

# Political Exil Forced Women's Presentation and Representations

Jean-Yves Causer

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Between 2014 and 2017, I supervised with Jacqueline Igersheim and Juan Matas a survey to study the new female profiles of immigration. These investigations, involving about 60 students, have on rare occasions focused on women who have fled their country for political reasons, even though this migration phenomenon has become particularly massive in recent years.

Returning from Iraq and Syria, Zainab Bangura, as a Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, refers, in the following terms, to the intentionality laying in the most barbaric acts inflicted on defenseless human beings who have not could escape:

“The leaders of the IS armed group have understood that the best way to dehumanize a society is to attack women and children. They know that no man will forgive someone who has violated his sweetheart or his offspring. This makes reconciliation impossible and it is wanted.”

The sense of what Georg Simmel called “non conciliation” (nonconciliation) appears in all its cruelest aspects:

“Nonconciliation means that the struggle inflicted on the soul a modification of its being, which is irreversible: this is why it cannot be compared to a healed wound but to the loss of a limb. Here is the most tragic nonconciliation: there is no need for it that rancor, reproach, or a secret revolt remains in the soul, which will place a positive barrier between it and the other; only that the conflict that has been waged has killed something in it that cannot be revived, even if we strive passionately about it” (Simmel, 1992, p. 156).

The tragedy experienced by refugee women contains a part of unspeakable and it would be presumptuous to emphasize all its dimensions, the latter referring to too different realities. Nevertheless, it seemed useful to me to give a voice to some of them by showing how the latter mobilize strategic resources to develop their identity projects and identity strategies. In fact, I would like to highlight certain contrasts that give relief to the eminently singular integration paths, but also to norms and values that refer to the complexity of games and issues of more societal regulation (Ferréol, 2013, p. 1854).

At a meeting organized between the Chilean origin sociologist Juan Matas and about 20 young Syrian refugees, it was mentioned that it is difficult to locate oneself in this cultural space between, where the question of the fidelity of links arises. At this occasion, Juan Matas was able to mention the difficulty of being both a *good emigrant* (for the relatives of the country of origin) and a *good immigrant* (for residents who are to be met in the hosting society); which would give us the definition of an incomplete process of integration then seen as a form of dynamic combination of the cultural elements composing the two geographical entities.

It is therefore necessary to better understand in a perspective of actionnalisation of sociology (Desroche) and on the basis of the analysis of narratives, what is at stake in refugee migrants' paths. This should therefore make it possible to provide some explanatory elements of all that does not necessarily facilitate the integration into insufficiently inclusive systems.

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---

## From the advancement of knowledge to the justification of using the method

Laurence Roulleau-Berger, drawing inspiration from the work of Marc Abélès, was able to elaborate an immigrants females profiles typology, which has the interest of deepening the perspective that we can have because, according Roulleau-Berger, the migrant women would have ability to develop new skills. Three ideal types are thus able to shed light on regimes of otherness, producing patterns of recognition that are unequally legitimized:

- “Regimes of low alterity, when migrant women with few resources and little protection from collective systems are subject to social, economic and ethnic inequalities in social worlds, which have little legitimacy and distribute little social and public recognition, little social esteem” (Roulleau-Berger, 2010, p. 178).
- “Strong alterity regimes, when well-endowed women migrants, who are protected by collective systems are engaged in processes of social, economic and cultural affiliation in legitimate institutions that distribute social and public recognition, social esteem” (ibid., p. 179);
- “Partially autonomous regimes of alterity, when women migrants, who are rather weak in resources, are designated as possessing weakly recognized social skills, develop collective and individual mobilization capacities, social creativity and even resistance by appropriating interstitial spaces” (ibid., p. 179).

