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Incorporating Immigrants:
Theatrical Aid Work and the Politics of Witnessing in France

by

Emine Fisek

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Performance Studies

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Women, Gender and Sexuality

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Shannon Jackson, Chair

Professor Saba Mahmood

Professor Shannon Steen

Professor Soraya Tlatli

Spring 2010

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by Emine Fisek

Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in Performance Studies
and the Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender and Sexuality

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Shannon Jackson, Chair

There is emerging in France today a particular relationship between theater practice and immigration. Paris-based organizations interested in immigrant rights, from humanitarian groups to juridical aid collectives to arts organizations both large and small, are funding projects that ask participants to formulate their life experiences as public performances, collaborate with professional actors and expand their corporal repertoires. These activities are imagined to endow participants with an opportunity to self-express *and* a capacity to integrate within a new world. Whether in the context of language classes for immigrant women in underprivileged neighborhoods, or as a practical activity facilitating asylum seekers' socio-professional insertion into French life, what I refer to as *theatrical aid work* is emerging as a practice that can address the vexed question of immigrant rights, integration and experience.

Drawing on both ethnographic and historical research, this dissertation examines the relationship between these embodied acts and the “performers” and “publics” they aim to engender. I ask: What is the image of the “integrated immigrant” offered the largely North, West and Sub-Saharan African, Middle Eastern and Eastern European men and women who participate in these projects? How are racial and gender difference constructed during these processes? Bodily discipline has been central to the French state's approach towards integration. Similarly, French cultural policies have identified theater-going as a privileged act of citizenship. How then do we assess theatrical aid work against this broader historical, political and cultural backdrop? Finally, what do these practices tell us about the relationship between aesthetics and politics, how are aesthetic practices imagined to cultivate specific kinds of political personhood?

As a result, this manuscript balances three lines of inquiry. First, I read the emergence of these vocabularies against historical debates regarding the relationship between bodily norms, philosophies of assimilation and the development of cultural policies as the safeguard of national identity. Second, I investigate the dynamics of the projects and the encounters that result, between the testimonies being staged, the public they address and the notion of “Frenchness” being performed. Third, I explore the ways in which these embodied practices push us to re-think traditional understandings of both political art *and* immigration policies.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A few years ago, I was interviewing a Parisian artist who had worked extensively with stories of migration and displacement from immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. As our conversation came to an end, he placed his elbows on the table that separated us and said: “Now, tell me *your* story.” For reasons I was unable to identify at the time, the question shocked me. I was in the midst of doing the Parisian fieldwork for my dissertation, and was trying to understand what drew artists to the “stories” of others, what potential they felt these stories carried, ethically, politically and aesthetically. With his question, my interlocutor had made me into a character in my own fieldwork, rather than its calm, composed spectator. Yet, something besides this unexpected shift had ruffled my feathers: for the first time I understood the demand that I myself had made of others. I approached humanitarian and social aid workers, theater artists, immigrants to France from various backgrounds and asked them to make time for me, allow me into their homes, workspaces and city haunts, read my long and confusing forms and answer my questions. Not only did my interlocutors respond with generosity and hospitality, they did so despite the fact that they could not quite place me in the world. I have chosen not to name them here, but my debt remains and it is to them that I owe the utmost gratitude for my dissertation.

Back in Berkeley, my greatest debt is to the chair of my dissertation committee, Shannon Jackson, whose support has been unwavering, kind and trusting and whose advice has had an uncanny way of revealing its wisdom in layers that unfold over time. I could not have asked for a more caring mentor. My three dissertation committee members have been spirited, thoughtful companions. Shannon Steen has been a wonderful presence throughout my years at Berkeley, starting with Keywords and ending with invaluable feedback that tugged the dissertation into place. Saba Mahmood and Soraya Tlatli showed tremendous patience as my project fluctuated between topics both legible and illegible, listening with care and responding with vigor. Their passion for their own work has opened windows in mine. Earlier on, Samera Esmeir’s class on the human opened another such window and remains one of my most adored learning experiences at Berkeley. And long before I arrived in California, Allen Kuharski and Ulla Neuerburg-Denzer’s mentorship at Swarthmore College made me realize I didn’t want to be anything but a student and really anything but a student of theater. I only hope I am able to do the same for my own students.

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Throughout graduate school, my darling friends have made the fact of having two homes both a gift and a challenge. In Istanbul, Elcin Kitapci, Tracy Kazmirci, Tules Akinci, Ekin Ilyasoglu, Nazli Kaptanoglu and Betty Mizrahi welcomed me with open arms, quickly erasing months of separation and making dissertations seem far-away, insignificant endeavors. From their disparate homes in New York, Boston and London, Ayse Demirel Atakan, Julide Tolek, Beril Tari and Elcin Akcura provided the American and European versions of this warm home-away-from-home. Ardan Arac spent the past five years hopping and skipping all over North America but always managed to come find me in Berkeley, finally becoming a neighbor that I only wish I could hold onto for longer than is left us. The thought that Elizabeth Nolte is living in the home that I had yakked about for so long makes me happier than words can say. She is the first friend who bridged my two worlds. Poulami Roychowdhury (and her lovely parents!) has been an anchor ever since college and never seems far, even during a phone call from Berkeley to Kolkata. She and Gunes Bender are the best parts of the Thanksgiving table.

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Berkeley, California
May 2010

Sevgili Anneme ve Babama...

CHAPTER ONE

INTEGRATING THE BODY: THEATRICAL AID WORK AND THE IMMIGRATION POLITICS OF LATE 20TH CENTURY FRANCE

Réseau Education Sans Frontières (RESF) is a network of nation-wide collectivities founded in 2004 by a group of parents, educators and human-rights activists. Widely recognized throughout France, RESF lobbies on behalf of the French-educated children of undocumented immigrants who are threatened with deportation to their countries of origin. In the vein of a number of humanitarian organizations working in France today, RESF expands its activities by re-imagining the kinds of support and aid they are able to offer the individuals with whom they work. In 2006, RESF 91 of the Ile-de-France department of Essonne offered a writing class to a number of the undocumented youth who were growing up, clandestinely, beneath the aid workers' gazes. Concerned with the daily consequences of these youths' residency status (fear of riding public transportation, the constant need to shield one's status from friends and community) RESF 91 felt that what these youth needed was a creative outlet which would allow for their experiences to be put into words. The result was the small volume La Plume Sans Papier (The Quill without Paper) a word-play on the colloquial reference to undocumented immigrants, the *sans-papiers*. Soon afterwards, guided by enthusiastic RESF 91 members, the authors of La Plume found themselves rehearsing for a performance of their work with film and stage actor Rachida Brakni.

When I met with the North, West and Sub-Saharan African youth of La Plume, they had performed their work several times and collected much media attention. Meanwhile, several members of the original cast were no longer with the group, and had been replaced by other RESF youth. This shift was interpreted by an RESF member as a reflection of what had become a generalized awareness on the part of the RESF community: the efficacy of public performance. Referencing one recently joined actor, a teenager with a few years in France under his belt but grim prospects for his application, this member related that he had probably joined because the activity would bolster the chances of his residency application.¹ When I inquired as to why that was, the reply voiced a belief that became commonplace in my encounters with activist art circles in Paris: public performance was a sign of a connectedness between the applicant and his or her social world. This was precisely what the prefecture would be trying to deny in order to mark the applicant a failure in relation to one of the most significant criteria in the offer of residency: an affective attachment to French culture and the outward exhibition of a desire to be enmeshed in its values, ideals and practices. The embodied act which the teenager had chosen to undertake would not merely accompany his application but fundamentally shape the process of proving to the prefecture that he was sufficiently acculturated.

This dissertation explores the ways in which theatrical performance has come to play a significant role in how immigration, refuge and exile are addressed in France today. RESF's

¹ Throughout this manuscript, readers will note that while the names of institutions and organizations have been retained, individuals' names have been omitted or altered to preserve confidentiality. The exceptions to this rule are the two "historical" voices of Chapter Two, whose personal recollections from the 1970s are central to the chapter's reconstruction of the period's dynamics.

exploration of ways to reflect upon, publicly present, and render useful the suffering of those they aid is certainly specific given its institutional location and urgency of context, as the above anecdote reveals. And yet, La Plume is indicative of a far broader turn to theater practice in the work of Paris-based neighborhood associations, humanitarian organizations, immigrant alliances and arts centers. Whether in the context of French language classes for first generation immigrant women in underprivileged neighborhoods, as part of a series of practical activities facilitating asylum seekers' cultural and socio-professional incorporation into French life or embedded in larger performance-based activisms celebrating immigrant cultural expression, what I refer to as *theatrical aid work* is increasingly emerging as a practice with the capacity to address the vexed question of immigrant rights, integration and experience.

While assigning these theatrical practices an over-arching label risks blanketing their contexts and particularities, several qualities do in fact unify them across institutional, geographic and activist lines. These classes, workshops and projects urge participants to formulate their thoughts and life experiences with an eye to their public announcement, often in collaboration with professional actors. Thus, participants are not only asked to share, but to do so publicly, according to specific rules of presentation and for specific audiences. In turn, these ventures are weighed with the goal of imparting to the participants a capacity to question, address, integrate within, and survive a new world. This dissertation asks: How then do these projects articulate the relationship between theatrical practice and the lived reality of immigrant experience in France? As a practice that is both embodied *and* discursive, with what capacities is "theater" endowed? What do their articulations reveal about French integration and identity discourses more generally? How do these projects position the largely North, West and Sub-Saharan African, Middle Eastern and Eastern European men and women who are the participants? How are racial and gender difference constructed during these processes?

My choice of the phrase "theatrical aid work" stems from a need to distinguish between the highly instrumentalized and distributed nature of these practices and the more long-lasting and situated goals of theater projects classed under the rubric of *community-based performance*. The aesthetic, ethical as well as discursive qualms of theatrical aid work will certainly resonate with those projects whose explicit goals are to rehabilitate neighborhoods and communities. However, theatrical aid work has emerged in response to a set of rather unique historical conditions. Since the early 1970s, the management of cultural plurality in France has been marked by the need for all immigrants to be integrated into society by slowly effacing public signs of cultural difference. In practice, this refers to the adoption of particular norms of behavior, with compulsory primary education as the guarantor of this uniformity (Noiriel, Melting Pot 168). An oft-cited example of the spatial significance of the republican school *and* the symbolic significance of corporal conduct, are the public debates that began in 1989 when three female students in Creil entered their school with headscarves. This minor event generated a wide-ranging and ongoing debate on French secularism, multiculturalism and different sets of *bodily* practices (Scott 23). It is against this body-conscious framework that theatrical rehearsal and performance have emerged in France as the stuff of non-governmental organizations' political imaginaries. The embodied dimensions of theatrical work are central to articulating theater's social utility as a *practical* activity with the potential to effect changes on bodies.

A brief return to La Plume elucidates the varied dimensions of the aptitude that theatrical work is imagined to embody as a practice: a vehicle for expression, as well as for bodily engagement. La Plume sought to render tangible the Essonne youth's experience of social

isolation via written experimentation. During our conversations however, RESF workers linked the fact of writing, and later the fact of public performance, to the youth's need to render *public* those same experiences. This impulse stood in opposition to the safety and familiarity of the writing workshop. What resolved this contradiction was a belief that theatrical performance not only offered public engagement and profoundly affected audience members but that it *did* something bodily to the actor on stage, thereby furthering the self-work at the origin of the writing workshop. Furthermore, the theatrical medium through which this self-work (variously labeled autonomization, self-empowerment and emancipation) was achieved, would be read against a rich history of the role of art in the life of the nation and recognized as a distinctly valuable and French cultural practice. On the pages of a residency application, it would signify an aptitude not only with the cultural habits of the nation but a willingness to undertake the labor of self-work in the presence of spectators. What I heard over the course of my fieldwork was that this labor could be made to serve as a privileged sign of emancipation and social integration.

While the notions of self-empowerment and emancipation that emerge in this brief summary may be available in a variety of social aid projects utilizing the arts, their civic emergence in France is unquestionably linked to the nation's unique political, intellectual and cultural history: the development of French Republicanism and the role of arts practices in the social life of the nation. Importantly, the dynamics of La Plume hinge on the precise location of theatrical practice in the French cultural imaginary. French cultural policies, legendary for their insistence upon cultural democratization as a public service, initially stemmed from the French state's post-World War II concern with re-integrating formerly German occupied territories. Throughout the 1960s and 70s, the relationship between nationality and aesthetic products posited by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs generated a notion of theater-going publics as engaged in acts of citizenship. Access to "the highest and most lasting forms of artistic achievement of the past," in David Looseley's summary of legendary mid-century Minister of Culture André Malraux's attitude, were positioned as "a means of national cohesion, creating a sense of belonging to a community of shared values" (36). Meanwhile, in the visions of the performance artists that matured alongside to the mass political events of the era (wars in Algeria and Vietnam, the extended general strikes of May 1968 and later labor movements), theater was increasingly assigned the role of cultivating awareness, giving "voice" to the transnational oppressed through public visibility. One of the over-arching claims of my dissertation is that theatrical aid work constitutes the fusion of these two performance legacies. This fusion is readily visible in the understanding of theater sketched above, and moreover aligns neatly with the two conceptual approaches to bodily practice that are being merged. How so?

For RESF as well as the majority of the artists with whom I spoke, theater served as a medium for the communication of messages. This essentially representational and expressive view of theater however, was matched with the expectation that it would also serve as a medium for cultivating appropriate comportments. These behavioral models were geared for the social world into which immigrants, widely defined, would enter. For example, in the theater workshops of Cimade, another humanitarian organization providing juridical aid to asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented immigrants, workshop leader Monique would ask participants to embody certain physical gestures. Her expectation was that once installed, these gestures would then cultivate the emotional state of which the physical gesture was merely the representational sign. Thus, the link Monique made between outer form and inner substance, positioned embodied activity as both *representative* and *constitutive* of inner life and thought.

This merger blends together the two distinct ways in which anthropological and sociological scholarship have approached the study of ritual acts. Briefly put, the first of these is characterized by a sharp Durkhemian distinction between thoughts and acts, where the latter are symbolic of the former. The second approaches ritual acts as generative practices that do not necessarily stand in a relation of representation with an interior self but rather constitute it and endow it with specific skills.

The conceptual challenge posed by theatrical aid work necessitates an understanding of the practice that foregrounds its status as *performance*, an act that is “furnished forth” (Jackson, *Professing* 13) into observable public space even when undertaken specifically on behalf of the self. Taking on the study of theatrical aid work from within the theoretical resources and paradigms of Performance Studies highlights the dimensions of the practice that may seem paradoxical when juxtaposed: first, to render visible the question of immigrant experience, and second, to afford the participant/performer an opportunity to test the embodied foundations of identity formation and transformation. In other words, to draw on the signifying dimensions of stage activity, all the while suggesting that the signifying subject is open to adjustment. Part of my goal in this dissertation is to provide both a socio-historical and conceptual framework for understanding the multiple “paradoxes” of theatrical aid work. These paradoxes include the conceptual challenges outlined above, the counter-intuitive assumption that public declarations of suffering at the hand of administrative structures will guarantee recognition from those same structures, the equally unexpected claim that self-emancipation can happen not through assuming theatrical characters but re-presenting the facts of one’s own life, the list goes on. By the time this dissertation arrives at an end, these “paradoxes” will reveal themselves to be entirely consistent with the realities of 21st century French social life.

This chapter begins with a bird’s eye view of French immigration policies since the Second World War, with a specific focus on the role of bodily comportment in integration debates. Bodily conduct’s centrality to the French state’s approach towards integration will serve as the broader background to the forms of corporal engagement that non-governmental groups have generated, such as theater. This relationship will be joined with the early history of theatrical decentralization and cultural policy making, postwar efforts which evolved to offer a theory of national identity based on the relationship between aesthetic products and citizenship. These intertwined visions of bodily practice will be followed by a layout of the theoretical tools my dissertation will reference: theories of ritual activity from anthropology and the specific twists that performance scholarship has brought to this lineage by merging it with practices that partake of aesthetic components. Finally, I will introduce the four organizations where I gathered the ethnographic observations that compose the majority of this manuscript, offer my principle of selection and provide a brief outline of the four ensuing chapters.

