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In the Shadow of Asylum

Belgium's Asylum Seekers' Reception: Its Policies, its Representations in the Press, and an Ethnographic Example

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To Emmanuel, Jean-Marie, Fazal, Ehsan, Jahan, Éric, André, Jean, Caleb, Olivier and the other residents of the center

È così che ho sviluppato questa ossessione. Provare a rendere quel nulla un po' meno nulla. Provare a oltrepassare la categoria di "vittima", che non spiega niente della complessa vita degli esseri umani. Provare a dipanare i fili di eventi che a prima vista paiono incomprensibili nel loro ginepraio di violenza, lutti, oppressione, che pure determina la vita di tanti.

Alessandro Leogrande, *La Frontiera*. Milano, Feltrinelli, 2015, p.15.

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Abstract

The media, the politicians and the NGOs often refer to a "migratory crisis" or a "reception crisis". This was the case in Belgium in the period between August 2021 and December 2022. The question at the core of this thesis stems from this alleged "crisis" framed by the media. How is the Belgian reception system for asylum seekers currently organized, how is it framed by the media, and how is it perceived and lived by its different actors and recipients? Thus, this research unfolds in four main objectives. The first objective is to explain the functioning of the Belgian reception system for asylum seekers, highlighting to which extent it respects the human rights and moral integrity of the asylum seekers. The second objective is to observe the (non-)respect of human rights and the temporalities by highlighting some particular features of the policies. The third objective is to analyze the media construction of a particular representation of asylum seekers and of the reception system in Belgium. Finally, the last objective is to focus on the lived experience of asylum seekers in the reception system in Belgium.

This thesis underlines the structural violence that can be found in the shadow of asylum, but also the agency and resistance of asylum seekers that can be hidden in the shadow of ill-designed policies, misrepresentations and humanitarian victimization.

Extended Summary

I media, i politici e le ONG fanno spesso riferimento a una "crisi migratoria" o a una "crisi di accoglienza". È stato il caso del Belgio nel periodo compreso tra agosto 2021 e dicembre 2022. QI media, i politici e le ONG fanno spesso riferimento a una "crisi migratoria" o a una "crisi dell'accoglienza". Questo è stato il caso in Belgio nel periodo tra agosto 2021 e dicembre 2022. La domanda al centro di questa tesi deriva da questa presunta "crisi" delineata dai media. Come è attualmente organizzato il sistema di accoglienza belga per i richiedenti asilo, come viene presentato dai media e come viene percepito e vissuto dai suoi diversi attori e destinatari? Pertanto, questa ricerca si sviluppa in quattro obiettivi principali. Il primo obiettivo è spiegare il funzionamento del sistema di accoglienza belga per i richiedenti asilo, evidenziando fino a che punto rispetta i diritti umani e l'integrità morale dei richiedenti asilo. Il secondo obiettivo è osservare il (non-)rispetto dei diritti umani e delle temporalità evidenziando alcune caratteristiche particolari delle politiche. Il terzo obiettivo è analizzare la costruzione mediatica di una particolare rappresentazione dei richiedenti asilo e del sistema di accoglienza in Belgio. Infine, l'ultimo obiettivo è focalizzarsi sull'esperienza vissuta dei richiedenti asilo nel sistema di accoglienza in Belgio.

Questa tesi mette in luce diverse caratteristiche dell'ombra dell'asilo. In primo luogo, si possono trovare alcune falle nelle politiche sull'asilo e sull'accoglienza, insieme alla violenza strutturale inscritta nella legge o presente nella violazione dello stato di diritto. In secondo luogo, le rappresentazioni dei migranti come massa indistinta, vittimizzazione e minaccia selezionano aspetti specifici e distorti della rappresentazione dei migranti e nascondono la loro esperienza umana vissuta. Infine, il tempo di attesa e la segregazione sociale plasmati dall'umanitarizzazione dell'attesa e dal confinamento umanitario mirano a controllare socialmente i richiedenti asilo, mantenendoli nell'ombra delle temporalità e delle spazialità dell'asilo.

Questa ricerca viene condotta seguendo la forte convinzione che le voci dei richiedenti asilo debbano essere ascoltate nella ricerca che li riguarda. Inoltre, l'etnografia combinata con l'analisi delle politiche e delle rappresentazioni giornalistiche dovrebbe rendere visibile ciò che è latente. L'obiettivo è evidenziare la violenza strutturale attraverso cui il sistema di accoglienza fa passare i richiedenti asilo, considerandoli non solo vittime ma esseri umani con diritti e capacità di agire.

Abbreviations

CPAS: Centre Public d'Action Sociale (Belgian social welfare services)

Fedasil: Belgian Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers

CGRS (Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless persons)

MENA: Mineur étranger non-accompagné (unaccompanied migrant minors)

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Introduction

In recent years, migration has become a highly controversial topic within major Western democracies, sparking complex debates on current policies and triggering intense emotional reactions. On a global scale, migratory movements are on the rise, resulting in important consequences for the daily lives of individuals, both in countries of origin and in host countries. There are several channels to migrate, and these channels correspond to different migrant statuses. One of them is the status of asylum seeker, which corresponds to people seeking international protection in a country different from their origin country. Thus, the term "asylum seekers" refers to migrants who are applying for refugee status. According to Article 1 of the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees, a refugee is a person outside of their country of origin who has a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion". Belgium is one of the signatories of this convention.

Asylum seeker is then a temporary status that refers to people waiting for status determinacy. During this period, we argue that asylum seekers are kept in the shadow of asylum: they wait for status determinacy for an undetermined period of time, they are mainly hosted in reception centers that are physically and socially relatively closed to the outside world, and their inclusion process is put on hold. Moreover, the status of asylum seekers beholds fewer rights than the refugee status. And these rights are not always respected. As a matter of fact, despite the right to reception, thousands of asylum seekers are sleeping on the streets in Brussels, because Belgian authorities are not respecting the state of law.

In relation to the evolution of asylum applications in Belgium (Maryns, 2006), following the fall of the Berlin Wall, they began to increase significantly. By 1990, the number had risen to 12,000 and reached 25,000 in 1993. In 2000, the figures reached 40,000 applications. At that time, the government hypothesized that Belgium had become an attractive destination for asylum seekers due to the financial support and extended shelter it provided. Consequently, in 2001, changes were made to the reception system, while the laws remained the same, with the aim of discouraging refugees from seeking asylum in Belgium. Financial support was canceled, the processing time was reduced, the initial selection process became more stringent, and specific attention was given to certain groups, effectively implementing a quota system. As a result, the number of applications decreased,

returning to approximately 25,000. Subsequently, during the arrivals in 2015, which the media often described as a "mass" or a "wave," around 38,000 applications were filed (Eurostat, 2015).

By comparison, approximately 20,000 people sought asylum in Belgium in 2021 (Eurostat, 2021), marking the beginning of the current hosting crisis, and slightly less than 30,000 in 2022 (Eurostat, 2022). The term "hosting crisis" is used in the media and in some scholars' research to refer to the lack of reception places, which results in a lack of provision of the other services that the hosting state is bound to provide to asylum seekers - material aid, social, medical and psychological support. In the media, this term is finding itself in similar contexts to those of "migratory crisis" and "refugee crisis". For several years now, the terms "migratory crisis" or "refugee crisis" have been used in media and political rhetoric to depict migratory movements toward Europe. This implies a temporary moment in which the number of refugees would be unprecedented, which would make migration not manageable. Some scholars refused those terms and preferred "refugee reception crisis" (Martiniello et al., 2019) to insist on a structural problem in the reception system.

Since August 2021, both "reception crisis" and "migratory crisis" are found in the main Belgian newspapers. They refer to the situation, spanning from August 2021 to nowadays, in which there has been, on the one hand, an increase in asylum requests in Belgium and, on the other hand, the revelation that the reception system is not fit to manage the arrivals. Several events have been put forward by the media and Belgian authorities to explain the shortage of reception places. They argue that the increase was unpredictable, as we could not know that international events such as the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan and the war in Ukraine were going to happen. Moreover, they insist on the problems that Belgium had to face, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the 2021 flood in Wallonia, which reduced the number of places in reception centers.

However, as Martiniello et al. (2019) already argued before these events, the problem goes deeper, in the very structure of the reception system. The way asylum and reception policies are designed does not correspond to the actual arrivals and needs of asylum seekers. The provision of sanctuary to refugees is an expression of humanitarian solidarity, a commitment to the idea of common humanity. By not providing their fundamental rights to asylum seekers, the Belgian government does not comply with international conventions such as the Geneva one, the European Directives concerning reception, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the state of law.

The question at the core of this thesis stems from this alleged "refugee reception crisis" framed by the media. How is the Belgian reception system for asylum seekers currently organized, how is it framed by the media, and how is it perceived and lived by its different actors and recipients?

Thus, this research unfolds in four main objectives. The first objective is to explain the functioning of the Belgian reception system for asylum seekers, highlighting to which extent it respects the human rights and moral integrity of the asylum seekers. The second objective is to observe the (non-)respect of human rights and the temporalities by highlighting some particular features of the policies. The third objective is to analyze the media construction of a particular representation of asylum seekers and of the reception system in Belgium. Finally, the last objective is to focus on the lived experience of asylum seekers in the reception system in Belgium.

Each objective corresponds to one chapter of this thesis. This research takes place in the context of my master's program in Mobility Studies. As such, its aim is to look beyond socioeconomic structures and cultural identities too often considered fixed and immobile. Within this framework, this thesis adopts a broad approach, using a macro level perspective on asylum and reception policies, a media analysis, and a micro perspective on the lived experience of asylum seekers. It seeks to challenge the conventional comprehension of human actions, across different temporal and spatial dimensions. The four objectives concern different perspectives on the asylum seekers' situation in Belgium. The analysis of the policies, the media and the lived experience in the same research leads to a broader comprehension of the situation, highlighting structural deficiencies of the reception system, representations of asylum seekers privileging massification, dehumanization and dramatization, and the institutional and social control over asylum seekers lives and their ways to cope with it.

The focus of the first chapter is on the political and legal system that is Belgian policies on asylum and reception as well as on the European Union policies applied by Belgium regarding that matter. Therefore, this chapter takes a macro-level approach by examining asylum policies from a top-down perspective. Its objective is to analyze how Belgium and the European Union shape the reception of asylum seekers through their policies. In addition, the chapter utilizes official news from various institutional actors responsible for asylum and reception to highlight recent changes in the reception system. The chapter is structured into two sections. Firstly, we provide a brief overview of the history of asylum seekers' reception and the asylum procedure in Belgium, emphasizing the most recent developments. Secondly, we focus on the institutional actors involved and delve into the operational aspects of the reception system as defined in the policies.

The second chapter analyzes some specific features of the asylum and reception policies in relation to temporalities and the respect for human rights. For this chapter, the concentration on the temporalities of the policies and their consequences is limited to theoretical considerations and insights from the scientific literature. As a matter of fact, the topic of temporalities will be studied more in-depth in relation to the lived experience of asylum seekers in the last chapter. In the second chapter, particular attention is paid to the extent to which emergency is inscribed in law, to the lack of definition and determination of temporalities in the asylum procedure, and to the possibilities to postpone or extend this procedure. These features are likely to cause psychological distress to asylum seekers. They can be described as structural violence embedded in the reception system. Thus, a section of this chapter is dedicated to the description of structural violence and its translation into the asylum and reception policies.

The third chapter changes focus: it does not take the policies as the object of analysis anymore, but the media discourse in Belgium. Rodney Benson (2018) argues that the focus of the discussion should not revolve around whether the media supports or opposes immigration, but rather on their responsibility to elucidate the underlying reasons and impacts of immigration, including the potential emergence of hostile reactions. The Belgian media, like many others, extensively cover the topic of immigration, which has become a significant focal point in major journals. This was particularly evident during 2015 and 2016, when a large influx of Syrians sought refuge in the European Union, escaping the war in their homeland. More recently, the media's attention has shifted towards individuals fleeing the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the conflict in Ukraine. Furthermore, the media has not only highlighted a "migratory crisis" but also shed light on a "reception crisis." This is due to the fact that Fedasil and its partner organizations have been unable to fully fulfill their duty to provide adequate reception, citing insufficient infrastructure to accommodate any more asylum seekers. As a result, hundreds of individuals have found themselves sleeping on the streets of Belgium, primarily in Brussels, the capital city. The media has extensively reported on this situation.

Given the controversial nature of immigration, its media portrayal is highly sensitive, encompassing various crucial societal themes such as inclusion, mobility, social divisions, and coexistence. The written media plays a significant role in shaping collective perceptions of otherness (Chusseau, 2020) and influencing the structure of public debates (Benson, 2018). Consequently, it becomes crucial to examine how the media frames these issues and the potential consequences of such framings. Therefore, the objective of this chapter is to analyze how two prominent francophone media newspapers frame asylum seekers and the current reception situation

in Belgium. The corpus spans from August 2021 to December 2022. The starting date was chosen following international events that resulted in a large number of people fleeing their country. The end date corresponds to the moment in which I started the ethnography reported in the last chapter. The method is borrowed from Rodney Benson (2018), who studied the representation of migrants in the press through the framings newspapers create. The articles were chosen from the two main francophone newspapers of Belgium, La Libre Belgique and Le Soir. Two kinds of framings are studied: the framings of the asylum seekers in the press and those of the reception system and the way Belgian authorities manage arrivals.

The fourth chapter adopts a different approach, using a micro perspective. The previous chapters focus on the way asylum seekers' reception is shaped and represented by institutional actors that are external to the experience of asylum seeking itself. Conversely, the last chapter focuses on the social agents that live the reception system in person: the asylum seekers. This part of the research is situated at the micro-level: it aims at describing and analyzing the lived experience of the system by them. Unfortunately, in the media as well as in the scientific literature, not often enough migrants' voices are heard in the research and articles that concern them.

To address this lack, I intend to place this research in a line of works that use a micro perspective on the topic, through qualitative methods. In order to do so, I conducted an ethnography in a reception center for asylum seekers, where I carried out an internship as part of my master's program in Mobility Studies. The center is managed by Fedasil, the Belgian federal reception institution. I adopted the participant observation method, as my role as an intern was to provide day-to-day assistance to residents of the center and organize integration activities. Furthermore, I conducted interviews with residents in order to consider their experience in the center, and the different strategies they put in place to cope with the structural violence and the social control under which the reception system puts them. I also interviewed some staff members of the center as key informants, in order to consider how the reception system is lived and perceived by them. After presenting the organization of the center and the description of it by asylum seekers and Fedasil's employees, I focus on the conflicting temporalities of asylum seekers' reception. By entering the reception system, asylum seekers enter a dominant regime of temporalities, that enters into conflict with their own. It also reproduces social control. Moreover, these temporal features are entangled with spatial features. The purpose of this ethnography is to underline the structural violence embedded in the reception system and its temporalities, and analyze how this experience is actually lived. Moreover, it aims at giving voice to the asylum seekers, to avoid victimization which leads to

massification and dehumanization, through showing their meaningful, active and productive experience of their temporalities in the reception center.

This research is conducted following the strong belief that asylum seekers' voices must be heard in the research concerning them. Moreover, the ethnography combined with the analysis of the policies and the press representations should render visible what is latent. The point is to underline the structural violence through which the reception system makes asylum seekers go, while not considering them as only victims but as human beings with rights and agency.

I. Asylum and Asylum Seekers Reception, Procedures and Policies

The asylum seekers' reception in Belgium is framed by different decrees and laws, both at the international and national levels. Belgium being a federalized state, the reception is managed by different institutional actors at the federal and local levels. This chapter aims at explaining the functioning of the Belgian reception system of asylum seekers. Particular attention will be paid to one major feature. We will focus on the extent to which the reception system – as the asylum policies shape it – respects human rights and moral integrity of the asylum seekers.

Thus, this chapter is situated at the macro level: a top-down perspective is adopted, focusing on asylum policies. The focus is on the political and legal system that is Belgian policies on asylum as well as on the European Union policies applied by Belgium regarding that matter. The scope is to understand how Belgian and the European Union frame asylum seekers' reception through their policy. Additionally, the official news of the different institutional actors that manage asylum and reception will be used to describe the recent changes in the reception system.

This chapter is divided into two main parts: first, we will briefly summarize the history of asylum seekers' reception and asylum procedure in Belgium, with a focus on the latest events; and second, we will concentrate on the institutional actors and the functioning of the reception system as laid down in the policies.

1. History of Asylum Seekers' Reception in Belgium

In 1951, 36 countries – among which was Belgium – adopted the Geneva Convention, relating to the status of refugees. The initial purpose of the Convention was to be used as a post-Second World War instrument to offer refuge to people displaced by the war and its aftermaths. Since then, its scope widened to include people fleeing persecution, now new ratifications have brought the total number of the States Party to 194. Most of them signed its additional protocols. The Geneva convention is at the core of refugee status determination in the European Union. It is grounded in the Universal Declaration of human rights of 1948, which expresses the right to seek asylum from persecution in other countries. The Convention had the scope to serve as an example, and stated

their hope that the right to asylum would exceed its initial boundaries and that states would grant refuge also to people that flee persecution but are not covered by the terms of the Convention.

Article 18 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union guarantees the right to asylum with due respect for the rules of the Geneva Convention, in accordance with the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

Belgian asylum policies are primarily based on the rules of the Convention. Additionally, the policies changed over the years. In 2011, one of the former general directors of the Belgian Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers, Bob Pleysier, stated that "asylum policy [was] born out of crises" (Pleysier, 2011). What Pleysier referred to as "crises" are periods in which the number of asylum seekers in Belgium exceeded what the Belgian government expected – or hoped – and, thus, had prepared for. Before what the media and political discourses framed as the "refugee crisis" of 2015-2016 and the current hosting crisis, Mescoli et al. (2019) counted four "crises". The first one took place in the 1980s. At that time, an explicit reception policy was almost nonexistent. Asylum seekers coming to Belgium would settle in a location of their choice and they would be taken care of by the local social welfare services (CPAS: Centre Public d'Action Sociale). Local governments expressed their disapproval, which resulted in the opening of the first collective reception center in Belgium – Petit-Château, in Brussels, which is still the arrival center. However, the space was not sufficient, and the Secretary of State for Equal Opportunities required the help of the Red Cross. Nowadays, a large part of the reception centers is still managed by the Red Cross. This moment signified the beginning of non-governmental organizations as major actors in the Belgian reception system.

The 1990s saw the occurrence of the second "crisis". The number of asylum seekers increased after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This increase pushed the lopsided reception system to change: the CPAS would intervene only if the reception centers could not manage the number of arrivals. Another increase in asylum applications took place as a consequence of the Kosovo war. This third "crisis" created new reception centers, and the CPAS would help in case of a surplus of arrivals. Moreover, the CPAS would cover a more important role in the reception system through the Local Reception initiative – a program aimed at offering individual accommodation to asylum seekers instead of financial support.

In 2002, as another result of the third "crisis", Fedasil (Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) was established, whose role was to coordinate the general reception network and to manage the reception centers.

Another important change in the reception system was signed by the implementation of the European directive for asylum seekers' reception, the Reception Act of 2007. This law guarantees the provision of material help for asylum seekers during the procedure, such as shelter, social, medical and psychological support, food, clothes, legal assistance, training and translation services.

In 2009, the Belgian government did not respect the reception Act of 2007 when it did not provide shelter to all asylum seekers on its territory. As a consequence, many had to sleep on the streets, or were hosted in hotels. This brought a large criticism toward the reception system by the media, but not only: it created tensions between the different parties of the government. From that moment, unlike before, only one government member was designated to carry the responsibility of migration and asylum policy.

In 2014, a restrictive approach to asylum policy was adopted by the Belgian government (Mescoli et al., 2019). Dissuasion campaigns were put into place to discourage people to seek asylum in Belgium, the government aimed at limiting family reunification and promoting voluntary return. Moreover, despite the fact that collective centers are more expensive due to the need for personnel, the government preferred them to individual accommodations.

In 2015, the number of arrivals put pressure on the reception system, and the Secretary of State Theo Francken initially reduced the number of applications per day to 150. As a result, people were forced to stay in the streets, causing NGOs to fill the gaps left by the government. "This kind of civil society initiatives have been interpreted in Belgium as replacing the government immobility" (Mescoli et al., 2019).

Nonetheless, during this period, Fedasil opened new reception centers. However, when the number of applications decreased in 2016, the government closed all the centers that are managed by private actors, as well as some federal ones.

> At the beginning of 2018, the decision was made that all recently opened collective reception centres would be closed; this was a purely political decision that did not take into account the quality of the reception centres, contrary to what Fedasil had advised. In September 2018 the government had to revise its decision, as the number of asylum applications had increased again since the summer of 2018 (Mescoli et al., 2019, p. 183).

Regarding the evolution of asylum applications (Maryns, 2006), before 1984 the numbers reached around 3 000. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, they increased: they went from 12 000 in 1990 up to 25 000 in 1993. In 2000, they had almost doubled, reaching 40 000 applications. The

government's hypothesis at the time was that Belgium had become an attractive country for asylum due to the financial support and the long shelter it provided. Consequently, in 2001, the implementation of the reception system changed, though the laws remained the same. The aim was to dissuade refugees from seeking asylum in Belgium. The financial support was canceled, the procedure time was reduced, the first-round selection process became more selective, and special attention was given to particular groups – in other words, they implemented a type of quota. The result was a decrease in the number of applications, which decreased back to 25 000. Later on, during the arrivals of 2015 described as a "mass" or a "wave" by the media, around 38 000 applications were filed (Eurostat, 2015). In comparison, around 20 000 people requested asylum in Belgium in 2021 (Eurostat, 2021), that is to say at the beginning of the current hosting crisis, and a bit less than 30 000 in 2022 (Eurostat, 2022).

In 2021 and 2022, the events in Afghanistan and Ukraine resulted in numerous asylum applications from these countries. These events caused the Belgian institutions governing asylum procedures and reception to implement some changes in their measures. They communicated these changes through their official news on their website.

The taking of power by the Talibans in Afghanistan in 2021 resulted in a lot of people fleeing the country, some of them coming to Belgium. Once again, this predictable arrival of displaced people put pressure on the reception system that had not been properly prepared. In August 2021, it was decided to temporarily suspend decisions on Afghan applicants. In early October, this measure was extended until November 15, 2021, and then to January 2022. The reason the General Commissioner gave was: "Like other EU countries, we did not have all the necessary information on the situation in Afghanistan[1]" (CGRA, "Politique Concernant l'Afghanistan"). When the Talibans took over, Belgium first granted subsidiary protection to those who did not fall under the Geneva Convention. It then suspended the decisions, to end up deciding in February 2022 that refugee status would be granted to those responding to the Convention's criteria, and that subsidiary protection would not be granted anymore due to the "security situation[2]" in Afghanistan (CGRA, "Afghanistan: Nouvelle Politique").

When the war in Ukraine broke out in February 2022, a large number of people fled the country. Following the Council of the European Union's decision, temporary protection was applied to the displaced people from Ukraine. According to Article 57 of the Belgian Act of 15 December 1980

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[1] Original text: "Comme d'autres pays de l'UE, nous ne disposions pas de toutes les informations nécessaires sur la situation en Afghanistan".
[2] Original text: "situation sécuritaire".

regarding access to the territory, residence, settlement and the removal of foreign nationals, "in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons", the targeted group would receive temporary protection. In this case, the Belgian federal institution that deals with the procedure is different. It is important to note here the difference between people fleeing Afghanistan and people fleeing Ukraine. On December 7, 2021, the Immigration Office wrote: "For persons wishing to come to Belgium, the normal residence procedures apply according to the rules in force today. [...] Your application will be judged on the merits (such as your link with Belgium and the fact that you are in immediate and personal danger)" (Belgian Immigration Office, "Afghanistan"). Conversely, three months later, temporary protection status is granted to Ukrainians and the Immigration Office stated: "The Immigration Office will examine the residence applications of these people with great care. Therefore, Ukrainians in Belgium **should not worry** if their residence permit expires in the next few weeks[3]" (Belgian Immigration Office, "Ukraine"). One can only note the difference in treatments and in tones, a difference that the Belgian government seems to make between asylum seekers from different states and cultural backgrounds.

Regarding the reception itself – material, medical, social and psychological support –, Fedasil wrote in September 2021 that they were looking to increase the number of reception centers.

> The pressure on the Fedasil network is due to multiple factors, such as the increase in asylum applications in Belgium, a loss of reception capacity following the floods [in Wallonia] last July, the resettlement of Syrian refugees, the extension of the length of stay in the centers and the repatriation operation from Afghanistan. In addition, the reception centers must reserve some of their spaces for Covid isolation[4]" (Fedasil, "Fedasil recherche des places d'accueil").

This kind of article stating how Fedasil is searching to have more facilities has become recurrent since the summer of 2021. Other articles inform on openings of new centers, some long-term ones and some temporary. In September 2022, the Bordet Center in Brussels opens its doors to asylum seekers who could not have a place at the arrival center. However, it acts firstly only as a night center, from 5 pm to 10 am. Other – temporary – solutions are put into place, such as the hosting of asylum seekers in touristic accommodations such as hostels (Fedasil, "Des mineurs accueillis à Ixelles"). In addition to the efforts to increase the number of reception places, the saturation of the Fedasil network resulted in the slowing down of the refugee resettlement program in Belgium

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[3] The terms "should not worry" are in bold in the original text.
[4] Original text: "La pression sur le réseau de Fedasil s'explique par de multiples facteurs, comme la hausse des demandes d'asile en Belgique, une perte de capacité d'accueil suite aux inondations en juillet dernier, la réinstallation de réfugiés syriens, le rallongement de la durée de séjour dans les centres et l'opération de rapatriement d'Afghanistan. De plus, les centres d'accueil doivent réserver une partie de leurs places pour l'isolement Covid."

(Fedasil, "La réinstallation de réfugiés est ralentie"). In parallel, several articles show the definitive differentiated channel for displaced Ukrainians: on the one hand, in the status determination as already stated, and, on the other hand, in the reception, with different arrival centers and different reception centers than for other asylum seekers. In October 2022, the hosting crisis reached the groups framed as more vulnerable by the authorities, i.e. families and unaccompanied minors. Consequently, some NGOs have proposed emergency solutions to provide a bed for those affected – solutions that were accepted and funded by Fedasil. Moreover, at the same time, a decision was taken to allocate 150 agents from other public services to Fedasil and its partners. A cry for help was sent to the institutions. The full use of the centers is indeed slowed down by the lack of personnel (Fedasil, "Du personnel externe pour Fedasil").

Furthermore, in addition to the implication of NGOs in the reception system, Fedasil calls on the private sector to participate:

> The four reception centers already managed by private companies (in Hasselt, Jalhay, Liège and Marcinelle) have been extended until 15 March 2023.

> The new public contract should make an additional 3,500 places available in April 2023 at the earliest. The reception is planned for a period of 1 year, which can be extended twice by 3 months[5] (Fedasil, "Accueil par le secteur privé").

In January 2023, following the non-respect of the laws related to the asylum seekers' reception stating that an asylum seeker has the right to shelter, material, medical, social and psychological support, the Belgian Ministry of Justice decided to proceed with the seizure and sale of a series of goods belonging to Fedasil. This follows the non-payment of standby duty to which Fedasil has been condemned several times.

To summarize the recent evolution of the Belgian reception system, there has been heavy pressure on reception, which led to three major consequences. First, numerous asylum seekers saw their right to shelter taken away by a non-prepared state, which resulted in them staying on the streets. Second, the asylum procedure and the reception system experienced some changes due to this pressure, mainly regarding two groups: Afghans and Ukrainians. On the procedure side, the status determination is differentiated for the two groups. On the reception side, the arrival and the shelter of the two groups were physically separated, Ukrainians having their own channel, while

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[5] Original text: "Concernant les quatre centres d'accueil qui sont déjà gérés par des sociétés privées (à Hasselt, Jalhay, Liège et Marcinelle), ils ont été prolongés jusqu'au 15 mars 2023.
Le nouveau marché public doit permettre la mise à disposition de 3.500 places supplémentaires, au plus tôt en avril 2023. L'accueil est prévu pour une durée d'1 an, prolongeable deux fois de 3 mois."

Afghans and other nationalities – Burundese, Palestinian, Congolese, etc. – were hosted in the regular Fedasil centers. Third, non-governmental actors – such as NGOs and private actors – were asked to help in the reception system, as well as government personnel that are not part of the agencies related to asylum.

Considering the history of asylum seekers' reception in Belgium, one can observe that what is framed as a "crisis" by the media and the government, resulted in changes in the asylum procedure and the reception; part of the changes in reception resulted in new centers opening. However, a considerable number of these new centers are temporary, and close after the end of the contract between Fedasil and the owners, or when the critical moment is considered over. Moreover, the government has the tendency, as it did in the past, to delegate its reception duty to non-governmental actors. Besides, Belgium has to periodically manage a number of requests that are framed as high, as the numbers showed, we did not reach an increase in asylum applications that was never seen before. As we will ask in the last part of this chapter: is this insufficient preparation part of structural violence, or is the Belgian state genuinely overwhelmed by events it could not have seen coming?

2. Belgian Asylum Seekers' Reception Policies and the Institutional Actors

First of all, to understand how reception is managed and governed in Belgium, one must understand the different levels of power in place. Belgium is a federal state; thus, the federal and regional governments have different responsibilities. The process of federalization in Belgium began in 1970, leading to the formal recognition of Belgium as a federal state in the 1993 constitution. Unlike most traditional federations, Belgium is the result of a federalism of disunity, rather than a process of union of entities joining together in a federation (Adam and Martiniello, 2016).

Belgium is divided into three linguistic communities, among which the francophone and the Flemish are the largest, with the Germanophone community being a small minority. Historically, there has always been linguistic tension between Walloons (from Wallonia, the southern part of Belgium) and Flemish (from Flanders, the northern part of Belgium). At the end of the 1960', because of the increasing linguistic divide, the traditional political parties split into French and Flemish variants, creating a two-party system. Moreover, apart from Brussels, the electorate of one linguistic community cannot vote for the political parties of the other (Adam and Martiniello, 2016).

The linguistic divide and, consequently, the federalization, was a matter of importance more for the Flemish part, which was led by a strong-rooted Flemish nationalism and a Walloon reaction to it. This shaped the political context on both sides of the linguistic border. As immigration and integration become more politicized in Flanders, Flemish political parties have gradually taken a firmer stand than French-speaking parties. Moreover, the French-speaking political context is still spared the presence of an extreme right-wing party that could pose a serious risk of competition. There could be two fundamental explanatory factors for the differences in integration policies between Flanders and Wallonia: the divergent politicization of immigration and integration and the strength of Flemish minority nationalism. Thus, the position on immigration becomes a determining factor in the choice of voters, in Flanders more than in the francophone part (Adam and Martiniello, 2016).

Going back to the structure of the Belgian federal state, the constitution starts with a statement on the division of Belgium into communities and regions. The federal state, the regions and the communities are the most important levels of power in the state. The Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels-Capital constitute the regions, they are socio-economic entities. Wallonia-Brussels, Flanders and German-speaking Communities compose the regions, they are cultural and linguistic entities. In Flanders, unlike in the south of the country, the Community and the Region overlap and blur the frontier between the two entities. Thus, the distinction is mainly theoretical.

The responsibility of the federal level is to be found in all matters concerning Belgian citizens. The regions being based on the territory, they are responsible for the so-called "territorial" matters. Finally, the communities being linguistic and cultural entities, they are responsible for matters relating broadly to people, such as education, health and culture. In matters of immigration and asylum, different levels of power are responsible: the European Union level, and the federal, regional, and community levels (Adam and Martiniello, 2016). At the federal level, five institutions play a role in the asylum procedure and reception. Chronologically, the Immigration Office is the first one that asylum seekers encounter, it is responsible for the initial check and it carries out the investigation of admissibility. This stage decides if the procedure is admissible for further investigation to grant refugee status. The Immigration Office performs the Dublin examination, i.e. if the applicant is the responsibility of another Member State of the European Union, because it might not be the applicant's first application for asylum. In that case, the Immigration Office checks if the applicant is bringing new and relevant elements to their request. At this stage, the process consists of a short statement and a standard questionnaire (Fedasil, "Cadre Légal").

The CGRS (Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless persons) is the federal institution that oversees the investigation of the merit of the application; it is the organ responsible for granting refugee status. The applicant gives an interview to the CGRS to specify the reasons for their asylum request, and the CGRS is the competent institution that grants or not international protection. While this investigation is ongoing, a temporary residence permit is given to the applicant.