If this latter profile has the advantage of involving a variety of paths showing a form of resilience faithful to the characteristics presented by Roulleau-Berger (Causer, 2013), it also brings together some refugee women mobilizing their capital to escape the persecution and attempt to rebound after a period of de-skilling and destabilization. Without going so far as the evocation of an identity strategy, which testifies to a too totalizing terminology, I underline the importance of this identity desire in process to conceive with Renaud Sainsaulieu as the quest for recognition of an own consideration research project (Sainsaulieu, 1977). The fact that all the logics of action are not influenced or aimed at identity must not obscure the importance of the refusal to be manipulated in games of power that do not only refer to the importance, in the present case, of male dominance. Is it possible for a player, feeling himself capable of influencing the course of events, to intentionally or unknowingly become a simple playing card for a lifetime sequence (Bernoux, 2004).

Interviews on biography or life stories have therefore the heuristic interest of drawing singular portraits from the interpretative analysis of practices and representations following repeated interviews with one or more several informants or respondents:

“Because it involves a break with its milieu and the models in which the individual was socialized, the prolonged situation as a stranger (unlike that of the tourist and even of the student who receives a grant) constitutes a quasi-experimental situation because it is in a crisis situation that motivations and mechanisms become more apparent. Thus, the cut with the social environment and with its own historical continuity forces the individual to a brutal change in identities, often devalued compared to those he had at home. In this process, full of detours, ambiguities and more or less painful clashes, the individual reacts with what he is, but this "being" has been socialized in a determined culture and expressed in modalities its own” (Vasquez, 2013, p. 146).

Daniel Bertaux synthesizes the methodology, specific to life stories, with the use of seven

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---

qualifiers (Bertaux, 2014, p. 41ff.):

- Expressiveness (at the center of his model) refers this (often popular) way of addressing the sociologist as if she/he were the "society". It is possible to experience this sensation in many other circumstances, such as in certain committees where it is necessary to hear, for example, parents applying for approval for the adoption of a child;
- Historicity designating, at the simplest, the inscription of each of us to her/his historical temporality. In the case of Algerian immigrants, it may refer, according to Abdelmalek Sayad, to these three ages, participating in an institutionalization of their settlement on French hexagonal soil (Sayad, 1999, p. 54ff.);
- The Singularity because "the history of her/his life course is the story of a journey that first produced it before it gradually tries to take control of it with more or less energy and success (*ibid.*, p. 44);
- Subjectivity, on the other hand, would make it possible to grasp the perceptions and situation assessments likely to preside over individual choices and, consequently, to participate in the reorientations, bifurcations and commitments;
- the Activity includes the Weberian relationship to values because it relates to what people do or what they could have done for other reasons and / or other circumstances;
- Contextuality informs us about the mediations that the sociologist can establish between the individual and her/his environment. In this respect, Bertaux observes that these are most often apprehended in the register of interpersonal relations which "are inseparable from the experienced contexts" (*ibid.*, p. 47);
- Finally, Connectivity is the feature that seems to me to be the most interesting because it testifies of the fact that we are not alone in the world. Exacerbated in the effort to maintain, at all costs, links with her/his own who are sometimes scattered all over the world, this connectivity invalidates the ideology mythifying contemporary individualism. Let us just remind Norbert Elias's suggestion that the loss of a member of our close circle is, like that of a physical member: far from being outside our being, it would be experienced in ourselves ... (Elias, 2012).
- The connection with the relatives is also done by telephone (usually by smartphone). Especially when all members of an extended family are scattered around the world.

## The constraints and elements that can be mobilized in a "rebound" strategy

"It is true that subjective history cannot be reduced as a result of belongings to the societal "we": distance to roles, an essential mark of reflective consciousness, is also the condition for the construction of a narrative identity. Distancing becomes thus an important resource for rebuilding new projects, reinterpreting its past history differently and subjectively engaging in a personal history, always reinventing, which is not reduced to an objectified social trajectory" (Dubar, 2003, p. 201).

This quotation has the advantage of expressing the essential of the theoretical perspective

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---

of its author and echoing my project to take seriously the intentionality present in certain choices of orientation or bifurcation strategies.