Coming to France, 1945-2009

In 2007, following former Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy’s election as President of France (an election in which the former had run on a “law-and-order” campaign that increasingly targeted immigrants), international coverage of French politics spotlighted immigration dilemmas as the nation’s most basic actuality, permeating all aspects of public life. In a *New York Times* article introducing the new Paris-based National Center for the History of Immigration for example, art critic Michael Kimmelman wrote: “Immigration is the big,

unavoidable issue not just in the United States but across Europe now, and nowhere more obviously than here in France” (par.1). Lingering in the background of this statement were memories of the events Kimmelman soon recalled, events which the French press have overwhelmingly referred to as the *émeutes* or riots of Clichy-sous-Bois. In 2005, the Parisian suburb witnessed growing public unrest following the deaths of two teenagers being chased by the police. Soon, the turmoil spread to surrounding towns and urban centers throughout France. Both domestic and international media responded by focusing on the police violence and racially motivated identity checks that marred *banlieue* inhabitants’ lives on a daily basis. Nonetheless, many referred to the riots as the French “intifada” (“France’s Failure” 11), a religiously motivated uprising emerging from the multiply racialized, un-integrated and communitarian ghettos of the Republic, evidenced best in evocative titles such as: “Paris is Burning: The Muslim Challenge” (Newsweek). Hence by 2007, when Kimmelman declared “immigration” to be a “big” problem, he in effect summarized the dominant narratives that had grown attached to the phenomenon. References to immigration had less to do with migratory flows than with the French state’s failure to “integrate” its multicultural polity. And France’s issues were no longer simply French issues but European ones, given the supra-national reach of the European Union of which France was now a significant part and on behalf of whom it lobbied for tighter borders and visa restrictions.

However, Kimmelman’s simple statement is also revelatory of the transformation that “immigration” has undergone in the French public sphere: its current “unavoidable” status indicates that it was once entirely “avoidable” despite its visibility. This shift resonates with Gérard Noiriel’s observation that the history of immigration to France has been marked by alternating periods of calm and “crises” (Melting Pot 196). In the 20th century, the period of calm corresponds to the three decades of economic and industrial growth that followed the Second World War, when labor immigration was not only allowed but promoted. Migration, Danièle Lochak notes, was “in fact encouraged by the state as long as it responded to the immediate needs of the French economy. It appeared as a problem only when the first signs of labor shortage were registered in the late sixties” (32). By the mid-1970s, as legal measures restricted both immigration to France and the rights available to migrant laborers, non-European immigrant workers and their families would emerge as the targets of xenophobic language peppered with references to what Gérard Noiriel refers to as their mixed, “contradictory forms of socialization” (Melting Pot 162).

A wider view of immigration to France would of course draw parallels between the late-20th century distrust of foreigners and the widespread stigmatization and violence experienced by Italian, Belgian and German immigrants during the 19th and early 20th centuries (Noiriel, Melting Pot 197-198). Furthermore, if being French requires what Herman Lebovics has labeled an “apprenticeship in citizenship” (Lebovics 79), this imperative existed long before the arrival of foreigners became a concern. The centralizing tendencies of the Third Republic (1870-1940) were preoccupied with solidifying “national homogenization” (Wilder 18) among disparate national populations from Bretons to Gascons. Unique to the emergence of increasingly restrictive legislation during the 1970s however was the way in which it rendered “immigrant integration” the key problem associated with “immigration”. The French state now drew large numbers of immigrants from former colonies whose theoretical accession to full French citizenship had been one of French colonialism’s most vexed negotiations. Consequently, although accusations of incommensurable cultural difference, delinquency and disproportionate

dependence on the benefits of the French welfare state would be directed at immigrant populations in general, North African immigrants and Algerians specifically served as targets of animosity.² Canvassing the development of immigrant integration as a political issue, Benjamin Stora notes that support for the right-wing and anti-immigration *Front National* (FN) was a response to leader Jean-Marie Le Pen's mixing of a lingering colonial racism with the increasingly visible presence of second generation Algerian immigrants. The modification and adaptation implied by immigrant integration would be juxtaposed with the immutability implied by FN's statements that there remained an "infinite distance" (Stora 140) between Algerian Muslims and French social norms.

Immigration's transition from "a technical, elite question of political economy and welfare management, towards more fundamental, symbolic public issues" (Favell 24) is nowhere more visible than in legislative developments. The early 1970s recognition of immigration as a key issue is exemplified in the Marcellin-Fontanet Circulaire of 1972, which toughened the conditions for delivery of residency permits or *cartes de séjour* for immigrant workers. Labor migration would be entirely halted in 1974, followed by intermittent invitations for resident non-nationals to leave France in the form of *aides au retour* and restrictions on familial regroupement (Lochak 33-34). In 1980, these tendencies culminated in the *Loi Bonnet*, which openly blurred the legal boundaries between "immigration and clandestinity (*clandestinité*) and clandestinity and delinquency" (35). The Socialist Party's ascent to power and François Mitterand's presidency during the 1980s would significantly roll back some of these developments. However, critics of Mitterand's widespread decentralization policies and support for immigrants' right of association would further portend "sectarianism" (Favell 51) and disharmony. In 1986 and again in 1993, the *Loi Pasqua* finally cemented in law what both the Left and Right were by then hinting at: a re-thinking of the basis of what French "national identity" and "cultural identity" (Lochak 39) consisted of. Children born in France to immigrant parents could no longer automatically accede to French citizenship when they turned 18, they were required to "manifest their will to acquire this nationality" (42). Despite the fact that these laws were overturned in 1998, nationality and citizenship were now phenomena that individuals needed to cultivate the "will" to attain.³

Many of the civic actors with whom I spoke would note that the *Loi Pasqua* had subsumed the work of improved welfare and labor conditions for immigrant working classes beneath the vague imperative to "integrate" these individuals. This was a development they routinely denounced. Immigrant theater workshops however evidenced the degree to which these shifts *informed* their daily work and came to define theater's capacities as a social practice.

² As Driss Maghraoui notes, historical analyses of French government in the North African colonies quickly reveal the contradictory nature of colonial citizenship: "The French settlers were strong supporters of the politics of assimilation, but paradoxically opposed its logical outcome, which would normally grant full citizenship to Algerians" (Maghraoui 217). Algerian Muslims, in other words, were considered assimilable yet denied individual rights predicated on citizenship. The decolonization of the French *département* of Algeria, colloquially referred to as *Algérie Française*, officially concluded in 1962, following the eight-year War of Independence. By the mid-1970s, repatriated French-Algerian landowners and disgruntled army officials dotted the French landscape, living side-by-side with both new and older populations of Algerian immigrants.

³ On a far more practical level, the Pasqua laws "wreaked havoc", in Trica Danielle Keaton's words, during their short tenure: "requests for nationality could be denied if a person had a criminal record, which is not unlikely among those outer-city youths who are also engaged in alternative economies, and some have been deported to their parents' home countries" (Keaton 12).

Consider for example Cimade's theater workshops, which were undertaken as part of a cross-European Exchanges Partnership. Exchanges' goal was to "empower" individuals to "tackle social exclusion and marginalisation from the labour market" (Cimade, Empowering 8) and consisted of a wide range of practical initiatives. While the official language of booklets and brochures emphasized enhanced language acquisition through theater, organizers articulated theatrical rehearsal and performance as the means for immigrants to develop the will to express themselves to the host country as individuals who belonged (see chapter 3). While these contradictions lay bare the messy nature of social work and its questionable autonomy with regards to government structures, they are also a direct result of the legislative changes of the 21st century. By the time Nicolas Sarkozy held tenure as Minister of the Interior and later as President, the need "to love the country by which one is welcomed (*aimer le pays qui l'accueille*)" (Sarkozy quoted in Cette France-là 170) would evolve into a distinct policy principle.

Studies suggest that the *Loi Sarkozy* of 2003 and 2006 are responsible for the trends that mark the current immigration policy landscape in France. These trends are two-fold. First, the nation must distinguish between immigration that is "chosen (*choisie*)" and that to which it is "subjected (*subie*)" (Cette France-là 96), a principle realized via ever harsher conditions for familial regroupement and political asylum. This principle however, must not obscure the French state's commitment to welcoming the "persecuted" (97), especially when it comes to the "rights of women" (111).⁴ As Chapter 5 will demonstrate in detail, this emphasis on human suffering has generated what many scholars now refer to as criteria based on "compassion" (Fassin "Compassion" 368). In turn, such an approach towards the negotiation of residency permits emphasizes the imagined universal nature of *physical* pain, and places immigrants and asylum seekers in positions where they must "make a case for" (Ticktin 43) the immensity of their suffering.

The second trend is that the work of monitoring the "chosen" must be delegated to the newly established Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-Development. Founded by Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007 with the professed objective of gathering the widespread political management of immigration from several Ministries (e.g. the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Social Affairs etc.) to a single structure, the organization emphasizes the "complementary" and "intimately linked" ("Présentation" par. 7) relationship between the phenomena in its title. In turn, many interpret such a title as the most visible edge of a politics of immigration founded on "better choosing (*sélectionner*) the migrants who will be welcomed" (Cette France-là 95) in to France and monitoring their subsequent residency in the country. In particular, the Ministry must "seek proof of and control the determination of the migrant...to integrate himself fully into the society that welcomes him" (98). In the words of one immigration activist, contemporary developments have moved the threshold of "integration" from an experience that is an observable fact in French-born 18 year-olds to "an essential quality of

⁴ The distinctly national nature of these developments must of course be evaluated within the larger context of the EU's immigration politics. The policy of open borders and freedom of movement within the member nations of the European Union have additionally allowed European leaders to "respond to the anxieties of their citizens by reviving the fantasy of a closure of borders" (Cette France-là 103).

integratability” (98) already visible in individuals who are stepping foot on French soil for the first time.⁵

Moreover, a unique outcome of Sarkozy-era immigration politics has been the installment of two conflicting policy objectives: to maintain “efficacious” (*Cette France-là* 104) functioning by establishing deportation quotas for every administrative year and to “pay all attention necessary to particular cases” (103). These dual objectives mean that while care is taken to maintain France’s image as the homeland of human rights and political asylum, prefectures and administrators are nevertheless encouraged to fill quotas by any means possible as annual deadlines approach. For juridical and social aid organizations such as RESF and Cimade, these imperatives mean that they too have to depend on what they refer to as “case by case” logic. Rather than depicting the enormity of the social and psychic vulnerability these legal changes engender, and employing broader references to human rights violations, they concentrate instead on the assumed legitimacy and affective potential of singular stories, adjusting their advocacy strategy according to the situation of the “case”, or aided individual, at hand. An RESF worker, who had been involved with a number of the organization’s public, theatrical projects, explained to me that this principle guided the ways in which they sought media sponsorship. If the prefectures promised to honor the particularity of human life, stories that “captured” the imagination triumphed over the “banal” realities of asylum and migration. RESF’s turn to the affective capacities of theater drew on a similar logic; the unique stories that composed *La Plume* provided the participants with an outlet that would establish their “persecuted” status but also count as a sign of having assimilated to a certain lifestyle.

During my conversations with both activists and artists engaged with the question of immigration, the turn to “particular” stories of suffering was a unifying theme. Equally common across Paris however, from smaller venues to state-funded national theaters, was a tendency to treat performance as an event that transitioned the actor from the particularity of an injured life to the universality of human suffering (see chapter 4). The performance of immigrant difference often functioned as a stage in the individual’s public presentation of his or her integratability to universal norms. The very act of performing, in other words, took on meanings and capacities based on the political configurations within which it took place. While this dissertation explores the relationship between the political shifts outlined here and the aesthetic maneuvers these shifts make available to non-governmental actors, it will push the question of influence and try to understand the worlds that result from these artistic choices. In other words, the path between non-governmental political strategies and aesthetic innovation will be depicted as a two-way road (see chapter 5). In order to explore in greater depth the relationship between policy imperatives such as integration and theater practice however, it is necessary to trace the specific understanding of integration in France, how it relates to the historical construction of French identity and the role of bodily practices in social life.

Integration and Republican Citizenship

⁵ The ongoing headscarf affair or *l’affaire du foulard* is an example of how early evidence of “integrability” is now sought not only in primo-arrivants but in 3rd and 4th generation immigrants born in France. Legislation that denies headscarf-wearing girls entry into public primary and secondary schools reverses the traditional Republican formula that the school is “the space of transition from private to public, from family and community to nation” (Scott 103). As later portions of this chapter will outline in detail, the school, like the nation, is now a place that the “foreign” individual can enter only if she is already “integrated” to the secular French way of life.

Earlier, I had noted that in comparison with various community-based performance traditions, theatrical aid work differed in that it rarely grew out of a focus on an existing community or locality. This distinction may itself seem un-intuitive, as a number of the organizations I depict in these pages will reveal themselves to be deeply rooted within their neighborhoods. What I encountered over the course of my fieldwork, however, was that these organizations' articulations of "community" rarely constituted what community-based theater scholar Sonja Kuftinec refers to as "grounding identity through group building and mythmaking" (6). Often, as in the case of Cimade for example, organizers presented "collectivity" as central to maintaining the distribution of performance labor, but didn't quite link it to life post-performance. Others, such as L'Accueil Goutte d'Or, a social center based in a poor Parisian district, hinged the "myth" of community upon one individual's public performance of immigrant suffering. Yet they rarely made the performance itself into the groundwork for communal identification, what Jan Cohen-Cruz refers to as "a shared primary identity" (2). The Maison des Tilleuls, in the Northern Parisian suburb of Blanc-Mesnil, was very invested in the underserved Tilleuls quarter, yet rarely did they make mention of group identities.

It is possible to offer these nuanced alternatives as a corrective to what Kuftinec identifies as the fragmentation and exclusion often implied by stable understandings of community. In other words, every time a "community" is defined according to specific identity markers, it generates a non-community composed of those whose identities differ. An equally valid suggestion would be that the individuality these organizations advocated had directly to do with the urgent and function-driven contexts in which they worked, from prepping asylum seekers for residency applications to arming immigrant women with enough language skills to seek immediate employment. However, neither of these explanations is as operative as the specific history of the notion of community and individuality in French Republicanism, and how the immediate goal of social integration relates to these notions. In order to understand the distinct logic of the discourses of collectivity these individuals mobilized, it is important to understand the philosophical models that bind French Republican identity and immigrant integration.

The French Republican model of personhood is above all characterized by the autonomy of individuals from the constraints of particular communal identities such as family, ethnicity, religion or regional locality. In contrast, the appropriate channel through which individuals can seek affiliation and individual expression is that of the political community: French national identity. Scholarship often refers to this as the "universalist" philosophy of French Republicanism, one which considers individuals to be abstract human subjects unmarked by race, ethnicity, gender or religious belonging. In contrast, "particularism" is posed as a practice that acknowledges concrete cultural categories. As historian Gary Wilder notes however, this distinction has a tendency to blur the complexities of French political history and the ways in which it combined universalist and particularist approaches: "In so far as citizenship was a function of one's abstract human rights, it expressed universality, and insofar as it was secured by membership within a concrete national entity, it expressed particularity" (16). In other words, the universality of "humanity" and the particularity of "French-ness" were entirely compatible, and formed the basis for distinguishing between the national and the foreigner:

Given that all human beings were supposed to be free and equal members of a self-governing nation-state, political exclusion was henceforth only legitimate for those

groups whose members did not meet the new criteria of individuality, rationality and autonomy. (16)

The continuity that Wilder implies here between universality and particularity undergirds the multi-dimensional immigration politics I traced earlier. Nicolas Sarkozy often positions French identity as “a message for which all of humanity is the beneficiary” (Cette France-là 99). This articulation of French citizenship as the sign of a set of universal values (such as a commitment to human dignity, autonomy and rights) applicable to “all of humanity”, is attached to policy changes that increasingly police immigrant integration. In other words, the subjective criteria that underline approximations of “integratability” to French norms and distinguish between immigrants and asylum seekers according to such a criteria, are considered compatible with acknowledgments of universal humanity. Immigration policies are one example of how abstract humanity often finds expression in concrete (French) cultural practices.

Long before immigrant integration posed a challenge to French Republicanism, particularity and difference *among* French citizens had emerged as an equally weighty civic problem. In Republican thought, civil society was indistinct from the state, “civil and political society ideally mapped onto one another” (Wilder 159). Political activity, participation and critique, were the basis for taking part in one’s “self-government” (159) vis-à-vis religious, regional or other structures of activity. Although self-government remained only a theoretical reality for the majority of the population, in Wilder’s words, it was nevertheless “an idiom for emancipatory action” (158). Self-government and individual emancipation however, were premised on the necessity that the morality and way of life it declared align with the kinds of secular national affiliation the French nation-state requested of its citizens. In other words, individual freedom necessarily meant autonomous, secular and rational personhood.