Once they have applied for asylum to the Immigration Office, asylum seekers have the right to shelter, material, medical, psychological and social support. Fedasil, as mentioned above, is the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers and coordinates the reception system of all centers, including those managed by partners. It is also in charge of, if applicable, voluntary return. In case of denial of admission by the Immigration Office or of refugee status by the CGRS, asylum seekers have the right to appeal the decision. In the first case, the CGRS takes over the investigation from the Immigration Office. In the second case, appeals are handled by the Council for Alien Law Litigation and by the State Appeals Council. If the application gets definitively refused, the asylum seekers receive an order to leave Belgian territory.

The region level gets involved in reception as well: the regional institutions are competent in the integration of asylum seekers and refugees. The community level is theoretically not involved in reception, but is brought into it through its function, mainly in education, health and culture (Mescoli et al., 2019; Maryns, 2006; CGRS, "Cadre Légal" and Fedasil, "Cadre Légal"). With regard to the opening of new reception centers, the decision is at the federal level:

> The decision regarding the location of a collective reception centre is made by the Council of Ministers and proposed by the Secretary of State responsible for asylum and migration. The role of Fedasil in this decision-making process is limited. Equally, most of the municipalities involved have been allowed little or no participation or advice in the decision-making process concerning the opening of collective reception centres. Mayors are informed shortly before the opening of a centre by the Secretary of State (Mescoli et al., 2019, p. 180).

As already mentioned, the State is not the only actor in the asylum seekers' reception in Belgium: NGOs have a long history of compensating for the lack of places and/or support that the State does not give. The most present partner of the State in the reception is without a doubt the Belgian Red Cross. Since 1989, the Belgian Red Cross has been mandated by the Belgian government to provide shelter and support to asylum seekers. There is a partnership with Fedasil that provides an agreement on the budget, operational issues and quality assurance that the government provides to the NGO. This outsourcing of public services is part of the Belgian

tradition of pillarization (Mescoli et al., 2019; Croix Rouge Belgique, "Accueillir"). However, NGOs do not only cover the role of helper of the governmental reception system: they also pressure it to adapt, through policy influencers, pressure groups, events and demonstrations.

In order to fully comprehend the functioning of the reception system and asylum, one should look at the legal framework on which it is based. Fundamentally, the legal basis of the Belgian asylum procedure is to be found in the Geneva Convention of 1951. Thus, the CGRS bases its investigation and the granting of refugee status in accordance with the provisions of the Convention. In addition, it comprises texts from the European Union and Belgian transpositions and legal definitions. In the following paragraphs, three main texts will be discussed: the Geneva Convention, the Belgian Act of December 15, 1980, including the following protocols added to it over the years, regarding access to the territory, residence, settlement and the removal of foreigners, and the Reception Act of 2007.

The Geneva Convention provides for the case of a federal state such as Belgium, and states that a federal government is bound to the provisions of the Convention to the same extent as the Parties which are not federal states.

The Geneva Convention has two main features: its foundation in human rights and the definition of refugees. Seeking asylum is recognized as a right by the Universal Declaration of human rights of 1948. This is considered an inviolable right, and every signatory country should provide this right. The people who can benefit from it are designated as refugees, which definition is:

> 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 (Geneva Convention, 1951, Article 1).

In addition to the refuge a country should provide to people who experience this kind of persecution, the text stipulates that countries shall apply the Convention without discrimination as to sex, age, disability, sexuality, or other prohibited grounds of discrimination. This principle of non-discrimination is at the foundation of the Convention, together with the principles of non-penalization and non-refoulement. Non-penalization refers to the fact that asylum seekers and refugees should not be penalized if they used an irregular way to enter the country; this implies that the seeking of asylum can require people to bypass some immigration rules. In relation to the

principle of non-refoulement, it indicates the prohibition for a country to expel or return an asylum seeker or a refugee against their will to a territory where they have good reason to fear threats to their life or freedom.

The Geneva Convention is an old text, and it has been modified through protocols in order to make it up to date – notably with the Protocol of 1967, which extended the geographical area and the period that had been confined to Europe and to the events before 1951 that resulted in the displacement of people. Nonetheless, the Convention is still criticized for its outdated definitions, and for the narrowness of the definition of refugee, which does not cover all kinds of displacements. To partially remedy this, the European Union created in 2006 the subsidiary protection. The Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2011 aims at unifying the status for refugees and the subsidiary protection among the Member States, in order to lay down common criteria of qualification to grant international protection. International protection is the term that refers to the kind of protection provided to refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. According to the directive 2011/95/EU (Article 2.f):

> 'Person eligible for subsidiary protection' means a third-country national or a stateless person who does not qualify as a refugee but in respect of whom substantial grounds have been shown for believing that the person concerned, if returned to his or her country of origin, or in the case of a stateless person, to his or her country of former habitual residence, would face a real risk of suffering serious harm as defined in Article 15, and to whom Article 17(1) and (2) does not apply, and is unable, or, owing to such risk, unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country.

In other words, subsidiary protection comes into place to protect people who have also been displaced, but who do not answer to the Geneva Convention definition. This Directive from the European Parliament and the European Council, among other directives, is transposed to Belgian law. The so-called Belgian "Alien Act", i.e. the Act of December 15, 1980, regarding access to the territory, residence, settlement and the removal of foreign nationals, contains the definition for both these statuses. Moreover, article 48/4 lists the real risks intended in the EU Directive: death penalty, execution, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, punishment of the applicant in his or her home country, or a serious threat to the life of a civilian because of indiscriminate violence in internal or international armed conflict.

The "Alien Act" also lays down the responsibilities of the Immigration Office and the CGRS with regard to the special needs that an asylum seeker might require during the procedure.

Furthermore, it states exhaustively in which areas the CGRS is responsible. As stated before, the main role of this federal institution is to grant or refuse refugee status, but also the subsidiary protection status. If applicable, it can also abrogate such statuses or exclude the asylum seeker from international protection.

The Geneva Convention and the "Alien Act" mostly treat the determination of the refugee or beneficiary of subsidiary protection statuses. Along with other European and Belgian texts, they lay down the criteria for granting this status. Regarding the reception of asylum seekers though, they do not provide a lot of measures concerning this matter. In Belgium, as already said, the main federal institution overseeing reception is Fedasil. When someone wants to apply for asylum, they do so at the arrival center in Brussels, called "Petit-Château". The building is managed by Fedasil, however, a part of it is designated for the registration of asylum applications by the Immigration Office.

Fedasil's legal framework is based on the Belgian Law of January 12, 2007, on the reception of asylum seekers and other categories of foreigners. It constitutes the reference for asylum seekers' reception in Belgium. This law transposes the European Union directives 2003/9/EC and 2013/33/EU into Belgian law. These directives have two main goals: on the one hand, to ensure a dignified life for asylum seekers by setting minimum standards for their reception conditions, and, on the other hand, to harmonize these conditions in the different Member States of the European Union.

The Belgian law of January 12, 2007, is more commonly known as the "Reception Act". It aims at providing material support for applicants for international protection. This material assistance includes accommodation, meals, clothing, and medical, social and psychological support. Moreover, it comprises the granting of a daily allowance as well as access to legal aid, and services such as interpreting and training. Furthermore, Fedasil is also required to propose individual support for people who wish to use the assisted voluntary return program to their country of origin or to a third country in which they are admitted or authorized to stay. On this last point, Amandine Van Neste-Gottignies (2019) showed what a great emphasis is put on voluntary return communication by Fedasil. We will further interrogate this feature in the next section of this chapter.

In terms of shelter, Fedasil provides for collective centers that are managed by the federal institution or one of its partners. The accommodation allocated to an asylum seeker as well as the medical, social and psychological support should be decided in accordance with the individual needs of each individual. In terms of the duration of the stay in a reception center, an asylum seeker has the right to shelter and support for the whole duration of the asylum procedure, or for a period

of time a bit longer than the procedure itself. The right to material assistance begins when the application is filed and ends when the proceedings are finally closed. However, the benefit of this assistance can be extended under certain conditions.

Regarding the people who can benefit from Fedasil and its partners' assistance, the beneficiaries are asylum seekers, but not only. It entails also the family of the asylum seeker, the non-accompanied minors – MENA is the proper term used in Belgium (Mineur Étranger Non-Accompagné) –, and minors irregularly staying with their parents on the territory and whose state of need has been established by a public social action center (Fedasil, "Cadre Légal").

The Belgian Reception Act lays down some definitions. First of all, article 2 defines the asylum seeker as:

> A foreigner who has an application for asylum, with the aim of being recognized as a refugee or being granted subsidiary protection status[6].

So far, we have used different terms to refer to different categories of people in search of international protection: asylum seekers, international protection seekers, and subsidiary protection applicants. From now on, "asylum seekers" will be used as intended in the Reception Act, i.e. international protection seekers. In the Reception Act – and higher in these paragraphs –, the term "beneficiary" is sometimes used to designate those who receive the services of the reception system. However, from now on, we will refrain from using this term – except in the citation from legal texts incorporated in the thesis –, because of its participation in a logic of unilateral help to newcomers. This logic prevents a real consideration of what asylum seekers want and bring, and of their agency. Therefore, the term "asylum seekers" will be adopted for the rest of the thesis.

As well as the Geneva Convention, the European Directives and Belgian laws derived from it, the Reception Act is based on human rights. Article 3 states that "every asylum seeker has the right to be received in such a way as to enable him/her to lead a life in accordance with human dignity[7]". Further on, the article lays down the definition of the reception:

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[6] Original text: "l'étranger qui a une demande d'asile, ayant pour objectif soit la reconnaissance du statut de réfugié, soit l'octroi du statut de protection subsidiaire".
[7] Original text: "Tout demandeur d'asile a droit à un accueil devant lui permettre de mener une vie conforme à la dignité humaine".

Reception means material aid granted in accordance with this law or social aid granted by the public social action centers in accordance with the law of July 8, 1976 on the organization of the public social action centers[8].

Fedasil's role stops when social aid is granted by the public social action centers (CPAS), which happens when the designation of a reception structure ends or when the asylum seeker has been granted a temporary protection status or a residence permit of more than three months.

In case of "crisis" – i.e. when there is a higher number of arrivals than expected and the reception centers have no room left –, Article 18 provides that asylum seekers would be housed in an emergency shelter, from where they would have access only to limited social assistance. The article also states that:

The stay in such a facility can only be for a reasonable period of time, as short as possible, and the basic needs of the foster care recipient are met according to the assessment of his/her specific needs. These include all necessary assistance, such as food, accommodation, access to health facilities and medical support[9].

However, the law does not mention which kind of accommodation would be provided, or what is intended by a "reasonable period of time".

Regarding unaccompanied minors, the Reception Act provides a particular channel of reception for them. First of all, those who declare themselves minors but for which there is a doubt that they are under 18 years old have to take an age test. Moreover, their reception center is different: they are received in an observation and orientation center. It is interesting to note that the law does not provide information on what the observation and the orientation consist of. It actually refers to the observation of the unaccompanied minors in order to know their strengths, weaknesses, needs and their possible social or family network in Belgium. Along with the observations, several interviews are conducted by the social service provided by the center. Afterward, the MENA are oriented towards a reception structure that is the most adapted to their needs and where they can stay throughout their minority. They should stay in the observation and orientation center for a period between four and six weeks.

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[8] Original text: "Par accueil, on entend l'aide matérielle octroyée conformément à la présente loi ou l'aide sociale octroyée par les centres publics d'action sociale conformément à la loi du 8 juillet 1976 organique des centres publics d'action sociale."

[9] Original text: "Le séjour dans une telle structure peut uniquement avoir lieu pour une période raisonnable aussi courte que possible et les besoins fondamentaux du bénéficiaire de l'accueil y sont rencontrés en fonction de l'évaluation de ses besoins spécifiques. Ceux-ci comprennent toute l'assistance nécessaire, et notamment la nourriture, le logement, l'accès aux facilités sanitaires et l'accompagnement médical."

The Reception Act also provides for sanctions that can be taken against the asylum seeker or the reception center. If the asylum seeker seriously breaches the rules and the regulations applicable in the center, he might face a penalty that should be chosen in accordance with the nature and importance of the breach and the circumstances surrounding it. On the other hand, if the center or one of its collaborators breach the reception provisions, the asylum seeker has the right to file a complaint to the director of the reception structure. The complaint can refer to the living conditions in the center or the application of internal regulations.

It is interesting to note that the Reception Act lays down the provisions for an outsourced reception system; as a matter of fact, Articles 62 and 64 guarantee it. Article 62 gives the right to the Belgian institutions to delegate through conventions parts of their duty to partners, including non-governmental organizations such as the Belgian Red Cross, but also other public authorities and associations. In addition to these delegations, Article 64 grants the right to public social action centers to organize a community or individual reception structures, with a view to providing material assistance to asylum seekers.

> These reception structures, known as local reception initiatives, are the subject of an agreement between the public social action center and the Agency[10].

To sum up this section, we can say that Belgium is a federal state governed by different levels of power. Due to the historical differences between the Regions and the Communities, asylum seekers' reception is not conceived in the same way on the different sides of the linguistic frontiers. However, federal institutions play a major role in the asylum procedure and in the reception. Belgian legal framework of asylum and reception is mainly a transposition of the Geneva Convention of 1951, which has a human rights purpose in its core, and European directives. This legal framework provides for an asylum seekers' reception that is intended to be humane – "in accordance with human dignity". However, some loopholes might be found in it. First of all, the asylum category does not cover each category of persons fleeing their country. The addition of the subsidiary status in 2006 managed to enlarge the international protection purpose. However, the combined scopes of the asylum and the subsidiary protection remain narrow – what about the people who flee a kind of persecution that is not laid down on the list, or if they flee environmental issues, or a country that is considered a "safe third country"? The language used in the legal framework is also questionable – beneficiaries, alien, safe third country. Furthermore, the federal institutions' delegation of their reception duty to non-governmental actors also poses questions.

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[10] Original text: "Ces structures d'accueil, désignées initiatives locales d'accueil, font l'objet d'une convention conclue entre le centre public d'action sociale et l'Agence".

Finally, some terms, such as "emergency shelter", or "reasonable period of time", are quite broad, and are subject to interpretation – not always in favor of asylum seekers... The next section will view more into details how the reception system is conceived and how it does not always answer the "human dignity" it is intended to provide.

II. The Reception System Facing Human Rights and Temporalities

The previous chapter focused on the extent to which the asylum and reception policies respect human rights and moral integrity of the asylum seekers. In this chapter, we will observe the (non-)respect of human rights and the temporalities by highlighting some particular features of the policies.

The focus on temporality and its consequences for asylum seekers is limited to theoretical considerations and insights from the scientific literature on the topic. An in-deep, bottom-up analysis of asylum seekers' perspective on temporality will occupy the third chapter, concentrating on ethnographic data collected in an asylum seekers' reception center in Brussels.

1. Structural Violence in the Belgian Asylum System?

Structural violence is a useful concept to analyze how asylum seekers could be discriminated against and/or how the violation of human rights and human dignity can be insidiously embedded in the way the reception system itself is structured.

Structural violence as an embedded feature of the asylum procedure has been studied by several scholars. As we will see later, this structural violence is to be found in the conflicting temporalities, among other characteristics, of the asylum request and the asylum seekers. But before entering the topic of temporalities, scholars have highlighted violations of human dignity in the asylum procedure in Belgium and in the reception.

Structural violence "refers to the systematic ways in which social structures or social institutions harm or otherwise disadvantage local individuals. [It] is often invisible and lacking one specific person who can (or will) be held responsible" (Robbins et al., 2017, p. 216). Structural violence is embedded in political, legal, social and economic forces, such as institutionalized racism and sexism.

> Social inequalities based on race or ethnicity, gender, religious creed, and — above all — social class are the motor force behind most human rights violations. In other words, violence against individuals is usually embedded in entrenched structural violence" (Farmer, 2003, p. 219).

Slavoj Žižek, in *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, joins Robbins et al. and Farmer in his understanding of violence as inherent in a system: this does not only concern direct physical violence but more subtle forms of power and exploitation relations as well. He distinguishes three forms of violence. First, a subjective one like crime and terror, which is enacted by social agents. Second, an objective one: racism, hate-speech, discrimination, and symbolic violence embodied in the language. And third, a systemic one: the effects of political and economic systems (Žižek, 2008). Structural violence, as Robbins et al. and Farmer intend it, can include both objective and systemic forms of violence (Zotto, 2022).

Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes argue that structural violence can be seen in poverty, hunger, social exclusion and humiliation, and that it translates into intimate and domestic violence. They insist on the fact that the power and the meaning of violence are first acquired in its social and cultural dimensions. They highlight the concept of a continuum of violence, which comprises "a multitude of small wars and invisible genocides conducted in the normative social spaces" (Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes, 2004). This continuum is present in class, ethnicity and gender inequalities. This concept underscores how we are able to reduce socially vulnerable people to non-persons, implicitly agreeing to their oppression. It encompasses racial social exclusion, dehumanization and reification toward others (Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes, 2004; Zotto, 2022).

Jacynthe Mazzocchetti (2017) studied the violence of borders, both geopolitical and symbolic, which can be seen through the procedures related to asylum requests (in the initial request, in appeals, refusals...). She highlighted the ethnocentrism of asylum procedures. This ethnocentrism is to be understood especially in relation to the biographical narrative that the asylum seekers have to perform for the interview with the CGRS. This investigation is supposed to distinguish between those who can be recognized as refugees, and those who cannot. However, the interpretation of these categories relies on an imagined stereotypical conception. Considerations on the constructed nature of these categories, as well as the highly political feature of the Geneva Convention, are erased from the procedure, as if the criteria were neither situated in time nor related to economic, political or geostrategic contexts.

Mazzocchetti (2017) strongly criticizes this inconsideration, which she calls "ethnocentrism of asylum procedure". She explains how biased the interviews are conducted by the CGRS. The interview consists of the presentation by the asylum seeker of their story, arguing their need for protection by constructing a biographical narrative and by bringing any material evidence that may support their case, such as identification papers, medical certificates, journal articles, etc. To

interpret the asylum seeker's story and to evaluate its credibility, the CGRS' agents rely on the information at their disposal about the origin country, such as the research conducted by the CGRS' research center, or reports from UN institutions, Council of Europe institutions, NGOs, etc. To analyze the credibility of the biographical narrative, the agents use mainly the prism of "plausibility" and "coherence" criteria. Especially in case of a lack of material evidence, the narrative plays a key role.

Mazzocchetti (2017) conducted an ethnography with an asylum seeker in Belgium who saw his asylum application being denied for "origin fraud". Ali was not able to answer the questions concerning the geography of his region in Afghanistan.

> The fact that we are dealing with a young man, a shepherd and illiterate at the time, does not seem to be acceptable at all. […] Indeed, Ali's knowledge of his environment does not correspond to the knowledge recorded[11] (Mazzocchetti, 2017, p. 104).

Moreover, Ali was asked to pass a biometrical test (an age test), because he declared himself as a minor. Mazzoccheti points out how those tests – approved, as we saw, under European and Belgian laws – can reveal themselves unreliable. The age determination is not a criteria for asylum *per se*, but it organizes the reception, dividing the categories considered vulnerable from the others. Furthermore, these tests are ethnocentric, based on a Western conception of age. They are Western-centric in the consideration that science is the major truth and that the reference is a Western white man.

Van Neste-Gottignies and Mistiaen (2019) also studied the structural violence embedded in asylum procedures and reception in Belgium. They focus on the communication practice in the reception centers in Belgium. They slide the focus from media, policies and politics of asylum to the actual information that is given to asylum seekers. Mainly, they concentrate on the communication of Fedasil to asylum seekers. Fedasil is almost entirely distinct from the State – no political decision is made by the agency, they are separated from the investigation, which is conducted by the CGRS. However, its financial resources come mainly from the State, and it remains under the authority of the State Secretary of Asylum and Migration. "Although somewhat independent, it must abide by the guiding principles of the powers that be" (Van Neste-Gottignies and Mistiaen, 2019, p. 124).

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[11] Original text: " Le fait d'avoir face à soi un jeune homme, berger et analphabète à l'époque, ne semble aucunement recevable. [...] En effet, les connaissances qu'Ali a de son milieu ne correspondent pas aux connaissances consignées."

Van Neste-Gottignies and Mistiaen (2019) come to the conclusion that Fedasil's communication to asylum seekers about reception and asylum procedures is hardly visible. As a matter of fact, the availability of information is pretty scarce. Moreover, this lack of information is also to be understood by the public to which the chosen terms are destined. Indeed, the communication tools on reception do not seem to be designed for asylum seekers, which results in oral transmission of the information. As a consequence, the information one asylum seeker gets might not be the same as another one, depending on the social worker communicating it. "In this context, informing remains an additional favour granted by the host country to its guests rather than a right" (Van Neste-Gottignies and Mistiaen, 2019, p. 123).

This inequality in information reinforces the power asymmetry that is inherent to the relations between the asylum and reception institutions and asylum seekers. Moreover, Van Neste-Gottignies and Mistiaen (2019) underline the imbalance between the lack of information on asylum procedure and reception, and the emphasis on the voluntary return program.

> While return programmes are coordinated by Fedasil by law, one can ask themselves why the latter puts a great emphasis on voluntary return communication rather than on the organisation main activity: reception (Van Neste-Gottignies and Mistiaen, 2019, p. 123).

This participates in information precarity and follows the will and priority put forward by Belgian institutions. The emphasis on the voluntary return program is to be seen in the bigger quantity of information and the more friendly interface of the website treating this topic, as well as in the positive illustration stories. This proves how unwanted asylum seekers are by these institutions. Furthermore, there is a difference in communication based on the country of origin. Indeed, a distinction is made between those considered legitimate refugees – answering to an ideal figure – and those who are not. Those considered illegitimate are more encouraged to go back to their origin country, even if those countries are considered dangerous. This was the case in the former Secretary of State Theo Francken's discourse, encouraging people from Afghanistan and Iraq to use the voluntary return program.

Furthermore, taking a look at the official news of the different institutional actors that manage asylum and reception might be useful to analyze to what extent asylum seekers' reception and asylum procedure in Belgium follow the Geneva Convention and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. First, as stated before, the Geneva Convention is based on the fundamental principle of non-discrimination. This principle is also stated in Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. However, as seen with the differentiated

channels of the asylum procedure and reception for Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians, this principle is undermined. Two sets of events that created a "mass influx of displaced persons" – terms used in the Belgian "Alien Act" – have resulted in two very different managements of the asylum requests – offering temporary protection to Ukrainians and suspending asylum requests for Afghans.

Moreover, the Convention's stipulation of non-penalization for an illegal entry or stay gets challenged by the imaginaries to which Van Neste-Gottignies and Mistiaen (2019) refer. Indeed, the issue with irregular entry is that it might contribute to the imaginary of the "non-ideal figure of the refugee".

Finally – and it might be the biggest violation of both the Geneva Convention and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union –, Fedasil and the other reception organizations in Belgium have been experiencing a shortage of spots in the reception center. Consequently, the Belgian government is not answering to its duty of asylum seekers' reception. This brought thousands of asylum seekers to sleep on the street, or to stay in informal *squats*[12]. The Belgian Ministry of Justice and the European Court for Human Rights both condemned Fedasil thousands of times in the past two years for this breach of human rights. However, Nicole de Moore, the current Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration refused to pay the fines that Fedasil received (Fedasil's Intranet).

2. Conflicting Temporalities in Asylum Policies and Reception

Over the years, migration scholars have adopted different perspectives to study the migratory phenomena. As Baas and Yeoh show (2019), migration studies have adopted different focuses throughout time. They sum up the latest years of the history of the discipline: from an interest in the push- and pull-factors influencing migration, scholars have then focused on the concept of transnationalism. The publication of the article about the new mobility paradigm by Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2006) challenged migration studies with new questions and a new perspective. This new paradigm not only highlights the various mobilities, but also their paradoxes with the moorings. It is important to note that Sheller and Urry underline the power relations embedded in im/mobility.

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[12] *Squat* in French refers to the occupation of a place with a view to habitation without the agreement of the legal owner of the place. Legally it is an occupation without right or title, the squat is therefore illegal. By extension, squat refers to the place thus occupied.

The new mobilities paradigm has been particularly influential in migration research with regard to questions of who is able to migrate, under what conditions, and how discussions in receiving nations have often centred on deeply neoliberal notions of economic nationalism where migrants are valorized according to the benefits they bring to the nation-state (Baas and Yeoh, 2019, p. 163).

Recently, the lens of temporalities has interested migration scholars. Already in 2001, in his article "The Time of Migration", Saulo Cwerner pointed out how the aim of disciplining is at the center of immigration policies. His concept of "heteronomous times" underlines the fact that, to some extent, migrants are not in charge of their own time. Immigration policies require them to wait, to put their life on hold, and let them see only a blurry future.

Beyond the loss of control over their own time, Robertson (2014) refers to the intersections between the pace imposed on migrants and their biographic time, i.e. the imaginaries of their own temporalities and the lived time. These concepts challenge those of linearity and unidirectionality that might have been seen in the past in migration studies and in migration imaginaries.

With regard to refugees and asylum seekers, several scholars focused on the act of "waiting" as a disciplinary method used by immigration policies, which can be lived as a suspended or transitional time (Baas and Yeoh, 2019; Mitchell, 2022; Ahmad, 2008; Conlon, 2011; Elliot, 2016; Griffiths, 2014; Villegas, 2014).

Katharyne Mitchell (2022) notes that human geography, the social sciences in general, and especially migration studies have experienced over the past 10 years a revival in the interest in time and temporalities. In migration studies, the focus of temporalities has been mainly on mobility, borders and asylum.

In addition to the clear geopolitical forces at play in controlling migrant movement, numerous scholars also highlight the multiple ways that states attempt to rationalize, integrate, govern, and coordinate migrant temporalities in concert with the dynamics of capital accumulation (Mitchell, 2022, p. 1).

Mitchell (2022) notes a second major trend: the migration scholars that study temporalities also have been interested in the lived experience of the time by migrants. This trend focuses on the constitution of migrants and asylum seekers as subjects across different times and different spaces, throughout the constraints, the constant changes and the pace of everyday life.

Other perspectives have been adopted at the crossroad of temporalities and migration. Feminism is one of them. Deirdre Conlon (2011) adopted this interdisciplinary lens to study the time and space of migrants' mobilities and immobilities. She focuses on how waiting is inscribed in regional and international geopolitics and the integration of this act into migrants' life, as well as their resistance to it. She argues that the emphasis on feminism and mobility studies on this topic can bring new valuable questions and insights.

Alice Elliot (2016) focused on the production of different kinds of subjects in the world through the act of waiting that migration policies require. Specifically, she focuses on these productions through transnational movements of emigrants from Morocco. She highlights how the process of waiting is not only a feature of migration, but also a parameter in the constitution of subjects.

As Mazzocchetti (2017) and Van Neste-Gottignies and Mistiaen (2019), Orsini et al. (2022) also studied the structural violence embedded in asylum procedures and reception in Belgium. Along with Belgium, they studied the day-to-day violence in Lybia, Italy and Greece within Europe's governance of migration. Over the years, migration has been more and more considered a top security issue by European institutions. Policy tools and an increasingly complex administrative procedure have been developed, along with the creation of reception facilities. Orsini et al. categorize them as control tools of asylum seekers. The European Union's governance of migration reproduces an unequal distribution of power, suffered by unwanted migrants as discriminated groups. Orsini et al. highlight the five categories of violence laid down by Kara Dempsey (2020): physical, verbal, psychological, sexual, and nonlinear ("disrupted potential for a life with some stability and growth/life integrity"). This violence takes place across three spaces: the origin country, transitional states, and EU host states.

Orsini et al. focus on two key moments: the crossing of international borders and the effort of accessing international protection or obtaining legal status for unwanted migrants. Among other things, they highlight how controlling the temporalities of asylum seekers is one of the key-purpose to Europe's governance of migration. It participates in a strategy of controlling their arrival and stay, which is embedded in the legal and administrative procedures of asylum, "whose function is to slow down, divert, or even revert migration" (Orsini et al., 2022, p. 261). It is part of the so-called "politics of exhaustion", i.e. "a form of violence impeding migrants' achievement of their migratory plans and aspirations" (Orsini et al., 2022, p. 261). The point is to take away the control of the temporality of asylum seekers' life.

This kind of violence is an inherent part of the inequality embedded in the structure of asylum procedure and reception. Thus, it is considered structural violence, which is to be found in the actions of different social and institutional actors, such as law enforcement agents, the personnel of reception and detention centers, and the smugglers. "The day‑to‑ day (arbitrary) decisions of these actors often translate into the systematic use of violence on unwanted migrants" (Orsini et al., 2022, p. 262). The moments/spaces in which the asylum seekers might be more vulnerable and exposed to violence are within the junctures, i.e. the transitions, such as the transition from one country to another, or from one legal status to another – which can also be the lack of legal status.

Van Neste-Gottignies and Mistiaen (2019) also highlighted the violence that can be found in the management of the conflicting temporalities in the asylum procedure and reception. In particular, they insist on the disturbance of the asylum seekers' psychological time through the quantity of information given about voluntary return, way before the communication of the final decision about the granting of the refugee or subsidiary protection status. Several factors create a temporality of confusion for the asylum seeker, such as the struggle to leave the origin country, the events that happen on the way to the arrival country, and the sudden changes of a social, cultural and linguistic nature at the arrival. In front of these factors, the discourse on the prospect of return might seem impossible. Moreover, this can break the confidence between the asylum seeker and their social worker, who represents the canal of information.

> Political discourse tries to impose its vision of reception on social workers by interfering in their relations with asylum seekers, as illustrated by the letters sent by the Secretary of State. Fedasil — who has to respect political guidelines — exerts some pressure on people in direct contact with asylum seekers to orientate their work in a particular way. In this context, social workers cope with a paradoxical position: reception and support on the one hand, encouraging return on the other. In practice, they adapt their discourses to resist institutional and political injunctions (Van Neste-Gottignies and Mistiaen, 2019, p. 137).

Ruben Andersson (2014) considers that waiting is a management technique used by state institutions and bureaucracies. He states that "authorities engage in an active usurpation of time for the purpose of migration control" (Andersson, 2014, p. 796). He goes further, assimilating these practices to the testimony of the consideration of insignificance: by exercising their power of making migrants wait, state institutions waste migrants' time arbitrarily or simply negate it.

3. Belgian Timing Policies for Asylum Seekers

When one takes a look at the temporalities planned by the asylum policies and the reception of asylum seekers, two features seem evident. On the one hand, a part of the procedures has a precise time frame, with a defined number of days, months or years, and eventual prolongations. On the other hand, another part is set in undefined terms, without any mention of a number of days, months or years.

Regarding the application for asylum, the Belgian "Alien Act" of 1980 provides that a foreigner who wants to file for international protection should do so when they enter the state, or at least within eight working days after entering. For those who have legally entered Belgium for a stay not exceeding three months, they must submit an application for international protection before the end of the stay (Article 50).

According to European Directives 2011/95/EU and 2013/32/EU, asylum seekers have to submit "as soon as possible" (2011/95/EU, Article 4) the documents supporting their application (about age, background, identity, nationality, previous residence, previous asylum applications, travel routes, travel documents, reasons for applying). Moreover, they "shall be informed of the time frame" (2013/32/EU, Article 12) at their disposal for the submission of these documents. According to the Belgian "Alien Act" of 1980, the appropriate authorities should register the asylum request within three days after the application. However, this period can be extended in the case of a large number – which is not specified – of simultaneous requests.

This is the moment where the waiting comes into play – at least in regard to Belgian asylum procedures and reception, since asylum seekers are very likely to have experienced waiting at other moments along their migratory trajectory. According to Directive 2013/32/EU, asylum seekers should receive the notice concerning the decision in a "reasonable time" (Article 12) and "Member States shall ensure that the examination procedure is concluded *as soon as possible*[13]" (Article 31). Further, it is specified that the examination should not take more than six months after registering of the application.

However, the policies provide for eventual cases that would change the temporality of the procedure or the reception. This period of six months for the maximum time of the examination can be extended to not more than nine months in case of:

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[13] The italic was added by the author.

(a) complex issues of fact and/or law are involved;

(b) a large number of third-country nationals or stateless persons simultaneously apply for international protection, making it very difficult in practice to conclude the procedure within the six-month time limit;

(c) where the delay can clearly be attributed to the failure of the applicant to comply with his or her obligations (Directive 2013/32/EU, Article 31).

The same article provides for a further extension of this period of nine months if the situation in the origin country is uncertain and thought to be temporary. In this case, the appropriate Member State should:

(b) inform the applicants concerned *within a reasonable time*[14] of the reasons for the postponement;

(c) inform the Commission *within a reasonable time*[15] of the postponement of procedures for that country of origin (Directive 2013/32/EU, Article 31).