In this case, she is a young woman from Qaraqoch, a city ravaged by Daech's exactions, near Mosul. For reasons of confidentiality, she is "renamed" Katrin in the present article. She lived with her family for two and a half years in France. Aged 29, Katrin and her three sisters still at home are taking care of their father, who is now very sick. She learns French to improve her French skills enough to be able to enter and pursue vocational training in the labor market. Compared to her placement in the siblings with two boys and five girls, she is in the 6th place.

Looking at the content of the various exchanges with Katrin, I can pick up four points that need to be taken up and deepened: language problems, cultural difficulties of adaptation with a more specific question, that of its relationship to time and, finally, aspects inherent in its status as an Iraqi woman.

The most important is the language barrier and the immense frustration caused by this difficulty in being able to dialogue and communicate with the residents of the host country:

« *Je prends des cours français à l'université de Mulhouse, mais je n'ai pas encore choisi une formation. Je suis toujours en train de réfléchir pour faire quelque chose, quelque chose de facile pour moi... La langue est importante et aussi le fait de savoir s'il y a du travail dans tel secteur. J'ai besoin de concours, d'aide car ça c'est difficile.* » "I take French classes at the University of Mulhouse, but I have not yet chosen a training. I'm always thinking about doing something, something easy for me ... Language is important and also knowing if there is work in that area. I need help because it's difficult."

Katrin was trained as a surveyor in his country and an internship experience would have made her understand the difficulty of being integrated into this professional field. She did two other internships in a nursery school without being clearly set on her reorientation ... She continues, in fact, to look for her way. But language is also an essential mediation in interpersonal relations and it establishes a relationship between not having too many friendly French relations of her age to her difficulty in speaking French, also to the fact of not working, and being with persons sharing the same (foreign) place as her:

« *Comme je ne travaille pas et quand je fais des stages, je rencontre des gens étrangers et âgés... Là je ne parle pas bien le français.* » "As I do not work and when I do internships, I meet foreigners and old people ... There I do not speak French well."

It is difficult, according to her, to make French friendships, to have one or her place. This term, repeated several times in her remarks, refers to the fact of undergoing a form of isolation and even a logic of assignation difficult to live.

Cultural difficulties are also mentioned with some lucidity. Being Confronted to the administrative world of the bureaucracy and its bureaucratism (as borrowed from the Swiss sociologist Giovanni Busino) is a formidable challenge to which Katrin and his people have been confronted:

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---

« En France, pour nous, la difficulté c'était pour les papiers. C'est difficile pour chercher un appartement parce que nous sommes beaucoup, j'habite avec mes parents et quatre filles et frère, cela fait sept personnes. La première fois, on ne nous a pas loué parce que nous ne sommes pas français et mes parents ils sont malades et âgés et tout ça... Quand nous cherchions pour un appartement la première année, on a loué un appartement au quatrième étage sans ascenseur (Rire). C'était bien pour nous mais pour mes parents, difficile. Et après, pour louer en France c'est difficile, c'est très dur. Même pour une personne. C'est dur car, nous, on a toujours besoin de quelque chose et il n'y a pas ces choses, pour le rendez-vous, pour faire le document heu... Chaque fois, je demande ce qui se passe, ce qu'il y a ou pas tout ça ! Cela prend beaucoup de temps. Pour trouver une école, un travail, un logement, on doit chercher parce que pour aller à un endroit, on nous a donné une feuille avec un site internet ou une adresse ou encore quelque chose d'écrit en français, mais, nous, on n'a rien compris... »

"In France, for us, the difficulty was for the documents. It's hard to look for an apartment because we are a lot, I live with my parents and four daughters and a brother, that makes seven people. The first time we were not taken on because we are not French and my parents are sick and old and all that ... When we were looking for an apartment the first year we rented a fourth floor apartment with no lift (laugh). It was good for us but for my parents, difficult. And then, to hire in France is difficult, it's very hard. Even for one person. It's hard because we always need something and there are not these things for the appointment to make the document. Every time I ask what is going on, that there is or not all that! This takes lots of time. In order to find a school, a job, a place to live, we have to look for it, because to go to a place, we were given a sheet with a website or an address or something written in French, but we did not understand anything ..."