A momentary return to the politics of collectivity in the theater workshops would allow us to note how these dynamics underlined the organizers’ notions of community. Theater workshops generated self-governing individuals who could publicly critique the state at whose hands they suffered. While revelatory of a “particular” identity, these declarations also evidenced a critical engagement with the notion of a national identity: French citizenship. Therefore, although organizers were well aware that performance necessitated at the very least an impromptu collective, they rarely felt the need to address the communal identity that that collective might generate. The link between individual and state instead remained un-mediated.

Perhaps more so than any other political thinker, the eighteenth century French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau is credited with outlining the political order that would come to characterize both the French Revolution and French Republicanism. In The Social Contract (1762), Rousseau would formulate a theory of social life that reconciled the “freedom” that associative organization could provide French citizens with the necessity that those freedoms never emerge from “the particular individuality of each contracting party” (Rousseau 164). Instead, the nation would be “a moral and collective body, composed of as many members as the assembly has voices, and which receives from this same act its unity, its common self (*moi*), its life, and its will” (164). Eventually termed “the general will of the people”, this “common self” would exercise sovereignty and author law. An authority figure could be considered “legitimate only to the extent that he is the product of the general will” (Schnapper 48).

Crucially, the primary threat to this social order rarely emerged in the form of a greedy dictator. Rather, in Hannah Arendt’s apt summary, “the common enemy within the nation is the

sum total of the particular interests of all citizens” (68). Those who chose not to participate in the common self would “be constrained to do so by the whole body; which means nothing else than that he shall be forced to be free; for such is the condition which, uniting every citizen to the fatherland, protects him from all personal dependency” (Rousseau 166). The phrase “forced to be free” warrants pause when approached from a framework that might define freedom as the eradication of all constraints, what is often referred to as “negative freedom” (Mahmood 10). For Rousseau however, “freedom” implied an individual’s ability to conform to the principles determined by the general will, for this would be the only setting through which freedom could be exercised. In Schnapper’s words, “[for Rousseau] man is free, not because he is independent, but because the law expresses his own will” (Schnapper 49).

This brief foray into social contract theory is essential for understanding how both citizenship and immigrant integration have been articulated in late 20th century France. If the French Revolution mandated a “unitary and total conception of citizenship” (Schnapper 39), such a conception depended on a citizenship that would be “organized and guaranteed by a centralized state and the expression of the general will” (44). Unlike the abstract individual of Anglo-American liberalism, defined by a set of individual liberties that could undermine political tyranny, the French individual-citizen would “willingly submit himself to the community” (49). Dominique Schnapper, Pascale Krief and Emmanuel Peignard’s summary of national integration policy in France reflects these self-nation dynamics: “National belonging is thought to be the result of cultural belonging and the individual’s political will: this is the major source of the elective ideology of the nation which has dominated the French concept. Through its universal and abstract ambitions, the Revolution implied that all those who adhered to the nation’s values, in particular human rights, could all become its members” (Schnapper, Krief and Peignard 15). French citizenship, in other words, was premised on adherence to a set of values signifying both “cultural belonging” and “political will”.

While reference to the term “abstract individual” is often taken to refer to the Anglo-American tradition of individual freedom, the French Republican system positioned it somewhat differently, linking it to the citizen, who “by definition is an abstract individual, without identification and particular qualifiers” (Schnapper 148). In French Republicanism then, abstract individuality served as the guarantee of the abstract citizen’s ability to adhere to the general will, rather than to the demands of “particular” identities such as ethnic belonging. Given this mandate, as well as the highly specific and dangerous location of civic associations in the French political imagination, it is not unexpected that immigrants were denied the right to associative organization until the early 1980s. However, François Mitterrand’s era of reform, decentralization and expanded rights would coincide with the increasingly repressive legislative changes I outlined earlier. As immigrant identity began to enter the French public sphere in concrete and permanent ways, accusations from the Right would position the breakdown of the centralized state as the harbinger of communitarian tendencies. *Communautarisme* soon came to refer to any sign of individuals’ attachment to specific cultural categories or communities, which were assumed to counter-act the unmediated relationship between individual, abstract citizens and the French state. Adrian Favell notes that this impasse would force the government to “return to the idea of republican citizenship, and the defense of a universalist ideal of integration for immigrants through public virtues and civic incorporation in the old revolutionary tradition” (57).

This “return to tradition” shifted the Mitterrand government’s understanding of “integration” from creating avenues of socio-economic insertion for second generation immigrants to an intangible moral project. Sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad would argue that the notion of social integration had always been intangible, taking the term to reference “a state, a point of arrival, a quality to which several factors contribute, some of them objective and materially objectified, others immaterial or of a symbolic order, and transcending the whole group or society and giving it the makings of its spirit, its own style, and its internal coherence” (221). Visible throughout the 1980s and 90s however, was a secondary shift. “Schooling and socialization in France” (Schnapper, Krief and Peignard 23) remained key ingredients for acquiring nationality. However those state-sponsored efforts which had comprised the project of integration during the 1960s and 70s, such as proportioned immigrant “quotas” (Weil 54) for co-habitation with French populations in suburban neighborhoods or language classes⁶ for immigrant populations were re-articulated as a need to facilitate “the internalisation of universal values by both autochthonous and migrant populations” (Schnapper, Krief and Peignard 17). In turn, this effort was increasingly positioned as the responsibility of immigrants’ associations, which were funded if their activities were deemed “conducive to integration” (Hargreaves, *Immigration* 89), a phenomenon which is elaborated in Chapter 3.

If France was once again “a self-elective membership association” (Favell 64) in the Rousseau tradition, then the *Loi Pasqua*’s demand of voluntary membership would position immigrants in “a new moral relation to their adopted nation, which puts the accent on their individual rights and responsibilities” (68). In other words, if immigrants displayed signs of responsibilities that derived from sources other than those of the nation-state, such as for example transnational political commitments in North Africa, they were not only failures as citizens but moral failures as well, behaving in a “selfish, particularistic or anti-national way” (82). By the early 21st century integration had become, above all, a moral endeavor.

Since the early 1990s, the majority of cases where the “un-integrated” tendencies of immigrant populations have garnered public attention have involved immigrant bodily practices. From the veil affair to sensationalized tele-visual discoveries of basement mosques or other venues of social exchange in immigration-saturated neighborhoods, to polygamous family arrangements to female excisions, accusations of “communitarian” association have for the most part focused on practices that are taken to rupture French corporal behavior (particularly those deemed a guarantee of gender equality). The notion that the immigrant’s presence in France is registered at a fundamentally corporal level has been further normalized in remarks from government officials, such as the infamous statement Jacques Chirac made in 1991. Addressing a crowd in Orléans, the soon-to-be President declared that he understood the plight of the “French worker” who lived across from an immigrant family with “a father, three or four spouses and twenty kids who made 50000 francs in social benefits without working. If you add to this the noises and odors (*le bruit et l’odeur*), then of course the French worker across the landing goes crazy” (Cimade, *Votre Voisin* 12). In statements such as these, while the conceptual threat posed by the immigrant made reference to his seemingly advantageous relationship with the French

⁶ Funding for these activities as well as others, such as occupational training, was and continues to be arranged through the Fonds d’Action Sociale (FAS), which was founded in 1958 with the goal of targeting the social needs of Algerian workers in French metropolises (Cour des Comptes 33-34). Over the following decades, the FAS morphed in its nomenclature and the specificities of its target, but its goal remained “to support the state project of integrating immigrants and their descendants into French society” (Hargreaves, *Immigration* 89).

state, the visceral experience of immigrant presence had to do with this immigrant's body and what that body *did*: what it cooked, wore, said and produced. A brief turn to *l'affaire du foulard* or the headscarf affair will further illustrate corporeality's significance to the French debate on integration.

The Veil: Ostentation, Integration, Swimming

On March 15th 2004, when President Jacques Chirac signed a bill banning the wearing of "conspicuous" symbols of religious belonging in public primary and secondary schools, the so-called "veil ban" was welcomed as a defense of the uniquely French brand of secularism: *laïcité*. Public debates had begun in 1989 in Creil, where three women had entered their middle school wearing headscarves. Professor Ernest Chénière's decision to expel the women ignited a controversy that soon dovetailed with the era's popular interest in immigrant youth and Islamic practice to become national in scope: were these women undermining the separation of church and state by wearing symbols of their religious affiliation on school grounds? The *Conseil d'Etat*, the highest judicial body in France, would respond that "students could not be refused admission to school for simply wearing headscarves; this would be a violation of the right to individual conscience, which included religious conviction" (Scott 25). Nevertheless, the *foulard* became the most visible face of immigration's presence in the French public sphere during the coming decade. Academic ethnographers periodically argued that women who wore headscarves articulated their connection to the practice along distinctly "French" terms, highlighting it as a mode of self-governance. Conversely, public intellectuals deemed the *foulard* patriarchal, with philosopher André Glucksmann further adding that it was "covered in blood", a remnant of "Nazi times" (Quoted in Gaspard and Khosrokhavar 32). The anti-Islamic sentiment that underlined these comments drew from various international developments. Throughout the 1990s, the civil war in Algeria, the Islamic Republic in Iran and the build-up to the Al-Aqsa Intifada in Palestine were portrayed by the mainstream French press as evidence of the need to cultivate a "good Islam" (Deltombe 215). What began as a concern with the symbolic maintenance of the Republican school had by the mid-1990s become a question of integration.

In 1994, a series of new cases led Minister of Education François Bayrou to declare the *foulard* (by then referred to by the ethnicized term *le voile*) an "ostentatious" sign of religious belonging, its visibility constituting "transparent acts of proselytizing" (Scott 27). Unlike the kippah, the cross and the Sikh turban, the *voile*'s influence was taken to exceed the boundaries of the self. By 2000, the High Council of Integration would issue a report that "recognized the difficulty of excluding students with headscarves at the same time that it defined the wearing of these as antithetical to the goal of "integration"" (29). An appointed research commission arrived at the conclusion that the headscarf's presence in public schools countered the Republican expectation that the nation remain the primary axis of affiliation in individual's lives. The Republican school, as the "paradigm of integration" (Dayan-Hezbrun 71) was the only space within which this affiliation could be secured before the secondary hold of religions, communities and alternative politics emerged. How then could it accommodate the veil? In

Bayrou's words, "the school is designed to integrate; therefore it must exclude" (Quoted in Scott 103).⁷

While the veil debates were primarily characterized by references to the secular core of Republican citizenship, they provide an equally rich site for understanding the relationship between corporal acts and nationality. The fact that the bodily nature of veiling was key to the objections it raised are visible in the frequency with which critics of all backgrounds referenced its problematic presence in physical education classes. This dynamic is evident in the nuanced 2004 publication *L'une voilée, l'autre pas* (One veiled, the other not). Authored by Saïda Kada, a Lyon-based activist and Dounia Bouzar, an anthropologist and educator working for the government, the book chronicles a Socratic dialogue premised on the fact that while both women are Muslim, Kada wears a headscarf and Bouzar does not. Their discussions over a narrative that Bouzar collected during her fieldwork with immigrant youth is helpful for outlining what the headscarf debates revealed about the corporal dimension of immigrant integration.

In 19-year old Nassera's narrative, wearing a headscarf is a practice the young woman abandons in order to be able to attend her public school. The emphasis on receiving a good education that Nassera finds in her religious practice is what culls from her the necessity to abandon elements of that same practice for specific durations. When she graduates, she re-dons her headscarf, which, she tells Bouzar "had never left her (*il ne m'a jamais quitté, mon foulard*)" (Bouzar and Kada 76). Responding to Nassera's story, Kada questions the administrative rationale that forces the young woman to live her spirituality in an asymmetrical manner in order to partake of the structures of learning that are her due. Bouzar, in turn, highlights the state's pedagogical project as one where "doing things together, sweating together, constructing together" (83) is key to the cultivation of identification across difference: a socialization that favors joint living before private ties sequester adult life. The central example around which Bouzar rallies the importance of communal activity is that of the swimming class. The headscarf could be accepted as long as it did not "ostentatiously" promote difference but could that ever be the case if headscarf wearing girls chose to not share a swimming pool with their male classmates? And how could they swim with headscarves?

The fact that the image of a young woman, slowly sinking into a watery abyss beneath layers of wet fabric proved so potent in the public rants that surrounded the headscarf are indicative of the privileged position accorded both bodily life generally and sports practice more specifically within the Republican tradition. In Bouzar's discussion, the necessary limit of

⁷ Beyond offering legal justifications for discriminating against Muslim populations, Joan Scott notes that the veil ban radically transformed the original conception of the Republican school encapsulated in the Jules Ferry laws of 1881 and 1882. Historian Eugen Weber notes that long before migratory flows from non-European nations became a concern, the primary referent for the public school's function as "a center of acculturation" (226) was regional heterogeneity within France. Drawing on 19th century reformer Pierre Gascar's reference to a non-French speaking grandmother who lacked recognizable affect, Weber notes that the school "not only taught the national language, but suggested new sentiments and new gestures" (227) to those who arrived at its doors from the far corners of the Republic. Furthermore, the political and religious neutrality attributed to the *space* of the Republican school and deemed under threat by the wearing of the veil was in fact a quality to "be incarnated by the agents of the State, meaning teachers" (Gaspard and Khosrokhavar 180). Jean-Marie Mayeur suggests that Jules Ferry identified the State/Teacher's neutrality as a "mission" (153) to promote "the ideas that are the honor and the *raison d'être* of modern France" (Ferry quoted in Mayeur 153). The conduits of these morals were teachers who were not partisan but also clearly not neutral, instead charged with transmitting "the spirit of the French revolution" (153). The 21st century references to this "neutrality" not only rendered this new "morality" the unmarked essence of French life, as opposed to a goal to be achieved, but broadened its container from the teachers to the school as a whole.

multiculturalism is the student's need to participate in the life of the community. (The demand for kosher or halal food in the school cafeteria for example, functions differently. It does not stipulate segregated eating spaces.) In response, Kada protests that a practicing young Muslim's faith is as legitimate a reason to participate in separate physical education classes as various other rationales students offer to avoid participating at all. All that is necessary, Kada writes, is for the school to "recognize a doctor or psychologist's attestation that he feels this situation provokes real psychological suffering in relation to their [these students'] identity construction" (Bouzar and Kada 84-85). In turn, Bouzar replies that Kada's suggestion entails a fundamental re-thinking of the standards the World Health Organization maintains regarding the "physical and psychological well-being" (85) of youth. As it stands, Islam is not taken to hold an authority over the body in circumstances where the common law stipulates identical treatment of all students. "You ask," Bouzar adds, "that motives related to Islam be considered part of the common law" (85).

Bouzar and Kada's discussion reveal two related yet contradictory elements that are key to how immigrant integration is currently articulated in France. First, how human corporeality is lived and experienced is taken to stand separately from that human's ethical and religious affiliations. In other words, the state's institutions are charged with keeping that body healthy even if the methods for doing so induce other kinds of rupture in that individual's life, such as a devout Muslim girl having to display partial nudity in front of male classmates. Paradoxically however, bodily practices are also fully acknowledged as *engendering* moral behaviors. Communal physical education classes are imagined to bring about identification, equality and cultural homogeneity. Bodily practices then, become a key site through which to control immigrant integration and national morality.

Significant in Bouzar's account of national pedagogy, is the positioning of physical education classes as central to "doing things together, sweating together, constructing together" (83). While this brief exchange is in part a testament to the various contexts within which the headscarf's "ostentation" was debated, it is also indicative of how the Republic has articulated the relationship between bodily practice and integration through the larger domain of sports activities. Much like the Republican school, sports have emerged as a bodily arena through which to secure an anti-communitarian hold on citizens. Paul Silverstein notes that throughout the integration discourses of the 1980s and 90s, sports practice emerged in urban reform projects as the necessary cure for religious practice. Both implicated the body and its ritual habits. Additionally, sports not only trained the immigrant body in ways that engendered discipline and moral strength, they also "retrain Muslim bodies away from religious practices" (Silverstein 136) that proved competitors to the state's efforts at rehabilitation. Silverstein writes that the goal of the Youth and Sports program instigated by the Ministry of Urbanization in 1992, "was not only to prevent violence, delinquency, and drug abuse, but also to defuse the sectarianism supposedly promoted in the parallel Islamic summer camps that were increasingly being presented by the media as *jihad* training bases" (136).⁸ Once again, the target of the state's anti-sectarian, anti-communitarian and secular training was the immigrant's body.