The total period for the examination should not exceed twenty-one months from the application.

"A foreigner who submits an application for international protection [...] must elect domicile in Belgium[16]" (1980 "Alien Act", Article 51/2). If they wish to use these provisions, asylum seekers have the right to shelter in one of Fedasil's reception centers or Fedasil's partners'. The shelter, material and medical support, social and psychological assistance, last the time of the procedure of the application for international protection or a little longer. The right to material assistance begins when the application is filed and ends when the procedure is finally closed.

In case of a high number of requests, the Belgian Reception Act provides for emergency shelter for a "reasonable period as short as possible[17]" (Reception Act, Article 18).

Furthermore, as stated in the "Alien Act" (Article 49/3), an application for international protection "is automatically considered a priority under the Geneva Convention[18]". One can wonder what the term "priority" entails in this case. As a matter of fact, measures have been taken in Belgium's examination procedures to primarily consider the files on top of the pile. Thus, the latest

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[14] The italic was added by the author.
[15] The italic was added by the author.
[16] Original text: "L'étranger qui introduit une demande de protection internationale [...] doit élire domicile en Belgique."
[17] Original text: "période raisonnable aussi courte que possible".
[18] Original text: "est d'office examinée en priorité dans le cadre de la Convention de Genève".

applications are examined in priority, which postpones the examination of those filed before. Consequently, the Belgium Government often does not follow the total of twenty-one months as the maximal time for the application.

Overall, three main features are to highlight in this focus on temporality in asylum and reception policies. First, emergency is inscribed in law. Second, some terms about the temporality of the asylum procedures are undefined, which makes space for loopholes. Lastly, the procedure can be postponed or extended, as inscribed in law, and even sometimes overflows the set extensions. These three elements are likely to cause uncertainty and a sentiment of wasted time, which can lead to psychological distress, by disturbing the biographical time of the asylum seekers. This is part of the structural violence described at the beginning of this section. The Belgian institutions in charge of asylum and reception are structured around policies that are very likely to cause these uncertainties.

III. Media Analysis: the Framing of Asylum Seekers and of the Reception Situation

1. Immigration and Asylum in the Media

In recent years, immigration has become a recurrent topic in the media, a quite divisive one. It is raising complex policy issues in Western democracies and triggering strong emotional reactions from the media, the politics and the public. In his book about the shaping of the image of immigration by the media, Rodney Benson (2018) asked the question: "Are they up to the task?". In his work, Benson deplores the current commercial and political scope of the media, and he argues for a journalistic field that would be structured around civic-cultural objectives. Consequently, the debate should not be on the tendency of the media to be for or against immigration, but on their role to explain its causes and consequences, as well as the hostile reactions it can generate.

The media in Belgium are no exception, and the topic of immigration occupies a large part of the main journals. It was especially true in 2015 and 2016, when a large number of Syrians fled the war in their country and came to seek asylum in the European Union. More recently, the media have focused a lot on people fleeing the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the war in Ukraine. Moreover, they have been writing not only about a "migratory crisis", but also about a "reception crisis". As a matter of fact, Fedasil and its partner are not completely answering their reception duty, arguing that their infrastructures are not able to host any more asylum seekers. Consequently, hundreds of people find themselves sleeping in the streets of Belgium, mainly in Brussels, the capital, and the media have been writing about it extensively.

Immigration tends to be a controversial topic; therefore, its media coverage is sensitive. It concerns different core social themes, such as inclusion[19], mobility, social fracture and living together. Written media plays a significant role in the formation of collective imagination on otherness (Chusseau, 2020), as well as in the structuration of the public debate (Benson, 2018). For this reason, it is important to study such framings by the media, and the consequences they might have. Therefore, this chapter aims at analyzing the way two major francophone media frame asylum seekers and the current reception situation in Belgium. First of all, it will focus on the state of the

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[19] We will prefer the term "inclusion" to the controversial analog term "integration".

art in the media coverage of the representations of asylum seekers, especially in Belgium. Second, it will explain the Belgian context in which the chosen articles take place: on the one hand, the journalistic field in Belgium; and, on the other hand, the recent migratory context, from August 2021 with events in Afghanistan to December 2022. Third, it will present the method for the choice of the articles and their analysis, which is based on a mixed approach of discourse analysis and corpus linguistics. Finally, it will present the analysis of the articles and the discussions.

2. State of the Art

2.1. Why Study the Printed Press?

Although social media might be relevant in this field, the printed press remains a key reference in the way media can shape common representations and public discourse. As Myria Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017, p. 4) put it in the Council of Europe report about media coverage of the so-called "refugee crisis" of 2015-2016:

> While social media have also played a significant role in exchanging information across Europe and beyond (including among refugees themselves and as a link to the countries of origin), mainstream media's informational role remains paramount. Mainstream media still constitute key and trusted resources for officials and publics to make sense and take action in the course of events.

They also argue that focussing on the quality press is quite relevant as it plays a role in public affairs. As a matter of fact, it influences the political agendas and the politicians and policymakers, and the public considerations on what can be legitimate. Benson (2018) insists on how the media also shapes the public's agenda, and not only reflects social reality. Indeed, they actively influence the public's representations in their choice of topics and events to describe, those to minimize, and those they overlook.

Chusseau (2020) also supports the analysis of the printed press, mainly because of the legitimacy of its discourse. The main printed journals tend to be the ones with the greatest symbolic capital, therefore to be the ones considered the most legitimate. This legitimacy is built through the readership contract, which is the symbolic relationship between the journal and its readers. If the public reads a discourse that potentially corresponds to its needs, it will come back to this journal.

Thus, the readers will progressively consider the discourse of the journal legitimate, and this discourse will shape their worldview (Marty, 2010).

From a more general point of view, discourse is worth studying because of the viewpoint that its denominations carry. They are "an open battlefield for social actors who try to impose their own meaning or agenda" (Calabrese and Mistiaen, 2017 p. 213). They determine the conditions for the existence of social phenomena, since they are made out of discourse. Social actors, when creating a discourse - and journalists, when writing an article -, have a wide and available resource of lexical and syntactic elements. The choice they make to build their discourse is relevant to their worldview and the way they will shape a particular topic for their interlocutor or public. These choices are generated by their ideological and social position, and could also be a consequence of their professional routine in the case of journalists (Calabrese and Mistiaen, 2017).

2.2. Representation of Immigration in the Printed Press

In their report on media representation of immigrants for the Council of Europe, Myria Georgiou and Rafal Zaborowski (2017) noted how academic literature on this topic highlights the importance of media for, on the one hand, public representation of inequalities in social relations, and, on the other hand, cultural power. Through these representations, the public gets a sense of identity and otherness, to whom "we" and "they" refer. Moreover, they underline the tendency of the academic literature to focus on the stigmatization of migrants, refugees and other minorities, "which may result in prejudice and discriminatory attitudes against individual representatives of such groups and the rejection of cultural diversity altogether" (Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017, p. 5).

Conversely, Benson (2018) noted how the representation of immigration in the printed press tended to be overlooked by migration scholars. Their preferences are more worn on macro-social factors, such as political discourse, the focus on a post-Fordist economy, and a concentration on structural racism and discrimination. Nevertheless, Benson's idea of an absence of media analysis concerning immigration is not completely verified when one looks at the literature. Very recently, Carlos Arcila Calderón and Andreas Veglis edited *Migrants and Refugees in Southern Europe beyond the News Stories* (2023), which examines how migration is portrayed in news media and social platforms in Spain, Italy, and Greece. They involve analyzing the frames used in news photographs depicting migrants and refugees in relevant news outlets, conducting a computational study to identify online hate speech related to racism and xenophobia on social media, and

conducting a thorough qualitative evaluation to understand the perceptions of journalists specializing in migration regarding the relationship between migration and journalism. Furthermore, Erik Bleich, Irene Bloemraad and Els de Graauw (2015) published an article in which they reassess the role of media in advancing a field, migration studies, that has traditionally relied on other forms of data. They present a wide range of new research that demonstrates how media analysis contributes to our understanding of migrants and minorities in the public sphere.

In his book *Shaping Immigration*, Benson chose to focus on the media framings of immigration, arguing that the role of media is not only to reflect society, but that they play an active role in the constitution of the public debate. His scope was to answer two questions: how has the news media covered immigration in France and in the United States? And how has this coverage varied according to media ownership, audiences, and professional practices?

His research follows Bourdieu's field theory, for which a field is a professional and organizational space where external constraints are mediated. Journalism is considered one of these semi-autonomous institutional fields: in Western democracies, journalism is to some degree autonomous from the state and the market, and it is structured around its own structural rules that its actors follow more or less consciously. However, Benson's theory contrasts with Bourdieu. Bourdieu's field theory is structured around two kinds of power, the cultural and economic ones. The first one is considered autonomous, and the second one heteronomous. Moreover, the economic one exercises some kind of pressure on the cultural fields. Conversely, for Benson, there is no autonomous power, but two heteronomous poles in society: a civic one and an economic. The field of journalism negotiates its rules between those two poles. His field theory is at the intersection between macro and micro considerations: the semiotic analysis is not cut out from social significations and the political and economic analysis does not reduce press discourses to social determinism. In this way, he is able to analyze complex interactions at the crossroads of civic power, structural rules of the field and market dynamics (Benson, 2018).

Starting from his field theory, he answers his research question: he created his own method based on the principle of frames, which he defines as the selective perception of a phenomena, in this case migration. He tackled the different frames of immigrants by the media in three main categories: the victim, the hero and the threat frames. He divides each frame into three or four main features. First, the victim description of immigrants splits into the "global economy" frame - which underlines the world's inequalities -, the "humanitarian frame" - which highlights the social, political and economic suffering of the migrants -, and the "racism frame", which focuses on discrimination.

Second, the hero description is divided into three frames: the "cultural diversity" one, the "integration" and the "good worker". Finally, Benson tackles four categories in the description of migrants as a threat: the "job", the concern for "public order", the "taxes" considerations and the "national cohesion". His main conclusions were that two main frames are the most recurrent in the printed press: the "humanitarian" one and the "public order" (Benson, 2018).

His theory of the frames of immigrants by the media was successful among migration scholars, and some of them followed it for their own research. This is the case of Andressa Bittencourt (2021), who studied the way the established printed press framed the "migratory crisis" of 2015-2016, and she compared it to the frame found in alternative media. She observed the presence of specific elements in the media discourse about refugees, migratory movements and reception in France. Her objective was to tackle how the established printed press, through its symbolic power, built its version of the "migratory crisis", and how the alternative media tried to introduce different representations of the people on the move.

She coupled Benson's definition of framing with Robert Entman's (2007) definition:

[The framing is] a process that selects certain elements of a perceivable reality to make a specific narrative (or story), in order to promote a certain interpretation. Framing introduces or highlights certain ideas, activating patterns that encourage target audiences to think, feel and decide in a particular way. Some aspects of the information are highlighted, so that the receiver understands that it is an important topic, facilitating its memorization. Some aspects of reality are thus highlighted, while other elements are omitted, leading audiences to have different reactions[20] (Bittencourt, 2021).

These framings take place in the general effects research by the press discourse, such as authenticity effects, verisimilitude and dramatization. Bittencourt notes how dramatization is particularly visible in the press discourse on the people on the move. On the one hand, dramatization can be seen in the negative qualifications of migratory movements (some examples: "chaos", "tragedies", "threat", etc.), coupled with the representations of overwhelming mass movements (some examples: "flows", "waves", "mass", etc.). On the other hand, dramatization is

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[20] Original text: "[Le *framing* est] un processus qui sélectionne certains éléments d'une réalité perceptible pour en faire une narration (ou un récit) spécifique, de façon à promouvoir une certaine interprétation. Le *framing* introduit ou met en évidence certaines idées, activant des schémas qui encouragent les audiences cibles à penser, à sentir et à décider d'une manière particulière. Quelques aspects de l'information sont mis en avant, de sorte que le récepteur comprend qu'il s'agit d'un sujet important, facilitant sa mémorisation. Quelques aspects de la réalité sont donc mis en lumière, tandis que d'autres éléments sont omis, ce qui amène les publics à avoir des réactions différentes."

also found in the representations of the migratory trajectory, with the use of terms framing them as tragic and difficult percourse (Bittencourt, 2021).

Furthermore, Bittencourt (2021) found that the framings of the press tend to stigmatize people on the move and to deprive them of their own voice. As a matter of fact, even if migrants are the main protagonists of the stories reported in the press, they only constitute secondary sources for journalists, who do not report their voices in their articles. As a direct consequence, there is an absence of migrants' perspectives in the press and an abundance of a Western point of view on the topic. This tendency leads to stigmatization, and cancels out individual characteristics. According to Bittencourt (2021), this participates in the construction of dominated categories.

As Benson, Bittencourt (2021) comes to the conclusion that the main frames of the people on the move are as victims or as threats. The "victim" frame is to be understood as an attempt at humanization that is built through victimization and miserabilism. The "threat" frame is constructed through terms such as "illegal migrants" or "stowaways", which creates an idea of criminality related to migration. In the different representations of people on the move by the media, Bittencourt highlights how they are never represented as a potential workforce or as contributors to economic, scientific, cultural or political progress in hosting countries.

Myria Georgiou and Rafal Zaborowski (2017) come to a similar conclusion in their report on the "migratory crisis" of 2015-2016 in the media. They studied 20 European journals and their representations, and they found that the European printed press played a key role in the presentation of the arrival of migrants in Europe in 2015 as a crisis. While the coverage of "the crisis" was characterized by great diversity, the newcomers were generally perceived as unwelcome, different from Europeans and either vulnerable or dangerous intruders. They asked the following research questions: "What are the media narratives of the "refugee/migrant crisis"? What are the specific frames of positive and negative actions relating to the management of "the crisis"?" (Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017). Their starting hypothesis was that there were two axes of the media coverage of the events in 2015-2016: on one pole militarization, with border controls and the securitization of Europe, and humanitarianism on the other pole, with compassion and care for new arrivals.

With regard to how the European press framed narratives of the consequences of migrants' arrivals, Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017) divided the negative and positive consequences, underlining if they were economic, cultural, geopolitical or moral. This analysis found two main axis, as already stated in their hypothesis, humanitarian and militaristic:

Our main classification of actions stated, suggested or declared with regards to the refugee crisis in the press articles distinguished between measures to help the refugees (these included actions such as providing shelter, donating money or other things, opening borders, help with registration, lobbying for political solution etc.) and measures to protect the country and/or Europe (which included, among other measures, sending refugees or migrants back, closing borders, building physical obstacles between countries, upping police or guard presence) (Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017 p. 9).

With regard to the portrayal of asylum seekers, they found that the predominant description (62%) in the press was by their citizenship, that only a quarter of the articles from the sample would distinguish between men and women, and less than 30% would precise the age group. Few articles would use the names of the asylum seekers, and even fewer would mention their profession. Refugees thus emerge from these narratives as an anonymous, unskilled group. "They are 'the other' to the presumed reader of the press" (Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017, p. 10). As Bittencourt (2021), Georgiou and Zaborowski note that asylum seekers are not represented as being of any use to European countries, mainly because of this frame that denies them any individual characteristics. This representation also inspires little empathy and raises suspicion. From these findings, Georgiou and Zaborowski conclude that the role of media in these representations is paramount. For this reason, they encourage the Council of Europe - for which they conducted the research in the first place - to further contribute "to fairer and more inclusive coverage of refugees and migrants across Europe" (Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017).

What was framed as a crisis by the media in 2015-2016 has interested other migration scholars, such as Marco Martiniello, Alessandro Mazzola, Bart Meuleman and Andrea Rea with their book *The Refugee Reception Crisis in Europe. Polarized Opinions and Mobilizations* (2019). In the introduction, they argue for the adoption of the terms "refugee reception crisis" rather than "refugee crisis". They argue that the terms "refugee crisis" that we often see in the press frame the "long summer of migrations" (Hess et al. 2016) as an apocalyptic set of events. They would represent migrants' arrivals as something exceptional, never seen before. Martiniello et al. also noted how media representations tend to paint a humanitarian disaster or a threat to Europeans. They conclude that the main cause for it is the use of certain terms and the wrong use of statistics by different international and European agencies. In their opinion, the representation in the media coupled with the international institutions' one contributed to creating a moral panic. They also note the political impact these frames can have:

Something is perceived as a threat to society; the media depicts the threat in simplistic ways; the symbolic representation of the threat provided by the media arouses widespread public concern; and, finally, policymakers respond to the threat by enacting new policies (Martiniello et al., 2019, p. 17).

Martiniello and al. (2019) point out another misconception in the numbers. A large number of articles described the migratory movements of 2015-2016 as the biggest one since the Second World War. However, once again, this is an exaggeration of the numbers and a misuse of the statistics (Martiniello et al., 2019).

So far, we have only presented migration scholars' works on European, French or American representations in the printed press. Belgium's journals are no exception, and they answer to these main mechanisms described for other Western democracies. Nonetheless, a few migration scholars also focused on the shape of migrants representations by Belgian media.

With regard to the francophone media in Belgium, Sabri Derinöz and Laura Calabrese (2022) studied their representation of cultural diversity. According to them, the media represents diversity as a characteristic feature of the Belgian state, especially in Brussels. They studied the concept of cultural diversity in the media discourse of the two main francophone Belgian journals, La Libre Belgique and Le Soir, using a mixed approach between discourse analysis and corpus linguistics. They also had recourse to the theory of frames and search in their corpus the way diversity was framed in the francophone Belgian media. They based their research on the recurrence of certain terms in the titles of the articles from their corpus.

Their findings show that the concept of diversity is framed in two main ways: diversity as a descriptive concept related to human societies and diversity as a normative model for managing multiculturality. Each frame is constituted by two general features. On the one hand, the descriptive conception can be declined in the defense of cultural property and the recognition of ethnocultural heterogeneity. On the other hand, the normative conception of diversity refers to the promotion of ethnocultural groups or to the representation of minorities in the media (Derinöz and Calabrese, 2022).

In another work, Laura Calabrese and Valériane Mistiaen (Calabrese and Mistiaen, 2017) also used discourse analysis to study media patterns in naming displaced people. As others before them (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Baker, Gabrielatos, Khosravinik, Krzyzanowski, McEnery and Wodak, 2008), they note how "migrants", "immigrants", "refugees" and "asylum seekers" have the

tendency to be used in the same contexts. Consequently, the media discourse creates an overlapping of the meanings of the different terms. Moreover, Calabrese and Mistiaen reaffirm (Holmes and Castañeda, 2016) the distinction made in the discourse between "deserving" refugees and "undeserving" migrants, the latter often referred to as "illegal" and "threatening".

The method of discourse analysis was also used by Laurianne Chusseau (2020) in her study of the representation of people on the move in the Belgian francophone press. She insists on the impact of the accumulation of the same terms in the press: it leads to the creation of stereotypes, which can turn into a media myth, i.e. a media resource which is virtually available and which is often used in the press, having a strong impact on the public. Chusseau also notes how terms such as "migration" and "immigration" tend to be associated with adjectives that connote illegality. Consequently, migrants are stigmatized, and a distinction is made between those who deserve their place in the hosting country and those who do not.

As we can see with the academic literature on the topic, the representation of people on the move in the printed press is a topic of concern. The use and the repetition of certain terms can impact strongly not only the public imagination, but also the way policy makers and politics shape immigration policies. The printed press of diverse regions and countries have been analyzed, including Belgium. However, no migration scholar has yet studied the representation in the francophone printed press in the light of the recent events that shaped immigration in Belgium, i.e. the return of the Talibans in Afghanistan and the war in Ukraine. This chapter aims at filling this gap.

3. Method

The method for the analysis of La Libre Belgique's and Le Soir's articles is inspired by Rodney Benson's method of frames (2018). As stated above, a frame is a selective perception of a certain topic, in this case the situation of asylum seekers in Belgium. These frames are similar to windows: they focus our attention on specific elements and exclude other points of view. This method is not intended to simply identify discriminations and prejudices; it is meant to raise questions of a new type: among the various ways of considering the same issue, how many are represented? Which perspectives are put forward, or on the contrary left in the background?

As mentioned in the state of the art, Benson (2018) identified three main categories of ways of framing immigrants in the media: the "victims" frame, the "heroes" and the "threats". The media analysis of this chapter will show the recurrence of these frames in the selected articles of Le Soir and La Libre Belgique. Moreover, since the scope of this chapter is not only to study the frames of asylum seekers, but also the way the reception situation in Belgium is depicted by the media, the analysis will also focus on the way this reception is framed.

The articles were chosen according to three criteria: the belonging to Le Soir or La Libre Belgique, the time frame and their mention of a crisis related to migration. The search for these articles was carried out through the Europresse server, a portal that provides access to more than 8,000 resources (newspapers, journals, blogs) from various subject areas, including many exclusive publications. Titles include the latest available editions, archives and websites. The articles being in French, the translations of the relevant terms will be used in the presentation of the analysis, with the mention of the original text when necessary.

188 articles answered the selected criteria: 76 mentioned a "reception crisis[21]" and 112 a "migratory crisis[22]". Afterwards, we verify that the articles contain a mention of the Belgian situation or the situation concerning the European Union as a whole, and we put apart the articles that did not concern migration at all. After these verifications, exactly 100 articles were found relevant to our corpus: 42 with the mention of a "migratory crisis" and 58 with the mention of a "reception crisis".

The exact time frame in which the articles were chosen was from the 1st of August 2021 to the 31st December of 2022. This time range has been selected because La Libre Belgique and Le Soir started in August 2021 framing the reception crisis in Belgium as the consequence of two events: Belarus' releasing of migrants into the European Union and people arriving in the European Union to flee the violence in Afghanistan. As stated before, the end of the selected time range does not mean that the hosting issue for asylum seekers has been resolved. However, the end was set for a matter of convenience, and was fixed just before the beginning of the ethnography about which the reader can read in the next chapter.

Coming back to the frames in the selected articles, they are identified through the presence of particular words or expressions. We used a qualitative method at the crossroads between discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to analyze them. We observed the presence of certain elements in the

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[21] Original text: "crise de l'accueil".
[22] Original text: "crise migratoire".

articles of La Libre Belgique and Le Soir, in order to not only classify the representations created in the frames Benson identified, but also to see if other frames had been created. Moreover, the categories of speakers in the articles were put under scrutiny. As Benson (2018) noted, the representation of certain social and institutional actors in the media and the fact that their voice is heard through testimony or even just their name mentioned can have a significant impact on the representations of both the asylum seekers and the reception system.

The corpus was subjected to both manual and computer-assisted analysis. The first involved coding the corpus using an analysis grid, where we observed the following variables:

- if the situation was framed as a "migratory crisis" or as a "reception crisis";
- the terms used for the description of the persons on the move;
- the terms used for the description of the state's response to arrivals;
- the presence of which voices of social and institutional actors;
- the insistence on securitization;
- the dramatization of the situation.

In order to observe those variables, each selected article was read through an in-depth analysis. Discourse analysis allows one to get acquainted with the text and to identify the recurrence of certain topics and lexical fields. This is how the variables were selected, and then analyzed.

On the other hand, corpus linguistics is also helpful in this kind of analysis. As Calabrese and Mistiaen (2017) put it:

> If [discourse analysis] provides the concepts and theoretical framework to analyze discourse, using a "Corpus linguistics methodology allows for a higher degree of objectivity — that is, it enables the researcher to approach the texts (relatively) free from any preconceived notions regarding their linguistic or semantic/pragmatic content.

Wolfgang Teubert (2009) explains that corpus linguistics asks how data can be categorized. The focus is on what is common to all occurrences of a lexical item, or common to all occurrences of a larger unit such as a more or less fixed sentence. This purpose requires adopting a synchronic perspective. This synchronic perspective is important, because it allows one to see the importance of certain topics and the way they are framed at a certain period in history. The different texts in which the topics and the occurrences of certain terms find themselves are linked through the phenomenon of intertextuality, attributed to Julia Kristeva:

> Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations, any text is absorption and transformation of another text. Instead of the notion of intersubjectivity, the notion of intertextuality is installed (Kristeva, 1986, p. 37).

With corpus linguistics, the meaning of a lexical item is everything that has been said about it in the discourse (Teubert, 2009). We can link the theory of corpus linguistics and intertextuality to Benson's frame theory: through the occurrences of certain terms and specific lexical fields, a frame, a selective representation, is constructed in the net of the discourse constructed by the media articles.

For our analysis, in each section and for each of the newspapers, several keywords and lexical fields were identified in order to quantify the number of repetitions of these. The occurrences of the following terms (and their lemmas) were counted:

- lexical field of the crisis: "chaos", "emergency", "pressure", "crisis", "saturation"[23];
- lexical field of legality: "irregular", "illegal", "human rights", "men's rights", "crime against humanity", "dignity", "state of law"[24].
- lexical field of dramatization: "drama", "tragedy", "hopelessness", "suffering"[25].

However, this analysis distances itself from Teubert's affirmation that "computer tools are the result of an unbiased methodology. The computer counts, measures, compares and ranks[26]" (Teubert, 2009). A computed method is not completely impartial, and can even miss some nuances because of too fixed categories. For this reason, a mixed approach has been adopted here. The use of the discourse analysis and the in-depth reading of each article allows the researcher to discover terms, lexical fields or expressions that would not have been envisioned in a purely computed method.

This study cannot claim to hold an authoritative discourse on all Belgian news media. But its scope is to provide useful insights into a particular subset of media organizations at a particular time.

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[23] Original text: "chaos", "urgence", "pression", "crise", "saturation".
[24] Original text: "irrégulier", "illégal", "droits humains", "droits de l'Homme", "crime contre l'humanité", "dignité", "état de droit".
[25] Original text: "drame", "tragédie", "désespoir", "souffrance".
[26] Original text: "Les outils informatiques sont les résultantes d'une méthodologie impartiale. L'ordinateur compte, mesure, compare et classe".

4. Context of the articles

4.1. The Francophone Belgian Printed Press

In Belgium, since the country is linguistically divided, a part of the printed press is written in Dutch for Flanders, and another part in French for Brussels and Wallonia - only a small part in German. This thesis only concentrates on the francophone press production, for a matter of linguistic resources. Nonetheless, further analyses of the representation of asylum seekers in the Belgian printed press from both sides of the linguistic frontier could be relevant to an overview of the whole country.

In their general report on francophone media in Belgium, Antoine and Heinderyckx (2011) note how the Belgian francophone daily press market is owned by three different press groups: Rossel, Les Éditions de l'Avenir and IPM. Rossel and IPM are each owned by a different family, and have a family structure. The daily news press in francophone Belgium is grouped around seven titles or groups of titles (some regional variations are distributed under different titles): L'Avenir, La Dernière Heure - Les Sports, L'Echo, La Libre Belgique, Metro, Le Soir and Sud Presse.

This thesis focuses on La Libre Belgique and Le Soir. The choice of these journals is a consequence of the fact that they are the two journals with the major symbolic and cultural capital. The public tends to consider Le Soir the francophone reference for national and international news. It tackles political and economic problems as well as cultural events. "La Libre Belgique" is also quite popular and tries to distinguish itself by providing more in-depth analyses of national news (BrusselsLife, 2015). In addition to the symbolic and cultural capital, these two journals are owned by two different press groups, which might reflect differentiated opinions.

When it was created, La Libre Belgique had a clear catholic ideology, which remained strong until 1999, but faded away afterwards. Nowadays, its political orientation is liberal - it is interesting to note that every main francophone journal defines itself as liberal. When asked about its clear political orientation, the journal answers: "Neither to the left. Nor to the right. Nor elsewhere! But free! Free from any link with influential groups, be they political, economic, social, cultural, religious or sporting[27]" (Chusseau, 2020). In 2022, Le Libre Belgique had 871 300 readers, of which 49% were men and 51% were women (CIM, 2022).

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[27] Original text: "Ni à gauche. Ni à droite. Ni ailleurs ! Mais libre ! Libre de tout lien avec des groupes d'influence, qu'ils soient politiques, économiques, sociaux, culturels, religieux, sportifs".

Following the principle of pillarization on which Belgium was founded, at its creation, Le Soir was seen as the counterpart to the center-left catholic newspaper that La Libre Belgique represented. It was considered a liberal, progressive, and politically federalist newspaper. It kept this ideology through the years. In 2022, Le Soir had 1 369 300 readers, of which 53% were men and 47% women (CIM, 2022).

It is interesting to note that, even if Belgian newspapers are not owned by the state, they rely on public funding to cope with the crisis that has been hitting them for a long time. Their main revenues do not come from the sale of their newspapers. Thus, in the Wallonia-Brussels region, more than seven million euros are distributed in direct aid to the six recognized daily press titles, of which La Libre Belgique and Le Soir. Other public measures are relieving the budgets of the press: a 0% VAT which considerably reduces the selling price and preferential postal rates (Bonvoisin, 2015).

In his analysis of the independence of media, Daniel Bonvoisin (2015) asked the question: "Does this public aid constitute a lever of political influence on the media?". His answer is:

> In a direct sense, probably not. Regulated by the laws that govern aid, support depends on objective criteria (number of employees, for example) that make ideological sanction difficult. On the other hand, it risks distorting the competition between new non-beneficiary candidates and those who are already supported, indirectly disadvantaging the emergence of alternatives (Bonvoisin, 2015).

Furthermore, advertisements also play a significant role in their funding. As a matter of fact, they are the main financial resources for Belgian newspapers; for example, they constitute half of Le Soir's revenues. According to Bonvoisin (2015), this importance of advertising revenues alone constitutes a risk to media independence. Indeed, it could be in the interest of a private advertiser to promote its products in a medium that would otherwise investigate the validity of its qualities.

Another question about the independence of the Belgian newspapers is raised about their owners. As a matter of fact, Rossel and IPM both have interests in other sectors of the economy. The guarantee that owners do not interfere with the editorial line is not much present (Bonvoisin, 2015).

This is where we can find one feature of the heteronomy that Benson (2018) mentions as a constitutive part of the journalistic field. According to Benson (2018), the journalistic field is structured on three distinct levels of analysis: the field position, the field logic and the field structure. First, the field position refers to the relative proximity to market or non-market power, as

regulated by the state. In Belgium, the funding by advertisements and public funds shows a clear proximity with both the market field and the political field. Second, the field logic is the journalistic practices and formats that are dominant, which translates the influences exerted by external fields. Finally, the field structure entails three features: the hierarchy inside the field, between outlets, newsrooms of subject matter, the habitus of journalists and audiences and the organization of the competition.

4.2. The Events Between August 2021 and December 2022

Starting in October 2021, La Libre Belgique and Le Soir started writing about a reception crisis for asylum seekers in Belgium. The causes behind this so-called "crisis" are numerous and mainly structural. We already saw a part of it in the chapter about the policies concerning asylum seekers. However, as we will see in the discussion about the articles from La Libre Belgique and Le Soir, the politics and a part of the media impute the responsibility of the hosting issues to external factors. In general, the origin countries are framed as the guilty ones. For the hosting issues of 2021-2023[28], the designated culprits are Afghanistan and Ukraine. Thus, the time range to choose the articles has been set from the beginning of the month when the Talibans took Kaboul, in August 2021, until the start of the ethnography of the next chapter, at the beginning of January 2023.

When talking about the asylum seekers' situation in Belgium, one should consider what happens in the European Union concerning that matter. Indeed, since asylum law is mainly a translation of European directives, all Member States should follow them. Moreover, the situation in one Member State does not only concern this state, but all of them, notably because of the Dublin Convention and the common scope of building a "Fortress Europe" at the external borders of the European Union.

