planes of themes. This reaffirms the inefficiency of the State in terms of hospitality to refugees and their hostility toward that group, which is frequently replaced with individual or collective gestures of solidarity (the lady in the subway and the kind bank clerk in Khadija's case; the Bois Dormoy Park association in Aman's case).

4.2 Enunciative deixis in Khadija's and Aman's narratives

In Lara (2021, 2023), I have pointed out that deixis is generally classified according to three domains pertaining to the enunciative situation: person, space and time. Nonetheless, many researchers (including Maingueneau himself in his global semantics) use that notion specifically from a space-time perspective: here-now *vs.* there-then. Thus, I begin by focusing on the space-time coordinates in the selected life stories and I stress that for Maingueneau (2005) dates and precise places are not relevant but rather the scene and the chronology built by discourse to authorize and legitimate the enunciation.

Both narratives then approach a here-now (France in the present) that opposes a there-then (home country – and other countries in Aman's case – in the past). Both

these extremes are articulated by the process of displacement from one country to another. As I have examined what takes places in the specific times/places while exploring the narratives themes, I can discuss the category of person that, as mentioned, I have added to the space-time coordinates devised by Maingueneau (2005) given its importance to/in life stories.

As expected with such speech genre, the first-person singular is vastly used: an I who tells (oneself) to someone else as seen in passages 1 to 7. This I can, however, slide to an (exclusive) \mathbf{we} : I+my relatives, I+my friends, I+my migration companions, I+other refugees..., thus expressing the narrator's belonging to a more or less broad group with which they share values, feelings and points of view. The \mathbf{we} (refugees), in several moments, opposes \mathbf{they} (French or natives in other countries), revealing the opposition between inferiority (vulnerability) and superiority (strength and power). Here are examples extracted from the passages reproduced earlier:

- a) At 8h30, a guard came out to insult us because we were not properly queued. Us = I + other migrants/refugees standing in line Khadija;
- b) [...] a small park ran by an association that generously opened their doors for us. After another eviction, we spent a few days at park Éole. Us = we+my companions (expelled from La Chapelle) Aman;
- c) Suddenly, three guards stepped outside and started to shout: [...] These people treated us like cattle. Opposition: they (French guards) vs. we (refugees) Khadija;
- d) We were in the middle of the desert, where Libyans were waiting to continue the journey. [...] For three weeks we suffered with the heat during the day, the cold at night, the thirst, the hunger, and diseases and the violence of our coyote. Opposition: they (Libyans) vs. We (refugees).

In both narratives, the generic you (tu/vous) is also present to mean anyone in the same situation as shown by these two examples (also extracted from the passages cited earlier):

a) One must know that if you aren't married and decide to work amongst men, you are responsible for exposing yourself to sexism. You = any woman in the same situation: single and working in a predominantly male field –

Khadija;

b) At each moment death looks upon you and it can catch you by surprise. You = any person in a ferry in the middle of the ocean – Aman.

The generic **you** (*tu/vous*) is also used in direct speech in Khadija's life story (see P2) when she reports what the 115 clerk had told her. Therefore, a meaning effect of reality is created as if Khadija were reproducing the clerk's exact words. However, this resource was used only once by the Algerian woman and none by the Eritrean.

In short: **I** is predominantly used in life stories since there is no other way of telling oneself without the first-person singular, but it is also necessary to consider the cases of slide to (exclusive) **we** which can be used to oppose to **them**, in addition to a generic **you** (*tu/vous*). From a space-time standpoint, in general, an opposition is established between **here-now** and **there-then**, pointing out two (or more) important stages in the lives of displaced subjects connected through migratory experiences. Ultimately, discussing migratory events means, above everything else, considering a before and an after (Deprez, 2002).

4.3 Mode of enunciation: Khadija's and Aman's ethos

The last plane from global semantics I employ in my analytical device is the mode of enunciation. As I have discussed in Lara (2021, 2023), even written discourse has its own "voice" that institutes a "a specific manner of saying" (Maingueneau, 2005, p. 94-95) to be learned from aspects such as the tone, the fluency, the rhythm, the word choice, the arguments, etc. This "manner of saying," which refers to a "manner of being" appears in later works of the author (for example, Maingueneau, 2006, 2008, 2020) associated to the notion of *rhetoric ethos*, that is, the image speakers build of themselves in/through discourse. That image is related to collective representations, to stereotypes (assessed either positively or negatively), which the interlocutor associates to the "guarantor" of discourse, and which the utterance/enunciation itself helps to reinforce or to transform (Maingueneau, 2006).

In the case of testimonial texts, such as life stories, *ethos* is of fundamental importance. According to Amossy (2004), testimonial discourses are based on the authority of the one able to state "I was there". Therefore, *ethos* is at the center of testimonial discourses both at the level of the utterance and the enunciation. In addition, Fontanille (2007, p. 87) admits that *ethos*, in the canonic sense of the "narrator's image", serves as proof of legitimacy of the utterance. Moreover, from his perspective, *ethos* comprehends an integral part of *pathos*, and *pathos* (that is, the effects produced in the interlocutors) comprehends a part of a projected *ethos*.

What image(s) Khadija and Aman project through their mode of enunciation? As refugees, both cultivate images (an *ethos*) of vulnerability and frustration in the narratives of the various situations they have endured. This elicits in the other (the readers) empathy and indignation (as illustrated in passages (T3) and (T5)), corroborating Fontanille's arguments (2007) about the integration of *ethos* and *pathos*. In doing so, they also manage to recover prevalent stereotypes regarding who refugees are and how they live.