⁸ The fact that bodily expenditure of the kind offered by sports practice could cultivate new sources of moral potential within these young bodies, finds its necessary neoliberal end in the hyper-commercialized figures of immigrant sports heroes such as Zinedine Zidane and Zair Kedadouche. Portrayed by both domestic and international corporations as the ideal subject of immigrant salvation, Zidane emerges in these commercial practices as the hip face of multicultural secularism. Consider for example Nike's ad: "No law prevents you from wearing a

The development of theatrical rehearsal and performance as a distinctly embodied mode through which to *practice* immigrant integration can now be placed within a larger discursive history that has increasingly identified the immigrant's body at the center of national morality. Theatrical aid work however, differs from the criminalization of the headscarf or the proliferation of sports programs in one significant way. The brief outline of bodily integration offered above reveals the French state's clear investment in the notion that bodily practices of a ritual nature imply self-cultivation. This distinctly pragmatic view of ritual activity, one which understands habits to be constitutive of beliefs, is rarely recognized as such. Instead, the wearing of the veil, or the public visibility of non-Western cultural customs from manner of dress to manner of gait are taken to act as *signs* of a politico-religious, sectarian stance towards the French state.

Conversely, theatrical aid work is openly embodied in nature and is presented as such. During my conversations with organizers, they emphasized the importance of bodily learning when it came to language acquisition, metropolitan street readiness and overall comfort with the habits of French social life. Of course, this did not mean that the tendency to subject bodily life to "the status of a sign" (Connerton 95) was entirely absent. The chapters that follow will outline moments when the "otherness" of certain participants' behaviors would transition the organizers' approach from pragmatic to symbolic ones. In other words, while they themselves took for granted that bodily universes had to be learned and unlearned, signs of foreign bodily repertoires would be treated as evidence of *ideological* resistance on the part of participants to the work of theater. When participants felt that they could not take part in scenes that involved more physical exposure than they were comfortable with, this choice would be taken to contradict the "liberatory" work of being on a stage. However, these moments of confusion and tension were in large part subsumed beneath an investment in cultivating bodies and speaking of this process openly.

The ease with which theatrical aid work addressed the corporeal elements of immigrant integration is evidence of yet another embodied ingredient from French history: the development of theatrical and cultural decentralization and policy. In the second half of the 20th century, immigrant integration was not the only bodily effort to preoccupy the French state. Policy makers were equally interested in increasing the regional autonomy of arts centers, democratizing access to the arts and positioning arts practices as *habit-generating phenomena* that could create "cultured" citizens. The notion that participating in, observing and frequenting arts practices could shape moral universes was a view that theatrical aid workers had inherited from over six decades of culture's positioning as a public offering.

Theatrical Decentralization and Cultural Policy

Although cultural policy scholars often note that "France's paradigmatic position at the 'interventionist' end of the spectrum of cultural policy frameworks constitutes a fairly recent phenomenon" (Ahearne 2), the designation of "culture" as a realm where the state could intervene far predated the 1959 founding of the Ministry for Cultural Affairs. The concern with

PSG [Paris Saint-Germain] jersey to school" (Silverstein 139). Sports, in other words, are fundamentally secular and enable free access to all domains of French public life. Islam does not. In the widely read memoir *La France et les Beurs*, Kedadouche repeatedly declares himself to be the kind of Muslim who "loves whisky, sexy women, American music and the charcuterie" (77).

“culture” in French policy-making was and remains a concern with unruly geographies. At the end of the 19th century, the development of policies aimed at intervening in the leisure practices of the French public was a direct result of anxieties over the isolated provinces of the nation, where citizens remained loyal to regional dialects and national heritage was but an abstract designation. A century later, cultural policy would concern the management of immigrant populations, the literal emergence of other “geographies” within the space of the nation. The brief portrait of cultural policy making that follows will use as its navigational principle the changing links that policy-makers have drawn between heritage, citizenship and integration. Rather than suggest that cultural policy has gradually come to absorb and respond to the demographic realities of post-colonial France, I suggest that the guiding impulse behind cultural policy-making was always the management of heterogeneity.

Historian Herman Lebovics notes that as the 19th century drew to an end, the Third Republic’s solidification into a centralized Republican state was in continuous conversation with regionalisms. While the late 19th century witnessed increasingly folkloric interest in regional difference, for many the “countryside” would also emerge as a “repository” (Lebovics 142) of *national* heritage, in an effort to resurrect an older French nationalism. Of course, the “Revolutionary myth of a single cultural heritage” (Looseley 13) offered by later cultural policies was itself *regional* in origin: “Parisian and middle-class, serviced by academicism and uniformly disseminated in elementary form by the centralised *école républicaine*” (13). Nevertheless, in the years that followed the German defeat in World War II and the collapse of the Vichy Regime, cultural activists would view access to culture as “a means of resisting the appeal of future totalitarianisms and building a more just society” (22). In other words, “post-war democratisation was therefore not so much a political as an ethical and civic imperative aiming to transcend class struggle in favour of national consensus and individual self-fulfillment” (22). In the aftermath of the German occupation, “culture” would emerge as the guarantee of both heritage and class-blind consensus.

The immediate postwar project referred to as dramatic decentralization was managed by Jeanne Laurent, a policy maker from the Ministry of Beaux-Arts who drew up a long-term plan for establishing financially autonomous regional theaters throughout France. This project was a response to the postwar disarray within which “culture” was negotiated, evidenced by the first *Centre Dramatique Nationale* (National Center for Drama (CDN)). The Centre Dramatique de l’Est was founded in 1946 when local officials in the formerly German-occupied Alsace region filed requests with the Ministry, citing the need to combat the “germanization of spirit in our provinces” (Goetschel 48) and concluding that the state needed to bring the “masterpieces of French culture to the Alsatians” (48). Additionally, what Pascale Goetschel identifies as the guiding ideology behind decentralization was “the necessity to go to the working masses” (68) with a focus on *immigrant* working masses: a 1948 report would highlight “a strong proportion of workers of foreign origin who need to be made to benefit from our culture so that they become true (*véritable*) French citizens” (Quoted in Goetschel 68). By 1946, the targets of “culture” were not merely the isolated regions of France but “foreign” workers, and engaging in class-based action necessarily meant engaging with foreigners.

During the 50s and 60s however, both the class-based *and* transnational dimensions of public access were backgrounded to discussions of affective citizenship. Goetschel notes that during the initial years of decentralization, the *class* designation of the targets rarely structured “a theatre of class struggles” (37). They referenced instead a generalized “ameliorization of

social conditions” (37) and “social democratization” (37) and Laurent’s rhetoric came to sound increasingly moral in tone. Dramatic decentralization and *animation* (the forging of “new forms of relationship with the local public” (Looseley 25)) were “the moral duty of a secular state” (28) to create forms of “spiritual life” for its public (Looseley quoting Laurent 28). Theatre’s conceptualization as the “spiritual” offering of a “secular” state may sound contradictory. However, within the context of post-World War II France, civic morality was understood to be a primarily secular enterprise, and *laïcité* a public religion that could combat totalitarian rule. The advent of André Malraux and the birth of the Ministry of Culture would dissolve those tensions with the introduction of a new term: humanity. Appointed by Charles de Gaulle as the first head of the Ministry of Culture in 1959, Malraux would draw from Laurent’s map for dramatic decentralization to create a brand new structure of cultural diffusion: the *Maison de Culture* (House of Culture (MC)). Functioning much like the multiplying CDNs, the MCs would serve as regional nodes where the French public could access a variety of leisure activities, theater being foremost among them.

Unlike Laurent however, Malraux eschewed the need for *animateurs* and other intermediary workers. He argued instead that the French public’s experience of art would serve as such an “aesthetic shock” (Ahearne 8) that it would engender self-fulfillment and emancipation.⁹ It was at this juncture that the “human” became a specific tool of argumentation, as Dominique Darzacq makes clear in her approximation of Malraux’s MCs: “secular cathedrals, destined to permit all citizens to access the masterpieces of humanity” (16). If the MCs were “secular cathedrals” but “cathedrals” nonetheless, what guaranteed their status as worldly rather than holy were their ability to orient “human” emotions in the direction of *citizenship* by way of an *appreciation of art objects*. At a 1966 colloquium, Malraux would announce:

The Maisons de Culture do not bring about knowledge (*des connaissances*), they bring about emotions, works of art rendered live, to the people who are facing these works of art. The University must teach what she knows, the Maisons de Culture must make others love (*aimer*) what they themselves love (Malraux “Discours de Dakar”).

Malraux delineated the MCs as dispensers of emotion, but crucially differentiated them from the other home of fiercely guarded secular thought in French life: the Republican school. Suspended between the school and the church, the MCs (and by association, the Ministry of Culture) safeguarded an element of human life perhaps best summarized by a certain Georges Combet. The politician noted during a 1961 plenary session of the Commission for Cultural Facilities and Artistic Patrimony that culture “corresponds to the health, to the morale, to the security of man and of the collective and if we have created social insurances [*Assurances Sociales*] to protect man from illness and from accidents then we also have the duty to protect him against accidents of civilization, born of this period of disorder and disequilibrium” (Quoted in Dubois 226). The connection that Combet draws here between public health and cultural policy situates “the security of man” as a matter of medical targeting, while the security of the “collective” is prone

⁹ Importantly, for Malraux, the aesthetic products that could engender the shock in question did not include radio, television or film, classified as “dream factories (*les usines de reve*)” (Malraux “Brasilia”).

to afflictions of a “civilizational” kind, requiring the installment of *cultural* security and protection.¹⁰

By the early 21st century, references to “civilizational” security were certainly sparse in the politically nuanced discourses of the civic actors with whom I spoke. Yet the mid-century suggestion that engaging in arts practices required little mediation, and that such engagement evidenced an inherently “human” capacity remained unquestioned assumptions. Many of my interlocutors referenced the “human” need for self-expression as the basis for labeling theatrical practice a sort of “liberatory” labor. “Being on stage”, one workshop leader told me, “is speaking in a space of liberty, where one is listened to.” Yet detailed accounts of workshop proceedings and narratives about participants soon revealed that “recognition”, “liberation” and the necessity of “self-expression” weren’t self-evident to those involved. Instead, taking a photograph, writing a story or dancing on stage were activities that participants needed to cultivate the ability to partake of, let alone enjoy. “Aesthetic shock” revealed itself to be a complicated experience.

In fact, as *Maisons de Culture* multiplied across France, Malraux’s many theses did little to elucidate the specific mechanics of how “aesthetic shock” would generate cultured human-citizens. Of what did the moment of shock consist, and how did it train those who “faced works of art”? Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s study of European museums and museum-going publics was the first work to counter Malraux’s theory of art appreciation. Commissioned by the Ministry for Cultural Affairs and eventually published in 1969 under the title of L’Amour de l’Art: Les Musées d’Art Européens et leur Public, the co-written (with Alain Darbel and Dominique Schnapper) work would unearth themes that would become central to the sociologist’s later work. Bourdieu argued, unlike Malraux, that the encounter between art object and art observer was rarely amorous. The observer could only make sense of the art work when armed with a set of “cultural codes” (Field 215) that could be used to “decipher” (216) the work at hand. Internalizing this code was not a singular experience, instead requiring an ongoing “training” (231) in experiencing works of art. This training produced a “cultivated disposition” that functioned, akin to Bourdieu’s notion of the bodily *habitus*, as “a durable and generalized attitude which implies recognition of the value of works of art and the ability to appropriate them by means of generic categories” (230). The possibility of the art observer’s cultivating a non-trained, “free” disposition with regards to works of art was itself contingent upon “the full assimilation of school culture” (231) as the basis from which “free” appreciation (or its lack) could be brewed. In Bourdieu’s estimation, far from providing the kind of prolonged exposure necessary for achieving a universality of aesthetic experience amidst the French population, museums (and given this text’s audience, one could equally substitute a *Maison de Culture*)

¹⁰ Although the “humanity” to be protected from “accidents of civilization” in instances such as these are firmly national, Malraux’s larger conceptualization of the benefits of the “humanity” emanating from artistic masterpieces indicated a global potential for salvation as well. Following a state visit to India in 1964, Malraux declared to the General Assembly: “French literature is unknown in India but Nehru told me: ‘In our country, because of the multiplicity of languages, we don’t know Tamil works that well in Bengali speaking regions, the book that everyone knows is titled Les Misérables.’ Ladies and Gentleman, our country represents and represents still, in the order of spirit, what I call the generosity of the world (*la générosité du monde*)” (Malraux “Allocution”). French literature, in this instance, not only functioned as the home of universal appeal, it was specifically *giving* in its ability to *unify* where no unification existed. The context of Malraux’s comments were equally interesting, two years after the French state’s single most painful colonial loss, the Minister of Culture introduced a former *British* colony to the General Assembly as having been permeated by French cultural life. Since the question of imperial generosity was impossible to address within the context of North Africa, artistic influence was re-distributed to South Asia.

merely maintained social inequity by establishing specific hierarchies within a “system of production and circulation of symbolic goods” (124).

Bourdieu’s class critique greatly influenced the Villeurbanne Declaration of May 25th 1968. Following the student riots and political instability that had rocked the nation earlier in the month, heads of CDNs and MCs would gather at Director Roger Planchon’s theatre in Villeurbanne to craft their response. In direct contrast to Malraux’s vision for a nation comprised of relationships between men and artworks, philosopher Francis Jeanson argued that the conditions were not in place for “encounters between men” (quoted in Ahearne 11). “Beyond our potential public,” Jeanson would later summarize in 1994, “one must realize the existence of a non-public, composed of the marginalia of things public, citizens who cannot access the real means of citizenship [*citoyennisation*]. [What is necessary is] the undertaking of politicization, in the sense of aiding others to self-politicize, to become effective members of the city” (Jeanson 87).¹¹ What emerged from Villeurbanne was an explicit politicization of the work of culture, and a privileged link between that politicization and theatrical practice. Mankind, the declaration stated, needed to “invent their own humanity together” (“La déclaration” 195), and the non-public had to “politicize itself” (195). This form of action was best achieved through theatre, “a privileged form of expression out of all the possible forms of expression as it is a collective human work offered to the collectivity of men” (“La déclaration” 195-196).¹² By the early 1970s, as immigration and integration slowly transformed into driving political questions and immigrants into an obvious “non-public”, new targets of politicization would emerge: residence halls for immigrant workers, suburban centers with high concentrations of foreign-born populations and immigrant labor movements.¹³ The legacies of this era, which will be examined in detail in the following chapter, would provide the groundwork for theatrical aid work.

¹¹ Significantly, accounts of cultural history rarely ever highlight moments of exchange such as those that took place at Villeurbanne as engagements with the realities and changing demographics of post-colonial France. Jeanson’s significant presence at Villeurbanne makes these blind spots far harder to ignore, for the philosopher’s identity in 1968 was intimately bound to the Algerian War of Independence. Famed as the head of the *Réseau Jeanson*, a literal network of suitcase carriers who had provided metropolitan aid for the Algerian *Front National de Libération*, Jeanson had clearly not shed his cross-Mediterranean identity in the aftermath of the war. In a short text for a collection of essays on 1968, Jeanson remembers visiting the offices of André Malraux in 1966-7 on behalf of a friend working for the Théâtre Bourgogne. Upon hearing a reference to theater, the immediately enthused Minister of Culture, Jeanson writes, had stopped in his tracks, stating: “Well then, we shall give you a House of Culture.” Bypassing Jeanson’s protests, the Minister had added, “but yes, imagine, this will be wonderful, we will give you the house of culture of Lille, there will surely be one in Lille, and then on the night of the inauguration, you can have the National Theater of Algiers perform. This is good, no?” (Jeanson 91) Visible in instances such as these was the emergence of an already clear distinction between the celebration of culture as a matter of *inter-national* cooperation rather than *national* inclusion.

¹² Importantly, the rationale as to why theatrical creation could provide the best kind of cultural action to “the collectivity of men” showed the clear influence of a decade’s worth of exchange between French theater circles and the German director and playwright Bertold Brecht’s Berliner Ensemble: “a certain non-mystifying dramatization or theatricalization of the contradictions that haunt man” (“La déclaration” 196).