In August 2021, the situation in the European Union was already framed as a "migratory crisis" because of events at the border between Belarus and Lithuania. Belarus is accused of sending migrants to Lithuania to create a crisis there. The election of Belarus' President Alexandre Lukashenko raised some concerns, and the European Union tried to put pressure on the regime through targeted sanctions at the end of May 2021, which prompted Lukashenko to threaten to flood the bloc with "migrants and drugs". The release of migrants at its border with Lithuania is supposed

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[28] The lack of spots in reception centers is still ongoing at the moment in which this thesis was written. For a matter of convenience, the time range has been set from 2021 to 2023, but it is highly probable that the issue will continue in the future.
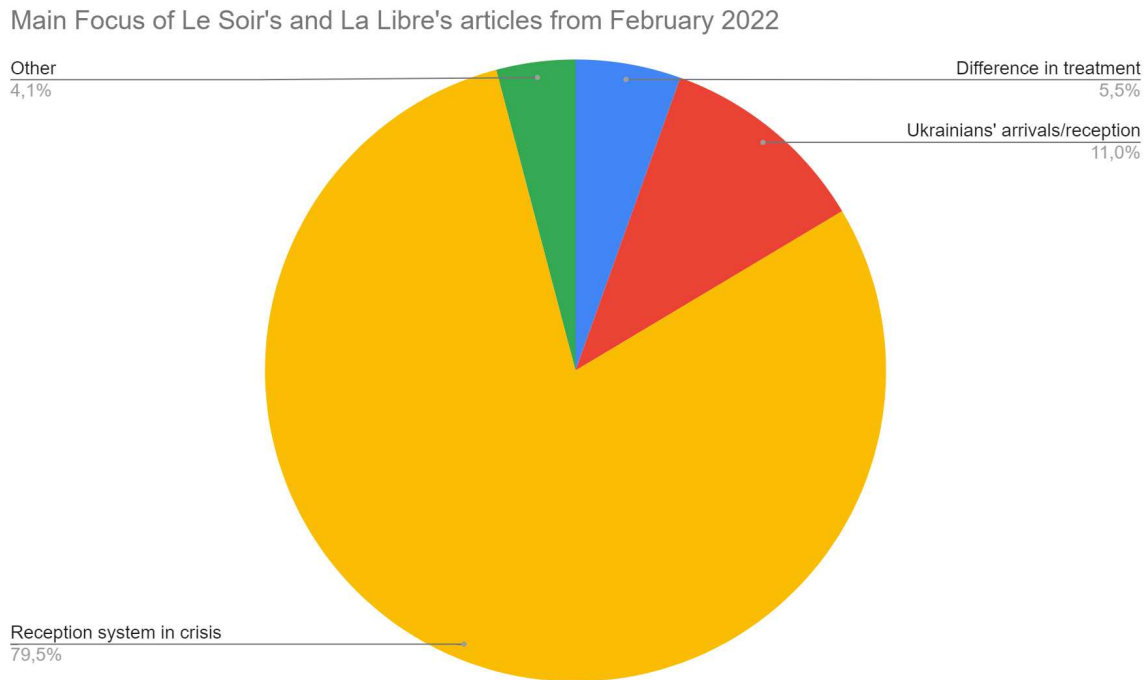
to be the response to these economic sanctions. A similar situation was to be found at the borders between Belarus and two other Member States, Latvia and Poland.

In August 2021, at the same time as their concern for what was happening at the European Union's external borders, La Libre and Le Soir started to also frame as a "migratory crisis" the consequences of the situation in Afghanistan. After the withdrawal of the US troops from the country, the Talibans returned to power and took Kaboul on the 15th of August 2021. La Libre and Le Soir wrote extensively about the departure of EU citizens from Afghanistan, but also the departure of others who feared the repression of human rights by the Talibans.

Between September 2021 and February 2022, numerous articles from Le Soir and La Libre Belgique wrote extensively about those situations at Belarus' borders with the European Union and in Afghanistan. The main question was: how does the European Union deal with this "unexpected" number of people fleeing violence? People arriving in Europe were described as "uncontrolled flows", and all eyes - read: all articles - were on the European Union's response to these events.

In February 2022, a new concern kept the newspapers busy: the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Starting from Russia's violation of Ukraine's soil, La Libre Belgique and Le Soir adopted one main focus: the "crisis" that the Belgian reception system experiences.

Figure 1.

Main Focus of Le Soir's and La Libre's articles from February 2022

Other
4,1%

Difference in treatment
5,5%

Ukrainians' arrivals/reception
11,0%

Reception system in crisis
79,5%

As the above graph shows, almost 80% of the selected articles since February 2022 focused on the issues of reception that Belgium faces. We see a shift in the newspaper's concentration from international concerns and events at the borders of the European Union to the local events in Belgium. In the time frame selected for this chapter, the first mention of saturation of the Belgian reception system was on the 18th of October 2021. However, as the graph below shows, there is a higher concentration of articles focusing on this issue starting in the summer of 2022.

Figure 2.

Date of the publication of the articles
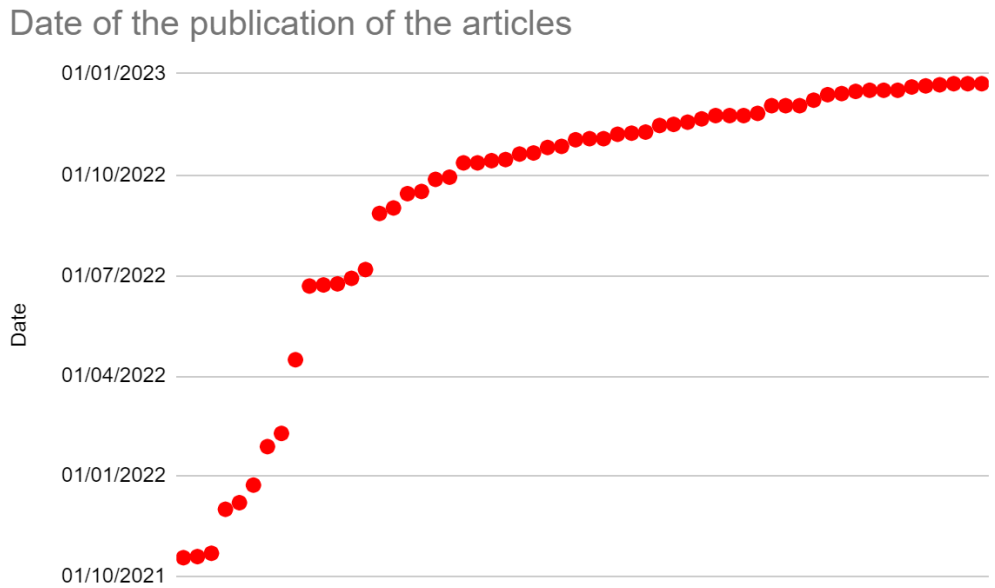
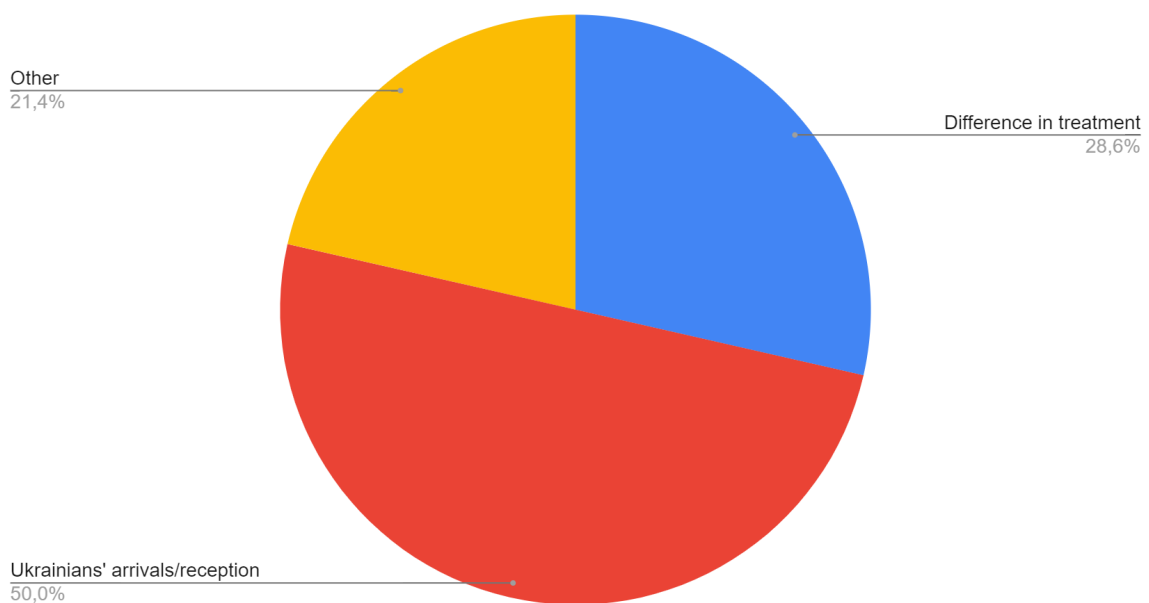Moreover, it is also interesting to check the other main focuses of the articles once the feature of the "reception crisis" is taking out of consideration:

Figure 3.

Main Focus of Le Soir's and La Libre's articles from February 2022, the "reception crisis" articles apart

Other
21,4%

Difference in treatment
28,6%

Ukrainians' arrivals/reception
50,0%

As the above graph shows, Ukrainians' arrivals in Europe and especially in Belgium occupied the consequent space in the articles of the two main francophone Belgian newspapers. This is also a reflection of the differences in the treatment of asylum seekers. As the press focuses on Ukrainians' arrivals, the way the reception is organized by the Belgian reception institutions also discriminates between the reception of Ukrainians on the one hand, and the reception of other asylum seekers on the other. An important part of the selected articles from la Libre Belgique and le Soir refer to this imbalance.

After the beginning of the war in Ukraine, following the Council of the European Union's decision, temporary protection was applied to the displaced people from Ukraine. That meant that their reception was not in the hands of Fedasil's centers. Moreover, the institutions managing asylum in Belgium started two programs to host Ukrainians fleeing the war: Housing Tool and #PlaceDispo[29]. Fedasil uses Housing tool to orientate displaced persons in collaboration with the municipal coordinator. The Housing Tool is the instrument that allows Fedasil to match Ukrainians in need of emergency accommodation with local authorities. It is a federal platform on which each municipality can consult and edit the overview of the offered housing. The communal coordinators will update the submitted data by deleting housing that is no longer available and by adding new places. On the other hand, #PlaceDispo is one of the Belgian reception system's ways to externalize its role and to pass it on to the civic society. As a matter of fact, this program aims at collecting and centralizing data of citizens that would be willing to host Ukrainians.

These initiatives were supposed to make manageable the arrivals of Ukrainian refugees in Belgium on the one hand, and leave enough spots in Fedasil and its partners' centers on the other hand. However, they did not contain the reception issues: indeed, despite these initiatives, hundreds of asylum seekers did not receive a place to stay and were constrained to sleep in the streets.

Some asylum seekers found a way to not sleep in the streets and went to live in *squats*[30]. In Brussels especially, temporary occupancy of unoccupied property has been growing in recent years, not only because of the lack of spots in the reception system, but also because of the increase in the price of accommodation and Covid-19. In 2022, Brussels authorities then decided to allocate 1.3 million euros to support temporary social occupation initiatives in empty buildings. The financial intervention covers energy and insurance costs and, if necessary, costs related to improvements to ensure the safety of the occupants. In Brussels, one of these squats hosted more than 700 asylum

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[29] Translation from French: Available Spots.
[30] *Squat* in French refers to the occupation of a place with a view to habitation without the agreement of the legal owner of the place. Legally it is an occupation without right or title.

seekers. It received the ironic nickname "The Palace of Rights[31]". At the end of 2022, some of the occupants were "regularized" and were given a spot in the reception system.

Among the articles about the "hosting crisis", there is a consequent number that focuses particularly on the Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration. Sammy Madhi resigned from this post at the end of June 2022. He left the position to Nicole de Moor, another member of his political party, the CD&V (center-right).

In the meantime, the lack of spots for asylum seekers is not resolved. The newspapers report on the condemnations that the Belgian State faces for the non-respect of its own laws and EU directives. They also write about the anger of civil society about the fact that the government is still not proposing any valid solution. In November 2022, a collective of lawyers, social sector workers, academic and association staff, addressed an open letter in the newspapers to the Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration, asking her to find a solution for the asylum seekers sleeping in the streets. In December 2022, NGOs refused to leave the office of Alexander De Croo, Belgian Prime Minister, threatening to stay if the state of crisis for the government was not declared. Still at the moment these pages were written, the Belgian government has not declared the state of crisis.

5. Analysis of the Articles and Discussions

The presentation of the analysis is structured in two parts: first, the way La Libre Belgique and Le Soir frame immigrants, second, the framing of the reception situation in Belgium.

5.1. Framing of Migrants in La Libre Belgique and Le Soir

5.1.1. Interchangeable Use of "migrants", "asylum seekers" and "refugees"

The choice of the term "migrants" in this section is on purpose: as it will be shown, the press does not always make the distinction between the different categories of migrants, be they legal or sociological. As a matter of fact, in our corpus, the right terms were not always collocated with the right context. The term "migrants" is used in 80% of the corpus, and the term "refugees" in 77%. When looking at the context of these terms, one can note that "refugees" is often used in the sense of "migrants", since a large part of the people the articles talk about have still not received refugee

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[31] Original text: "Le Palais des Droits".

status. The terms "asylum seekers" is found in 73% of the articles, and "international protection seekers" in 29%. Their context shows that it is often a correct use. However, in the same articles, the same people or groups of people are alternatively designated "asylum seekers" or "international protection seekers" and "refugees", which clearly enters in contradiction. This misuse of terminology can lead the discerning reader to wonder whether the journalists are correctly informed on their topic.

Calabrese and Mistiaen (2017) had already noticed in their corpus that those terms could be interchangeable to some extent in the press discourse. According to them, the interchangeability of "migrants" and "refugees" might be a consequence of a non-legal definition by journalists. Indeed, from some perspective, a refugee could be a person fleeing a difficult situation in their origin country, and not necessarily a person who officially received refugee status. However, this explanation encounters a wall when it comes to the term "asylum seekers", which is in essence a legal term. Calabrese and Mistiaen also mention some works (Holmes and Castañeda, 2016) that show two distinctive representations: the "deserving refugees" and the "undeserving migrants". In our corpus of La Libre Belgique and Le Soir, this distinction is made through other mechanisms that we will present, since there is an almost-interchangeability between the different terms to depict people on the move. It is worth mentioning, however, that the term "asylum seekers" is more often used in the articles treating the "reception crisis" (mentioned in 56 articles) than in the ones treating the "migratory crisis" (mentioned in 17 articles). As a matter of fact, the "reception crisis" mainly concerns asylum seekers and not other kinds of legal definitions of migrants.

Another term that is used to describe migrants is "people in exile[32]". This term is used in 12 articles of our corpus. It is mainly used for Ukrainians by La Libre Belgique and Le Soir. This differentiation in the choice of terms to refer to Ukrainians and to other asylum seekers reflects the proportion of articles that treat the arrivals of Ukrainians and those that treat the arrival of asylum seekers in general. This difference plays a role in the representation of both groups. "Exile" has a cultural meaning and connotations, which resonate with a certain imaginary. This term connotes a romanticized view of the fact of leaving our origin country: it is connected to the imaginary of Roman and Greek exiles, or personalities such as Napoleon Bonaparte.

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[32] Original text: "exilés".

Furthermore, migrants tend to be depicted as a mass by the media. In our corpus, the terms "wave" and "flows[33]" are used to describe the movements of migrants. "Wave" is present in 14% of the corpus, and "flows" in 23%. According to Bittencourt (2021), these terms that connote a large number of arrivals from an aquatic perspective participate in the dramatization of migrants' situation. It refers to a negative semantic field to depict migratory movements.

Furthermore, it connotes massification, where the individuals become indistinguishable. This indistinction is further seen in other terms and expressions used to depict migrants as homogeneous groups and not individuals. First of all, migrants are the social actors whose voices are less represented in the corpus. Unlike other social and institutional actors, their names rarely appear in the articles. In total, 20 migrants' names are stated in the corpus; however, they are distributed in only 10 articles. A larger part is described through their citizenship. However, also here, there is an effect of indistinction: the only citizenships that are mentioned are Ukrainians (in 46 articles), Afghans (in 38) and Syrians (32). Even if the difference is not that large, we see once again that Ukrainians' arrivals are more covered than others.

In their report, Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017) wrote about this general indistinction between refugees and asylum seekers. The media treat them as a whole, as a mass, and this representation has consequences.

> Refugees thus emerge from these narratives as an anonymous, unskilled group. They are 'the other' to the presumed reader of the press and this limited characterisation shapes the discourse surrounding the refugee crisis for both European audiences and stakeholders. In the mediated narrative, without individual characteristics, refugees are implied to be of little use for European countries (as they seem to have no profession), inspiring little empathy (because they are dehumanised and de-individualised) and raising suspicion (because no gender distinction aids the narrative of refugees being "mostly young men chancing their luck") (Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017, p. 10).

Our corpus corresponds to Georgiou and Zaborowski's findings to some extent. On the one hand, it presents the same indistinction with regard to name, nationalities and professions. On the other hand, however, several articles from our corpus distinguish age and gender. They nonetheless create anonymous groups, but with at least one distinction. They create three main groups: men, women and children. In several articles, there is a clear distinction between two groups: men on one side,

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[33] Original text: "vague" and "flux".

women and children on the other. Women and children are considered the most vulnerable group: thus, the reception system is supposed to pay specific attention to them. We see that this specific attention in the policies and the reception system is reflected in the media discourse (see graph below). Another category is unaccompanied minors. Their occurrences in the articles also tend to be in a linguistic context that contains "women" and/or "children".

On the one hand, this specific attention creates a distinction between migrants that make migrants less anonymous. It also acknowledges vulnerabilities. On the other hand, the fact of putting women in the same box as children infantilizes them and takes away their agency.

Figure 4.
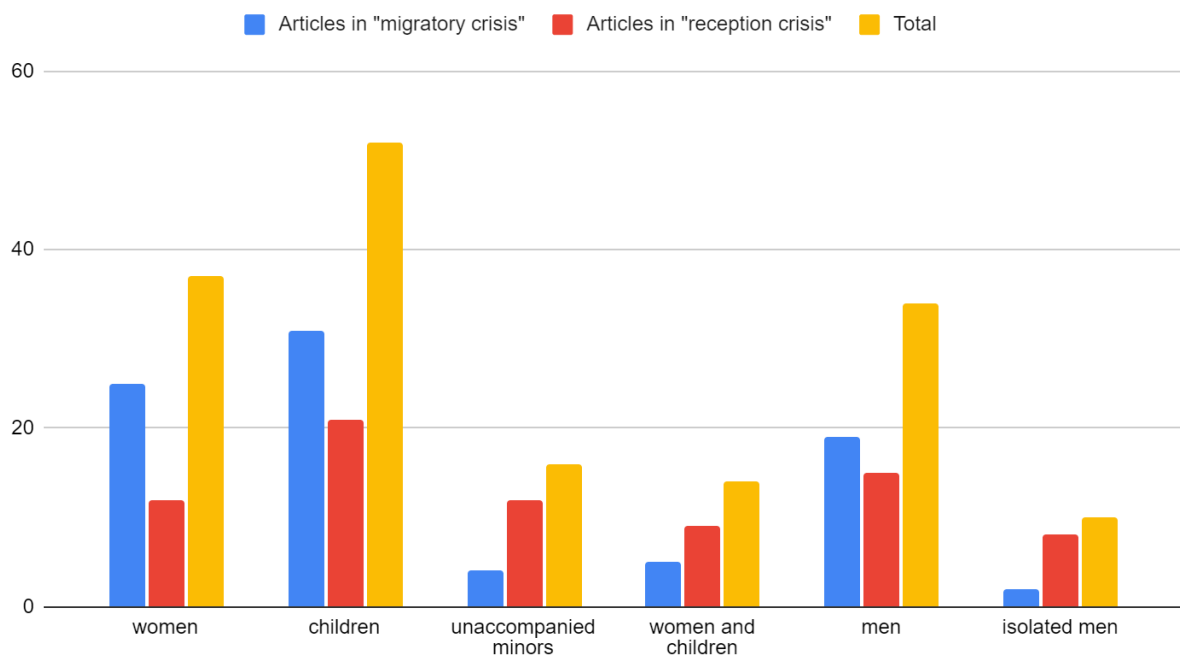
The above graph shows how, in some articles, men are not depicted as only "men", but the substantive is accompanied by the adjective "isolated[34]". Also in this case, the media discourse reflects the policies terminology: "isolated men" are a specific category that is taken into consideration in the allocation of a shelter for asylum seekers that answer to this characteristic. Isolated men, unlike families, women, children and unaccompanied minors, are not considered a vulnerable group. As such, they are the first ones to be victims of the lack of spots in the reception system, since the available spots are allocated to a more vulnerable public.

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[34] Original text: "hommes isolés" or "hommes seuls".

Looking at the above graph, it is interesting to note that, even if isolated men, and men in general, are the first ones to be concerned by a reception crisis, the articles of La Libre Belgique and Le Soir that focus on a "migratory crisis" and/or a "reception crisis" mention more children and women than men. The difference is particularly striking for children: they have occurrences in 52 articles, where the occurrences of women are in 37 and those of men in 34. One can note here that the media choose to highlight a vulnerable category, but not the category that is the most affected by the reception crisis they report about. The mentions and the repetitions of the danger to which children are exposed - and, to a larger extent, the one women are exposed to - trigger the *pathos* for the reader. The representation of children having to sleep on the streets has a dramatization effect: the reader might be more affected by imagining this than by imagining adults sleeping on the streets. This dramatization and putting women and children together create a framing of migrants as passive victims.

According to Bittencourt (2021, p. xx):

> The discourse of media information plays with its influence, provoking in a variable way, and with diverse consequences, effects of authenticity, verisimilitude and dramatization. [...] Dramatization, in fact, has been one of the constants in the coverage of the "crisis", starting with the use of words.

This dramatization can be seen through the lexical field of drama, with terms such as "drama", "tragedy", hopelessness", and "suffering" (and their lemmas).

Figure 5.

Lexical field of dramatization
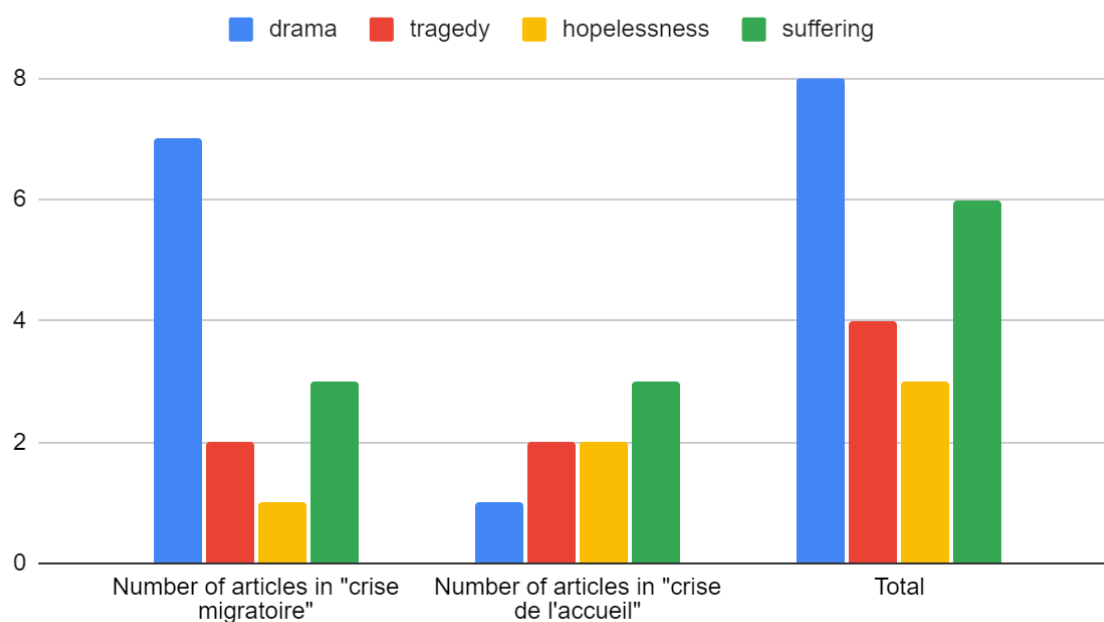
Some more complex expressions can also express this lexical field. In our corpus, some of these expressions were very striking and were found in the titles. According to Derinoz and Calabrese (2022), discourse analysis should also focus on headlines, which have important textual and cognitive functions. In this sense, they summarize the article and help the reader construct a general meaning. Here are some examples of the way the lexical field of drama is used in the titles:

- "Will it take a death to grasp the urgency[35]?";
- "Long waits, traumatic interviews and uncertainty about the future: when seeking asylum harms you[36]";
- "After the teenagers, families left on the street by Fedasil[37]";
- "You [the State] say you are doing everything you can? We [the civic society] don't believe you[38]";
- "A fake Christmas market to denounce real misery[39]";
- "A thousand invisibles squat in a filthy "Palace of Rights"[40]".

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[35] Original text: "Faudra-t-il un mort pour saisir l'urgence ?".
[36] Original text: "Attente interminable, entretien traumatisant et incertitude sur l'avenir : quand demander l'asile abîme".
[37] Original text: "Après les adolescents, des familles laissées à la rue par Fedasil".
[38] Original text: "Vous faites tout ce que vous pouvez ? Nous ne vous croyons pas".
[39] Original text: "Un faux marché de Noël pour dénoncer la vraie misère".
[40] Original text: 'Un millier d'invisibles squattent un crasseux "Palais des droits"'.

These titles activate the *pathos* for the reader: the lexical field used by these headlines shapes the situation with a dramatic lexicon, meant to pass on empathy to the reader.

Nonetheless, the proportion of this lexical field should be relativized. Indeed, as the above graph shows, only 8 headlines in our corpus contain the most recurrent term of the dramatization lexical field, i.e. "drama". The other terms are found in even fewer articles.

5.1.4. Framing of the "deserving" and "undeserving" migrants

As we have shown, there are different ways of framing migrants. A common framing is victimization: migrants are victims of a violent situation in their origin country, of the traumas of the journey, and of the Belgian reception system which does not provide what it should. On the other end, there is another common framing: the threat framing, which depicts migrants as a wave that the reception system is not able to manage.

Beside these framings, there is also a distinction between the representation of the "deserving" migrants and the "undeserving" ones. The press itself engages in debates over this distinction. In one article, "Ukrainians correspond to the representation of the good refugee[41]", Le Soir interviewed an expert on migration, who explains the difference in treatment between Ukrainians and other asylum seekers. She denounced the essentialization of types of migrants: the refugee is considered from the moral and political point of view while the immigrant is evaluated according to criteria that fall under utilitarianism. There is a degradation of the migrant, which is opposed to the "true refugee". The consequences are a hierarchization of the migrants and racialization among them.

Few articles in our corpus use this kind of meta-analysis of their own practices in the representation of migrants. In spite of such argumentations, the major part of the articles reflect this construction of the distinct representations of the "good" and the "bad" migrants. It is not said explicitly, but the use of a certain terminology reveals it. Mainly, the terminology of illegality frames a certain part of the migration as non-deserving. Another small part of the articles shapes certain migrants as responsible in part of the reception crisis. Indeed, according to some articles and some interviewed politicians, some asylum seekers occupy spots in the reception system even if they are not eligible for asylum. Amongst them, are the asylum seekers who fall under the Dublin Convention, according to which the asylum seeker has to seek refuge in the first Member State where he was registered.

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[41] Original text: "Les Ukrainiens correspondent à la figure du bon réfugié".

In the major part of the articles concerning the "reception crisis", the reception institutions are depicted as the ones to blame. However, the use of certain terms depicts migrants as partially or totally guilty. The academic literature wrote extensively about the framing of migrants as illegals. This tendency is also found in our corpus. In our analysis, 8 articles about the "migratory crisis" connect the adjective "irregular" with "migrants" (or their lemmas), and none in those about the "reception crisis". On the other hand, 8 articles about the "reception crisis" connect the adjective "illegal" with "migrants" (or their lemmas), and none in those about the "migratory crisis".

Figure 6.

Articles associating migrants with "irregular" or "illegal"
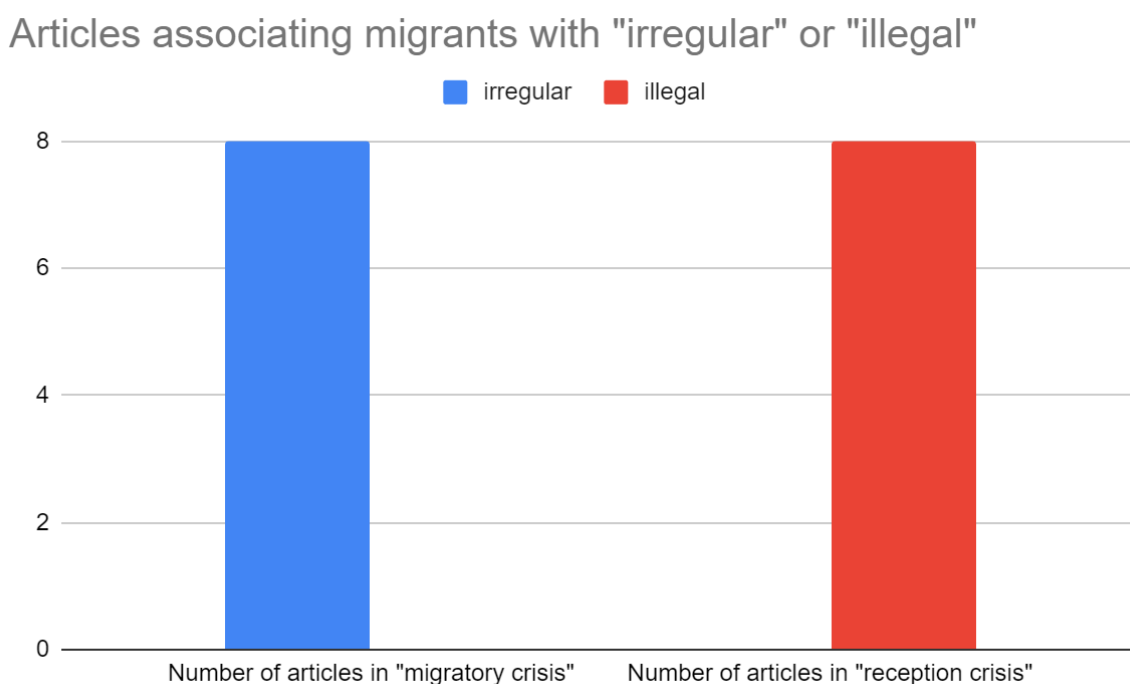
It is interesting to note that, when searching for the linguistic context of "illegal", three articles out of the 11 that mention "illegal" associate the term not with migrants, but with the state's response to arrivals. Thus, our research contrasts with the previous findings of the literature that found that the representation of migrants often connoted illegality. The analysis of our corpus shows that the representation of migrants as illegal or irregular still exists, but not to the same extent. Indeed, this is demonstrated on the one hand, by the small number of articles that link "migrants" and "illegal/irregular", and the fact that the term "illegal" is sometimes associated with the way migrants are treated and not with their own actions.

However, the representation of migrants in our corpus is not all that positive. The in-depth reading of the articles reveals other ways of framing migrants as "undeserving". Some expressions

link them to illegality through drugs, such as "Belarus promised to flood with migrants and drugs[42]", "minors who use drugs, which is a significant part of the public that wanders around the two main Brussels train stations[43]". Some other expressions connote a fraud that asylum seekers would have committed: "some asylum seekers who have reached the age of majority, but who pretend to be minors and take the places[44]". Violence is also a recurrent theme linked to the representation of migrants. Concerning this topic, some articles wrote about the reception centers: "[there are] safety concerns also, reported some concerned workers[45]", or "the migrants tried to force their way into the building[46]".

Another way asylum seekers are depicted as "undeserving" is through the insinuation that they do not need asylum or they are too "picky" about their destination: "two thirds of those who apply for international protection do not need it[47]", "there can be a wall, but there must be a door through which those who need protection can pass[48]", or "avoid "shopping" by applicants[49]".

These representations depict some asylum seekers as not corresponding with the ideal figure of the refugees. Some also create a contrast between "us" versus "them, such as "the Ukrainian lady who has been living with me for three months is rich. [...] her attitude does not correspond to my values[50]". Some articles report the concern of a part of the civic society about the inclusion of migrants into Belgian society:

> How can we integrate into the job market these tens of thousands of people who do not speak our language and do not have a recognized diploma? Who are the private landlords who will agree to rent them a property, without any perspective on the duration of the lease? How can we be sure that our education will be able to properly supervise the Ukrainian children and teenagers who will invest our schools in a few days[51]?

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[42] Original text: "la Biélorussie a promis d'inonder de migrants et de drogue".

[43] Original text: "mineurs qui consomment de la drogue, ce qui représente une partie non négligeable du public qui erre autour des deux gares bruxelloises principales".

[44] Original text: "des demandeurs d'asile majeurs, mais qui se font passer pour des mineurs et prennent les places".

[45] Original text: "Il serait aussi question de souci de sécurité, rapportent des travailleurs inquiets".

[46] Original text: "les migrants ont tenté de forcer l'entrée du bâtiment".

[47] Original text: "Deux tiers des personnes qui demandent une protection internationale n'en ont pas besoin".