At times, a critical *ethos* is observed, since both refugees realize the absurdity of some situations. In Khadija's narrative, that is manifested in her struggle to complete the OFPRA documents:

(T8) Finally, I was able to start the procedures to access my rights. Despite knowing French, I could not understand the explanatory jargon of those papers. They used really complicated terms. I put myself, then, as someone who could not speak the language....²² (Geai, 2015, p. 59).

Not understand, jargon, complicated terms, someone who could not speak the language show the incoherence of attempting to complete asylum request documents

²² In the original: "J'ai pu alors enfin commencer mes démarches quant à l'overture de mes droites. Malgré mes connaissances sur la langue française, je n'arrivais pas à comprendre le charabia explicatif sur les papiers. Ils utilisaient des termes vraiment compliqués à compreende. Je me suis mise alors à la place d'une personne ne parlant pas la langue…".

written in unintelligible language even for French speakers. The same critical perspective is present when Aman compares the boat he was on to a ferry ("I got onto a boat, but I'm not sure that's the proper word. I would rather call it a 'ferry'").

At the end of their narratives, they instill a tone of hope regarding the future. Khadiija, for example, talks briefly about her past, which she deems **painful**, but claims the following about her family: "Today I know that I am their hope. Yes, I am my family's hope" [Aujourd'hui, je sais que je suis leur espoir. Oui, je suis l'espoir de ma famille (Geai, 2015, p. 62).]. The repetition, reaffirmed by the adverb oui (yes) in the second utterance leaves no doubt of her positive expectations to assist her family in the future.

Khadija's and Aman's multiple "faces", as I see it, can be articulated around a more comprehensive *ethos*: the *ethos* of resilience, in reference to the ability one has of adapting to changes, of recovering from challenging situations, adversities or crises. Such *ethos* can be seen clearly in Aman's final statements:

(T9) I have been through a lot in my life, now my only dream is to live freely without putting my life in danger daily [...] Be it my migration companions or I, we are mere refugees who only wish to feel peace and serenity. I have lost two brothers to armed conflicts connected to the dictatorship in my country, my family is in Eritrea, my roots are also there, and I, I am here. I have taken all those risks for the chance to prosper. So, even if the challenge is far from overcome, I'm not coming back, because I want to believe that my "tomorrow" is here [...]²³ (Geai, 2015, p. 84-85).

In (T9), putting life in danger, loosing brothers, armed conflicts, dictatorship, risks, challenge show the many adversities Aman had to face to shift his life into a

²³ In the original: "J'ai vécu beaucoup de choses dans ma vie, je ne rêve dorénavant que de vivre librement sans devoir risquer ma vie quotidiennement [...] Que ce soit moi ou mes compagnons de voyage, nous sommes juste des réfugiés qui avons comme unique désir de connaître la paix et la sérénité. J'ai perdu deux frères dans les conflits armés liés à la dictature de mon pays, le reste de ma famille est là-bas em Érythrée, mes racines y sont aussi, et moi, je suis ici. J'ai pris tous ces risques pour avoir la chance de m'épanouir. Alors, même si ce défi est loin d'être gagné, je ne ferais pas machine arrière, car je veux croire que mon 'demain' est ici [...]".

new direction, that is, to find **peace**, **serenity** and the **chance to prosper**, similarly, in a "resilient land", life is resumed with new vegetation after a fire or flood, as stated by Machado (2021, p. 153), using a metaphor by Boris Cyrulnik.

Having completed the analysis of life stories through the planes of global semantics, I now turn to the conclusion, confident of having given voice to these two refugees – subjects in vulnerable situations, who represent countless others in France and in the world – and of having enhanced their access to social visibility/audibility.

5 Conclusion

The present work reaffirms, as I see it, the testimonial nature of life stories. In the present of the enunciation, when individuals tell someone an episode of their lives – in this case, the migratory experience –, they recover "marks" of a past time that they have witnessed, heard of, experienced. In doing so, they place themselves as guarantors of what is said. At the same time, they communicate a gesture (and a discourse) of resistance to destabilize the official discourse and the stereotypes that often target specific minorities. For refugees, this means threatening national security and identity, stealing jobs and undermining the rights of legitimate citizens etc. It is not coincidental that Aman claims in P8 that he and his companions are "mere refugees who only wish for peace and serenity".

If each story is unique and their subject singular – as seen through Khadija's and Aman's trajectories and narratives, who stress different stages of their experiences – it is possible to learn aspects that serve as refugees' common discourse, albeit the impossibility of generalizing results without a more comprehensive and detailed investigation.

I highlight from these common aspects: 1) themes repeated in both life stories: **unwelcome**, (**verbal and physical**) **violence**, **dehumanization**, **xenophobia**, revealing States that are underprepared to deal with "their" refugees, as I have claimed; 2) predominant use of first-person singular, which is expected in life stories, with an *I*

unfolding between past and present, between the home country (and other countries) and the final destination country; 3) the construction of an ethos of resilience, that is, people who were able to overcome challenges to shift life towards a new direction; 4) regarding vocabulary, it is noteworthy "how, depending on their uses, words behave in discourses, calling out for one another, creating controversy and oppositions; in short: forming 'nets'" (Lara, 2021, p. 65) 24. One such example: the words cattle and (rabid) animals call out for one another in Khadija's and Aman's discourses to materialize, metaphorically, the theme of dehumanization of refugees.

Finally, these "truthful statements" reveal narratives that are testimonial in nature and that based on individual experiences foster the creation of a collective subjectivity (Ginzburg, 2015), that is, those in which the shout of one person can echo as the shout of an entire group of people, resisting (discursively) to the instituted power and to crystalized ideas.

Translated by Larissa de P. Cavalcanti.

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²⁴ In the original: "como, em função de seus usos, as palavras se comportam nos discursos, chamando umas às outras, polemizando, opondo-se; em suma: formando 'redes'".

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