¹³ While I will trace the explicit emergence of “immigration” as a target for cultural policy making in the next chapter, one convergence is worth noting at this juncture. In André Malraux’s original formulations, the “humanizing” role of culture had above all to do with reconstructing the civic morality that the Second World War had ruptured. Unearthing the texts of Molière, Marivaux and Racine promised a new era of democratic cultural production and life. By the time cultural politicization became an issue of immigrant integration however, “humanity” had less to do with secular morality. Rather, it functioned as a category with an opposite: the non-human. Culture would be taken to intervene in lives that were “inhuman”, a designation that mirrored what scholars

If Villeurbanne set the stage for *animation*'s emergence as a key tool with which to address immigration and integration however, it also serves as evidence of the parameters such projects would have. A return to the difficulties of assessing the community-generating dimensions of contemporary theatrical aid work is helpful here. Earlier, I had noted that the "collectivity" on offer in these practices was haunted by a tradition of political thought that cautioned against particular communal identities. Therefore, while organizers were cognizant of the cooperative nature of performance labor, they shied away from referring to themselves as community builders. This wariness with community is equally evident in Villeurbanne's articulation of theater's "privilege". Theater's uniqueness derived from its shared nature, it placed a "collective work" in the line of vision of "the collectivity of men". However, in this and similar statements, "collectivity" was more of a reference to numbers than joint experience. Both Malraux's theory of aesthetic experience and appreciation, and Bourdieu's critique of this experience's potential for generating bodily habits, replicated a scenario of encounter where exchange happened primarily between works of art and their singular observers. I do not mean to suggest that communal experience was never at stake, as the larger project of cultural policy making remained the cultivation of *national* habits and tastes. Nevertheless, the "nation" was meant to operate at an abstract register for the theater-going worker/immigrant, the spatial scale for becoming "cultured" remained at the level of the individual.

It would be overly determined to suggest that these dynamics set the only horizon available for the kinds of theatrical aid work that would emerge at the beginning of the 21st century. However, they were relevant to how participants were asked to conceptualize their involvement, incorporate the skills dispensed, and treat other participants in the practices that I chronicled. Far more generally, this brief history of how "art" became inscribed in daily life as socially transformative, recognized, valued and durable, was often assumed by organizers to exist in the historical knowledge and imagination of newly arrived immigrants. As a consequence, theatrical aid work involved constant negotiation between these competing knowledges, accompanied by the frustration and disappointments these negotiations often entailed. In order to do justice to these complexities, my goal throughout this manuscript is two-fold. First, I underline moments when contemporary choices reflect specific historical legacies and their founding assumptions. Second, I highlight the malleability of cultural practices and the extent to which they remain in conversation with and are transformed by their circumstances of production.

Ritual and Performance

Finally, tracing the dynamics of theatrical aid work requires a sense of how "theatre" functions in the first place, how it does the work that it does. How did these individuals conceptualize both theatrical practices specifically, and bodily practices more generally? For Sylvie, who administered women's theater workshops for a Paris-based association, doing theater was both a way of concretizing language acquisition *and* familiarizing participants with the dominant modes of exchange characterizing French social life. Key to this understanding of

refer to as the era's slow modifications to immigrant stigmatization: from a racial/ethnic difference to a "cultural" difference that mainstream attitudes would repeatedly stress.

familiarity, comfort and acculturation, was the sense that these phenomena were not markings with which to clothe participants. Instead, these were states that bodies needed to attain and practice. Sylvie noted that the women who attended their workshops were capable of getting by (*se débrouiller*) in daily life with a set of self-generated methods, such as following the color-coding of *métro* lines. “Often,” she added, “nobody knows that they are illiterate.” The goal of the workshops however, was to gear both linguistic and theatrical learning towards generating a further sense of one’s “potential”, in Sylvie’s words: “As a human being, with all that I am, with all that I already have in me, I am capable of living in this society by understanding its codes, its usages, and be able to take my place in it.” For example, Sylvie considered theatrical practice an important element for learning to “perform” in job interviews. Bodily life was central to the kind of “potential” the workshops ultimately wished to cultivate: a comfort derived from bodily readiness.

If we consider the daily *métro* ride, and the theater class and field trip where that ride is rehearsed as repeated and *ritual* activities, Sylvie’s understanding of them resonates with what anthropologist Catherine Bell refers to as “an approach to ritual activities that is less encumbered by assumptions about thinking and acting and more disclosing of the strategies by which ritualized activities do what they do” (4). Rehearsing a confident exit at a busy station installed “confidence” at an embodied register. Bell’s distinction between ritual acts as driven by “thinking and acting” as opposed to composed of various strategies for “doing” highlights a debate that has been central to how anthropological scholarship has approached the role of ritual practices in social life. Ritual is premised on a strict separation between thoughts and acts, where *thoughts* of religious beliefs or intellectual awareness of mythical knowledges form “conceptual blueprints” for *acts* that individuals then “perform” (Bell 19), whether before an audience or in private.

This separation appears in the work of a variety of anthropologists, from Clifford Geertz and Claude Lévi-Strauss to Victor Turner. Despite their distinct approaches to questions of meaning and symbolization, what these thinkers share is a commitment to the notion that ritual acts constitute a “manifestation or expression of thought” (Geertz) (Bell 31) or a “symbolic” expression of an attempt” (Lévi-Strauss) (35) at performing a meaningful act. For example, in his oft-cited essay, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight”, Geertz positions the “function” of this ritual act of gambling as “interpretive: it is a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves” (Geertz 448). Elsewhere, he states that the cockfights are also “positive agents in the creation and maintenance of such a sensibility” (451), revealing a complex understanding of the act whose relation to those involved is more than “metaphorical” (434). Nonetheless, for Geertz, the bodily life of ritual remains primarily a “simulation” (436) or “dramatization” (437) of the tenets of Balinese social relations.

Victor Turner’s own drama analogy emerges in the form of transitionist “social dramas.” This four part framework for understanding ritual places human actions and processes into a continuum where a “breach” in the fabric of everyday life is followed by a communal “crisis”, then “redress” by participants before “reintegration” into the everyday order of things (Turner 69). Crucially, the Aristotelian evolution offered here depends on the ability of “the redressive phase” (76) to have the crisis be “rendered meaningful” (76) and it is this phase that Turner identifies as a model for considering “all the genres of cultural performance” (108). Much like Geertz, Turner found that rituals could “reassert and reanimate the overarching values” (75) of the Ndembu people, and maintain a symbolic relation to their everyday world. Although the

anthropologist was clear that ritual also “transcends its frame” (79), his work nevertheless took the human capacity to engage in repeated, routinized and communal activity as an *indicator* of processes essentially happening elsewhere.

In turn, scholars such as Talal Asad and Saba Mahmood have sought to move beyond a theory of ritual acts as the outer reflections of previously established inner states. Rejecting the view that all bodily practices are necessarily *representative* in character and instead focusing on disciplinary regimens of bodily training in different religious traditions, they suggest a reading of embodied activity as constitutive (rather than signifying) of thoughts and beliefs. In other words, they approach ritual as the place where things happen, rather than where they are represented. Borrowing notions of piety from Medieval Christianity, Asad argues for an understanding of ritual behavior as a series of “apt performances”. He writes:

Apt performance involves not symbols to be interpreted but abilities to be acquired according to rules that are sanctioned by those in authority: it presupposes no obscure meanings, but rather the formation of physical and linguistic skills. (*Genealogies* 62)

This understanding of how individuals conform to models (in this case a model of pious behavior) resonates with the aid worker’s understanding of confident conduct. The women’s ability to engage with metropolitan signs and symbols is less positioned as a performance of confidence than as the grounds from which confidence can be durably generated. In Saba Mahmood’s words, “ritual is not regarded as the theater in which a preformed self enacts a script of social action; rather, the space of ritual is one among a number of sites where the self comes to acquire and give expression to its proper form” (131). Over the course of this manuscript, the “proper form” towards which individuals work will shift, but its acquisition will almost always remain a matter of practical work.¹⁴

My own preference to opt for this alternative approach to ritual and bodily practices is a direct result of the fact that the majority of my interlocutors themselves understood the embodied nature of theatrical work to be generative of linguistic, emotional and physical skills. However, both organizers and participants were also distinctly aware that “theatre” did not just consist of scattered instances of rehearsal in the company of other actors, but performances destined to reach far larger crowds. This meant that although their work was underwritten by a pragmatic understanding of theatrical labor, the necessity to produce a public spectacle merged this understanding with symbolic concerns: how would certain actions *read* on stage? Of what would they be considered the symbols? Would they be recognized as the habit-generating events that the world of the workshop took them to be, or would they be treated as “enactments” of “reality” that weren’t even that *good*? In other words, aesthetic considerations and the desire to please an audience often meant that both participants and organizers would balance contradictory

¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* as “the system of structured, structuring dispositions” (Bourdieu, *Practice* 52) generated by the repeated effects of specific economic and social processes is equally important to cite in this context. While it is entirely useful to stay aware of Bourdieu’s notion that human intentionality always exists in relations of “dominance and subjugation” (Bell 84) to sources of authoritative power, I have found practice theory to rely too heavily on power as “a framework for action” (84), an approach which is not too distant from that of the symbolic behavior theorists. The participants of theatrical aid work in no way misrecognize the power-laden circumstances under which they “practice” citizenship. What I have found interesting to trace are responses that explicitly reference the structures of acquisition with which participants are forced to work (see Chapter 3).

conceptual understandings of how their work functioned and why it was important in the first place. This element of theatrical aid work brings the practice in close contact with the dilemmas of community-based performance, equally concerned with process yet necessarily driven by the demands of product.

A rich strain of performance studies research has struggled with theater's key status as an embodied practice with the ability to both *represent* and *engender*, a twofold process which indicates that intention and reception rarely align as either performers or publics wish. Traditional European Theater Studies, Willmar Sauter suggests, is itself equally invested in how "theater always materializes in the form of an event" (11). Yet when approached from the semiotic framework that this field of scholarship often utilizes, the "eventness" of theater is characterized by "a constant flow of hermeneutic processes of understanding" (12) and theater itself is essentially "a communicative event" (20). Of course, these hermeneutic processes are complex, for their capacity for deciphering the event on stage constantly negotiates the expressive act's relationship to "social reality" *and* its role "from within the theater and its own conventions" (Sauter 62). However, what underlines the semiotic approach is its commitment to the notion that the theatrical event both re-presents the world that surrounds its walls and does so by repeating the codes of conduct that have come to define that world's re-presentation in the theater. This understanding of the work of the theater has been questioned on multiple levels from Jacques Derrida's critique of the imitative nature of Western theater to the systematicity with which performance is then considered "temporarily suspended from other modes of social reality" (Jackson, Lines 17).

The theory of performativity, based on linguistic philosopher J.L. Austin's theory of performative utterance and further developed in the work of philosophers Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler provides a lens through which to understand the dual work of theater practice. J.L. Austin's famous statement that "the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action" (5) is often read beneath a semiotic light. This is due in part to Austin's insistence that the "doing" element of speech (such as a marriage vow that engenders a new social bond) is dependent on appropriate circumstances. This view suggests that what guarantees the performative element of speech is indelibly connected to how an observer measures the relationship between the speaker's "outward utterance" and "inward performance" (Austin 9). In fact, theatrical acting is Austin's signature example of "the *etiolations* of language" (22): the mismatch between intention and declaration that confounds the ordinary functioning of social dialogue.

What later scholarship has drawn out of Austin's oeuvre is the speech-act's ability to *constitute* social selves regardless of circumstance and often in defiance of them. Specifically, Judith Butler's work on hate speech takes seriously the performative's nature as both "signifying and enacting" (Excitable 44), and studies its relevance to how speech functions in the world. Later work on gender performativity "not as a singular or deliberate act, but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (Bodies 2) similarly balances the representational *and* sedimenting work of bodily and vocal acts. For the study of ceremonies, rituals and a variety of performance practices it introduces the notion, best summarized by Paul Connerton, that perhaps "rites are expressive acts only by virtue of their conspicuous regularity" (44).

Maintaining a binary understanding of ritual acts as both expressive and constitutive is key to understanding how theatrical aid work functions in France today. Theatrical aid work is

defined by ritual's ability to engender new types of behavior, new ways of action in the world. This element of theatre is central to why organizers choose it as the means with which to acculturate foreign bodies. However, the coming chapters will soon reveal that the imperative to perform introduces staged behavior's unavoidably expressive work. And this dimension of performance is key to understanding how racial and gender difference function in theatrical aid work. In other words, tracing the principles involved in performance, as opposed to rehearsal, will be fundamental to understanding how differently racialized and gendered bodies are presented in non-governmental, humanitarian efforts dealing with immigration and what performative work they are imagined to "do" on behalf of compassionate sociality and humanitarian sentiment.

Building on these exchanges between anthropological and critical theory on the problem of ritual and repetition, performance studies scholars Joseph Roach, Shannon Jackson and Diana Taylor have generated models for understanding re-enactment that lift the boundary between the stage and the social world. Jackson's studies of the embodied nature of social reform in turn-of-the-century Chicago, Roach's analysis of the relationship between gestural reproduction and historical remembering in circum-Atlantic performance cultures and Taylor's focus on embodied performance as revelatory of how various Latin American subjects "know" (Taylor 3) a set of historical truths, values and attitudes, underline how the *material life* of aesthetic forms are imagined to cultivate *moral* sensibilities. Eschewing traditions of thought that identify ethical values as the outcome of philosophical reflection, these scholars examine how "the embodied, environmental, and enacted nature of" performance generates "transformation in sensibility and behavior" (Jackson, Lines 238). Their question propels my interest in theatrical aid work: how can a focus on aesthetic practices that generate specific vocabularies for understanding bodily engagement help illuminate larger discussions regarding ritual activity and political personhood?

Thematizing Theatrical Aid Work

The fieldwork narratives that serve as the backbone of this dissertation originated from oral historical and ethnographic interviews with theater practitioners, social and humanitarian aid workers and political activists who operated in divergent contexts with divergent goals. Yet, I found that their work, as well as their articulation of its contribution to civic society could be joined beneath a panoramic definition of theatrical aid work: theatrical projects, presentations, workshops and classes whose explicit and implicit working principles derived from the specificities of contemporary immigrant and refugee experience in France. Some of these organizations conceived of their theatrical endeavors as part of a series of practical activities comprising their social aid work. Others conceived of it as an advocacy strategy with political after-effects as well as personal benefits. Yet others were commercial performance venues who involved immigrants and refugees in performance projects; they did not refer to their work as "aid" yet utilized vocabularies that clearly derived from aid contexts. In order to best reflect the similarities and differences that characterized my conversations around Paris, as well as gather them around key trends, the four chapters that follow are arranged thematically, rather than around field sites.

The four main organizations that emerge throughout this dissertation are the previously mentioned RESF, the juridical aid organization Cimade, the *centre social* or community center L'Accueil Goutte d'Or (which continues to house the association formerly known as the

Association Accueil Goutte d'Or (AGO)) based in the 18th arrondissement of Paris and the Maison des Tilleuls (MDT), another *centre social* in the Tilleuls quarter of the northeastern Parisian suburb of Blanc-Mesnil. Additionally, I reference a series of theater troupes, arts centers, humanitarian organizations as well as independent artists and activists. In the majority of the cases, the interviews made available to me, as well as the interviews I felt were more appropriate to demand, have been with the organizers, leaders or directors of various theatrical endeavors, rather than their participants. At times, this decision was a result of practical availabilities, as participants would have moved away by the time I approached a specific organization to ask about a project they had previously conducted. Other times, if organizers mentioned that the project had been dotted with discomfort for some participants, I felt it would be best not to pursue their participation in a research project that exhumed the discomforting experience. These choices have resulted in a manuscript that offers a view of theatrical aid work based in large part on organizers' observations and such an orientation necessarily tempers its illusions of getting to the truth of "what happened". Instead, my focus is on investigating the specificities of organizers' intentions. Practical availabilities have similarly shaped my choice of four Parisian organizations. Other groups as well as other cities could have been included. This constellation of field sites nevertheless illustrates the geographical, cultural and political variety of artistic and non-governmental work in Paris today.

Chapter 2 begins with the suggestion that the discursive repertoire of present-day social and arts aid work involving immigration was established during the 1970s. Scholarship often refers to the decade as key to the symbolic transition of the foreigner: as the postwar boom in France came to an end, "immigrant workers" slowly transitioned into "immigrants" who were not only residents but social and economic threats to nationals. This political shift heralded a shift in aesthetic and activist sensibilities, and coupled with the post-1968 emergence of subaltern selfhood as a question of human rights and identity politics, fundamentally changed both immigration activism and its attendant aesthetic practices. Archival research and oral historical interviews on the era's Arab-French performance troupes Al Assifa and La Kahina allow me to portray performance work that emerged during this shift and merged the vocabularies of classed labor struggle and individual emancipation. Most importantly, the juxtaposition of Al Assifa and La Kahina allows a glimpse into how individual speech emerged as central to both performance work and immigration activism by the early 1980s. This background is central to understanding more recent iterations of the relationship between speech and body in theatrical aid work.