[48] Original text: "Il peut y avoir un mur, mais il doit y avoir une porte que ceux qui ont besoin de protection puissent traverser".

[49] Original text: "éviter un « shopping » des demandeurs".

[50] Original text: "La dame ukrainienne qui vit chez moi depuis trois mois est riche. [...] son attitude ne correspond pas à mes valeurs".

[51] Original text: "Comment intégrer sur le marché du travail ces dizaines de milliers de personnes qui ne parlent pas notre langue et ne disposent pas de diplôme reconnu ? Qui sont les propriétaires privés qui accepteront de leur louer un bien, sans perspective sur la durée du bail ? Comment être sûr que notre enseignement pourra encadrer correctement les enfants et adolescents ukrainiens qui investiront nos écoles dans quelques jours ?".

Asylum seekers are also represented as a burden for the host country. The quote above already shows it. In one article, the term "burden[52]" is used to describe them. Another article wrote that some "asylum seekers occupy places in the Fedasil reception network, which has been saturated for many months[53]". This representation participates in the dehumanization of asylum seekers, framing them as an anonymous mass that weighs on the host country. In some articles, the dehumanization is striking through specific terms, such as "cleaning", referring to asking asylum seekers who are "undeserving" to leave the reception centers in order to make space for the "deserving ones": "[we need to] carry out a "clean-up" in order to have a clearer vision of the places actually available[54]".

5.1.5. Humanization and Voices of Social and Institutional Actors

To balance this dehumanization, some articles use techniques to humanize migrants. One article denounced the invisibility of migrants by using this precise term: "a thousand invisibles[55]". Another one also pointed out this invisibilization: "Just because we don't see them doesn't mean they aren't there[56]".

Furthermore, in an attempt at humanization, as stated above, some articles mention the names of migrants. Some go further and interview them. However, when looking at the proportion of interviews of migrants in the corpus compared to other social or institutional actors' interviews, one can only notice that the proportion of migrants' interviews is very low.

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[52] Original text: "fardeau".
[53] Original text: "ces demandeurs d'asile occupent des places dans le réseau d'accueil Fedasil, saturé depuis de nombreux mois".
[54] Original text: "effectuer un « nettoyage » afin d'avoir une vision plus claire des places réellement disponibles".
[55] Original text: "un millier d'invisibles".
[56] "Ce n'est pas parce qu'on ne les voit pas qu'ils ne sont pas là".

Figure 7.

Number of Interviews
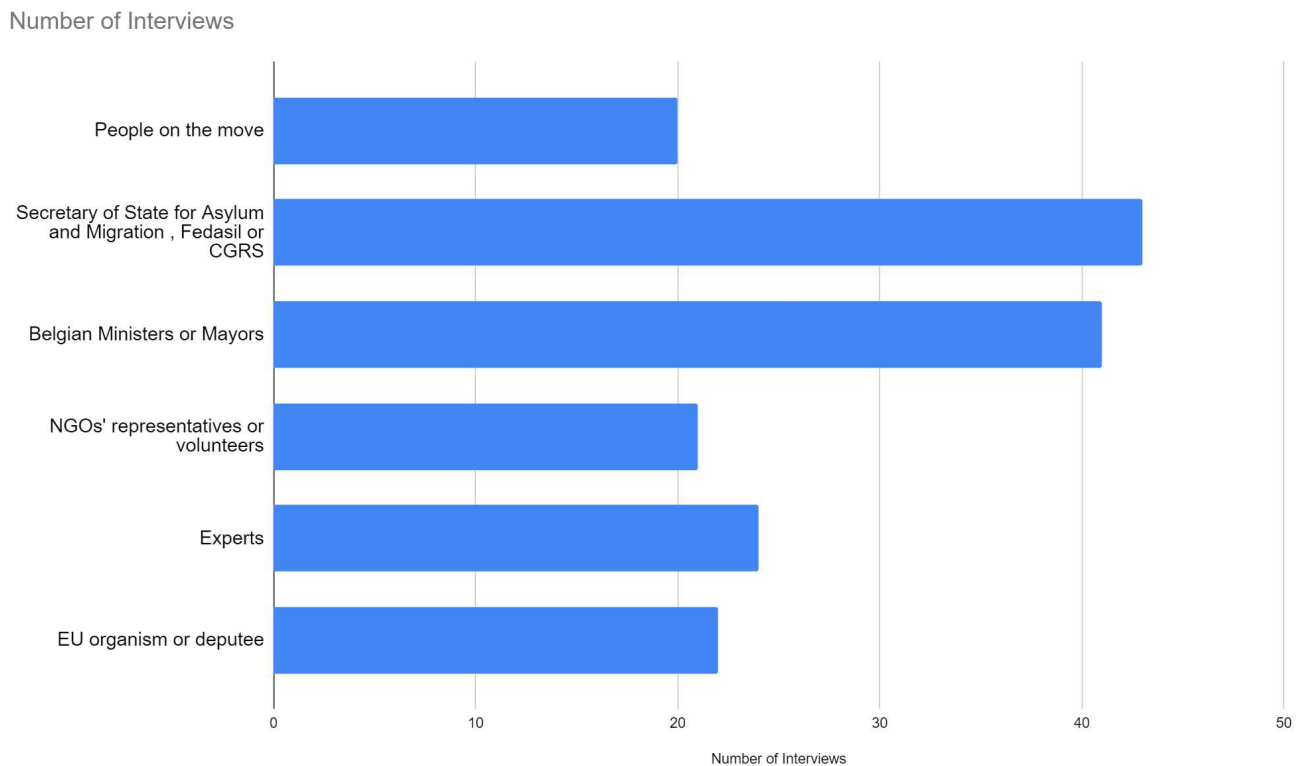
As the above graph shows, the migrants are actually the social actors that intervene the least in the articles of our corpus. In comparison, the reception institutions and the ministers have far more coverage.

Depriving migrants of this voice in the newspaper is a way of taking out their agency and of representing them as an indistinct and anonymous mass. They are the first ones to be concerned by the topics that are discussed in the articles, but they are literally the last ones that journalists go to when it comes to writing about their situation.

5.1.6. Which Framings of Migrants in the Corpus?

The most common terms to describe migrants in our corpus are "refugees", "asylum seekers", "migrants", "immigrants". The first four seem almost interchangeable in our corpus, which can create an amalgam for the readers and make the representation of migrants even more anonymous.

Anonymity is also seen in the mass lexical field used in the articles. This participates also in the creation of an indistinction between the different individuals. They are deprived of their individual

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characteristics. Only a few articles name the migrants. The few characteristics that are given are often creating subgroups out of the "mass", but these representations in groups still hide the individuals.

The mention of some characteristics, such as age or gender, triggers a loss of agency in the representation of women, and a dramatization of the situation by the mention of the most vulnerable groups. This dramatization is present also in some headlines of the corpus.

Finally, there is a distinction made between "deserving" and "undeserving" migrants through the association of terms designating migrants and a context that connotes illegality, or a burden for the state.

Looking at Benson's framings, this analysis identifies two main frames: the "victim" framing and the "threat" framing. The "victim" frame is mainly humanitarian, insisting on the dramatization of the migrants' situation in front of the reception system. The "threat" framing mainly regards public order by associating migrants with illegality, but they are also represented as a mass that burdens the Belgian and European systems.

5.2. Framing of the Migratory and Reception Situations

In this section, we will focus on the way the migratory and reception situations are represented in La Libre Belgique and Le Soir. First, we will focus on the term "crisis" and the way it is declined lexically in the articles. Second, we will concentrate on the difference between articles that highlight what is put into place by the government reception-wise, and those that openly criticize the way the reception of asylum seekers is handled. Finally, we will highlight the major differences between the use of the terms "migratory crisis" and "reception crisis".

5.2.1. The Reasons and the Consequences of the Term "Crisis"

As the creation of this corpus shows, from August 2021 to December 2022, the terms "migratory crisis" and "reception crisis" were recurrent in the articles of La Libre Belgique and Le Soir. The term "crisis" poses questions. Where does it come from? The first chapter showed how migrants' arrivals can be predictable to a certain extent. It also showed how the response of Belgium in

reception matters was always aimed short-term. The numbers of Eurostat showed that, if the number of arrivals is higher, it is nothing that we have ever seen before.

The term "crisis" refers to a period of time with intense difficulty. A crisis, by definition, is something out of the ordinary that does not expand in time. However, the summarized history of immigration in the first chapter showed that it *is* expanded in time and so it can not be characterized as "extraordinary".

So why the use of the term "crisis"? The reason behind this might be the representation by the media and the politicians, but also NGOs, each for their own reasons - willingness of sensationalism, structural racism and violence, the willingness of raising awareness and reaching people's sensibility… However, in our corpus, some articles interview experts who stress the continuity of migration and its ordinary character, and who point out the reception system's tendency to short-term provisions as the culprit for presenting the situation as a crisis.

The consequence of this framing is a representation of the situation as highly difficult and temporary. On the one hand, it might touch the reader and trigger the *pathos* with the idea of a humanitarian crisis and the suffering of victims. On the other hand, it might represent the people arriving as a threat, because of their numbers and the unprepared reception system.

5.2.2. The Lexical Field of the Crisis

The lexical field of crisis is dense, many terms or expressions can refer to it. For the analysis, the choice was made to focus on the most recurrent and their lemmas, i.e. "chaos", "urgency", "saturation" and, of course, "crisis".

Figure 8.

Articles mentionning the lexical field of the crisis
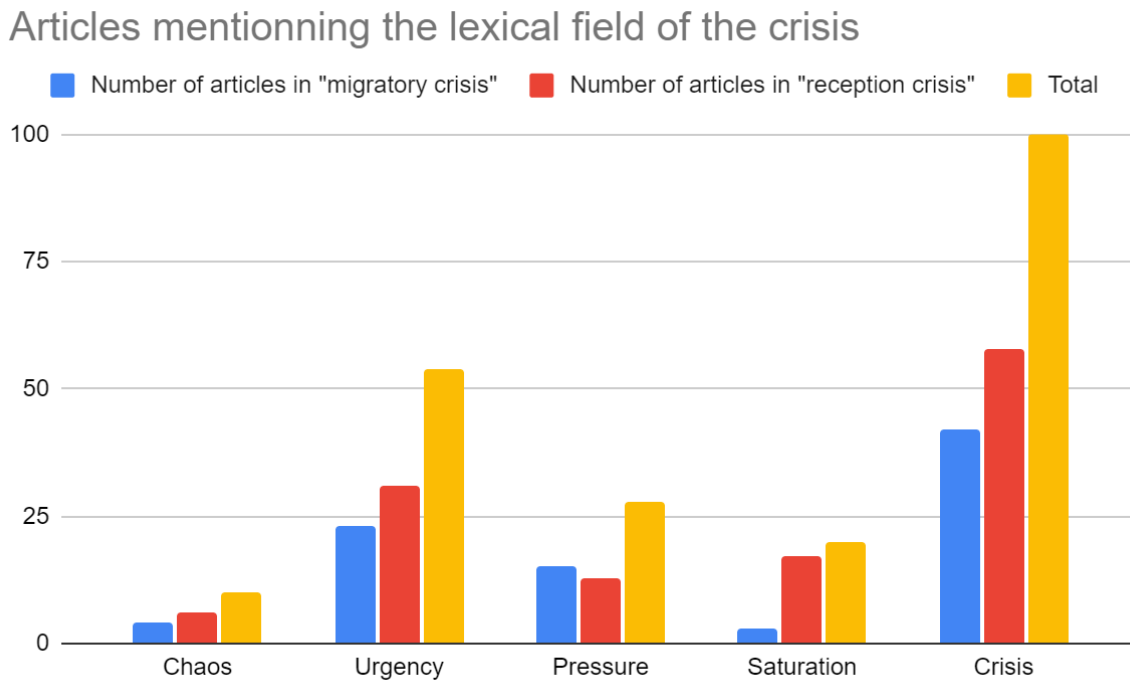
As the graph above shows, these lexical elements are quite recurrent in the corpus. The term "crisis" is obviously present in all articles, since the criteria for the formation of the corpus was for the articles to contain "migratory crisis" or "reception crisis". "Chaos" is the least represented term of the lexical field, but it might be the most striking one. It connotes a complete disaster, a total absence of rules and order. This links the migratory and reception situations to the imaginary of what the chaos refers to, i.e. the mythic state of the world before the creation of the universe.

The terms "urgency", "pressure" and "saturation" do not connote the same complete disorder as "chaos". They nonetheless create a representation of a pressing issue. They participate in the connotation of catastrophe. Moreover, the situation is represented as irresolvable, especially in the case of the reception situation. The articles concerning the "reception crisis" mainly describe how the reception institutions are not answering to the needs of asylum seekers, but also of the ones of their own personnel. The terms "impossible" and "irresolvable" are recurrent. Another strategy used to show the dead-end of the situation is an ironic distance from the journalists when they interview the reception institutions.

Furthermore, several articles characterize the arrivals as the biggest asylum seekers' movement since the Second World War. This is a theme that comes back often in both La Libre Belgique and Le Soir. First of all, as stated before, statistics and numbers in general tend to be misused in the

press. This comparison triggers for the reader an image of what is often framed as the most dramatic event of the XXth century. It creates a sense of panic. Moreover, this is not the first time newspapers compare a current situation to the refugees of the Second World War. As Martiniello et al. (2019) mentioned it, the arrivals of 2015-2016 in Europe were also compared to the Second World War in the press.

> Most of the comparisons made were to do with the total number of asylum seekers and not to their numbers relative to the total population (Martiniello et al., 2019, p. 18).

They also state how this framing comes from the visibility of the asylum channel for immigration. This visibility is represented in the media and might become an argument for the discourse of extreme-right parties.

The framing of the situation as a crisis through this lexical field might have three different consequences for the reader. First, it is misleading, as we stated in the previous section. Second and third, it can trigger a reaction of compassion/anger towards the State, or a reaction of fear/closure.

5.2.3. Do They Condemn the Authorities or Do They Applaud Their Measures?

The articles might not explicitly condemn or embrace what they report on, but the choice of the lexicon, some pragmatic attitudes such as irony, and the interviews of specific social and institutional actors produce a certain representation of the way arrivals of migrants and reception of asylum seekers are handled. In this section, it is particularly interesting to note that the articles mentioning a "migratory crisis" and those mentioning a "reception crisis" diverge in the way they frame the authorities' response.

First of all, the articles about a "migratory crisis" mainly talk about the European situation, and Belgium's as part of the European Union's response. The critics are numerous. Some articles write about the different anti-migrants walls that are built around Europe, and stress the lack of response from the European Union. Journalists interview experts that urge the European Union to review its migration policies, and who condemn the EU's attempt at changing the procedure to make it less accessible. Some articles highlight the differences in treatment between migrants from different origin countries, implying the selection that Europe makes. Finally, some articles also focus on the human rights condemnations that Belgium faces. Here are two examples of sentences condemning

the authorities: "Behind the words "welcome policy", we often discover a hidden confinement[57]"; "He [Belgian Secretary of State] is suspected of knowingly wanting to send the message to people seeking asylum in Belgium that the game is not worth it[58]".

However, the representation of the culprit is not always the European Institutions or Belgium. Several articles - sometimes the same ones that denounced the EU's response to arrivals - give the culpability to other states, some Member States such as Greece, but mainly origin countries and "transit" countries, such as Serbia, Belarus, Afghanistan or Ukraine. They are depicted as violent states which do not respect human rights.

On the other hand, other articles highlight the efforts put in place by the European Union and Belgium in the reception. The situation is still described as a crisis, a difficult period, but to which the authorities answer by putting in their best efforts. These articles are not numerous: out of the 42 articles concerning the "migratory crisis", only 4 do not criticize - explicitly or implicitly - the authorities' response.

Regarding the articles about the "reception crisis", they focus on Belgium's reception situation. These articles are highly critical of the way the reception institutions are handling the situation. Several articles highlight the efforts furnished by the authorities, but notice on the other hand that they are not enough. Some articles blame the lack of reception spots on external factors: the flood of 2021 in Wallonia, violent situations in non-EU countries that could not be predictable, EU Member States not respecting the Dublin Treaty… Others - and they constitute the major part - characterize the hosting issues as a consequence of a lack of political willingness to fix the problem, or a political indifference. They often mention the decision of the Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration to refuse to host asylum seekers in hotels out of fear of creating a "pull factor".

A recurrent theme in the latter category is the violation of fundamental rights by the Belgian State. To highlight this focus, we chose to look for the occurrences of this lexical field through five main terms and their lemmas:

- "illegality" in the context of the actions of the State towards asylum seekers;
- "human rights" in the context of violations of those of asylum seekers by the State;
- "crime against humanity" in the context of the Belgian State as the culprit and the asylum seekers the victims;

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[57] Original text: "Derrière les mots de "politique d'accueil", on découvre souvent un enfermement caché."
[58] Original text: "on le soupçonne de sciemment vouloir envoyer le message aux candidats à l'immigration en Belgique que le jeu n'en vaut pas la chandelle".

- "dignity" in the context of the State violating this fundamental right of asylum seekers;
- "state of right" in the context of Belgium not respecting its own laws with regard to the reception of asylum seekers.

As the graph below shows, the occurrences of these terms are quite recurrent, especially in the articles about the "reception crisis". As stated earlier, illegality was part of the framing of migrants in the Belgian press. Here, we see that a different kind of lexical field of illegality is related to the actions of the Belgian state. The accent here is on the violation of two things: the state of law and human rights. The state is then characterized as not answering to the very basis of the respect of humanity and as violating its own law.

Figure 9.

Occurrences of the lexical field of violation of fundamental rights by the State
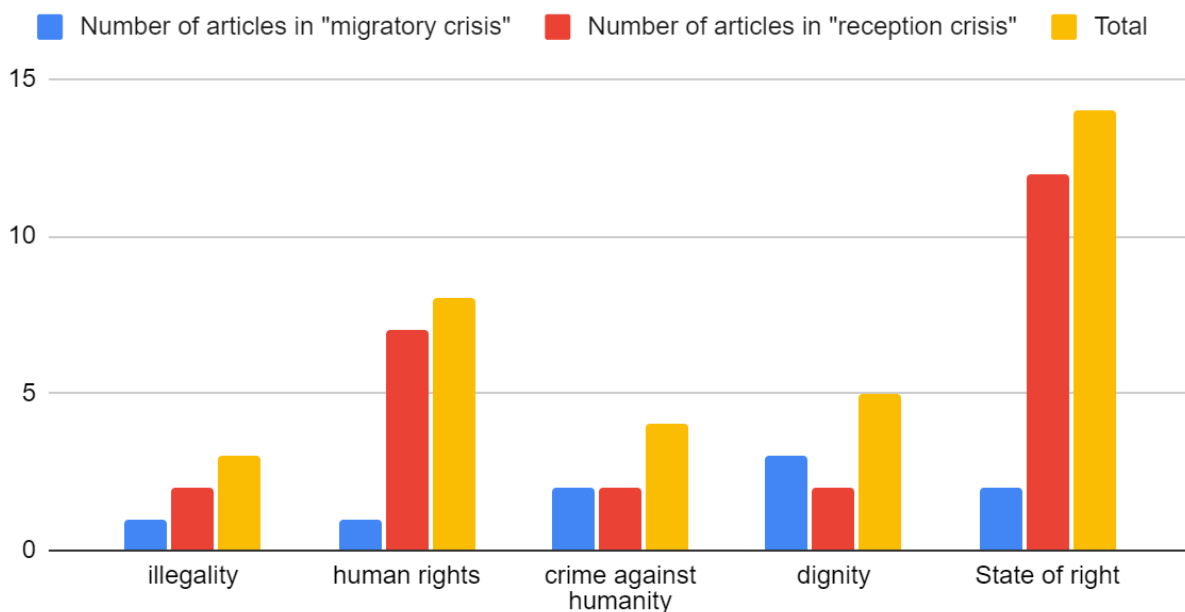
This characterization is linked to the recurrences of terms such as "indifference" (referring to the State), "lack of willingness", the repetition of the condemnations of Fedasil, the interviews of NGOs defending human rights and Fedasil's personnel angry at the way the reception is handled, the repetition of the number of people sleeping on the streets, and the accumulation of articles talking about the same topic stating how no amelioration has been made since the previous articles.

All these elements create a framing of the State's response to arrivals of asylum seekers that is tendentially negative. The State is represented as criminal and non-caring. The few articles that highlight the efforts of the reception institutions are not numerous enough to counterbalance this representation.

5.2.4. A "Migratory Crisis" vs. a "Reception Crisis"

This first criteria for the selection of the articles for the creation of the corpus was based on the presence of the terms "migratory crisis" or "reception crisis". The analysis of recurrent themes and lexical elements revealed a certain framing of the migrants and the authorities' response to arrivals in the press. These framings are created through all the articles of our corpus, regardless of their belonging to the category "migratory crisis" or "reception crisis". The framings are constructed in the accumulation of the representations in both categories.

However, it is worth noting that the journalistic choice between the terms "migratory crisis" and "reception crisis" is far from insignificant. First of all, we see that the articles about the "migratory crisis" tend to speak more about the situation of the European Union as a whole and of Belgium as part of this situation. On the other hand, in the articles about the "reception crisis", all articles focus on the hosting issue in Belgium.

Martiniello et al. (2019) already argue for the use of "reception crisis" instead of "migratory crisis" with regard to the events of 2015-2016. They insist on the fact that the number of arrivals is not what caused the reception issue, but the culprit was the way the reception system itself worked. Even if this research does not adhere to the use of the term "crisis" as a scientific term to describe arrivals of asylum seekers and their reception, it agrees with the essence of Martiniello et al.'s statement, which is that the reception system is not designed as to support a predictable number of asylum seekers.

In our research, we see that the term "reception crisis" is used a significant number of times. In some newspaper issues, it is even the title of the section under which the articles of our corpus are. Thus, it seems that there was a shift in the way the press frames the arrivals of asylum seekers in Belgium. The sample on which Martiniello et al. based their research was articles from 2015 and 2016. It seems that over the years, the press increasingly used the terms "reception crisis".

What is the consequence of that shift? What difference does it make in shaping the representation of asylum seekers' arrivals? Even if the terms "migratory crisis" are still very much in use, the increased number of occurrences of "reception crisis" shows a shift of guilt. With the terms "migratory crisis", the focus is on the migrants and the crisis is framed as being a consequence of their arrival. On the other hand, with the terms "reception crisis", the focus is on the reception system: the crisis is thus being framed as a consequence of the way the reception system works and is structured.

This consideration of the choice of terms reflects the highly critical perspective that La Libre Belgique and Le Soir adopted on the State's response to asylum seekers' arrivals. It is also linked to the framings of migrants as a threat or as victims. Indeed, the discussions in the articles about the "migratory crisis" tend towards securitization themes, the closing of Europe as a fortress, the construction of walls… Conversely, the articles about the "reception crisis" adopt a more humanitarian point of view, which is also seen in the analysis of the lexical field of illegality committed by the Belgian state.

To conclude, we can say that the framing "threat" relates more to the "migratory crisis" articles, and the framing "victim" more to the " reception crisis" articles. For this reason, the articles about the "reception crisis" adopt a more humanitarian perspective and a highly critical one on the State's actions. However, the framing "victim" of the migrants and "culprit" for the state does not seem to have found the just balance through their choice of the terms "reception crisis". Indeed, despite this humanization, the analysis of the framings of migrants and of the use of the term "crisis" showed how the representations in the francophone Belgian press still remain problematic.

5.3. La Libre Belgique vs. Le Soir

A remark needs to be made on the differences between the framings of La Libre Belgique and those of Le Soir. Despite their different political history, they seem to have a similar coverage of the studied topics. The reason might lie in the fact that they do not claim their political history so strongly, and, nowadays, they tend more to define their political allegiance to the center. Moreover, as stated above, every main francophone journal defines itself as liberal.

It is still possible to note some slight differences. The first one is the number of articles: in general Le Soir publishes more articles than La Libre, which is seen also in the articles concerning asylum seekers and the reception system.

A second difference lies in the use of the terms "reception crisis" and "migratory crisis". Proportionally, La Libre tends to use the terms "reception crisis" more than "migratory crisis" compared to Le Soir: "migratory crisis" appears in 47% of the articles of Le Soir while it appears only in 30% of the articles of La Libre. As we saw in the previous section, this includes a dominant framing of asylum seekers as "threat" in Le Soir, and as "victims" in la Libre Belgique. However, the dominance of the articles concerning the "reception crisis" still remains in both newspapers, with a larger dedicated number of articles for La Libre Belgique.

In regards to the number of interventions of the different social and institutional actors, the percentage is quite similar for the categories of people on the move, the reception institutions and EU organisms or deputies. However, the percentage is quite different in regards to the interventions of Belgian politicians (27% in la Libre Belgique, 47% in Le Soir), NGOs (14% for La Libre Belgique, 25% for Le Soir), and experts (11% for La Libre Belgique, 30% for Le Soir). Overall, it seems that Le Soir calls for more interventions of institutional and social actors in its articles. It is interesting to note that these interventions mainly come from politicians, as they intervene in almost half of Le Soir's articles. The same conclusion still remains: migrants have the lowest number of interventions in the articles of our collection. In contrast, reception institutions and ministers receive much more attention. By marginalizing migrants' voices in the newspaper, their agency is undermined, and they are portrayed as an undifferentiated and anonymous group. Despite being the most directly affected by the issues discussed in the articles, journalists prioritize other sources over migrants when reporting on their situation.

IV. The Lived Experience of Asylum Seekers: an Ethnographic Example

The precedent chapters adopted an external point of view on the Belgian reception system. They first focused on its policies and management, and then on its external representation by the press. It allowed us to grasp two different perspectives on the way the reception system and asylum seekers are considered: on the one hand, how Belgian institutions consider asylum and the people who request it, and on the other hand, how an institutional field that is separated from the reception institutions frames the system and the people who seek to enter this system.

The present chapter adopts a different approach. After having considered how the asylum seekers' reception is viewed by institutional agents that are external to the asylum process itself, it is time to focus on the social agents that live the reception system first-hand: the asylum seekers. This part of the research is situated at the micro-level to describe and analyze the lived experience of the system by them. As it was shown in the media analysis, migrants are the last ones to be interviewed in the selected articles of the press. Unfortunately, this situation reflects what can be observed also in the scientific papers: not often enough migrants' voices are heard in the research that concerns them.

In order to remedy this lack, several scholars adopted a micro perspective and, through qualitative research, gave voice to migrants. With this chapter, I intend to be part of this line of work. In order to do so, I conducted an ethnography in a first-phase center for asylum seekers, where I carried out an internship. The center is managed by Fedasil. I adopted the participant observation method, as my role as an intern was to provide day-to-day assistance to residents of the center and organize integration activities. Moreover, I interviewed residents that wished to be interviewed in order to consider their experience in the center, and the different strategies they put in place to cope with it. Finally, I interviewed some staff members of the center as key informants, in order to consider how the reception system is lived and perceived by them.

The chapter will be structured as follows: first, I will explain the reasons behind the choice of this ethnography. Second, I will explain the organization of the center, its role in the broader asylum system, and my function in the center during my internship. Then, I will report on the description of the center and the asylum system as a whole by some residents of the center and some of my colleagues. Finally, I will describe the temporality of the center and the asylum request as lived by

the asylum seekers, as well as the entanglements of the temporality with the specific space of the center. In the different sections, I highlight two main features: on the one hand, the paradoxical role of the reception system which stands between a humanitarian and a securitarian/control poles; and, on the other hand, the lived experience of this system by asylum seekers and their strategies to cope with it.

1. Methodology: Why an Ethnography?

1.1. To Show What Is Latent

Quantitative research tends to measure, to find results in numbers and calculations. Conversely, qualitative methods aim at studying the meaning of experiences rather than their frequency. Ethnographic fieldwork is one of these qualitative methods, and it constitutes one of the defining features of sociological and anthropological research. It can involve different forms of long-term engagements and interaction with specific groups, and explore phenomena through forms of observation such as focus groups, participant observation and interviews (Robbins et al., 2017).

For my research, I chose to conduct an ethnography in a first-phase reception center in Belgium. This idea came to life firstly through my day-to-day reading of the newspapers and their articles about the hosting crisis. The lack of migrants' voices was striking. My goal was then to research their lived experience of their reception in Belgium. Moreover, as Sarah Tobin (2019) stated, even if several scholars have focused on this lack and have tried to remedy it, there is a need of revisiting what is considered "policy-relevant research". Often, this kind of research is directed at stakeholders and policymakers. As a consequence, the individuality of asylum seekers is blurred and there is no focus on their agency, actions and personhood. There is a risk of doing an ethnography of the institution rather than an ethnography of the experience of asylum seekers.

> Rather, ethnography should render visible what is invisible; critique some underlying assumptions and highlight what is taken for granted in social fields. Beyond that, ethnographic accounts of human action must serve to question socially-constructed labels and categories (Tobin, 2019).

Various scholars (Safouane, 2017; Maculan, 2022; Tobin, 2021; Campesi, 2015; Uberti, 2019) put at the center of their research the experience of asylum seekers through ethnographic fieldwork. Some of them (Safouane, 2017) still noted a relegation to the background of the subjectivities of

migrants in the ongoing debates on migration. Furthermore, the ethnography should not be there to reinforce the representation of migrants as passive and vulnerable human beings (Chatty, 2016), but should engage in processes of identification with migrants (Safouane, 2017). In history, Philip Marfleet (2016) and Simon Behram (2016) studied the absence of refugees' voices from mainstream history. Marfleet calls it "collective amnesia", and Behram shows how the figure of the refugee has been romanticized through the imaginary of exile. Nowadays, the legal status of asylum seekers or of refugees has not pushed toward a promotion of migrants' voices in the research, but has paradoxically "restricted them in an international bureaucratic order where they are performed in the asylum claimant procedure" (Safouane, 2017, p. 1931).

Bureaucracy and categorization might hide and dehumanize the lived experience of asylum seekers. Moreover, the reception system which they enter when they request asylum has a control scope. This control is not inscribed in law, it is then necessary to go on the field to grasp the power dynamics of the system and the way asylum seekers experience it. An ethnography is relevant in the acknowledgment of these dynamics, but also in the different ways that asylum seekers find to cope with it. Moreover, this control can be seen in the temporalities of the asylum procedures and of the reception centers, as well as in the way the space of the center is organized.

Maculan (2022) studied asylum seekers' mechanisms of resistance to some kind of domination, surveillance and discipline in a reception center. He highlighted how ethnography can help us interpret and describe some situations, finding meaning in them. He states that ethnographic fieldwork is a way of avoiding stigmatization:

> Ethnography lends itself to the practice of resistance against the stigmatizing and over-simple representations of ASs often reproduced by the institutional discourse surrounding forced migrations and migrant reception processes (Maculan, 2022, p. 444).

1.2. Participant Observation and Interviews

In the context of my master's degree in Mobility Studies, I did an internship of five weeks in a Fedasil first-phase reception center in Belgium. Part of my job was to organize activities for the residents of the center. I used this opportunity to conduct my ethnography there, adopting participant observation and interviews as tools. For those five weeks, I shared the life of asylum seekers as an intern for Fedasil.

Participant observation was the first tool that I adopted, using it all along the ethnographic fieldwork. Through my position as an intern, I actively participated in the daily life of the center. This allowed me to observe and participate in the daily interactions between asylum seekers, as well as between them and my colleagues.

> Participant observation is a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, p. 1).

My position as an intern allowed me to spend some time with the residents, mainly during the activities that I organized or during language classes. As it was with my colleagues, the relationship between the personnel and the asylum seekers might seem kind of informal. Indeed, the residents have conversations with the personnel, play board games with them, joke with them… If it does not erase the difference in position and in power between the two groups, and if it is not the case for all of them, it still creates a climate where residents talk freely with the personnel. While working in the center, I benefited from this climate and residents were often coming to me to talk for a while. This allowed me to immerse myself in the life of the center and to grasp better the lived experience of the residents.

The second ethnographical tool that I used was interviews. They are open and flexible tools. The aim of interviews is to understand the interlocutors' worldviews. I conducted sixteen interviews: ten with asylum seekers from the center and six with my colleagues, of which three are former asylum seekers and passed through Fedasil's reception system.

The interview took place at the end of my internship, so my rapport with them would have had the time to grow into some trust. Since I had five weeks in the center, I wanted to get to know the residents and my colleagues before asking them if they were willing to have this conversation with me.

The interviews were semi-structured: I had some prepared questions, and the conversation was taking different directions following the topics they wanted to talk about. They are schemes, but used in a flexible way. Semi-structured interviews have the advantage of having guidelines, which allows us to focus on the research. This was particularly useful for talking about the reception system and their experience with it, and for comparing the answers.