The difficulty of moving from a social world that is not concerned with administrative domination with legal rationality (according to Max Weber's terminology) to a more bureaucratic society is amplified by a difficult relationship to language or racism and it is, above all, massively shared. A 50-year-old Turkish woman whose husband was a communist and who also suffered political repression, imprisonment and torture testifies to this:

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Volume 2, 2018

---

« *Ma voisine avait deux enfants, à peu près du même âge que mon fils. Je voulais pratiquer un peu la langue française. Je suis allée la voir et je lui ai demandé, je ne sais pas comment je le lui ai demandé mais j'ai dû dire : " Je suis votre voisine, mon fils il veut jouer avec vos enfants, et j'aimerais bien parler le français aussi". Elle m'a répondu : "depuis que les étrangers sont venus dans l'appartement, c'est sale ici". Elle m'a dit "non" et elle a fermé la porte. Pour moi, c'était très difficile. Mon fils ne comprenait pas [elle pleure]. Dans le parc aussi ça m'est arrivé encore une fois et au même endroit. Ça, c'était quelque chose que je n'oublierai jamais. Mon fils, il voulait jouer mais la dame voulait mettre une distance sans arrêt entre lui et ses enfants. Et mon fils, il était comme un petit chien. Il cherchait la balle pour jouer, il faisait des efforts tout ça, mais elle ne voulait pas. C'était difficile. Je sais aujourd'hui à quel point l'être humain peut être méchant, à quel point on peut être manipulé et tu peux tomber dans le piège... Mais mon fils était petit et je ne voulais pas qu'il reste comme ça. Je l'ai pris, je suis rentrée à la maison et j'ai pleuré ».*

"My neighbour had two children, about the same age as my son. I wanted to practice the French language a bit. I went to see her and I asked her, I do not know how I asked her but I had to say: "I am your neighbour, my son wants to play with your children, and I would like to speak French too". She replied: "Since the strangers came to the apartment, it's dirty here." She said "no" and she closed the door. For me it was very difficult. My son did not understand [she cries]. In the park also it happened to me again and in the same place. That was something I will never forget. My son wanted to play but the lady wanted to put a long distance between him and his children. And my son, he was like a little dog. He was looking for the ball to play, he was trying all that, but she did not want to. It was hard. I know today how bad a human being can be, how badly you can be manipulated and you can fall into the trap ... But my son was small and I did not want him to stay like that. I took it, went home and cried."

In my opinion, Bertaux has no reason to doubt of the heuristic relevance of connectivity as a property of life narrative insofar as connectivity, defined as "the most significant interpersonal relationship set" (Bertaux, op. cit.: 48), is essential to consider when migrants remain grouped. Katrin and her family (they currently live to seven in an apartment) have nevertheless benefited from a few non-negligible human resources: The presence of an uncle, the support of the consulate and the opportunity of a plane to leave Iraq. While living in a family group may include benefits in terms of mutual support and support, it has disadvantages if its members do not have the opportunity and the willingness to open up to others. A brother and sister, however, left home as required by their family traditions. However, they still function according to the principles of masculine domination (Bourdieu, 1998) which do not really help young women to take their autonomy.

Katrin nevertheless knew how to seize supports. She got them because she is a Christian. In particular, the members of the Catholic Caritas Association welcomed her rather warmly. Unlike other members of her family, especially a young sister who remains very isolated and thus encounters important problems in her integration. Katrin is fully aware of the social and professional issues linked to a correct command of the French language:

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Volume 2, 2018

---

« *Quand je rencontre des gens très sympas et tout ça. Pour moi, c'est difficile à cause de la langue, de notre culture. Parce que quand quelqu'un vient ici, ce n'est pas facile de faire comme les français. On va faire quelque chose de difficile en tant qu'étrangers : habiter dans deux choses, la chose de son pays et celle d'ici. Et quelques fois la personne n'arrive pas à faire une seule vie. C'est comme deux vies séparées et oui... »*

"When I meet very nice people and all that. For me, it's difficult because of the language, our culture. Because when someone comes here, it's not easy to do like the French. We are going to do something difficult as foreigners: living in two things, the thing of the home country and that of here. And sometimes the person cannot make a single life. It's like two separate lives and yes ..."