Turning the focus to contemporary practices, Chapter 3 examines an important dimension of theatrical aid work: the use of a discourse of individualism that draws on the tradition of selfhood depicted above yet refracts the Republican legacy by articulating individuality through performance work. Focusing on the theatrical work of Cimade and AGO, both organizations that make reference to social integration, the chapter explores how "the individual" emerges as the ideal figure of integration. Additionally, it asks what relationship individuality has to bodily practices and the kinds of bodily and discursive "integration" opportunities theater provides. Chapter 4 continues this line of questioning and introduces the procedure of self-narration central to theatrical aid work. Focusing on the role of personal narrative in the work of RESF and MDT, the chapter explores how and why narratives of suffering and violence are positioned as key to the forms of recognition (both social and administrative) that these performances are thought to

cull. In doing so, it asks what relationship spectators and actors have in theatrical aid work more broadly, as well as what kinds of racialized and gendered identities result from this relationship.

Chapter 5 shifts the attention to a different genre of theatrical aid work, what I refer to as humanitarian theater projects. Unlike the practices outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, the silhouette of the humanitarian theater work is more professional, and while immigrants and refugees are involved, the work itself is not positioned as an “aid” project with traditional benefits such as language acquisition, metropolitan familiarity or creative self-expression. Yet the humanitarian theater work is a significant complement to these projects, for its understanding of the social status of theatrical performance (particularly theatrical performance that interrogates immigration and employs immigrants and refugees) resonates with the larger trends of humanitarian aid and humanitarian reporting in France. Therefore, I read these projects against a history of French humanitarianism, focusing on the tradition of “witnessing” key to 20th century medical humanitarian movements. These questions are rallied around a number of theater projects whose scales range from neighborhood-based fundraising efforts to national and transnational examples of “theatrical humanitarianism” in the work of the famed collective, the Théâtre du Soleil. These examples serve as the backdrop to the query: how does the management of knowledge in theatrical aid encounters relate to the global information economy?

CHAPTER TWO

FROM *TRAVAILLEUR IMMIGRE* TO *IMMIGRE*: LEFT MILITANCY, CULTURAL POLICY AND PERFORMANCE IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

By 1975, Al Assifa, the Arab-French militant theater troupe that had been founded during the Lip watch factory strikes of 1973 by activists from various labor movements, and had since successfully toured their immigration themed play, *Ca travaille, ça travaille, ça ferme sa gueule* throughout France, were showing signs of wear and tear. The unidentified troupe member and note-taker of an Oct. 12, 1975 meeting diagnosed the group's problems as such: "We often lived as though we were a community, but it is a community that was in fact a fiction...this is probably the most important reason as to why we had crises, crises which seemed to erupt over the smallest details" (Al Assifa "Bilan", 1). While this troupe member dispelled the notion that a commitment to immigration activism did not suffice to unify a group composed of French nationals and North-African immigrants, troupe member Mohammed "Mokhtar" Bacheri went further in another, undated meeting: "Often, it is only the acting that brings us together. That is insufficient and dangerous for our continuation" (Al Assifa "L'ordre du Jour", 2). Later in the conversation, an unnamed voice would add: "We must install ourselves in a neighborhood, take it, and then animate it (*l'animer*)" (3).

Today, these voices provide a startlingly precise entry into questions that most vexed cultural policy makers, militant activists and immigration-related performance practitioners during the 1970s. First, of what did *animation* consist? How were low-income neighborhoods to be rallied into the state-sponsored effort to promote *activités culturelles* across the nation? When these questions were being posed by the French state, in what ways could militant activists lay claim to the same efforts? Second, of what did community consist? If political goals were shared by individuals whose political positions vis-à-vis the French state were radically different, how could they continue to rally for the universality of labor injustices while honoring the particulars of the era's social discriminations? Third, of what did "acting" consist? Clearly an intimate endeavor since it provided at least the illusion of community, what role did this aesthetic practice have in denouncing social conditions? Finally, the dual position of the performance activist itself was at stake: was the actor one who "took neighborhoods" and then generated stories from their conflicts, or did the actor have a story and conflict of its own, as these very brief exchanges immediately reveal? On whom then, was the "work" of acting spent?

This chapter arrives at these questions and thus at the particulars of 1970s performance-based immigration activism via the troupes Al Assifa and La Kahina, another Arab-French collective that emerged during the period. Rather than situating the decade as the mere background to contemporary theatrical aid work however, my goal is to highlight the significance of the socio-political shifts it reveals. During the early 1970s, the silhouette of the immigrant worker or *travailleur immigré* of the metropolitan French imagination was radically altered. This figure, which had been defined by his opaque presence along the racial, social and geographic margins of urban French life, came detached from its qualifier: worker. No longer defined by his position as a precarious laborer, he became an "immigrant", an individual whose residence in his host country was permanent. This accession to the status of resident heralded the

transformation of the silhouette's gender, as the image of the single male worker gave way to women and children, now a significant presence on French soil due to the government's familial reunification policies. Finally, the advent of recognizable forms of sociability such as the family, revealed the steady manner in which urban reforms planned to quarantine such increase in numbers. Thus, the so-called distance that would soon be posited between societal norms and the Arab/African body was literally spatialized, between urban centers and tribal peripheries.

While this chapter is devoted to tracing the specifics of this shift, and the political moment which gave rise to its emergence, it will also model a shift in aesthetic and activist sensibilities along the lines of this silhouette. The emergence of the social category of the "immigrant", I will argue, was less the result of an administrative relationship rendered permanent (the naturalization of temporary laborers), than of new ways of thinking about the moral relationship between French citizens and the members of the broadly construed third-world or *tier-monde* (which encompassed both former French colonial territories and newer zones of war and occupation). For alongside the increase in domestic unemployment that propelled immigration from former colonies into the spotlight as symbols of the end of postwar prosperity, the early 1970s also witnessed the birth of a renewed interest in transnational subaltern-ness as a question of human rights and identity politics. The "immigrant" occupied two positions along this shift. First, attached to a new qualifier, the increasing presence of the "economic immigrant" became the leitmotif of zero-immigration policies and far-right discourses arguing for a renewed social equilibrium. Second, as a third-world subject, the immigrant was re-cast as an asylum seeking victim, subject to violence done by others and in need of non-governmental French aid.

In *May '68 and its Afterlives*, Kristin Ross suggests that the mid-1970s interpretation of May 1968 as an "identity" (25) crisis would find a comfortable partner in the newly emerging humanitarian discourses of *ex-gauchistes* (leftists), where militancy on behalf of class, colony and ideology slowly merged into a larger activist whole, and activists were asked to negotiate the emergence of categories of people, nations and experiences that could serve as ethical absolutes.¹⁵ A 1991 text by *ex-gauchiste* Bernard Kouchner, founder of Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders (MSF)) and current Minister of International Affairs all but outlines this journey, portraying the practice of medicine and medicinal aid as the remedy for evils beyond political, state-derived cures (11). Elements of this identity and rights-driven sensibility permeate the contemporary practices I witnessed during my fieldwork. Conversely, Al Assifa and La Kahina emerged *during* this domestic shift in sensibility, a shift from the proletarian struggle of May 1968 to "identity" politics, and claimed aesthetic practices as the groundwork for social reform on the question of immigration. Therefore, their performances cradled worlds both continuous and disjointed. They incorporated vocabularies that emerged both prior to the advent of human rights advocacy as the basis of aesthetic activity *and*

¹⁵ The term "militant" will appear throughout this chapter, and always in conjunction with individuals and groups who themselves used the term to define their activities. Over the course of my fieldwork, I found that many artist-activists drew clear distinctions between doing "militant" theater, "engaged" theater or "political" theater, identifying themselves within one category while providing examples of individuals who worked in others. While an over-arching definition is perhaps short-sighted, what "militancy" evoked was a relationship to the question under scrutiny that exceeded the act of having a political opinion. To be a "militant" meant that one's life and work was fundamentally shaped by the object of their militancy, an understanding that statements from Al Assifa and La Kahina members will further elucidate.

vocabularies that mirrored this shift from politics to ethics when it came to the question of “otherness”.

The historical reach of this chapter thus serves to chart three distinct themes. First, the traditions of cultural activism that emerged in these militant performance practices were indelibly linked to the state’s cultural policies, begging the question as to what was significant about moments where actors avowed or disavowed centralized influence. Second, whether performing on stage or in the social world, immigration activism’s portrayals of grievances employed both universalist and particularist tendencies, thus revealing the conditions under which ethnic and racial identities could be addressed in public. Third, immigration related performance practices in particular instigated distinct categories of theatrical representation, such as *témoignage* or witnessing, that would dovetail with the newly burgeoning interest in “identity” to create the terrain upon which late century performance practices would then be built. I begin this chapter with May 1968 in order to trace the emergence of key activist vocabularies and draw a very brief pre-history of “witnessing” in political theater. These vocabularies will then provide a route through the social and political climate of the 1970s and the emerging concerns of cultural policy makers and immigrant labor movements. I will situate Al Assifa and La Kahina within this landscape, and finally end with a focus on the imperatives that would become attached to theatrical representations of immigration by the early 1980s. My goal, ultimately, is to unearth the contours of immigration related performance activism from before the “immigrant” acquired an “identity”.

May 68, Algeria and Dis-Identification

The series of actions that comprised what Kristin Ross refers to as the “mass political event” (3) of May 1968 began on the campus of the Université de Paris X Nanterre during the late days of April. At the root of the student protests sat President Charles de Gaulle’s support for ongoing American presence in Vietnam, a central grievance around which varied critiques were then articulated. The eventual administrative shut down of the campus would merge student protestors from Nanterre with those gathered throughout Paris (and most noticeably) in the Latin Quarter campus of the Sorbonne. It is these protests, followed by an immediate police response and subsequent mayhem, which stand at the core of present-day narratives regarding the events of May 68. In the days that followed, sit-down strikes occurred throughout industrial plants surrounding Paris, Nantes and Rouen, in due course leading to a rupture in daily metropolitan life. A few weeks later, President De Gaulle’s threats of emergency rule and speedy legislative elections would bring about the end of “the biggest strike in the history of the French worker’s movement, and the only “general” insurrection the overdeveloped world has known since World War II” (Ross 4).

Ross delineates the affective, bodily experiences and memories of the month of May 1968 as the forgotten elements of a crisis often referred to as “an affirmation of the status quo” (6) when analyzed in terms of the material benefits accrued, such as an increase in wages, influence on the national and international policies of the Fifth Republic or a sustained focus on individual and sexual liberation. Subsumed beneath this version of May 68, Ross argues, is a far vaster “crisis in functionalism” (25) experienced by way of cities that would not run, objects that could no longer be consumed and various lines of communication that were no longer open,

since those who guaranteed their continuity were somewhere other than their designated municipal spots.

The fact that the material rupture of daily life happened via “a synchronicity or “meeting” between intellectual refusal of the reigning ideology and worker insurrection” (Ross 4) is a legacy that is not quite paralleled in the 1970s recollections of the events of May, by which point a different ethical imperative would take hold. This imperative framed class critique as a question of “identity”, a newly emergent term that would couch the materiality of class relations within a larger ethical framework whose primary concern was the unvoiced anguish of “‘the plebe’, a spiritualized and silent figure of helplessness” (Ross 12). The figure of the common person therefore, was less significant for its relationship to civic life and material existence than for its significance as a source of moral truth and knowledge. This designation, as the final chapter will show, would become key to French humanitarianism.

The colonial dimensions of the historical revisionism that frames May 1968 as a moral insurrection are especially obscured by comments that insist on the singularity of its appearance. May 1968 was in no way a departure from the history of French public protest and insurgency, rather, the experience for those involved resembled a “palimpsest” (34) of that of Algerian War protestors in 1961 and 1962. For example, terms specific to the Algerian experience of police brutality and violence during the October 17, 1961 mass mobilization protesting curfews for Paris-based Algerians circulated: like the police offensive unleashed on that day, killing hundreds of unarmed Algerian protesters, the student and worker beatings of 1968 were referred to as rat-hunts or *ratonnades* (34).¹⁶

While bodily and discursive citations of this kind might suggest a direct link between the colonial cause and the student/worker cause, the series of protests that marked the 1960s and culminated in May 1968 require a more precise analysis. The experience of protest action that remained continuous throughout the 1960s and 1970s was an awareness of colonial militarism in the practices of metropolitan police forces.¹⁷ And yet, the third world dimensions of class struggle weren’t always articulated upfront. Although it is possible to label this separation inherently contradictory, it is equally useful to approach it as a window into the notions of “protest” that May 1968 generated, notions that would inform militant practices that would later directly address colonialism and immigration. Memories of the Algerian War and its material effects *in* Paris, such as the October 1961 massacres, permeated the insurgencies of May. However protest action was itself rarely taken to stand in a relationship to a category of individuals called “the Algerians”. Ross identifies this seeming rupture as an example of what political philosopher Jacques Rancière titles dis-identification. Rancière’s definition of the term highlights a rejection of violence done to others not by way of an identification with the individual tortured, but an in-ability to recognize and identify oneself with the torturer (the French state), thus alienating “the ‘French’ political subject from him or herself” (Rancière, “The

¹⁶In Philip Brooks and Alan Hayling’s documentary *Drowning by Bullets*, the confused inter-mixing of diverse experiences of protest and consequent brutality emerge in ways that directly obscure Algerian loss of life. As the filmmakers note, the events of October 17 receive little public acknowledgment. In contrast, the deaths of French communist demonstrators outside of the Charonne metro stop while protesting right-wing violence receive extensive commemoration from the French Left. The documentary demonstrates how such asymmetrical claims to public memory overwhelm even personal recollections, as loved ones are remembered as having perished in 1962 rather than their true demise from police violence in 1961.

¹⁷ Azouz Begag suggests that this was a straightforward result of the entry of repatriated Algerian *colons* (European immigrants to North Africa) into law enforcement during the 1960s and 1970s (Begag 13).

Cause” 25). For Rancière, in other words, the denial of the relationship to the colonial state might have as its addressee a group (the Algerians), but it is a group with whom the French political subject *cannot* identify. Ethical bonds are not assumed to begin where politics meet their limit, rather, ethical limitations beckon possibilities of political action. “The cause of the other,” Rancière writes, “exists only within politics, and it functions there as an impossible identification” (32).

While a humanitarian account of the Algerian war and May 68 activism would emphasize the ethical imperative to relieve human suffering, Rancière’s account of political concern instead mobilizes it as a matter of perception. Rancière’s thoughts regarding aesthetic practices in The Politics of Aesthetics: the Distribution of the Sensible draw from the same notion of political subjectivity as a relation of sensibility with things perceived: “the essence of politics consists in interrupting the distribution of the sensible by supplementing it with those who have no part in the perceptual coordinates of the community, thereby modifying the very aesthetico-political field of possibility” (3). The new entry into the “perceptual coordinates of the community” however, does not occasion identification *or* emancipation; it merely provides “configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity” (9).

The decision to frame an introduction to 1970s immigration activism via May 68 pivots around the form of protest action revealed here: dissent and denunciation employ critical tools that have less to do with recognition and far more with enlarging the possibilities of action available to the members of the city. Indeed, a larger view of the metropolitan effects of the Algerian War during the 1960s offers a variety of political dis-identifications that, as Rancière suggests, neither emancipate, nor create the circumstances for cathartic communion. They do however expand the boundaries of how one’s experience of otherness manifests in actions regarding *the self*.

The Manifesto of the 121 or the “Declaration of the Right of Refusing to Serve [*insoumission*] in the Algerian War” a document drafted in 1960, can serve as an example. The Manifesto contained the signatures of 121 intellectuals, artists and theatre practitioners who rallied for the right to abstain from a war they believed was waged on illegitimate grounds. Supported by philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and the team of his monthly political and literary review Les Temps Modernes and dismissed in journals with far vaster circulation such as Le Monde, (which featured a counter-declaration accusing “the professors of treason” (Quoted in Schalk 106)), the declaration read:

Today, this absurd and criminal conflict is principally kept alive by the wishes of the Army; and because of the political function which several of its high ranking representatives make it fulfill, this Army, at times openly and violently flouting every law, and betraying the mission which the country has entrusted to it, is compromising and risks corrupting the nation itself, by forcing citizens under its orders to be accomplices in factious or degrading activities.