The topics that we addressed were diverse, but all of them were focussing on their migratory experience and their experience of the asylum system in Belgium and in the European Union in

general for some of the residents. In particular, some of my questions were directed towards their impression of the center and towards the temporality of the asylum procedure on the one hand, and the temporality of the center on the other.

Semi-structured interviews have a weakness though: the light directivity that they imply might render the conversation a bit rigid and leave less space for spontaneity. For this reason they are complementary to my participant observation. The participant observation allowed me to observe and participate in this spontaneity of everyday life, and the interviews helped me gather answers through a focus that the everyday life in the center does not always provide.

In regard to the language that I used to communicate, the life in the center was mainly in French. However, being in Belgium, it is not that simple: some of my colleagues were Dutch speakers and do not speak French. Since I do not speak Dutch, we communicated in English. I also communicated in English with some of my colleagues who were former asylum seekers. Communication with the residents was more difficult: the majority of them do not speak one of the Belgian national languages or English. With them, the communication was always mediated through one of the cultural mediators, an official translator from Fedasil or simply another resident that knows English or French. This was for my day-to-day interactions in the center; for the interviews, I mainly conversed with people who speak French or English. Moreover, two residents spontaneously came to me to ask me if they could also participate. However, we did not share a common language. Thus, one of their friends in the center came with us and translated for us.

Despite the trust that evolved in my rapport with the residents, my position as a member of Fedasil's personnel still created an asymmetry between the residents and me. This asymmetry could not be erased, especially in solely five weeks. However, the elements that I gather and the ethnography in the center still reveal a part of the lived experience of the asylum seekers of the reception system. A relevant extension of this research would be spending a longer time in the center, and maybe under a different position such as volunteer, for which the asymmetry of power is reduced.

1.3. Objectivity and Ethics

A recurrent question in the history of ethnography has been: can the ethnographer be objective? Moreover, is it the ethnographer's purpose to be objective? These questions are at the base of an ethnography. The debate about objectivity in social sciences took an important turn with Max

Weber's conception. Weber's concept of objectivity in social sciences was rooted in the idea that researchers should try to reach value neutrality in their research. According to him, objectivity meant keeping one's personal values and beliefs separated from the scientific process. He argued that researchers should study social phenomena without letting their own biases influence their interpretations. Weber highlighted the importance of understanding the subjective meanings and intentions behind social actions while basing interpretations on empirical evidence and logical analysis. In this view, objectivity in social sciences required a delicate balance between empathetic understanding and detached observation, enabling researchers to uncover the underlying causes and mechanisms that shape social reality. Weber's conception takes place in the debate in the philosophy of social science in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This debate was organized between two poles, one advocating for positivism in human sciences, in line with natural sciences, and the other one arguing for a more interpretive and hermeneutic model (Gimbel, 2015). According to Gimbel (2015), Weber's conception was in-between these two poles: he still argues for causal and explanatory laws, while using the concept of interpretation in a social-scientific perspective.

In contemporary social sciences, the concept of objectivity has evolved and expanded in response to various critiques and intellectual developments. While Weber's emphasis on value neutrality still resonates nowadays, many scholars recognize that complete objectivity may be unattainable. According to Gimbel (2015), Thomas Kuhn (1962) was the one through which the conception took a turn away from Weber. Kuhn was a sociologist of science who argued that scientific paradigms are influenced by subjective factors such as personal biases, social norms, and cultural values. He emphasized that scientists operate within specific conceptual frameworks that shape their observations and interpretations. Other scholars acknowledged that complete objectivity in social sciences may be unattainable. Donna Haraway (1988), a feminist scholar, highlighted the situatedness of knowledge and the importance of acknowledging the researcher's standpoint. Sandra Harding (1986), a philosopher of science, critiqued the traditional notion of objectivity as being gendered and Eurocentric. Bruno Latour (1987), a sociologist of science, emphasized the role of social actors and networks in shaping scientific knowledge. He argued that objectivity is not a fixed state but a process that emerges through social interactions and negotiations.

The focus has shifted toward acknowledging and managing the researcher's positionality and its potential impact on knowledge production. Contemporary social scientists often strive for reflexivity (see, among others: Dorothy Smith, 1987, Donna Haraway, 1991; Sarah Ahmed, 2017). This approach encourages researchers to reflect on their own biases, subjectivities, and social

locations, and to transparently disclose these factors in their research process. By openly acknowledging their standpoint, social scientists aim to enhance the transparency and accountability of their work, and to foster a more nuanced understanding of social phenomena that recognizes the complexities of power, privilege, and diverse perspectives. Reflexivity encourages researchers to engage in ongoing critical self-reflection and dialogue with peers to minimize biases and promote a more robust and inclusive knowledge base in the social sciences.

Another ethical question that is raised when doing an ethnography is about the responsibilities an ethnographer has towards the groups they work with. What does "act ethically" mean in the context of an ethnography? As Robbins et al. (2017) underline, the ethical element is not present in some parts of the fieldwork, but rather the ethnography itself is an ethical commitment, and the fieldwork should be conducted following that line of thought.

Before conducting research, ethnographers should obtain informed consent from their interlocutors, i.e. the "ongoing process of ensuring that research participants understand the goals, methods, and potential outcomes of the research process, and give permission for the researcher to conduct said research" (Robbins et al., 2017, p. 51). In order to do so, I informed my supervisor and Fedasil's administration that I would conduct fieldwork at the center where I did my internship. Thus, Fedasil's administration asked me to file a document stating my research, its method and its purpose, as well as an authorization for Fedasil to read my work once it is done. Moreover, with the residents and my colleagues that I interviewed, I made sure to make my research clear and to ask for their permission to write about our conversations.

During the interviews and the participant observation, the residents and my colleagues trusted me with information that should not be reported in this thesis for two reasons. On the one hand, this research should not put my colleagues in an uncomfortable position vis-à-vis Fedasil's administration, who will read this thesis. On the other hand, residents trusted me with delicate information about their origin country and the reasons they left, which should stay confidential. For these reasons, the transcription of the interviews will not be reported at the end of the research. However, parts of it will be quoted in the text and the names of my interlocutors will not be stated. Instead, pseudonyms will be used. In the table below are reported the pseudonyms with the socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewees.

Table 1.

Pseudonyms	Age Range	Citizenship	Gender	A.S./Employee
Emmanuel	20-30	Burundi	Male	Asylum Seeker
Jean-Marie	50-60	Burundi	Male	Asylum Seeker
Fazal	15-18	Afghanistan	Male	Asylum Seeker
Ehsan	15-18	Afghanistan	Male	Asylum Seeker
Jahan	15-18	Afghanistan	Male	Asylum Seeker
Éric	20-30	Burundi	Male	Asylum Seeker
André	55-65	Burundi	Male	Asylum Seeker
Jean	25-35	Burundi	Male	Asylum Seeker
Caleb	15-18	RDC	Male	Asylum Seeker
Olivier	20-30	Burundi	Male	Asylum Seeker
Samuel	25-35	Eritrea	Male	Employee
Odile	35-45	Burundi	Male	Employee
Hélène	20-30	Belgian	Male	Employee
Juliette	20-30	Belgian	Male	Employee
Matteus	25-35	Brasilian	Male	Employee
Ilan	35-45	Djibouti	Male	Employee

2. Organization of the Center

2.1. Purpose of a First-Phase Center

The center where I conducted my research was a first-phase center. This means that asylum seekers are supposed to stay for a restricted period of time, to then be redirected to a second-phase center where they will spend the major part of their procedure. It is considered an in-between step between the moment they file their request for asylum and their longer stay in a second-phase center.

The center where I worked was in a period of transition toward an observation and orientation center for minors. At the time I was there, it still hosted minors as well as adults, but they were transitioning to only receive minors in the future. Since it was receiving two different age profiles, the services provided to asylum seekers were divided into two channels, one for adults and one for minors.

This center is also a center for more vulnerable asylum seekers. After the registration of their request for asylum, they would go to the service called "dispatching" where they would be assigned to a first-phase center. At the dispatching, Fedasil's personnel would assign the asylum seekers presenting more serious vulnerabilities to specific centers, including the one I worked in.

It should be noted that the center where I conducted my research only hosted men and boys from 16 to 18 years old. As a consequence, this ethnography does not adopt a strong gender perspective, since all residents were declared men. The center being thought to host the most vulnerable people from this category, some residents were part of the LGBTQIA+ community, from which some might have refused the categorization of man. This information, as private matters, was not divulged among colleagues, and the residents with whom I built a rapport did not talk to me about their gender identity. Consequently, I was not able to observe differences in treatments and in residents' narratives according to their gender. However, the gender perspective is a very important one also for research in migration studies. It is adopted by various researchers, and I hope it continues to be this way.

2.2. Official Documents

The center is an open center, which means that residents can go in and out freely. However, they are requested to be in the center at a certain schedule at night, and to be present for some activities or meetings. Upon their arrival at the center, the asylum seekers receive a card with their names, their room and an identification number written on it. They are supposed to always carry it while they are in the center, and leave it at the reception when they leave the center during the day. When they leave the center, they are required to carry with them the official document that they received at their registration, which states their status and works as their ID for the time of the procedure. They then have to ID-like documents: one for inside and one for outside the center.

Upon their arrival at the center, the personnel introduces them to the internal rules of the center. The residents then sign the document stating these internal regulations. These regulations concern

the physical and temporal organization of the center, but also the behavior they should adopt during their stay. This document also states their rights and their duties for their time in the center.

2.3. Temporal Organization of the Center

The center where I conducted the ethnography is situated near the city center. It is located next to a boulevard, in an adjacent street. In the surroundings, there is a hospital and a small park. It can be reached by several means of transportation.

During their time in the first-phase center, they can neither work nor go to school. Their day is regulated by the temporal organization of the center. There is a wake-up time and a bedtime, as well as a fixed schedule for breakfast, lunch and dinner. They can not cook, the catering is covered by an external company. The rest of the day is regulated by the activities: in theory, there is one language class per day and two or more other activities. These other activities can be cultural, sportive, or related to their inclusion in the neighborhood.

Besides the activities, the residents have different tasks in the center. They are also required to clean their own room and to bring their bedsheets to the laundry room on a fixed day. They can also sign up for community service inside the center, which requires mainly helping with the logistics service and cleaning the common areas. This community service is the only way for them to earn some money, since they are not allowed to work. In regard to money, there is one fixed day for them to receive their pocket money. They have a fixed schedule, which depends on their room, to go pick it up from the accountant's office. Another fixed activity that they have every week is the residents' meeting: the residents and the staff meet in order to discuss matters of the center. This is a moment for the staff to directly speak to all the residents, and for the residents to present their perspectives on certain issues concerning the center.

They also have appointments inside or outside the center. Inside, they can have appointments with the medical service, with their social worker or with the psychologist. Outside the center, they might have to go to the hospital for a more serious medical issue that can not be taken care of by the medical service, or they have their interview with the CGRS in order to assess their legal status.

2.4. A Physical Division

The center where I worked is physically divided into five different floors. This physical division reflects a categorization of the activities of the center and of the asylum seekers. On the one hand, the ground floor is reserved for the administration and the logistics of the center, while the third floor is dedicated to catering, where residents take their meals three times a day. The access to the ground floor is forbidden to the residents, and the third floor is closed when it is not mealtime. On the other hand, the first, second and fourth floors are reserved for the residents' rooms and one or two common rooms for free time and activities. There are also a fifth and a sixth floors in the building. At the time I was working there, they were not in conformity and some work was being done. The purpose was to create a gym, a common room to spend their free time and a kitchen.

The residents are divided according to their age: adults on the first floor, and minors on the second and the fourth floors. The bedrooms have different capacities: they are between four and eight per bedroom. There is also a quarantine bedroom for the residents who get Covid-19 or scabies. This latter disease was recurrent for new residents, since a lot of them lived in very precarious situations before arriving at the center, most of them having spent time on the streets.

The offices of the administration are on the ground floor: the coordination, the accountant, the human resources, the logistics, the communication offices… Meanwhile, the daily life assistants, the social workers, the cultural mediators, the psychologist and the medical staff have their offices on the same floors as the residents' bedrooms.

The center is a former hospital specialized in oncology. The arrangement of the center still reflects the hospital's physical organization. For example, the residents' bedrooms are the former patients' bedrooms. The stairway has no stairs, only a flat corridor that goes up the floors. The center reception is the former hospital's reception. The catering floor is where the hospital's restaurant used to be.

2.5. Which role for an Intern?

Officially, I was an intern in the communication, and integration of the center in the neighborhood services. For the latter, I would organize activities such as cleaning the neighborhood with the residents, or visits to the center by external people through team buildings. I would also participate in these activities.

In practice, communication and integration in the neighborhood took a small part of my time there. As the major part of the center's personnel, I was taking on responsibilities that were not in my job description. Every morning, the staff has a flash meeting to quickly state the organization of the day in the center and to communicate any unusuality. In practice, the first topic that we would go over was the presence of the workers. Almost every day of my internship, we were understaffed - some employees were on medical leave or on vacation. As a consequence, the other employees had to fill up the positions of the absentees.

In this context, I organized and participated in other tasks than the ones of communication and integration in the neighborhood. The two main other activities I would do were French classes and cultural visits. The language classes provided by the center are French and Dutch. Some residents would attend one of the two, some would attend both language classes. These classes were supposed to be taught by volunteers, but also they would be absent quite often. On the other hand, I would organize cultural visits to exhibitions or museums. These activities, In which I was not supposed to take part at the beginning, were actually the periods of time during which I would spend more time with the residents, and when they would open up to me, telling me about their stories, their home, their migratory trajectory, their experience of the asylum system and of the center.

2.6. A Work-in-Progress Center

The center could be called a work in progress. It opened shortly before I conducted my research. Its opening followed the usual Belgian reception system's *modus operandi* of short-term perspective. As stated in the first chapter, after the previous hosting crisis, Fedasil closed centers. However, with the recent hosting crisis, they needed more reception spots, which is why they opened the center where I worked.

The center was then created in a context of crisis, and this is reflected in its organization. First of all, the building was not in conformity at all, which is why a large part of it was under construction while I was there. Second, the organization of the staff was a bit blurred sometimes: some roles would overlap, and the daily schedule was not clear and kept changing while I was there. A fixed week schedule was actually in the making during my internship. In order to engage the residents in the life of the center, but also to start their inclusion and to distract them, the staff tries to have at least two activities per day: one language class and one other sportive, playful or cultural activity.

The final purpose would be to make these activities mandatory. However, because of the non-conformity of the building, the spaces in the center did not allow for activities with all the residents at the moment of the ethnography.

Finally, the internal rules were not completely fixed: we would have meetings about the information we have to give the residents upon their arrival and about the regulations written on the document they have to sign.

This work in progress was considered differently based on the employees' or the residents' discourse. The employees would often complain about the situation, taking a critical stand against the management by the headquarters. Especially, regarding this work in progress, they would denounce the conditions of non-conformity of the building, which could become dangerous for the residents as well as for them. Two of my colleagues qualified the center as "chaos", one of them even compared it to an official *squat*. Meanwhile, the residents would have complaints mainly about the state of their rooms - which often get flooded - considerations that they would express during the weekly residents' meetings. However, for the rest, the residents I interviewed often praised my colleagues, and would rationalize some of the deficiencies of the system in their discourse, explaining them by a shortage in the reception spots or in the personnel.

3. Voices on their Experience in the Center

Before analyzing the temporalities and the spatiality in the center in relation to asylum seekers' experience, it is important to consider the narratives of asylum seekers about the center. Their subjectivities are relevant on the one hand to give them a voice, on the other hand to reveal power relations in the center and in the reception system as a whole. Two main features can be observed in their narratives: a denunciation of structural violence committed by the reception system on the one hand, and a certain positivity about the micro-level of the reception.

In addition to the narratives of the residents, I will also present the considerations of some of my colleagues on their place of work and on the system in general. As employees of Fedasil, they hold a specific position of witnesses of the situations of asylum seekers, but also of actors of the system. As key informants, they talked largely about a feature of the center that was not so present in the residents' discourse and that I also noticed in my observations: a striking lack of means in the center and in the reception system in general.

3.1. Structural Violence

As seen in the second chapter, structural violence is a useful tool to analyze how asylum seekers could be discriminated against and/or how the violation of human rights and human dignity can be insidiously embedded in the way the reception system itself is structured. We saw how structural violence was inscribed in the policies of the reception system itself. In addition, structural violence is also directly perceived by some actors of this system: the asylum seekers and Fedasil's employees.

Some of the residents I talked to explicitly engaged in a critical discourse about the reception system in Belgium and in Europe. Two main features of structural violence were highlighted in this discourse. The first one, and the most shared one, is the non-compliance of the State to its duty of reception. Several residents referred to their stay in the streets before getting a spot at the center. One of them told me:

> They don't do what they could [hosting asylum seekers]. They don't respect human rights. You leave your country because it is dangerous, because it is too hard for you to live there anymore. You look for a refuge, but it is worse here [in Belgium] than in your country, because you have to sleep in the streets. This is very, very dangerous[59] (Olivier).

This feeling of injustice is shared by the members of the staff I talked to. When I asked one of my colleagues who is a former refugee, she told me that, according to her, the situation was different when she applied for asylum, there were enough spots in the reception system:

> Belgium is a country that welcomes, not that leaves people on the streets. How did we come to this? Why don't we want to welcome anymore[60] (Odile)?

According to her, this lack of compliance of the government to its own laws derived from a political unwillingness to host asylum seekers, and to grant refugee statuses. The purpose would be to render the asylum system in Belgium undesirable so it would not become a "pull factor". This opinion is shared by several of my colleagues from the center. In addition, as we saw in the chapter about media analysis, the Belgian printed press also tends to use this argument to explain the decisions of the asylum institutions.

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[59] Original text: "Ils ne font pas leur possible [accueillir les demandeurs d'asile]. Ils ne respectent pas les droits de l'homme. Tu quittes ton pays parce qu'il est dangereux, parce qu'il est trop difficile pour toi de vivre là. Tu cherches un refuge, mais c'est pire ici [en Belgique] que dans ton pays, parce que tu dois dormir dans la rue. C'est très, très dangereux."

[60] Original text: "La Belgique est une terre d'accueille, et non qui laisse les gens à la rue. Comment en sommes-nous arrivés là ? Pourquoi ne voulons-nous plus accueillir ?"

The second main feature of structural violence highlighted in residents' discourse lies in the agency that they feel the system takes away from them. This is particularly seen in the blur where they are left in regard to the future: will they get asylum? when will they have their interview with the CGRS? when will they be transferred to a second-phase center? Some residents told me how powerless they felt in front of these questions.

More than the fact to be kept in the dark, the feeling of having little or no influence on their future is also perceived as structural violence. At the beginning of my internship, one of the residents explained to me how he had been recognized as a refugee in another Member State, but the situation had become too difficult for him there. He then decided to come to Belgium. "I did not want to be a refugee", he told me. However, coming to Belgium, he had to start the asylum procedure - that he had already done in the other Member State - all over again.

> No matter how strong I've become, how many painful experiences I've been through, I don't know if I can make it. I would prefer to be like my friends, without any paper, so I would not have to do it all over again[61] (Jean).

He shared with me his non-agency feeling again later in my internship, when he was transferred to a second-phase center. Asylum seekers have no decision in their assignment to a center. This resident was being sent to a center in the countryside. It would be a contrast compared to the city center where the first-phase center was. Moreover, thanks to documents that he had from the Member state where he was first recognized as a refugee, he was allowed to work, unlike the other asylum seekers. However, this assignment far from any city would make it very difficult for him to keep doing this job.

This uncertainty on their transfer - when it will happen and where they will be sent - was recurrent in the concerns of the residents in their discourse. Moreover, the idea of disconnection from social and productive activities by being sent to a second-phase center is justified by the fact that numerous centers are in the countryside. The countryside is knowingly harder to reach with public transportation. One of my colleagues correlated this institutional choice to have reception centers far from everything with a political willingness to keep asylum seekers out of sight, so there would be less tension with the neighborhood.

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[61] Original text: "Quelle que soit la force que j'ai acquise, quelles que soient les expériences douloureuses que j'ai vécues, je ne sais pas si j'y arriverai. Je préférerais être comme mes amis, sans papier, pour ne pas avoir à tout recommencer."

This feeling of deprivation of agency over their own future is expressed by several asylum seekers. However, as Uberti (2019) showed, asylum seekers can show resistance to a system that deprives them of their agency. I will then counterbalance this expression of deprivation of agency in the further section on temporality and spatiality, highlighting the diverse ways of coping with a controlling system.

During my internship, my colleagues often highlighted the structural violence through which the reception system puts the asylum seekers. One of them told me: "when it comes to institutional violence, Fedasil has got you covered!". Another one of the center's employees made quite a striking metaphor for her job:

> Fedasil is a very violent institution. Sometimes, I feel like the Nazis in the concentration camps, because I think: "I am just doing my job, we need somebody to do this job" (Hélène).

She nuances her words later, describing the center as humanitarian and stating that she thinks that she "make[s] a difference". This difference is to be seen at the micro-level. According to her, the major part of structural violence happens at the macro level. In this line of thought, she also stated that she thinks that Fedasil is part of the humanitarian crisis that Belgium is experiencing.

> Fedasil doesn't have the means, so the pressure is on us and on the people in the center, so the people are even more traumatized than before their arrival in the system (Hélène).

3.2. Ambivalence and Rationalization

It is interesting to note that there seems to be an ambivalence in the asylum seekers' narratives between the reception system as a whole and the concrete of the center. Indeed, several residents mentioned structural violence from the reception institutions, but their discourse was mainly directed towards the waiting and the uncertainty through which the CGRS puts them, as well as towards the fact that numerous asylum seekers have to live in the streets while waiting for a spot in a first-phase center. However, this denunciation of injustice stopped for several residents that I interviewed once they started describing the way the center hosts them and is organized. They made a clear differentiation between the reception system outside of the center and the inside of the center. One resident who denounced the reception system for not respecting human rights also told me: "The center is amazing, the people here are amazing, I could stay my whole procedure here" (Olivier). This did not happen: one week later, he learned that he entered the conditions of the

Dublin Treaty and, since he had been registered before in another Member State, he was asked to leave the center and Belgian soil.

A resident from Afghanistan was really critical about the reception system, mainly because he had been in the center for three months and still could not go to school, since he was still in the first phase of the reception. However, he insisted and explicitly asked me to write in my thesis the following:

> Please, when you talk about us in your book, write exactly what I'm gonna say: here, it is paradise, because there is no war. It is paradise because there is peace. And please say also: we love Belgique people (Fazal).

Several other residents told me that they were happy with the activities, with doing sport, with the personnel of the center… They used terms to describe part of their experience in the center, such as "amazing", "kind" and their synonyms.

This kind of discourse about the center contrasted with the negativity of their narratives when they talked about their migratory trajectory or their reception by the Immigration Office. This latter part differed between adults and teenagers: indeed, on the one hand, the adults had all spent some time on the streets and, on the other hand, the teenagers, as considered more vulnerable, had been assigned to this first-phase center as soon as they registered at the Immigration Office.

One resident expressed this contrast between the horror of the situation in his origin country and of his migratory trajectory, and the hope he had found in Belgium and in the center through a metaphor that he also explicitly insisted that I write in my thesis: "If you try, you can fly" (Ehsan).

This ambivalence is met also in the discourse of some of my colleagues. As a matter of fact, as the exemple in the section on structural violence, there is a differentiation between their representations of the micro-level and of the macro level of the reception system. One of my colleagues qualified the micro-level, i.e. the level of the reception centers, "humanitarian". In their everyday work, several Fedasil's employees told me that they think that they make a positive difference.

It is interesting to note that, in the interviews, my colleagues who had a refugee background were less critical of the reception system than my other colleagues. They would denounce the fact that Fedasil would let asylum seekers sleep on the streets, but they would not question the well-founded basis of the asylum and reception systems. They would even praise it, and use terms such as

"good", "welcoming" and their synonyms to qualify the asylum system in Belgium. Conversely, my colleagues who did not have a refugee background would hold a very critical stand on the reception system and the structural violence in which it takes part.

Furthermore, if one part of the residents I interviewed took a critical stand against the reception system leaving asylum seekers sleeping on the streets, other residents tended to rationalize it. Three residents qualified it as "normal", or "understandable".

> I understand that you have to wait to get a place in a center, they explained to me that there were
> not enough places because there are a lot of asylum seekers[62] (Éric).

Positivity and rationalization did not occupy the major part of their narratives. However, it is crucial to highlight also this aspect of the asylum seekers' narratives, in order to not represent them as only victims of persecutions in their country and passive agents in the reception system. These narratives show more complex experiences.

It is important as well to confront this positivity with the rest of their narratives and with my observations during the fieldwork.

3.3. Insufficiency of Means

I observed a striking lack of means in the center. This insufficiency was not strongly highlighted in the asylum seekers' narratives. It was present in the rationalization of some residents of the lack of spots in the centers, but, besides this, it was not a dominant feature of their discourse. It was, however, very present in my observations and in my colleagues' discourse.

First of all, the lack of financial resources was the most visible. On my first day in the center, one of my colleagues already insisted on the money deficit to keep the center running. The week before I arrived, a part of the ceiling of the fourth floor - i.e. one of the floors with the residents' rooms - fell down. The center is obsolete, and there are not enough funds to renew it completely. As a consequence, even if the building has a very high capacity of space, several floors can not be used to host asylum seekers and to build the personnel's office.

The lack of means is also to be found in the shortage of every position that reception centers need. As stated before, every morning during the flash meeting, we would count who is absent. And

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[62] Original text: "Je comprends que tu dois attendre pour avoir une place dans un centre, ils m'ont expliqué qu'il n'y avait pas assez de places parce qu'il y a beaucoup de demandeurs".

there were several absent staff members every day. One day during my internship, the whole medical staff was absent. On another day, all the daily-life assistants were absent. Moreover, several colleagues told me that Fedasil would not employ enough personnel from the beginning. A striking example would be the position of the psychologist at the center: for 140 residents, there is only one part-time psychologist.

Another demonstration of Fedasil's lack of financial resources can be seen in the material used at the center. For the activities, the center would order artistic or sports material to the headquarters, and it would take months to arrive, if it ever arrives. Some of my colleagues from logistics told me how the material would arrive when the center would not need it anymore.

When asked about the reasons behind this situation, one of my colleagues answered:

> People at the headquarters not only have no money, but they also manage it badly. Some of them know the realities of the centers because they worked in one before leaving for the headquarters, but some have never stepped foot in a center (Hélène).

This lack of means and resources creates precarity in the center, which is mentioned by many of my colleagues, but that the residents did not mention in their interviews. However, during my fieldwork, I also assisted at the weekly residents' meetings. This moment was thought of as a platform where employees could communicate with all the residents, and vice-versa. It is interesting to note that the residents were required to participate in these meetings, but the employees were not.

In these meetings, residents would speak out against the situation in the center. One recurrent topic of discussion was the bedrooms: many got flooded because of the obsolete plumbery. Moreover, the state of the beds was also an object of concern: the mattresses and the blankets were considered of poor quality, and the frequency with which they were washed was not enough to prevent them from being malodorous.

These remarks show how this lack of means was directly felt and impacted asylum seekers' experience. The residents' meetings were for them a moment of empowerment, where they could actively participate in the shaping of the organization of the center. However, it is important to note that, since it was mandatory, there was coercion in this empowerment. Moreover, since the whole staff was not required to be present, it showed the unequal power relations that take place in the center.

4. Temporalities

In the second chapter, we saw that the lens of temporalities has interested migration scholars. In the Belgian reception system, we saw that emergency is inscribed in law, and that some terms about the temporality of the asylum procedures are undefined, which makes space for loopholes. Moreover, the procedure can be postponed or extended, as inscribed in law, and even sometimes overflows the set extensions. These three elements are likely to cause uncertainty and a sentiment of wasted time, which can lead to psychological distress, by disturbing the biographical time of the asylum seekers. The Belgian institutions in charge of asylum and reception are structured around policies that are very likely to cause these uncertainties.

In my ethnography, I noticed temporal tensions that asylum seekers go through. By entering the reception system, asylum seekers enter its institutional dominant temporalities. In this section, I first look at these temporal techniques of control. Second, I consider how their experience shaped by these dominant temporalities is often related to the act of waiting. This waiting is often considered a wasted time, where the asylum seekers are passive. Based on my fieldnotes and the interviews, I consider how this passivity is not the only feature of their experience, but that residents find resistance and coping mechanisms, and thus become active actors of their experience in the reception system. Finally, I focus on the relationship between temporality and space. The subjective experience of asylum seekers is framed by space as well as time. The asylum system's techniques of control are to be seen also in this relation, and in the way the reception center is organized in general.

4.1. Control through Dominant Temporalities

4.1.1. Waiting as a Control Instrument

Temporal techniques are used to control asylum seekers. Researchers who studied temporality focussed extensively on the wait that the asylum system forces on asylum seekers for their procedure. Mcnevin and Missbach (2018) see this control of temporalities as a humanitarianisation of waiting.

> Our analysis shows how efforts to improve the spatial dimensions of border control (that is, the space of confinement itself) enables the more systematic application of temporal techniques of control (prolonged indeterminacy). We call this process the humanitarianisation of waiting. The

humanitarianisation of waiting makes it harder to disentangle the managerial exercise of migrant care from the more pernicious practices of border security (Mcnevin and Missbach, 2018, p. 13).

The asylum institutions impose waiting on asylum seekers. This period often reaches several years before the definitive status determination. In a first-phase center such as the one where I conducted the ethnography, the wait is shorter, however the uncertainty is still very present. The residents are explicitly in this center to wait before being redirected to another center where they will wait once again for their status determination. This can seem really slow to residents, especially because of the uncertainty. They are kept in the dark in regard to the moment of their interview, the day of their transfer, their second-phase center, their status determination, etc.

Some residents told me explicitly that "faster would be better". One of them explained: "When you need something, you want it soon[63]". When asked what he does in this period before knowing if he will get refugee status, one resident told me: "I just wait[64]". In their narratives, the act of waiting occupies a large part. For most of the interviewees, this waiting time was negative. For one minor resident, the fact of waiting was stealing away time when he could be learning at school and start integrating into Belgian society. Another one told me that it was "frustrating" mainly because of the uncertainty. Several residents insisted on this uncertainty causing them concerns. The uncertainty of the time when they will be transferred is recurrent in their discourse. One of them told me:

> Transfers take time, and we don't know. They will take me and bring me to another place. I know I have to leave, this affects me psychologically. I see the others being transferred, I wonder when it is gonna be my turn. Some people take less time to be transferred, why? The uncertainty in the center is difficult. We need an exact time[65] (Caleb).

In his comment, the use of the terms "they will take me" expresses in a specific way his fear: indeed, he used the same term to describe when they abducted him in his country of origin. This reveals the particular distress in which the waiting and the uncertainty can put the asylum seekers through.

According to Mcnevin and Missbach (2018), the slowness of the procedure is part of stalling techniques from the asylum institutions that would prevent asylum seekers from achieving status

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[63] Original text: "Quand tu as besoin de quelque chose tu le veux tôt".
[64] Original text: "J'attends juste".
[65] Original text: "Les transferts prennent du temps, et on sait rien. On va m'enlever, m'emmener dans un autre endroit. Je sais que je dois partir, ça m'affecte psychologiquement. Je vois les autres être transférés, je me demande quand ce sera mon tour, certaines personnes prennent moins de temps pour être transférées, pourquoi? L'incertitude dans le centre est difficile. On doit avoir une durée exacte".

determinacy. This shapes asylum seekers' experience, which often results in periods of stasis, indeterminacy and limbo. Mcnevin and Missbach also insist on the fact that these temporal techniques are not unintended consequences of the administrative system, but a structural feature of the asylum system.

In addition to waiting for a decision from Fedasil for the second-phase center and from the CGRS for status determinacy, asylum seekers are subject to another kind of waiting: waiting before being part of the hosting society as a worker. As a matter of fact, asylum seekers are prevented from working for four months after their registration.

In their research on temporal tensions for migrants, Clayton and Vickers (2019) consider how dominant temporalities regulate the migrants' lives, mainly through an alternation of acceleration and deceleration. The first part of their research focuses on the period of prohibition of work for asylum seekers.

> The experience of those going through the asylum process is defined by waiting, suspension and uncertain futures, constructing a clear tension for those willing to contribute and resulting in other forms of unpaid activities. [...] This is an ordering that restricts which type of labor is allowed against desires to 'contribute', in a context where waged labor is valued more than other forms of activity and those removed from waged labor are consequently devalued. (Clayton and Vickers, 2019, p. 1466).