These constraints have also been thoroughly analyzed historically and sociologically, leading, among other things, to making these populations particularly vulnerable (Noiriel, 2006). Katrin, like many other people of immigrant origin (Schnapper, 1992), relies on institutional resources (notably for housing) and associations to get out of it and to rebound socially even if her professional project is still a little blurred and asks to be seriously worked. For this, she must also establish another relationship to time, less scatter and focus on her training prospects. She would ideally work in an office if she had computer skills.

She will also have to fight against certain prejudices all the more terrible which are not lived as such on the side of the discriminators and come to reinforce a form of aversive racism (Bourhis, Gagnon and Moïse, 1999: 199). A Syrian woman refugee, 35, married and mother of two young children, both spouses being unemployed, evokes with lucidity this reality:

« *Les Français ont une idée... un petit peu... euh... "mal" sur les réfugiés, les personnes qui n'ont pas la nationalité européenne. Ils pensent qu'ils ont un petit peu... mal éduqués, qu'ils sont un peu arriérés... Je ressens ça quand je parle avec des gens qui sont, tout le temps, étonnés que nous sommes bien éduqués, que nous pouvons être cultivés, que nous parlons plusieurs langues... Ils n'ont pas à l'esprit que les syriens, comme les autres... comme eux, comme les français, sont des gens comme les autres. Ils ont dans leur imagination que nous sommes autre chose [rires] ».*

"The French have an idea ... a little ... ah ... "bad" about refugees, people who do not have European citizenship. They think they are a little ... badly educated, that they are a bit backward ... I feel that when I talk with people who are, all the time, amazed that we are well educated, that we can be cultivated, that we speak several languages ... They do not have in mind that the Syrians, like the others ... like them, like the French, are people like the others. They have in their imagination that we are something else [laughs]."

## Some sociological questions about the evolution of representations around the refugee status

The problematic of resentment proves to be increasingly central in its content and its ideological functions. For Zygmunt Bauman:

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Volume 2, 2018

---

“It is gaining in importance with the increasing "fluidity" of social frameworks, the erasing of comfortable routines, the increasing fragility of links between men, and the atmosphere of uncertainty, insecurity and diffuse fear, sub-defined and free in which we live [...]. Among the despised unknown persons, the place of honor currently belongs to refugees, asylum seekers and more simply to the poor exiles of the impoverished regions of the planet. They are quoting Brecht, "an omen of bad news". By coming knocking at our doors, they remind us how fragile our security is, how weak and vulnerable our comfort is, our endangered tranquility” (Bauman, 2009, p. 48).

If associationism, which works in the field of reception and accompaniment of immigrants, struggles it, it cannot make up for the failures of republican institutions. The force of prejudice, however, is brought into conflict with simple principles of reality. Smāin Laacher reminds them in the following terms:

“Leaving is a cost; this act is never without symbolic and social harm. It is a break that nothing can repair, at least during the immigration duration. Only later generations will transform it into memories” (Laacher, 2012, p. 46).

When analyzing the interviews of refugee women who migrated to escape repression and sometimes to escape a social or physical death, I hope that a republican and humanist burst of hope emerges. If the obstacles to integration are pluralistic and interlocking and if more institutional mobilization is notoriously insufficient for mainly ideological reasons, would not it be time to combine and better articulate the responses made today to their problems in order to have a sufficiently dignified and respectful reception of migrants?

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Volume 2, 2018

---

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