...

Such are the conditions in which many Frenchmen have been led to reexamine their sense of values and of traditional obligations. What is citizenship if, under certain circumstances, it becomes shameful submission? Are there not cases where the refusal to

serve is a sacred duty, where “treason” means a courageous respect for what is true?
(Levine 125)

For the 121 signers, by forcing the (male) citizen to eschew his right to refrain from participating in “degrading activities”, the Army’s dictum became the location through which the *insoumissionist* could re-instate his fulfillment of the “obligations” of the citizen: “reexamining” his citizenship by refusing to undergo a *soumission*. In passages such as the one quoted above, the loss of political sovereignty over the self exemplified by “shameful submission” signaled the loss of national selfhood as well. This loss was not prefigured through a traditionally formulated threat to clear borders (“French territory has never been threatened” (Levine 124) as the manifesto would continue on to note), but the ill-fit between colonial militarism and the “values” of “Frenchmen”.

While it is possible to argue that documents such as the Manifesto of the 121 were only able to show support for the Algerian self through declaring an injury sustained to the *French* self first, it is also possible to view the Manifesto as the product of what Rancière referred to as “sense perceptions” in flux. The new “perceptual coordinates” offered by the 121 Manifesto suggested that these two kinds of political injury were related, despite the fact that there was no causal political link between them. Kristin Ross notes that the mid to late 1970s infusion of human rights discourses into the vocabulary of political struggle had resulted in shifting “the colonial or third-world other of the 1960s... from militant and articulate fighter and thinker to “victim” by a defense of human rights strictly identified as the rights of the victim” (167). The Manifesto of the 121 conversely, posited victimhood and injury as a condition available to all under circumstances of war. In turn, war served as the context within which the signers could re-ignite a broader *proletarian* politics, mobilizing “the traditional parties of the left” to “be awakened to their proper role and effectively fight for peace in Algeria” (Levine 85). These sensibilities would re-emerge in Al Assifa’s work on urban racism and police presence, barring them from romanticizing a *tier-mondiste* link and positing “impossible identifications” as the basis for alternative performance possibilities.

A different instance of this specific form of protest action, this time drawn from the world of theatrical performance, is important to note. In the pre-1968 aesthetic landscape, a significant example of theater practice that rejected critiques of state violence premised on identifying with the “Other” was French playwright Jean Genet’s *Les Paravents*, directed by Roger Blin and staged in 1966 at the Théâtre de l’Odéon during Jean-Louis Barrault’s tenure as director. One of very few theatrical works regarding the Algerian War to have emerged in France during the 1960s (and the only one to have been staged in a national theater) *Les Paravents* is based on the story of Said, a young and poor Algerian around whom the seventeen episodes of the play grow in concentric circles, encompassing the multilayered state of Algeria in war. Two years prior to the production of *Les Paravents*, Genet had declared to *Playboy* magazine that his fantastical play’s delayed staging (having been presented to Barrault as early as 1958) was “because the French apparently find something in it that isn’t there but that they think they see: the problem of the Algerian War” (Genet, *Declared Enemy* 7).

The notion that his play was not meant to stand in representative relation to the Algerian War was a theme that emerged throughout 1965-66 in Genet’s public declarations, rehearsal notes and letters of advice to Blin, only to be re-stated when performances proved violent.

Writing in response to protests led by war veterans and the “commandos” (White 492) who set the Odéon’s carpeting on fire, hurled smoke bombs and injured actors, Genet would repeat:

The few demonstrators of the Occident group [a far-right political movement founded in 1964] ... give in to the lazy side of their nature when they see on-stage a dead French officer sniffing the meticulous farts of his soldiers [referring to a scene that drew particular ire], whereas they ought to be seeing actors playing at being or at seeming... Actors’ acting is to military reality what smoke bombs are to the reality of napalm. (Genet, Reflections 49-50)

Equating, in other words, the deceptive panic spurred by a smoke bomb to the “lazy” viewing practices of the Parisian theater-going public, Genet seemingly criticized an inability to de-link the materiality of theatrical acts from the larger reality which they were taken to signify.

Around this attempt to diffuse the political implications of a collective act however, it is possible to perceive a paradoxical expansion of the political consequences of aesthetic activity. If the forewarning that “this play does not address the people of Algeria” (Bellity Peskine and Dichy 20) was necessary to guard the artists against the accusation that they were the “soilers (*souiller*)” (32) of the Odéon (Théâtre de France), a domain of national artistic production, artistic non-reference (there is no Algeria to which this play’s Algeria refers) soon revealed itself to be opposed to the notion of freedom. Those who objected to the artists’ claim that Les Paravents did *not* represent the Algerian War, reacted to this negating reference as one which dissolved the liberty that the national space of the Odéon stood for. This “liberty” (Barrault and Benmussa 20), as Barrault himself identified elsewhere, was mired in “scrupulous sincerity” (20). The cast and crew of Les Paravents therefore, were left facing an impossible dictum: theatrical activity was acceptable when illusory, the relationship between the sign and the real ruptured with clarity and rigor. But illusory activity in nationally subsidized spaces could also not partake of “certain false ‘engagements’” (20) for the space itself was designed for “communion” (20). In the words of one reviewer, Genet’s play and Barrault’s staging of it “deliberately incited scandal and rage (*la fureur*)” (Bellity Peskine and Dichy 32).

Within what Rancière would refer to as the “perceptual coordinates” available to the mid-century French artist then, Algeria simply confounded the domain of representation, political dis-identification taken to be the most dangerous stance that the nation’s arts could maintain. This refusal is important to note. The developments of the 1970s showed that the political right would respond negatively to the postcolonial dimensions of France’s proletarian protest culture. However, the artists’ outright rejection of mimetic reference and ethical propaganda with Les Paravents drew as much, if not more anger. The widespread uproar over Genet’s work reveals how difficult public acknowledgment of the Algerian War and immigration from North Africa would eventually prove to be.

Two themes are crucial to highlight here, both of which will emerge throughout the remainder of the chapter. First, the 1966 reactions to Les Paravents revealed that the authority deemed available to theatrical practices and theatrical works was indelibly linked to their architectural homes. In the words of an anonymous reviewer for Minute, if “a show is unbearable for a certain portion of the public, it isn’t the public who has to leave, for the public is already at home (*chez lui*)” (Bellity Peskine and Dichy 84). While the reviewer’s claim to domestic entitlement was in part a response to the Odéon’s specific place in the national imaginary, it

revealed the fruits of an ongoing struggle on the part of the French state: to establish centrally funded spaces which would become indispensable to mediating the relationship between French citizens and the artworks they encountered. The notion that state space could serve as a *public home* and that the development of cultural policies directly concerned the transformation of that public home into an art milieu is central to the Republican tradition outlined in the first chapter. Cultural policy developments in the 1970s would continue to work around this theme, including a new-found interest in *animating* the literal homes and neighborhoods of those who did not frequent these public homes themselves.

Second, the violence that erupted in the Odéon in response to the play's unsavory depiction of the French state and army were by no means singular instances of hostility surrounding France's relationship to Algeria, Algerians and "Arab" immigrants more broadly. As I aimed to outline in my introductory chapter, scholarship on immigration often focuses on immigrant stigmatization as having transitioned from racial to cultural difference. However, what a closer look at the 1970s reveals is that the two axes of difference were often intertwined and both dependent on each other's criteria. Before turning to the cultural policy developments and immigration-based performance activism of the 1970s then, it is important to provide a brief overview of the immigration politics and social realities of the era.

From *Travailleur Immigré* to *Immigré*: Housing, Labor and Culture

While the question of immigration from former colonies was already a matter of public debate when *Les Paravents* was launched, it wasn't until the first half of the 1970s that "immigration" emerged as key to the political landscape of France. In 1974, the center-right government of President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing would announce the suspension of labor migration to France (Hargreaves, *Immigration* 17). Following on the heels of Algerian President Houari Boumedienne's 1971 decision to nationalize the oil industry and the steady increase in oil prices that had begun with the OPEC crisis of 1973 (Stovall 82), the French government's suspension underlined a number of faultlines that already marked French-Arab tensions. Despite systematic recruitment and thus a steady stream of immigration from North Africa, foreign laborers' experiences in the Hexagon were rarely organized. Moroccan, Tunisian and Algerian laborers were often employed by secondary markets and given positions with little economic stability, leading to what Alec Hargreaves characterizes as an "institutionalized impermanence" (*Immigration* 51). Until legislation such as the 1972 Circulaire Marcellin-Fontanet (on the delivery of residency permits to immigrant workers) brought the question of migratory flows in French metropolises into the limelight, immigration was for the most part "left to the free play of the labour market" (179). The civic and administrative recognition of labor immigration as a "permanent" rather than a "temporary" phenomenon was thus a direct result of the socio-economic instability with which French party politics had begun to contend.

The question of housing was the most visible end of labor immigration's politicization. Originally, single male workers were housed in *foyers Sonacotra*, hostels established in 1956 with the intention of housing Algerian laborers, expanded after 1963 to include all foreign workers (Hargreaves, *Immigration* 69). With the advent of familial reunification policies however, the state began to allocate resources to the creation of *Habitation à Loyer Modéré* (Lodgings for Moderate Rates (HLM)), public housing designed with families, rather than singles, in mind.

Changes in architectural arrangements and resources reflected not only a generalized awareness of what Abdelmalek Sayad refers to as “labor” to “settler” (67) immigration, but of how the question of urban reform and the space of the home would become the “leitmotif” (Hargreaves, *Immigration* 179) of French integration policies and political propaganda calling for cultural unity. Contrary to the unsavory image of the cramped homosociality suggested by the laborers’ *foyers*, Sayad notes that “settler immigration” generated an image of a “family habitus.. or in other words a set of shared representations and practices” (72). In turn, this image would serve as “a mark of civilization” (Sayad 72). Ironically however, housing that could be termed “decent”, as the Circulaire Marcellin-Fontanet would dictate, was of limited availability and situated on the outskirts of metropolitan areas. This geographical fragmentation would then function as evidence of ethnic *communautarisme* (Begag 88) to center-right political circles in the decades that followed.

Compounding the deeply segregated nature of metropolitan immigrant presence was a widespread “racism that was ethno-racial in nature, the Algerian Muslim both immutable and inassimilable” (Stora 36). Historian Benjamin Stora notes that events such as the aforementioned October 17, 1961 massacre would “mark the transfer of the Algerian War towards France” (107) and well into the 1970s, “Arabicides” (84) would occur throughout urban and rural districts. Although anti-Arab violence prevailed throughout the 1960s, historian Eric Bleich notes that “from 1962 until early 1972, the official government line was well-rehearsed and quite firm: there was too little racism in France to merit legislation” (129). The eventual anti-race laws of 1972 would continue to subscribe to the myth of race-blind French social life. Concerned with “expressive” (122) racism and formulated largely in response to Vichy anti-semitism (141), they were not designed to address discrimination in the workplace, or hostels and schools.

In order to understand the emergence of immigration-related performance activism from within the 1970s social landscape, it is essential to focus on how the larger world of collective dissent was shifting in response to the era’s fraught developments. One significant group was the *Mouvement des Travailleurs Arabes* (Arab Workers Movement (MTA)), the 1970s labor movement that served as the breeding ground for almost all Parisian immigration activism during the decade. As labor scholar Rabah Aissaoui notes, the 1972 birth of the MTA provides an example of widespread political mobilization that both borrowed from various traditions of labor protest *and* battled classification as a group oriented on the basis of ethnic identification. The form of protest action with which the MTA would eventually be identified was a form of hunger-striking that explicitly foregrounded the bodily life of labor exploitation. As such, MTA’s struggles provide an excellent entry into understanding the conceptual and embodied dimensions of the performance activism that would soon follow. Both the labor movement and the theater troupes to whom it gave birth negotiated the universality of class-based injustice against the particularity of immigrant experience. Additionally, both positioned the visual aesthetics of the immigrant body as the locale through which to address the paradoxes of universalism.

Aissaoui traces the beginnings of the MTA to one of the most significant structures of political organization to solidify during May 1968: “action committees” or *comités d’action*, small groups of 1-15 individuals. By September 1970, students and laborers from North Africa were organizing *Comités Palestine* to fundraise for the Palestinian Red Crescent and generate awareness of Black September (King Hussein’s 1970 declaration of military rule and expulsion of Palestinians from Jordan) with public debates and film showings (Aissaoui 172). The Palestinian cause would soon serve as the seeds of MTA’s formation as “the intensive diffusion

of bilingual tracts and journals” (Zancarini-Fournel 116) within Sonacotra hostels and immigration heavy neighborhoods provided “frameworks for action” (Aissaoui 172) regarding the implementation of larger anti-racist ideologies and immigration reform *within* France.¹⁸ The need for reform articulated by the MTA focused on the Marcellin-Fontanet Circulaire of 18 September, 1972 which made the delivery of a *carte de séjour* or residency permit contingent upon the applicant’s possession of a work contract and “decent” lodgings (Zancarini-Fournel 116), a virtual impossibility since legal work contracts were themselves contingent upon the availability of an individual’s *carte de séjour*.

The adoption of the Marcellin-Fontanet Circulaire paved the way for a significant and widespread wave of hunger strikes on the part of illegal immigrants throughout France. Said Bouziri, who along with Faouzia Bouziri led one of the best publicized of these hunger strikes in the Saint-Bernard church of the 18th arrondissement of Paris, relates the political potency of hunger striking in a 1990 interview as specific to the conditions within which the action took place. During the increasingly harsh period preceding the Bouziri strikes, the question of the extent to which French labor unions could cater to the specificity of immigrant needs had come into question. Bouziri notes in the interview that many felt that “immigrants had to act autonomously in the creation of their own movement and that they could not organize from within existing structures” (Trappo). The form of autonomous action that developed in 1972 was that of the hunger strike, a political act that, for Bouziri, explicitly fore-grounded the body: “One plays with one’s body to say that one cannot take it anymore” (Trappo).

During the interview, Marseille-based activist Driss el Yazami concurred, adding that “a working population had never before had to turn to hunger striking. This simply did not exist in the heritage (*patrimoine*) of workers’ methods of struggle” (Trappo). From Bouziri’s 18th arrondissement struggle was born a new *comité*, the *Comité de Defense des Droits et de la Vie des Travailleurs Immigrés* (CDDVTI), which soon afterwards became a model for the kind of protest actions for which the MTA would become known throughout France: spontaneous and voluntary hunger striking. “Whereas in the early 1970s, illegal immigrants went on hunger strike once they had been arrested and were faced with expulsion... the movement now supported a more assertive stance whereby illegal immigrants came out and started hunger strikes voluntarily (“offensive hunger strike”)” (Aissaoui 174).

This embodied form of protest action was a direct response to the specific bodily life of immigrant labor practices. An undated mid-1970s MTA pamphlet makes this clear: “A shocking example: every morning at the Carpentras market, bosses choose from the workers who have lined up, waiting to be recruited according to their “physical form” exactly as it was during the good old times of slavery” (MTA “Pamphlet”). A paradox would then emerge. On the one hand, immigrant labor activists strove for a larger *working-class* identity that generalized state oppression. The creation of a broader, class-based solidarity would need to eschew racial or ethnic identity in favor of a universal, proletarian struggle. On the other hand, they were bound to their identity as a foreign labor force discriminated and segregated in specific ways. Therefore

¹⁸ Additionally, this shift from international investments (Palestine, Algeria, etc.) to domestic ones can be identified as belonging to a group that Abdelmalek Sayad refers to as the first to be marked by an experience of being bound with greater intensity to the country of immigration than the country of emigration (57). Thus, they experienced transitions to which the terms “laborer” and “settler” did not quite do justice. The experience of being in-transit would become a permanent *condition*, a “feeling of the ‘temporary that lasts’” (58) in the words of Sayad.

the basis of MTA's mobilization was necessarily ethnic (or inter-ethnic, as Aissaoui makes clear, since Malian, Mauritian and Pakistani struggles were strongly linked to the Maghrebi MTA).¹⁹

Bouziri and El Yazami's claim for hunger-striking as a voluntary and yet systematized form of political action needs to be analyzed within a political context merging the universal and the particular. The fact that particularist political formations were linked to bodily acts reveals an understanding of bodily life that both functions as a universal (harm done to that body will be recognizable to all) and specific: the immigrant's body is a source of livelihood to which he or she turns when all else fails, therefore its relationship to the political goal is far more immediate. I have chosen to delve into these practices at length for the kinds of dynamics that emerge here provide a wider political background for understanding how "immigrant aesthetics" would come to function in Al Assifa and La Kahina's work as both universalizing and particular. Thinking about their work in relation to the larger political strategies of the era and the visibility of hunger-striking allows us to see the kinds of body-conscious protest formats that were available to performance activists outside of the domains of influence scholarship often charts: cultural policies and avant-garde movements.