Several residents from the center mentioned this difficulty for them to be prevented from working. In their discourse, not working was deleterious to them in two ways: on the one hand, they were not able to earn money and provide for themselves; on the other hand, they wanted to prove their worth and show that they were productive. The lexical field of their potential as a working force for Belgium was recurrent in their narratives.

It is important to note that this was not the case for all asylum seekers in the center. Indeed, three-thirds of the residents were minors, which means that they would not have worked anyway. However, we see the same discourse about lost time and lost productivity, but in regard to education. The minor residents would express the same frustration as adults about this waiting period. Moreover, members from both groups would mention the distraction from their worries that working or learning could have been.

This waiting period during which asylum seekers are prevented from working or learning creates then not only a sense of loss of agency, but a marginalization as well. By not participating in

working or learning activities, the sense of value attached to it (Clayton and Vickers, 2019) cannot be gained by asylum seekers, keeping them out of the hosting society.
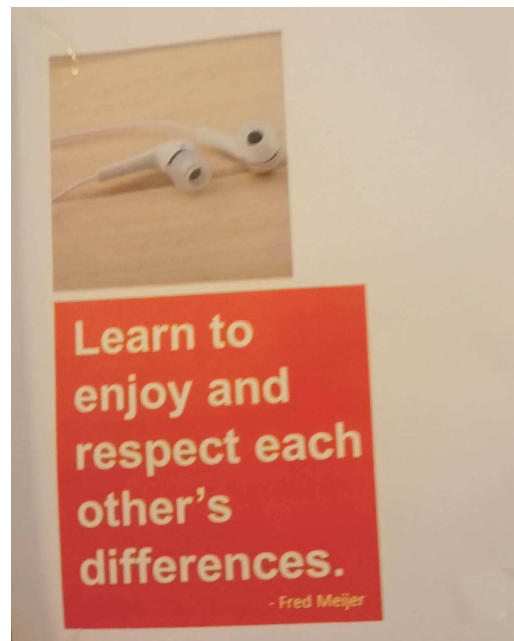
4.1.2. Imposed Schedule as Control Instrument

In the center, the internal regulations were very detailed, as shown with the document that the asylum seekers have to sign upon their arrival. In addition to this document, these internal regulations are reminded to residents in two ways: through posters in different languages with simplistic images (examples in Illustrations 1 and 2), and through reminders from the staff during the residents' meetings. This kind of reminder for internal regulations is not specific to the center where I did my internship, but is generalized in other European countries (Campesi, 2015).

Among these internal regulations, we can find the center schedule. The day was organized as follows: a wake-up time and a bedtime, fixed hours for the meals, one activity in the morning and one in the afternoon. The activities could be cultural, sportive, information sessions, playful or language classes. In addition, there were other obligations on a fixed day of the week: the resident meeting, picking up their pocket money, and cleaning their room and their sheets.

Illustration 1.   Illustration 2.

PLUS DE BRUIT APRES 22h, RESPECTER LE CALME
NO MORE NOISE AFTER 10 P.M., RESPECT THE CALM
GEEN GELUID MEER NA 22.00 uur, RESPECTEER DE RUST
د ماسپښین له 10 بجو وروسته نور شور نشته،
آرام ته درنـاوى وکرئ
لا مزيد من الضوضاء بعد الساعة 10 مساءً ،
احترموا السلام
ይሕሪ 10 p.m. ይሕሪ ሕጂ ይምጹ የለን፣ ንህይላት አክብር

Learn to enjoy and respect each other's differences.
- Fred Meijer

Moreover, they could participate in community service, for which they would earn some money. It is interesting to note that they would earn less at the hour than the legal minimum wage in

Belgium. However, the amount of retribution that residents would perceive is set by Fedasil, a federal institution.

The schedule was displayed on a board on each floor where there were the residents' rooms (see Illustration 3). The pins representing the activities and the obligations are moveable, but in practice they would stay at the same place on the board for two main reasons: the schedule does not change much from one week to another, and the staff would often forget to update the board.

Illustration 3.
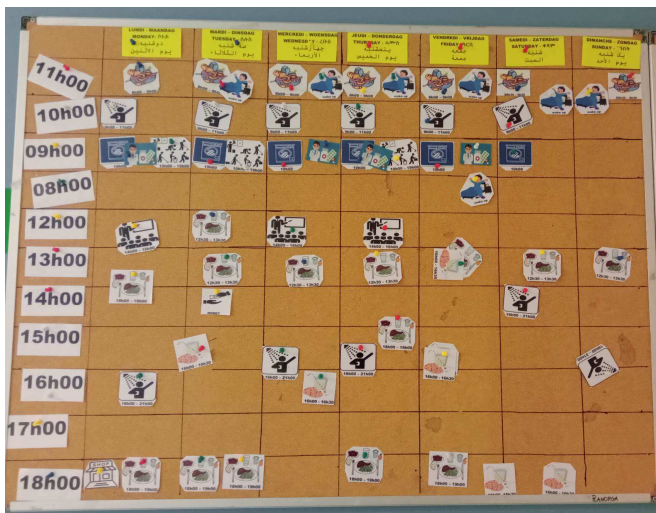
According to Campesi (2015, p. 8),

> The regimentation is a stress factor for asylum seekers, who do not necessarily share the vision of order imposed by the center's management, preferring to have greater room for self-organization.

Furthermore, these regulations have the purpose to impose a certain order in the center. This is wanted by the bureaucratic regimentation typical in large reception facilities. This permits major efficiency in the access to the resources for the residents. This creates total control over the asylum seekers' lives. These practices are massifying, which violates the human right of personal dignity of asylum seekers (Campesi, 2015).

Reception centers are considered total institutions, i.e. institutions where the bureaucratic efficiency produces a depersonalization of their beneficiaries. Considering Goffman's (1961) definition of total institutions, Campesi (2015) shows how reception centers answer this definition through their precarious housing facilities, the queues to access the canteen or to get a personnel kit, their pocket money, or to register to the community service, the "levelling of social differences

according to a uniform standard of hospitality" (Campesi, 2015, p. 10). These elements of total institutions can have the consequence of worsening the psychological state of asylum seekers.

In his fieldwork, Campesi (2015) found that asylum seekers tended to describe the reception centers as prisons. Conversely, in the interviews I conducted, the description of the center was far from the description of a prison. Some residents told me that the schedule helped them, especially the wake-up hour. They described it as a way to force them to get used to Belgian society. As said above, they would use a lexical field of positivity to describe their life in the center and the way the personnel treats them.

However, in my observations outside the interviews, I noticed the features of a total institution. The fixed schedule entered those features. Residents would queue in front of the accountant's office for a long time, they would miss activities and be excluded from the next ones as a punishment for not being on time, or in the morning they would find it hard to wake up at the time determined by the schedule and the staff would enter the rooms to exhort them to get out of bed. These features of bureaucracy and massification can bring distress to already traumatized individuals.

4.1.3. Humanitarianization of Waiting

McNevin and Missbach (2018) studied the temporal techniques of border control and the humanitarianization of waiting. They consider border control through the processual turn. Thus, they think it beyond spatial terms and incorporate in their conception the policies that enable or restrict entry and exit from a territory. They argue that there is a particular temporal feature of border control in regard to refugees and asylum seekers. The border is not considered a fixed line delimiting territories, but a process that is extended in time and space and that "enables the more systematic application of temporal techniques of control (prolonged indeterminacy)" (McNevin and Missbach, 2018, p. 13).

This process is called the humanitarianization of waiting.

> The humanitarianization of waiting makes it harder to disentangle the managerial exercise of migrant care from the more pernicious practices of border security (McNevin and Missbach, 2018, p. 13).

Humanitarianization refers to the institutionalized attentiveness to migrant's care. It is not only a governmental matter, but also an inter-governmental and non-governmental one. The reception

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system enters this humanitarianization through the services that it provides: shelter, social, medical and psychological services. Migration management clearly integrated humanitarianism. At border control thought of as a process, so also in the more general reception system of asylum seekers, this humanitarianism is entangled in temporal techniques of control: "access and speed on one hand, chronic waiting on the other" (McNevin and Missbach, 2018).

This humanitarianization of waiting is quite visible in the center where I conducted my ethnography. Moreover, it is present in the discourse of both asylum seekers and Fedasil's employees. This already mentioned distinction between a micro-level that is considered positive and benevolent and a macro level that is seen as perpetuating structural violence enters that definition. The residents I interviewed often referred to waiting as difficult, because they see it as an additional source of stress and moments in which their psychological trauma can expand. However, when asked what they thought about life in the center, the time they had there and the way the center is organized, almost all of them insisted on positive elements, praising the staff and its activities.

This humanitarianism can hide the structural violence of the reception system:

> Within the context of ongoing containment strategies, the impulse to alleviate their more obvious spatial hardships can obscure structures of violence that take temporal as well as spatial forms and contribute to their normalization. Unless more humane alternatives (including alternatives to detention) are pursued in parallel with sustained critique of the structures of violence that condition detention in the first place, the best efforts to improve confinement may end up only preserving it (McNevin and Missbach, 2018, p. 29).

4.2. The Limbo of Waiting: Passivity or Agency for Asylum Seekers?

4.2.1. A Spectrum

Several migration scholars studied the fact of waiting for migrants. They tend to position their research on a spectrum with two extremities: on the one hand, the politics of waiting can be considered immersing asylum seekers in passivity; on the other, it can be productive of coping mechanisms and generate agency for asylum seekers. In the past decade, if scholars tend to be closer to one of these poles than to the other, they still recognized the importance of both (see McNevin and Missbach, 2018; and Rotter, 2016).

Tefera (2021) and McNevin and Missbach (2018) use the term "limbo" to refer to the state of immobility and waiting in which asylum seekers are immersed. Tefera (2021) refers to this state of limbo as a moment and a place where asylum seekers' time is considered non-utilized or stagnant. It is viewed similarly as an "interlude that does not progress into the future" (Tefera, 2021, p. 118). According to McNevin and Missbach (2018), this often involves the absence of activities with meaning.

McNevin and Missbach (2018) warn us about the downsides of theories that would get too close to one pole of the spectrum passivity-agency. Both narratives can be instrumentalized by governmental agendas. Narratives emphasizing passivity present a simplistic portrayal of inactivity and lives on hold. This reinforces the idea that asylum seekers and refugees are solely responsible for their situation and should be discouraged from seeking asylum. The narrative polarized on the other side of the spectrum focuses on agency, achievements and resilience. This kind of narrative runs the risk of diverting attention away from the structural features that contribute to uncertainty, suggesting that any notion of limbo is exaggerated. By highlighting the accomplishments and abilities of asylum seekers and refugees, these narratives imply that the waiting period cannot be as burdensome as it may be presented.

In her research on the meaning of waiting for asylum seekers, Rotter (2016) found out that Asylum seekers commonly expressed the prevailing belief that waiting entails a passive and unproductive period characterized by stagnation and a lack of meaningful activity. However, for her ethnography, she decided to use broader ethnographical material relating to their everyday life. She discovered that the combination of both kinds of material attests to a more complex lived experience of waiting.

Rotter (2016) argues that their waiting can take three forms: affective, active and productive. The waiting can be affective in the sense that it shows anticipation of what lies ahead and contemplation of both desired and feared outcomes. Second, their waiting can be active, as they purposefully organize and occupy their time with diverse routines, activities, and projects. Finally, to a certain extent, waiting can also be productive, as it can be harnessed and converted into valuable resources. As a consequence, Rotter suggests that waiting should not be considered an empty interlude between events, but an intentional and agential process. However, she nuances her words:

> I do not wish to romanticize asylum seekers' waiting or to overlook the political implications of making people wait. Waiting can constitute an insidious means of exercising control over and profiting from those who are categorized as 'undesirables' (Rotter, 2016, p. 97).

As Rotter, I do not consider the waiting period as a wasted time, but as meaningful. It can be affective, active and/or productive. This should not take away the attention of waiting as a control instrument and a feature of structural violence. However, it presents the lived experience of this time by asylum seekers without picturing them as solely passive victims.

4.2.2.1. Time as Affective

The time that asylum seekers spend waiting is affective: the act of waiting encompasses meaning, intensifying individuals' awareness of their needs. As demonstrated in this study, asylum seekers anticipate the future, carefully considering various possibilities and envisioning alternative scenarios and events (Rotter, 2016).

As mentioned above, the waiting time might cause psychological distress, especially because of its relation to uncertainty. However, the residents whom I interviewed also associate the time they wait in the center as a kind of buffer time that can be seen in a positive way. Some of them considered their time in the center as peaceful, compared to the situations they had dealt with back in their origin country. It is not considered positive *per se*, but positive in a comparative perspective. One of them insisted on the fact of being alive:

> I just wait. While I am not in Burundi, it is okay. [...] In the meantime, I live[66]. What matters is living, breathing, playing, not being afraid. As long as you live, it's okay" (Jean).

Some of them considered beneficial features of waiting, not in a comparative way but in an essential way. One of them told me that "waiting is good". Another one considered that it was beneficial to reach peace of mind after the trauma of their migratory trajectory.

In their anticipation of the future, the uncertainty is preponderant. To address this, some residents use a projection of a positive future, or set a concrete objective as a coping mechanism. When asked what are his plans for the future, one told me: "I have a lot, a lot of hopes. I hope to get my documents in one year[67]".

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[66] Original text: "J'attends. Tant que je ne suis pas au Burundi, ça va. [...] En attendant, je vis. Ce qui compte c'est vivre, respirer, jouer, ne plus avoir peur. Tant que tu vis, ça va".
[67] Original text: "J'ai beaucoup, beaucoup d'espoir. J'espère avoir mes papiers dans un an".

4.2.2.2. Time as Active

Waiting can be an active experience, as individuals, under specific circumstances, are able to use waiting time to engage in a variety of activities that are both focused on the present (giving significance to daily life) and oriented toward the future (aimed at desired outcomes). In the center where I conducted my ethnography, such activities encompassed socializing, participating in organized activities, praying, engaging in daily routines, seeking information about the asylum process, and seeking support from peers. In fact, waiting can act as a trigger for taking action to secure the right to remain in Belgium and be included in Belgian society. Waiting becomes integrated into everyday routines and projects, and should not be perceived as something separate from the representation of everyday life (Rotter, 2016).

An important feature of their waiting time in the center is converted into activities. In the interviews, all residents particularly insisted on the help of sports activities and language classes. They would frame these activities as ways to evacuate anxiety and to keep busy with regard to sports activities, or as ways to invest their present time with a view to inclusion in Belgian society with regard to language classes. Moreover, they are active agents of the organization of parts of these activities, since they would organize in their free time football or basketball matches or study French or Dutch. They attach great significance to this agency in the way they organize their day or their future inclusion. Indeed, several residents provided me with advice for the general organization of the center and for specific activities as well.

4.2.2.3. Time as Productive

A third way to qualify asylum seekers' waiting time is with the term productive. There are situations where the waiting period can be utilized effectively by individuals who are waiting. This can occur when waiting time is transformed into a valuable asset or viewed retrospectively as preparatory for the future. Rotter (2016) argues that despite its restrictive and uncertain nature, the asylum waiting process was not experienced as stagnant or without any purpose by asylum seekers. This implies that there may be hidden dynamics at play during seemingly unremarkable waiting periods. Even for those who have suffered loss, trauma, and prolonged uncertainty, waiting can involve intentionality, action, and the possibility of change.

Attendance in language classes and studying independently show preparatory actions for the future. Another set of activities provided by the center that enters this category is the set of

information sessions. They consist of the presentation of the working and studying possibilities they can have when they will be authorized to work - four months after filing the request for asylum - or to study for minors. These sessions are also intended to have a long-term perspective, in the sense that they do not only present the possibilities for residents in a few months ahead, but they introduce prospects to be included in Belgian society in the long-term work-wise and study-wise. Mainly, these information sessions concern occupations in shortage, mainly manual work.

One of the residents considered compliance with the whole organization of the center as a productive way to get prepared to be included in Belgian society:

> It is as if I were jet-lagged, but it is positive, because when people will have something to do, responsibilities, objectives, they will already be used to [Belgian organization and temporalities][68] (Olivier).

This resident considered the constraining temporalities of the center as a jet lag compared to its own personal and individual temporality. However, according to him, this constraint benefits the residents by familiarizing them with Belgian society.

Two residents I interviewed utilized their time effectively through activities outside of the center. One of them had a work permit because he had been granted refugee status in another European Member State. He worked at a catering company and could use the time waiting for status determinacy saving money. Indeed, this was a stepping stone for him, since he had decided to leave the country where he had been granted refugee status because of its poor economic situation. The other resident who utilized his time outside of the center was volunteering five days a week at NGOs that help asylum seekers on the street. The NGOs he was volunteering for have a large part of their activities in the Palace of Rights in Schaerbeek, where this resident had resided for four months before getting a spot in the first-phase center where I did my internship. With this example, we see that not only the reception obligations of the state are externalized to third actors like NGOs, but that this externalization is carried on by asylum seekers themselves, the supposed recipients of the federal reception system. The resident I interviewed explained the rationales behind his volunteering engagement in these terms:

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[68] Original text: "C'est comme si j'étais en décalage horaire, mais c'est positif, parce que quand les gens auront quelque chose à faire, des responsabilités, des objectifs, ils seront déjà habitués [à l'organisation et aux temporalités belges]".

I don't need a lot of money. Just the right thing. I want to help people. I've been there, so I know. These people have already experienced the worst, and their human rights are still not respected here in Belgium. For me, helping people is the most rewarding thing[69] (Olivier).

As Rotter (2016) stated, the productive investment of asylum seekers' waiting time does not count for the major part of this time. The conversion of the wait into affective, active and productive time presents the asylum seekers' time in the reception facilities as meaningful and triggering of agency. The constraints and structural violence of the reception system can be part of this trigger. The purpose of this analysis is to highlight the meaningful experience of reception and the active role that asylum seekers take on. The point is not to romanticize their experience, which, as shown, is traumatic and marked by structural violence, in which the temporalities of the reception system play an important role.

One resident told me: "I don't want to be seen as just a victim. I don't like charity. I have to earn what I get[70]" (Olivier). The purpose of this ethnography was on the one hand to underline the structural violence embedded in the reception system and its temporalities, and analyze how this experience is actually lived. On the other hand, the purpose was to give voice to the asylum seekers, to avoid victimization which leads to massification and dehumanization, through showing their meaningful, active and productive experience of their temporalities in the reception center.

4.3. Temporality and Space

Time and space are related on different levels. Studying time *per se* without mentioning its link with space would be inconsiderate of existing relationships and the meaningful experience that develop in this relationship. In this section, I first unfold three different theories on the relationship between time and space as developed by Goshu Wolde Tefera (2021). Second, I present Campesi's (2015) theory of social disempowerment and the concept of striation of space as Safouane (2017) explained it for reception facilities. I compare his theory to the findings of my ethnography. Finally, I introduce Maculan's (2022) theory of asylum seekers' resistance to a humanitarian government and I compare it with the practice of the asylum seekers in the center where I did my internship.

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[69] Original text: "Je n'ai pas besoin de beaucoup d'argent. Juste ce qu'il faut. Je veux aider les gens. Je suis passé par là, donc je sais. Ces gens, ils ont déjà vécu le pire, et leurs droits humains ne sont toujours pas respectés ici, en Belgique. [...] Pour moi, aider les gens, c'est ce qu'il y a de plus gratifiant".

[70] Original text: "Je ne veux pas être considéré comme seulement une victime. Je n'aime pas la charité. Je dois mériter ce que je reçois".

Goshu Wolde Tefera (2021) identified three of these links between time and space through which subjective experiences are framed. The three notions are the following: time-space, time-geography and rhythm. First, in regard to time-space, the fundamental premise is that time and space are inseparable and reliant on each other. Time-spaces encompass domains in which the imagination, the construction and the performance of ordinary thoughts and actions take place. The lives of asylum seekers are distinctly envisioned and shaped through diverse time-spaces, characterized by dynamic and uneven interconnections. Time-space theory focuses on the shaping of human activities by both spatial and temporal dimensions. It recognizes that temporal processes influence spatial arrangement, which are thus not static entities.

Second, in relation to time-geography, it examines the paths and durations of activities and movements occurring within the realms of time and space, recognizing that they unfold along specific trajectories. Time-geography is a specific theoretical framework developed by the geographer Torsten Hägerstrand (Hägerstraand, 1970, Hägerstrand, 1985). Within the framework of time-geography, mobility trajectories contain territorial characteristics. In essence, time-geography facilitates comprehension of individuals' movements across time (as continuous sequences of events) and space (in terms of location). Time-geography focuses on the spatial and temporal constraints that people face in their daily lives and how they use their time and resources for different activities. The difference between time-space and time-geography is that, on the one hand, time-space analyzes the interplay of space and time, especially their influence on human activities, while, on the other hand, time-geography focuses on individual constraints and opportunities for action in space and time.

Finally, regarding rhythms, they are part of the constitution of social organization and they have an embedded temporal connotation.

> Social space is punctuated by repeated patterns and routines of everyday life, the timings, durations, and regularities, which can shape and sustain a sense of place for individuals and communities (Tefera, 2021, p. 117).

According to Tefera (2021), on the one hand time-space approaches contain subjectivist connotations while, on the other hand, rhythms and time-geography approaches highlight objectivist assumptions, in the sense of time considered as having a direction and a pace and measured in relation to space.

In time-geography and rhythm models, lived experiences are regulated and sustained by existing systems of labor relations, policy and governance structures, which in turn impose certain rhythms, patterns and cycles (Tefera, 2021, p. 118).

Overall, these three models of theories reveal that asylum seekers' experiences are both shaped by temporalities and space, as well as by the combination of the two, on subjective and objective levels.

4.3.2. Social Disempowerment and Striation

In his article, Campesi (2015) studied how reception facilities can become a trap for asylum seekers. Indeed, through the victimization by the reception system, a process of loss of agency is created, which Campesi calls social disempowerment. It describes the way in which asylum seekers become dependent on a "humanitarian government". This dependence serves the system of control of the state, "achieving the effect of confining asylum seekers within a concentrated place that can easily be controlled" (Campesi, 2015, p. 16). The government puts in place, through its reception system, a form of "humanitarian confinement", in the sense that it hosts asylum seekers on the one hand, but subjects them to control through workers that are supposed to perform humanitarian work.

This control is performed also through the configuration of reception centers, their internal organization and their relation to the outside world. The way centers are internally organized reflects a depersonalizing way of ordering space. This is a consequence of the efficiency wanted by total institutions, in order to perform administrative functions and control more effectively. We already saw how this depersonalization can take place through dominant temporalities. It is also seen in the way the center is organized. Here, the concept of striation of space as explained by Safouane (2017) is useful to analyze the layout of the center. It refers to the way space can be divided, differentiated and segmented into hierarchical categories. It involves the spatial organization and arrangement of different elements. According to Safouane (2017), reception centers are striated spaces that reterritorialize through apparatuses of capture. Safouane borrowed this concept of apparatus of capture from Deleuze and Guattari (1980):

Deleuze and Guattari talk about "apparatus of capture" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980) to designate the exercise of power in a striated space, which consists in re-coding and reterritorializing humans through the layout of the space (buildings, architecture, rules). The

capture of the asylum seekers' narratives through space is more relevant to understanding power relations in such reception facilities (Safouane, 2017, p. 1933).

There are also specific points of friction that link smooth and striated spaces. Safouane (2017) argues that reception center is one of them, called "holey spaces", a concept also borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari (1980). These holey spaces refer to corridors of escape from the control and the hierarchization of striated space. Striation is embedded in the reception center. In the center where I conducted my ethnography, it was evident in the categorization of the floors by the category of asylum seekers and the personnel, with interdiction to access some floors according to the category the residents were part of. Moreover, it is seen in the re-coding of the space, which refers to the process of conversion from the former function of the building to its reception function. The former purpose of the space has been de-coded through decontextualization and then recontextualized for its new purpose (Safouane, 2017). In the case of the center where I did my internship, they decoded the hospital settings and re-coded them into a first-phase reception center. As explained above, the features of the hospital are interestingly still tangible, but the re-codification led to the creation of new significations for the space: the patients' rooms became the residents', the nurses' offices became the daily life assistants and the cultural mediators', the hospital administration's office became the center administration's office, etc. As Safouane (2017) noted, the recodification enables the reterritorialization of asylum seekers, "who become ordered as they "queue" for their hearing" (Safouane, 2017, p. 1928). The system of queuing was recurrent in the center where I conducted my ethnography: asylum seekers would queue at the canteen, to get their pocket money, to give their names and their identification number before starting an activity, etc. The idea of queuing is also in the representation of the reception system in general: waiting to have a spot in a center, to have their interview, to move to a second-phase center, and to get status determinacy. This recodification and reterritorialization participate in the state's desire for control.

Safouane (2017) qualifies reception centers as "spaces of enmeshed temporalities", i.e. where temporalities of different categories of people occupying the center are overlapping. Indeed, the temporality experienced by the asylum seekers is much different from the one experienced by the staff, who work their shifts and then go back home. The reception center is thus a "space of transition and flow that deploys systems of immobility" (Safouane, 2017, p. 1934). They are similar to waiting rooms for asylum seekers, where their movements are regulated. This striation and regulation lead to social disempowerment.

In the recodification of the space to convert the building into a reception center, a subtle division of the inside and outside is created. The reception center is mainly closed to the outside world, except for some exceptions. Fedasil asks its centers to organize visits to the centers to increase awareness of asylum seekers' situation. However, my colleagues did not agree with this point of view, stating that the center was "not a zoo". Instead, they would organize workshops for companies that would come and help the staff, or meetings between asylum seekers and high school students. However, these activities where there was a porosity between the inside and the outside of the center were highly codified, with a tight schedule, precise parts of the center to which visitors would have access, and activities almost always mediated by the staff. It is not a closed center, so residents would leave if they wanted to, but they had to be back for a certain schedule if they still wanted to benefit from diverse services of the center.

As Campesi (2015) showed in his research, there is porosity between the inside and the outside of a reception center. However, as seen in the codified meetings with the outside and with its weak recurrency, this closure to the outside world exists, and it highlights one paradox of reception structures: they gather refugees into a defined and re-codified place to provide assistance but, at the same time, they prevent their residents to truthfully enter into contact with local communities.

This social segregation is called by Campesi (2015) "humanitarian confinement". This spatial concept can be linked to its temporal counterpart already mentioned above, the humanitarianization of waiting. The humanitarian element refers to the assistance the reception system is providing, and the term "confinement" is related to the partial closure of the center from the outside world.

> The humanitarian confinement of asylum seekers reflects a governmental logic that combines compassion with suspicion, assistance with control (Campesi, 2015, p. 17).

This humanitarian confinement achieves the confinement of asylum seekers into a space that is easily socially controlled. This leads to a reproduction of dependence of asylum seekers on the reception system and, as a consequence, reproduces social disempowerment.

4.3.3. Resistance and Agency

The social disempowerment that asylum seekers experience does not mean that they do not oppose some forms of resistance to it. In front of the total institution constituted by the reception system, asylum seekers can show opposition, claim rights and engage in conflict. They can do so by

taking possession of spaces of the reception center, putting forward alternative logics for reorganizing the space.

According to Safouane (2017), reception centers are not only striated spaces, but holey spaces as well. Thus, they constitute places where migrants can temporarily escape. This escape that can represent the center was tangible in the interviews I conducted. In their paradoxical way to frame the reception system, with a humanitarian component on the one hand and structural violence on the other, the residents illustrate a kind of repair that constitutes the center.

Moreover, according to Safouane (2017), since reterritorialization happens in reception centers through apparatuses of capture, migrants set up resistance movements in order to escape striation. Thus, migration can be considered a vector of space occupation and appropriation for asylum seekers, through an active participation in their own reterritorialization. In the center where I conducted the ethnography, this active participation can be seen in the advice that the residents I interviewed gave in regard to the organization of the center, but also in the decision they would make to participate in non-mandatory activities, or to do community service.

In their active participation in reterritorialization, asylum seekers also use the practice of resistance. According to Maculan (2022), asylum seekers show resistance to the humanitarian government. He defines resistance following Saitta's (2015) definition:

> We define resistance as "conflicts that have as their object different kinds of tangible and intangible stakes, linked to an interest in doing or obtaining something, as well as in affirming a full and free subjectivity, unfettered by a status attributed by others" (Saitta, 2015: 15). [...] They are often spontaneous individual actions that, at first glance, may appear self-indulgent and opportunistic, rather than explicitly questioning the structure of domination (Maculan, 2022, p. 432).

Resistance takes various forms in the center where I conducted the ethnography. One of them is creating a sort of tent with their clothes around their beds to try to create some privacy, in a room where other residents sleep and where members of the staff enter often without knocking, to ask them to wake up or to effectuate some tasks. According to Maculan (2022), this gesture to recreate privacy that is denied by the reception system reveals a gap between asylum seekers' everyday needs and what the reception system provides.

Furthermore, residents in the center would put on music and their phones without wearing earplugs, with a high volume. Walking in the corridors of the center is an auditive experience in

which several pieces of music overlap and create a sort of "brouhaha". The residents would act this way despite the posters stating an obligation to wear earplugs (see Illustration 2). They would do so not so much in their bedrooms or common rooms, but in the spaces of passage, i.e. the corridors and the reception. In this way, they resisted a clear obligation of the center by occupying the space through their music, expressing themselves to take possession of the places of passage.

This kind of resistance shows that, if social disempowerment is a reality, asylum seekers do not lose their capacity for opposition. An ethnography can bring to light these practices of resistance and to which extent they reveal the agency of asylum seekers. Asylum seekers' lives are governed by constant forms of surveillance and domination, which they can resist in some way through active participation and acts of resistance. The control on their lives has spatial features, and the resistance to it can also make use of the space.

Conclusion

The scope of the thesis was to underline the structural violence through which the reception system makes asylum seekers go, while not considering them as only victims but as human beings with rights and agency. The ethnography combined with the analysis of the policies and the press representations aimed at rendering visible what is latent. The question at the core of this thesis stemmed from the alleged "reception crisis" or "migration crisis" framed by the media. How is the Belgian reception system for asylum seekers currently organized, how is it framed by the media, and how is it perceived and lived by its different actors and recipients?

Thus, this research unfolded in four main objectives. The first objective was to explain the functioning of the Belgian reception system for asylum seekers, highlighting to which extent it respects the human rights and moral integrity of the asylum seekers. The second objective was to observe the (non-)respect of human rights and the temporalities by highlighting some particular features of the policies. The third objective was to analyze the media construction of a particular representation of asylum seekers and of the reception system in Belgium. Finally, the last objective was to focus on the lived experience of asylum seekers in the reception system in Belgium.

The first chapter aimed at explaining the functioning of the Belgian reception system of asylum seekers. Particular attention was paid to one major feature: the extent to which the reception system – as the asylum policies shape it – respects human rights and moral integrity of the asylum seekers. As we saw, the current shape of the reception system was born out of "crises", i.e. periods in which the number of asylum seekers in Belgium exceeded what the Belgian government expected – or hoped – and, thus, had prepared for. The recent evolution of the Belgian reception system was influenced by heavy pressure, which led to three major consequences. First, numerous asylum seekers saw their right to shelter taken away by a non-prepared state, which resulted in them staying on the streets. Second, the asylum procedure and the reception system experienced some changes due to this pressure, mainly regarding two groups: Afghans and Ukrainians. On the procedure side, status determination is differentiated for the two groups. On the reception side, the arrival and the shelter of the two groups were physically separated, Ukrainians having their own channel, while Afghans and other nationalities – Burundese, Palestinian, Congolese, Syrians, Eritreans, etc. – were hosted in the regular Fedasil centers and its parters'. Third, non-governmental actors – such as

NGOs and private actors – were asked to help in the reception system, as well as government personnel that are not part of the agencies related to asylum.

Considering the history of asylum seekers' reception in Belgium, one can observe that the number of arrivals resulted in changes in the asylum procedure and the reception; part of the changes in reception resulted in new centers opening. However, a considerable number of these new centers are temporary, and close after the end of the contract between Fedasil and the owners, or when the critical moment is considered over. Moreover, the government has the tendency, as it did in the past, to delegate its reception duty to non-governmental actors. Besides, Belgium has to periodically manage a number of requests that are framed as high. However, we did not reach an increase in asylum applications that was never seen before. The question is: is this insufficient preparation part of structural violence, or is the Belgian state genuinely overwhelmed by events it could not have predicted?

In order to answer, one should take a look at the reception and asylum policies. In Belgium, federal institutions play a major role in the asylum procedure and in the reception. Belgian legal framework of asylum and reception is mainly a transposition of the Geneva Convention of 1951, which has a human rights purpose in its core, and European directives. This legal framework provides for an asylum seekers' reception that is intended to be humane – "in accordance with human dignity". However, some loopholes might be found in it. First of all, the asylum category does not cover each category of persons fleeing their country. The addition of the subsidiary status in 2006 managed to widen the international protection purpose. However, the combined scopes of the asylum and the subsidiary protection remain narrow – what about the people who flee a kind of persecution that is not laid down on the list, or if they flee environmental issues, or a country that is considered a "safe third country"? The language used in the legal framework is also questionable – beneficiaries, alien, safe third country. Furthermore, the federal institutions' delegation of their reception duty to non-governmental actors also poses questions. Finally, some terms, such as "emergency shelter", or "reasonable period of time", are quite broad, and are subject to interpretation – not always in favor of asylum seekers...

The way the reception system is conceived does not always answer the "human dignity" it is intended to provide. Overall, when analyzing the temporalities inscribed in the reception and asylum policies, three main features are to highlight. First, emergency is inscribed in law. Second, some terms about the temporality of the asylum procedures are undefined, which makes space for loopholes. Lastly, the procedure can be postponed or extended, as inscribed in law, and even

sometimes overflows the set extensions. These three elements are likely to cause uncertainty and a sentiment of wasted time, which can lead to psychological distress, by disturbing the biographical time of the asylum seekers. The Belgian institutions in charge of asylum and reception are structured around policies that are very likely to cause these uncertainties. This is part of the structural violence embedded in the reception system, i.e. the systematic mechanisms through which social structures or institutions inflict harm or create disadvantages for individuals within a community. It is characterized by its subtle nature, often remaining unnoticed, and lacking a specific individual who can be held accountable for the resulting consequences.

The main Belgian newspapers reported on the increase of the arrivals and the management of the reception by Belgian authorities. Analyzing the articles of the two main newspapers on the francophone side of Belgium, one can note some specific features of the representation by the press of migrants and of the reception system. To study these representations, it is useful to use the method of the analysis of the framings, i.e. a process that involves the deliberate selection of specific elements from a perceived reality to construct a particular narrative or story, with the intention of promoting a specific interpretation. By focusing on certain specific terms and lexical fields, this thesis showed the different features of these framings.

Analyzing the framings of migrants in the selected corpus, this analysis identified two main frames: the "victim" framing and the "threat" framing. The "victim" frame is mainly humanitarian, insisting on the dramatization of the migrants' situation in front of the reception system. The "threat" framing mainly regards public order by associating migrants with illegality, but they are also represented as a mass that burdens the Belgian and European systems. Several elements participate in these framings. First, the most common terms to describe migrants in our corpus are "refugees", "asylum seekers", "migrants", "immigrants". These terms seem almost interchangeable in our corpus, which can create an amalgam for the readers and make the representation of migrants even more anonymous. Second, anonymity is also seen in the mass lexical field used in the articles. This too participates in the creation of an indistinction between the different individuals. They are deprived of their individual characteristics. Only a few articles name the migrants. The few characteristics that are given are often creating subgroups out of the "mass", but these representations in groups still hide the individuals. Third, the mention of some characteristics, such as age or gender, triggers a loss of agency in the representation of women, and a dramatization of the situation by the mention of the most vulnerable groups. This dramatization is present also in some headlines of the corpus. Finally, there is a distinction made between "deserving" and

"undeserving" migrants through the association of terms designating migrants and a context that connotes illegality, or a burden for the state.

This first criteria for the selection of the articles for the creation of the corpus was based on the presence of the terms "migratory crisis" or "reception crisis". The analysis of recurrent themes and lexical elements revealed a certain framing of the authorities' response to arrivals in the press. These framings are created through all the articles of our corpus, regardless of their belonging to the category "migratory crisis" or "reception crisis". The framings are constructed in the accumulation of the representations in both categories.

However, it is worth noting that the journalistic choice between the terms "migratory crisis" and "reception crisis" is far from insignificant. First of all, we see that the articles about the "migratory crisis" tend to speak more about the situation of the European Union as a whole and of Belgium as part of this situation. On the other hand, in the articles about the "reception crisis", all articles focus on the hosting issue in Belgium. In this research, we see that the term "reception crisis" is used a significant number of times. It seems that there was a shift in the way the press frames the arrivals of asylum seekers in Belgium. Over the years, the press increasingly used the terms "reception crisis". Even if the terms "migratory crisis" are still very much in use, the increased number of occurrences of "reception crisis" shows a shift of guilt. With the terms "migratory crisis", the focus is on the migrants and the crisis is framed as being a consequence of their arrival. On the other hand, with the terms "reception crisis", the focus is on the reception system: the crisis is thus being framed as a consequence of the way the reception system works and is structured.

This consideration of the choice of terms reflects the highly critical perspective that La Libre Belgique and Le Soir adopted on the State's response to asylum seekers' arrivals. It is also linked to the framings of migrants as a threat or as victims. Indeed, the discussions in the articles about the "migratory crisis" tend towards securitization themes, the closing of Europe as a fortress, the construction of walls… Conversely, the articles about the "reception crisis" adopt a more humanitarian point of view, which is also seen in the analysis of the lexical field of illegality committed by the Belgian state. Consequently, the framing "threat" relates more to the "migratory crisis" articles, and the framing "victim" more to the " reception crisis" articles.

However, the framing "victim" of the migrants and "culprit" for the state does not seem to have found the just balance through their choice of the terms "reception crisis". Indeed, despite this humanization, the analysis of the framings of migrants and of the use of the term "crisis" showed how the representations in the francophone Belgian press still remain problematic.

How is the reception system experienced the way it is framed by its policies, with its embedded structural violence? Considering the framings of the press of migrants and the reception system, how is it actually lived by its recipients? The ethnography in a Fedasil's first phase center allows us to dive into the lived experience of asylum seekers. Bureaucracy and categorization might hide and dehumanize this experience. Moreover, the reception system which they enter when they request asylum has a control scope. It is necessary to go on the field to grasp the power dynamics of the system and the way asylum seekers experience it. This ethnography allowed the acknowledgment of these dynamics, but also in the different ways that asylum seekers find to cope with it. This control can be seen in the temporalities of the asylum procedures and of the reception centers, as well as in the way the space of the center is organized.

Overall, residents and employees of the center where I conducted the ethnography highlighted three main features of the reception system as a whole and the center in particular. First, structural violence is visible in their discourse, especially the non-compliance of the State to its duty of reception and the feeling of loss of agency through the blur about where asylum seekers are left in regard to the future. Second, there is ambivalence and rationalization in the residents' narratives. An ambivalence can be found in their discourse between the reception system as a whole and the concrete of the center. They made a clear differentiation between the reception system outside of the center, which violates human rights and the state of law, and the inside of the center, which they abundantly praise. Third, insufficiency of means in the center was striking. This insufficiency was not strongly highlighted in the asylum seekers' narratives. It was present in the rationalization of some residents of the lack of spots in the centers, but, besides this, it was not a dominant feature of their discourse. It was, however, very present in my observations and in the employees' discourse.

More specifically, when analyzing the temporalities of the center and its spatiality, it is noticeable that waiting shapes an important part of the asylum seekers' experience. The first-phase center itself is designed as a place where residents wait to be redirected to a second-phase center, and the reception in general can be considered a waiting period before having status determinacy. This waiting is also inscribed in policies, through the time-frames they lay down. This waiting time is considered as wasted by several scholars, as well as asylum seekers. However, this period should not be reduced to only wasted time and feelings of uncertainty and blurred future which cause psychological distress. The wait can be converted into affective, active and productive time, which reveals a meaningful experience and a trigger for agency. The constraints and structural violence of the reception system can be part of this trigger. The purpose of this analysis was to highlight the meaningful experience of reception and the active role that asylum seekers take on. Nonetheless, the

point is not to romanticize their experience, which, as shown, is traumatic and marked by structural violence, in which the temporalities of the reception system play an important role.

When analyzing the spatiality of the center, one can note a certain porosity between the inside and the outside of a reception center. However, as seen in the codified meetings with the outside and with its weak recurrency, a complex closure to the outside world exists, and it highlights one paradox of reception structures: they gather refugees into a defined and re-codified place to provide assistance but, at the same time, they prevent their residents to truthfully enter into contact with local communities.

This social segregation can be considered "humanitarian confinement". This spatial concept can be linked to its temporal counterpart, the humanitarianization of waiting. The humanitarian element refers to the assistance the reception system is providing, and the term "confinement" is related to the partial closure of the center from the outside world.

This humanitarian confinement achieves the confinement of asylum seekers into a space that is easily socially controlled. This leads to a reproduction of dependence of asylum seekers on the reception system and, as a consequence, reproduces social disempowerment, in which the waiting time also participates.

Nonetheless, asylum seekers can set up resistance movements in order to escape the striation of the center and the imposed temporalities. Thus, migration can be considered a vector of space and time occupation and appropriation for asylum seekers, through an active participation in their own reterritorialization. In the center where I conducted the ethnography, this active participation can be seen in the advice that the residents I interviewed gave in regard to the organization of the center, but also in the decision they would make to participate in non-mandatory activities, or to do community service.

This kind of resistance shows that, if social disempowerment is a reality, asylum seekers do not lose their capacity for opposition. An ethnography can bring to light these practices of resistance and to which extent they reveal the agency of asylum seekers. Asylum seekers' lives are governed by constant forms of surveillance and domination, which they can resist in some way through active participation and acts of resistance. The control on their lives has spatial and temporal features, and the resistance to it can also make use of space and time.

This thesis highlighted several features of the shadow of asylum. First, some loopholes can be found in the asylum and reception policies, along with structural violence inscribed in law or

present in the violation of the state of law. Second, framings of migrants in representations of massification, indistinction, victimization and threats select specific and biased aspects of migrants representation and hide their human lived experience. Finally, the waiting time and the social segregation shaped by humanitarianization of waiting and humanitarian confinement aim at socially controlling asylum seekers while keeping them in the shadow of temporalities and spatialities of asylum.

All considered, this thesis underlined the structural violence that can be found in the shadow of asylum, but also the agency and resistance of asylum seekers that can be hidden in the shadow of ill-designed policies, misrepresentations and humanitarian victimization.

This research was conducted following the strong belief that asylum seekers' voices must be heard in the research concerning them. Moreover, the ethnography combined with the analysis of the policies and the press representations should render visible what is latent, what lies down in the shadow. The point is to underline the structural violence through which the reception system makes asylum seekers go, while not considering them as only victims but as human beings with rights and agency.

This thesis has examined the reception of asylum seekers in Belgium primarily from the perspective of governmental policies, media representations and ethnography. To expand the understanding of the reception process, future research could explore the role of civil society organizations in the reception and integration of asylum seekers. Investigating the involvement of NGOs, community groups, and volunteers in supporting and advocating for the rights of asylum seekers would provide valuable insights into the dynamics of reception beyond official policies. This research could delve into the challenges, successes, and potential areas of collaboration between civil society and government institutions, paving the way for more inclusive and participatory reception systems. An interesting research was conducted by Giulia Piva on a civil society's initiative, The Plateforme Citoyenne de Soutien aux Réfugiés (Piva, 2018).

Moreover, while this thesis has analyzed the framing of asylum seekers in francophone Belgian media, there is room for further investigation into the specific context of Flemish media and its impact on public perception. Future research could delve into the nuances of Flemish media coverage, including both traditional outlets and emerging communication formats such as social networks, podcasts, and TV news. This exploration would shed light on the role of media in shaping public opinion, understanding any regional variations, and identifying potential biases or gaps in the representation of asylum seekers. Such research would contribute to a more comprehensive

understanding of the media landscape and inform efforts to promote balanced and informed narratives surrounding migration and asylum.

Finally, while this thesis has focused on one specific reception center for the ethnography, future research could adopt a broader ethnographic approach. This would involve exploring reception centers across different regions in Belgium, considering the diversity of experiences among various groups of asylum seekers. Moreover, integrating an intersectional analysis of vulnerabilities could uncover other nuanced dynamics of marginalization and discrimination. This approach would facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse needs and challenges faced by specific subgroups of asylum seekers and inform targeted policy interventions and support mechanisms. Especially, since the center where I conducted the ethnography only hosted male asylum seekers, a focus on a gender analysis would allow for a more nuanced understanding of how reception policies and practices intersect with gender dynamics.

These research directions could help have a broader understanding of the reception dynamics, further highlighting embedded structural violence in our reception policies, while acknowledging different vulnerabilities and coping mechanisms among diverse groups and contexts.

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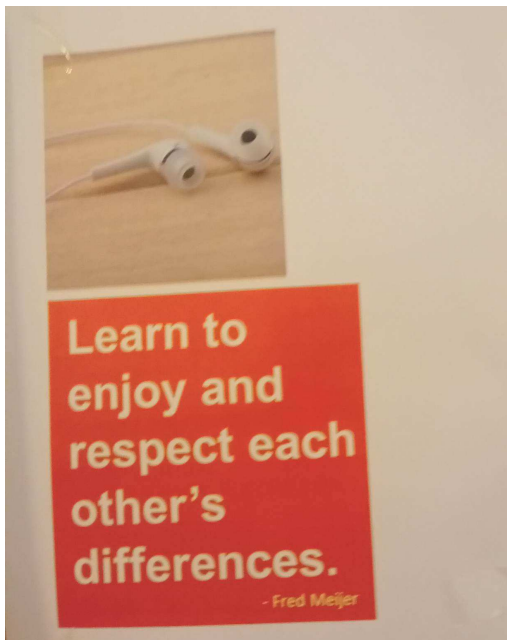Žižek, Slavoj. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. New York: Picador, 2008.

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Illustration 1

Illustration 2

Illustration 3
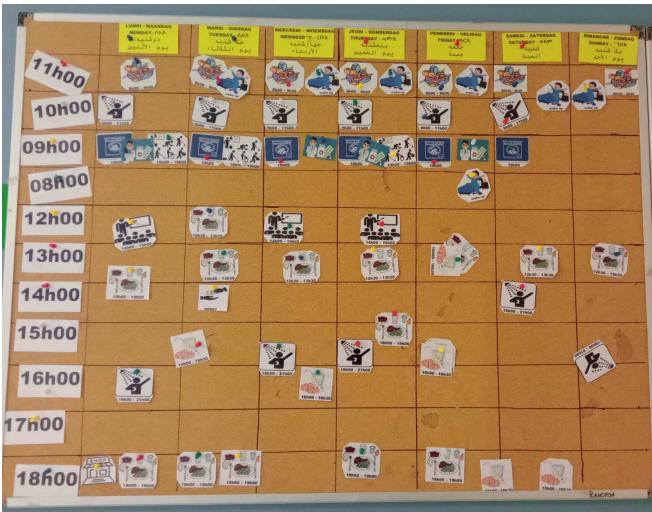
Figure 1

Main Focus of Le Soir's and La Libre's articles from February 2022

Other
4,1%

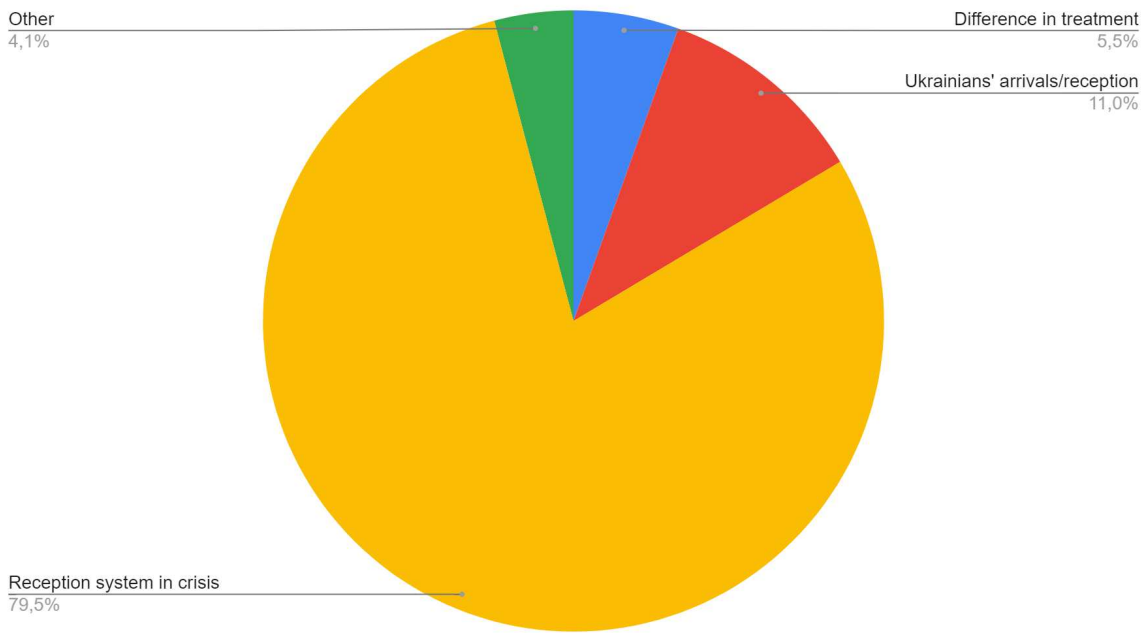Difference in treatment
5,5%

Ukrainians' arrivals/reception
11,0%

Reception system in crisis
79,5%

Figure 2

Date of the publication of the articles

Figure 3

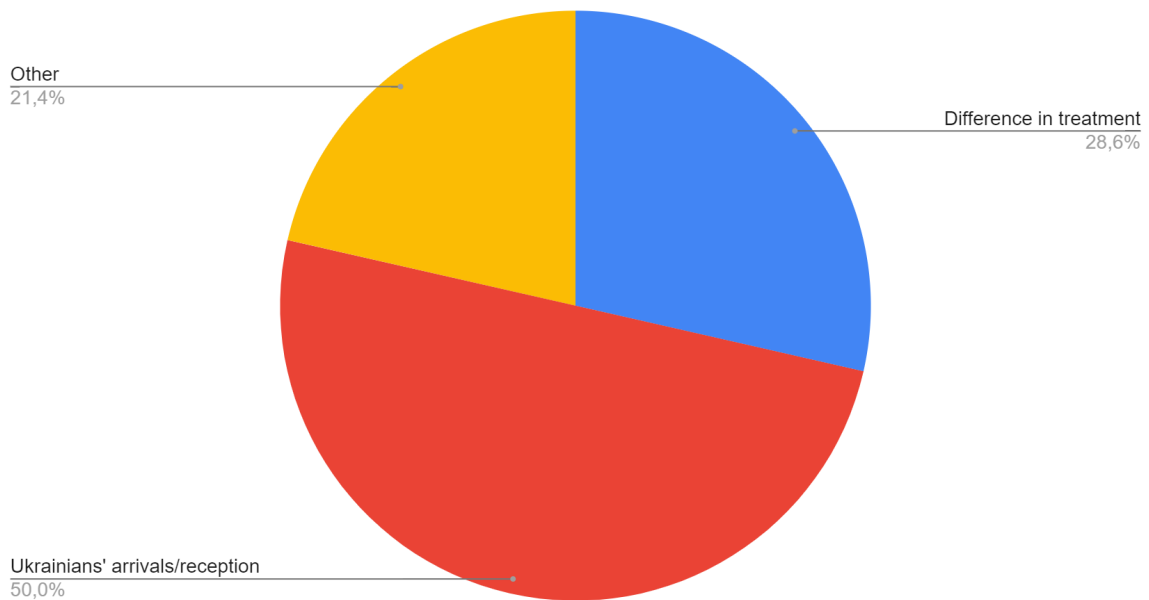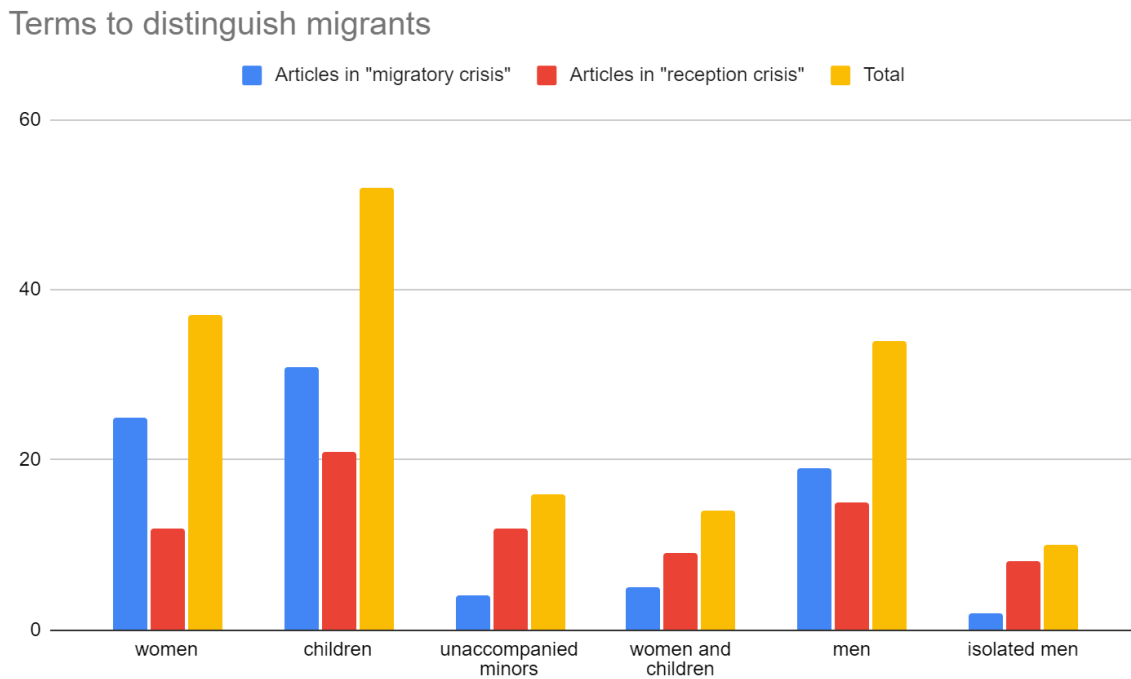Main Focus of Le Soir's and La Libre's articles from February 2022, the "reception crisis" articles apart

Other
21,4%

Difference in treatment
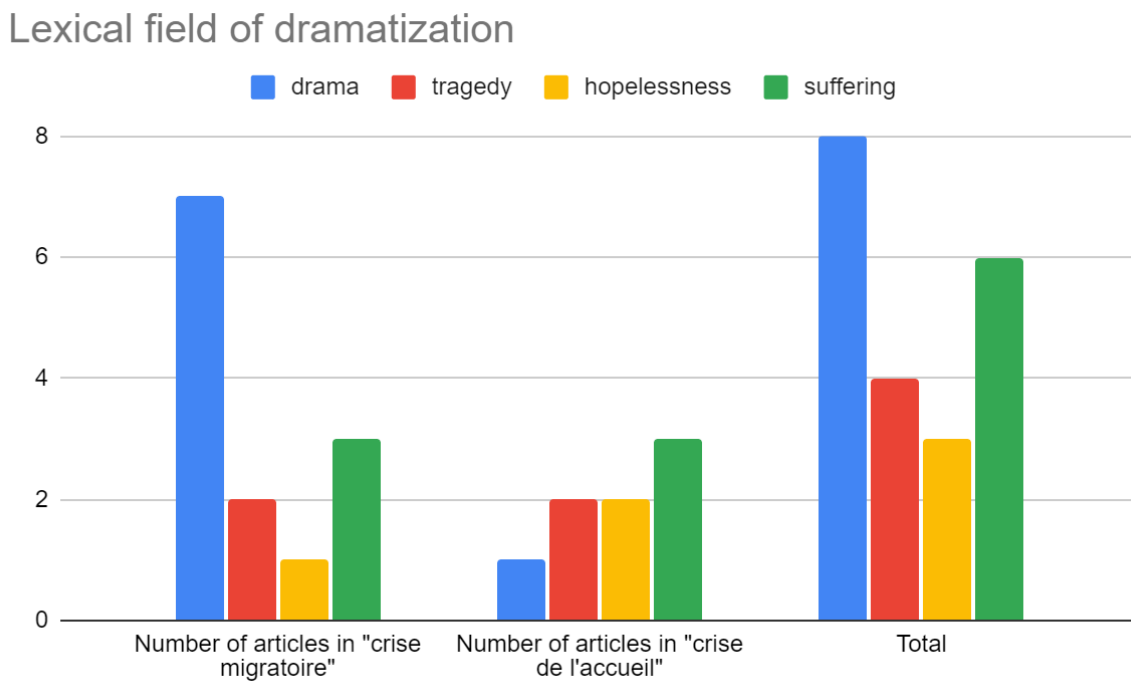28,6%

Ukrainians' arrivals/reception
50,0%

Figure 4

Terms to distinguish migrants

Articles in "migratory crisis" Articles in "reception crisis" Total

Figure 5

Lexical field of dramatization

drama tragedy hopelessness suffering
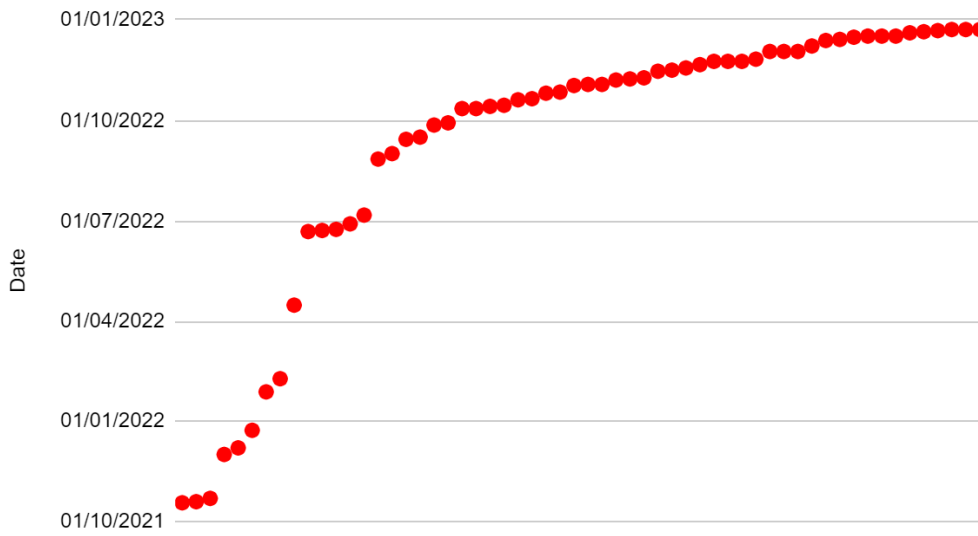
Figure 6

Articles associating migrants with "irregular" or "illegal"

■ irregular   ■ illegal
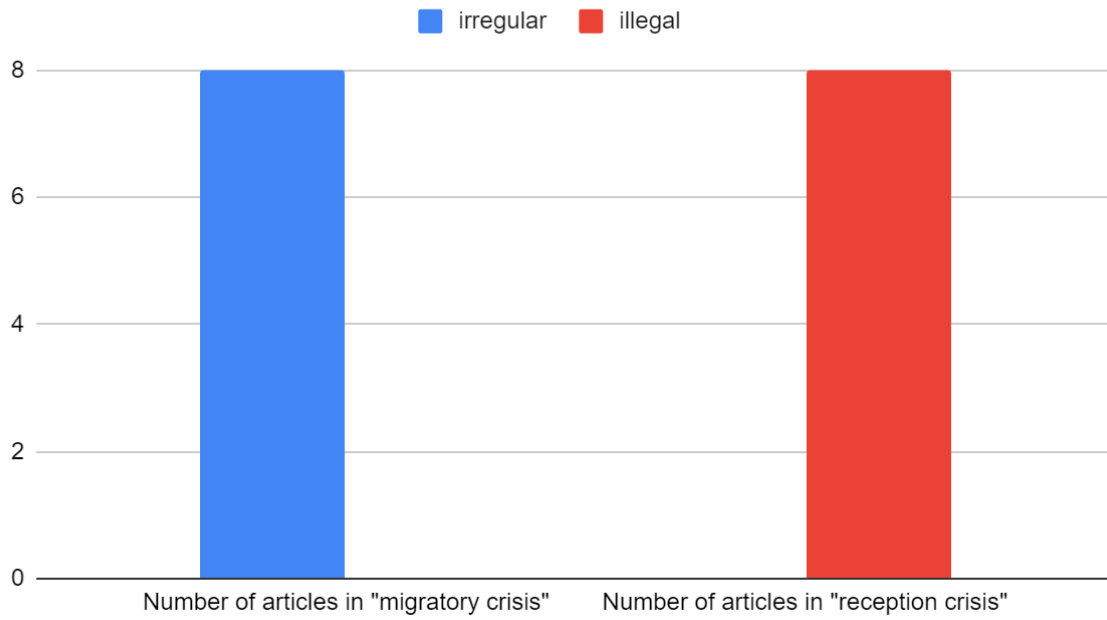
Figure 7

Number of Interviews

Figure 8

Articles mentionning the lexical field of the crisis

Legend: Number of articles in "migratory crisis" — Number of articles in "reception crisis" — Total
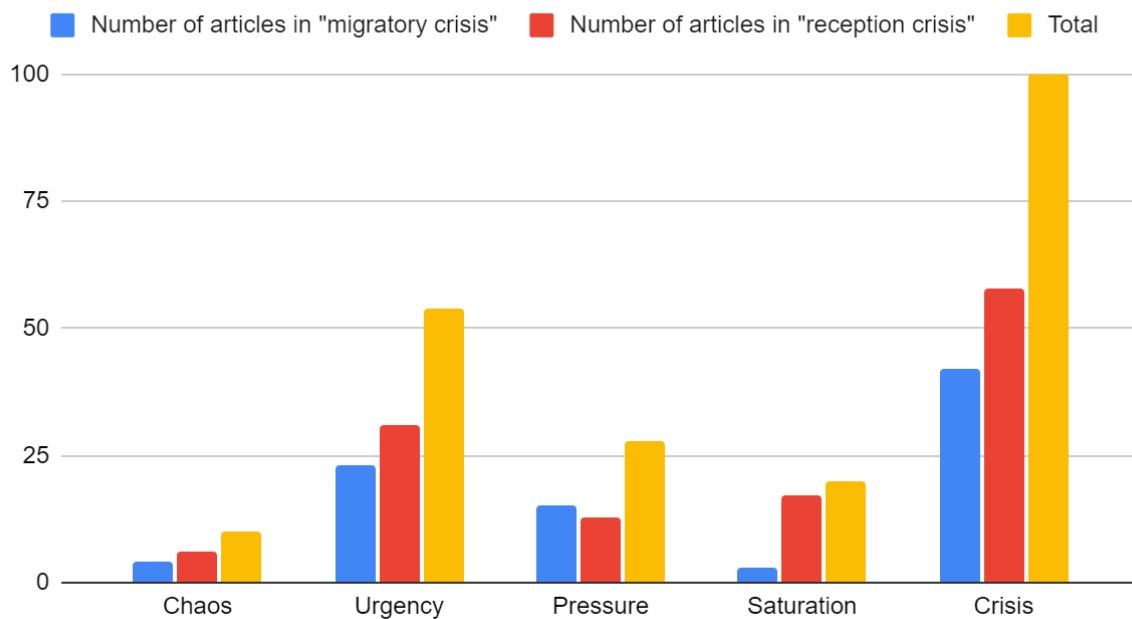
Figure 9

Occurrences of the lexical field of violation of fundamental rights by the State

Legend: Number of articles in "migratory crisis" — Number of articles in "reception crisis" — Total

Table 1

Pseudonyms	Age Range	Citizenship	Gender	A.S./Employee
Emmanuel	20-30	Burundi	Male	Asylum Seeker
Jean-Marie	50-60	Burundi	Male	Asylum Seeker
Fazal	15-18	Afghanistan	Male	Asylum Seeker
Ehsan	15-18	Afghanistan	Male	Asylum Seeker
Jahan	15-18	Afghanistan	Male	Asylum Seeker
Éric	20-30	Burundi	Male	Asylum Seeker
André	55-65	Burundi	Male	Asylum Seeker
Jean	25-35	Burundi	Male	Asylum Seeker
Caleb	15-18	RDC	Male	Asylum Seeker
Olivier	20-30	Burundi	Male	Asylum Seeker
Samuel	25-35	Eritrea	Male	Employee
Odile	35-45	Burundi	Male	Employee
Hélène	20-30	Belgian	Male	Employee
Juliette	20-30	Belgian	Male	Employee
Matteus	25-35	Brasilian	Male	Employee
Ilan	35-45	Djibouti	Male	Employee