However, it is equally essential to place these bodily acts in conversation with the specific forms of cultural action that were being developed by French activists. My decision to focus on the 1970s as an era key to the history of performance and immigration in France pivots on the coincidence between the emergence of these new kinds of immigrant labor practices, and the kinds of activist principles that would become the leitmotif of the era's cultural policy worries. By the mid-1970s, as immigration policies grew harsher and workplace conditions deteriorated, *animation* or the politicizing of communities, become available to both state and activist actors alike as the new imperative of cultural intervention.

In Chapter 1, I had noted that the French state's more than century-long intervention into cultural life and leisure practices far preceded the emergence of immigration as a political matter. In line with the liberal belief that political unity could only be constructed via cultural unity, the Third Republic had seized on the question of national heritage as the gate-way to early century centralization, and later, post-war decentralization and reconstruction. The creation of the regional *Centres Dramatiques Nationales* and *Maisons de Culture* would further "humanize" the masses through access to culture, as Minister of Culture André Malraux envisioned, all the while generating a set of *nationally recognizable habits*. As a result, the 1950s and early 1960s witnessed the Ministry of Culture's relentless efforts at dotting the French landscape with "public homes" such as the Odéon. By 1968 however, cultural activist Francis Jeanson would open the seminal artists' assembly at Villeurbanne with reference to the "non-public" (Jeanson 87) of cultural policy: working class audiences that advocates for cultural access and democratization routinely bypassed.

While the Villeurbanne meeting of 1968 explicitly politicized cultural policy discussions, a secondary yet equally important rift would divide the participants on the question of cultural action: *artistic creation* vs. *cultural animation*. Director Roger Planchon would argue for a return to artistic creation: "I would like the term "culture" to be abandoned once and for all. We no

¹⁹ Over the course of the 1970s, this paradox would lead MTA leaders into problematic philosophical corners, to either "posit immigrants' demands for rights as inherently universalist" (Aissaoui 172) despite glaring economic, legal and social segregation or openly criticize the Communist trade union *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT) or left-affiliated *Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail* (CFDT) for participating in government structures such as the *Office National d'Immigration* (179) and thus in the regulation of migratory flows.

longer know what it means. We should return to simple terms like “art” and “artist.”” (Quoted in Ahearne 12). *Animation*, the subsidized work of politicizing communities through cultural activities, needed to be differentiated from creative endeavors for it arrived with a social index. Over the course of the following decade, as the question of post-colonial immigration began to enter the domain of cultural policy making in straightforward ways, this distinction (between “art” and “cultural work”) would become particularly attached to *animateurs* or cultural agents working in immigration-related contexts.

Although this rift was due in part to an ongoing *theoretical* search for “the autonomy of art in a more general process of emancipation” (Wallon 49), it was equally indicative of the larger concern with efficacy that would mark the 1970s cultural policy landscape. Keenly aware of the socio-economic changes that had begun to mark the end of *les trentes glorieuses*²⁰, Minister for Cultural Affairs Maurice Druon would famously state in 1973 that he intended to dismiss progressives who approached his Ministry with a “begging bowl” in one hand and a “Molotov cocktail” (Quoted in Ahearne 15) in the other. Druon would herald what policy scholars often label an era of stagnation on the cultural policy front, evident in the changing approach outlined by President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing. The animation/creation dispute had, for Giscard d’Estaing, obfuscated the true necessities of the nation: “a sharper distinction between professional creation and amateur creativity, art and *animation*” (Looseley 53). As a result, from the mid-1970s onward, policy priorities would be redirected from the “population as such” to “the concerns of professional ‘creators’” (Ahearne 21).²¹

Al Assifa and La Kahina thus emerged in the midst of a policy era with overlapping yet conflicting interests. On the one hand, *animation* continued to gain ground as a significant means by which to include the “non-public” in the life of the nation. On the other however, funding structures increasingly pitted the competitive edge of artistic creation against cultural *animation*. While Al Assifa and La Kahina’s relationship with “cultural” sources of funding were always tenuous, these tensions nevertheless underlined the larger reception of their work. In what follows, I offer sketches of their work that will refer back to the dynamics of labor protests while weaving a larger portrait of the cultural policy developments of the 1970s and early 1980s.

Al Assifa: Creation, Animation, Immigration

²⁰ Often referred to as *les trentes glorieuses*, the period from 1945 to 1975 was marked by rapid economic expansion, contributing to the state’s lenient attitude towards labor immigration from beyond Europe’s borders (Begag 39).

²¹ While Giscard d’Estaing’s shift in emphasis is easily attributed to the economic climate of the post-OPEC crisis years, part of what was becoming evident over the course of the 1970s was that the “culture industries”, such as films and television, had fundamentally changed thinking regarding cultural access and democratization. Jean-Philippe Lecat, Minister of Culture from 1978 to 1981 would suggest in 1979 that the television screen had in effect “done more than the institutions of cultural decentralization to promote cultural democratization” (Ahearne 18). Jack Lang, who would serve as first Minister of Culture to the soon-to-be-victorious Socialists and who had erupted onto the cultural policy scene with the Nancy Theater Festival in 1963, would benefit from this newly burgeoning rationale of the 1970s and pursue it fervently after 1981. The new attitude, summed up by Ahearne, was that cultural democratization “was no longer a case of protecting citizens against the seductive embrace of the cultural industries, as Malraux and others had wanted to do, but of actively supporting (national) cultural industries in order to protect the existence of a quasi-anthropologically defined national culture” (20). As a result, Lang’s discourse in the 1980s would shuttle back and forth between the need to recognize cultural production of all kinds (what would be referred to as the “tout culturel” (Dubois 282) approach) and the need to aggressively re-instate “French” products in solidarity with other nations patronized by American cultural expansion.

A brief note is necessary here to elucidate my choice of focus. While immigration-based performance activism was by no means ubiquitous in 1970s France, Arab-French troupes Al Assifa and La Kahina were not the only ones to have emerged. For example, La Troupe Ibn Khaldoun would tour their 1974 production, Mohamed Travolta throughout France. Nanterre-based troupe Week-end à Nanterre would similarly thrive on the festival circuit and Aix-en-Provence-based El Halaka would regularly perform and hold “atelier expression des travailleurs Arabes” (El Halaka “Atelier”). My decision to focus this chapter on the two troupes is due in part to the oral histories to which I was able to gain access. As the reader will take note, Al Assifa’s Philippe Tancelin and La Kahina’s Salikha Amara’s oral recollections are central to my accounts of the troupes’ work.

However, this choice is also due in part to the specificities of the troupes’ composition. Al Assifa was composed of both French and Maghrebi militants, many of whom directly experienced the injustices they decried. La Kahina was composed of Amara’s friends, family as well as other militants, largely female but with a few male members who would agree to participate in a play on Algerian women’s conditions. The results, as I hope to show, are indicative of just how practitioners mixed the militant methods of 1968 with the *animation* sensibilities of the 1970s, all the while engaging with newly emerging discourses of identity politics. Their recovery thus ruptures an activist/immigrant history of France that posits no transition between the “political” struggles of the MTA and the “cultural” struggles of the 1980’s *Beur* boom. Rather, the mid-1970s emerges as an era trying to negotiate the imperatives of various intellectual genealogies.

Al Assifa’s birth as a performance troupe dates back to the conflicts surrounding the Lip watch factories in Besançon. Unlike the many strikes that dotted the French landscape in May 1973, *l’affaire Lip*, troupe founder and member Philippe Tancelin recounts, was specific for its insistence on *autogestion*: the communal decision making process that would replace the executive powers of the Lip administration with workers committees. Following on the heels of the Circulaire Marcellin-Fontanet and the newly minted MTA, the Lip strikes included an unprecedented number of immigrant workers assembled beneath the umbrella of the Maoist Gauche Proletarienne (GP), a heterogeneous gathering home to some of the most powerful intellectual figures of the far-left. The birth of Al Assifa was a direct response to the singularity of the Lip *autogestion*: “on our way to Lip, we decided that we wouldn’t simply arrive with tracts but that we would quickly put together a series of sketches”. The result of this five person effort was Al Assifa’s first performance piece: Ca travaille, ça travaille, ça ferme sa gueule, which would tour throughout France, in its various incarnations, until 1976. C’est la vie de chateau, pourvu que ça dure would follow in 1975, to tour until the group’s 1977 dissolution.

The formation of Al Assifa was linked to the era’s burgeoning relationship between immigrant labor activism, the GP and public intellectuals. Solidifying this link was the degree to which the Palestinian struggle and subsequently their joint working environment in the *Comités Palestine* allowed for exchange between the movements. As early as June 1971, Michelle Zancarini-Fournel notes, when the *Comités Palestine* had begun their transformation from nodes of international to domestic militancy, intellectuals such as Claude Mauriac and Michel Foucault had “penetrated” (116) the tightly knit Parisian neighborhood of La Goutte d’Or, functioning as the home of grassroots organizations providing welcome and aid to newly arrived immigrants. Central to the emergence of the Goutte d’Or as a new front of post-1968 militancy was the

October 27, 1971 killing of fifteen year old Ben Ali Djellali, a youth of Algerian origin who had been murdered by the superintendent of his building, unleashing several months of fervent activity. Left periodical *Libération* and Michel Foucault led several surveys or *enquêtes* while Mauriac, Jean Genet and prominent GP member Jean-Paul Sartre instituted a juridical aid and study room in the 18th arrondissement in Saint Bruno church, which would host landmark Al Assifa performances.²²

The hybrid environment from which Al Assifa had sprung thus provided them with a mixed spectatorial body, in Tancelin's words:

All the militant networks... la Cimade [a humanitarian organization founded post-WWII], *le Comité Unifié Français Immigré*, all leftists militants, from the *Gaullistes* of the left to the extreme left, the socialists, the communists, trade unions, all manner of organizations, humanitarians who were concerned with the question of immigration, they invited us because we dynamized and asked with clarity questions about the strikes using a cultural form (*une forme culturelle*) both ludic and aesthetic.

Today, scripts for neither of Al Assifa's full length performances, which were made up of sketches on factory conditions, neighborhood conflicts and racist encounters, exist. However, central to Tancelin's comments, as well as Tancelin and Clancy's published accounts from 1977 is the claim that Al Assifa's larger goal was the "affirmation of a new cultural identity of resistance and of immigration by way of aesthetic work, theatrical work that claimed... its own aesthetic categories." Throughout my conversation with Tancelin, "aesthetics" emerged as an endlessly diversifiable domain of intervention within which militant immigration activism needed to "claim" (*revendiquer*) its own location. Of what did this affirmation, and its claim to "resistant" aesthetics, consist?

Early on in *Les Tiers Idées*, the extensive treatise Tancelin and his sister and co-Al Assifa activist Geneviève Clancy wrote in 1977, the authors underlined a desire to "take back the streets (*prendre la rue*)" (35). This space of critical encounters co-opted by official ideologies of functionalism and segregation would produce "new forms" (11) of engagement. This call however, necessarily brought the troupe in ideological alliance with the numerous street theatre projects that were emerging throughout metropolitan France: "What will differentiate us from the culture of the left? From troupes that stage spectacles on current events or the fight?" (59) In my conversation with Tancelin, when I inquired as to how Al Assifa's work compared to that of other theater troupes who did the factory rounds, such as the already-famed theater collective Théâtre du Soleil, Tancelin replied, "Al Assifa was a militant troupe, the Théâtre du Soleil is a troupe that holds certain political positions, it's not the same thing."

²² Today, assessing the extent to which "Palestine" could serve both the MTA and the GP as a subject of mutual devotion is a tricky matter. Although it is possible to remark, as Abdellali Hajjat does in "The Origins of Support for the Palestinian Cause in France" that the *Comités Palestine* were able to round up a homogeneous set of sensibilities regarding the defense of Palestinian territories, the "idea" of Palestine itself fluctuated between registers both concrete and abstract. Al Assifa, named after a segment of the Palestinian Fatah movement (Neveux, *Théâtres en Lutte* 144), would directly reference the Palestinian cause. But this reference, Tancelin told me, functioned as the contemporary emergence of an earlier "beacon and symbol of revolutionary resistance": Che Guevara. The symbolic location occupied by Latin American at the end of the 60s had by 1973 given way to Palestine.

In instances such as these, “militancy” was a primarily class-based reference to the proletarian composition of their troupe: “there was no separation between the Al Assifa actor and the identity that he represented”. In other words, for the Al Assifa laborer-actor, the transition from an afternoon’s protest in front of the Ministry of the Interior to an evening’s performance in the Saint Bruno church was seamless. In the words of Al Assifa member Djellali, quoted by *Libération* in 1974, “the theatrical representation is nothing more than a moment in the fight” (Quoted in Neveux, “Apparition” 329). In later years, when troupe members began experiencing the frustrations with which I opened this chapter, this principle of seamlessness would re-emerge. In the words of one unidentified member, “Assifa doesn’t simply mean playing for an hour or two a week, as we have had the tendency to do. It also means carrying Assifa with us and letting it live everywhere. This is the only way that we can bring about political victory” (Al Assifa “Bilan”).

While comments on political militancy rarely highlighted the ethnic composition of the group, it is crucial to note here that elaborating upon the “new cultural forms” and “new aesthetic categories” at stake immediately laid bare the performativity of immigrant difference. During our conversation, Tancelin insisted that the “political”, “aesthetic” and “cultural” dimensions of Al Assifa’s work could not be separated from one another, a merger which highlighted their “originality”. In statements such as these, if “cultural” dimensions corresponded with the French Left’s culture of militancy and protest, “political” dimensions with its ideology, and “aesthetic” dimensions with the troupe’s references to earlier century political theater techniques such as agit-prop, what imbued all three dimensions with novelty was the kind of “recognition, affinity” Al Assifa’s visual presence created for the workers who were their audience: the literal presence of Arab performers in their midst. What we might refer to as “immigrant aesthetics”, in other words, was dependent on the literal bodies of Arab laborer-actors who after all, *looked* Arab.

A nuanced understanding of the ethnic authenticity at stake in these recollections however, is only possible in light of the cultural policy imperatives of the mid-1970s. As previously noted, Al Assifa’s period of fervent activity coincided with an era of stagnation in policy circles. Faced with a cultural field dominated by *enquête*-based artworks and *animateurs*’ search for marginal self-expression, government officials and artists alike expressed renewed interest in the autonomy of artistic processes and the benefits of professionalization. That aesthetics could be nothing more than the business of reporting one’s lived reality to the world in rehearsed format, was cut through with an awareness that the majority of their militant audience, in Tancelin’s words, would say “yes, we support the workers, but culture? That’s another thing... when immigrants, when workers want to work aesthetically (*faire de l’aesthetique*) no!” Militancy on behalf of immigration, in other words, could not make a claim to aesthetic achievement on the basis of the domain’s existing criteria. Ethnic authenticity then, provided a loophole, rendering “aesthetic” by way of *moral* criteria the exhibition of a body in the know, the Arab laborer-actor. Additionally, this dependence on the visibility of racial and ethnic difference, as I noted earlier, joined a set of practices that included the MTA: how could “different” bodies be made to signify both specificity *and* universality, in this case that of the universal human/actor?

Militant theater historian Olivier Neveux’s take on the aesthetics-politics merger highlights this distinction between politics and aesthetics: “competence would no longer be [for Al Assifa] a matter of technique or scholarship, but it would be of the order of knowing (*un savoir*), of biography or of the survey- a process of the enunciation of self” (Neveux,

“Apparition” 329). Neveux’s formulation suggests that human *experience* can be taken to dislodge *expertise* from its prioritized place in arts practice. Additionally, Neveux references the actual, material presence of Al Assifa as an event in itself, “the presence on stage of immigrants, in this particular perspective, permitted [Al Assifa] to both play with the hyper visibility of the immigrant (the fears and hatred that he/she engenders, the caricatures that specify him/her) and the invisibility that marked him/her politically. The *immigrant* became a ‘subject of experience’, a political subject” (Neveux, “Apparition” 331). Interestingly, Neveux equates the immigrant’s emergence within the domain of the political, in other words his or her visibility as a citizen-subject, with the immigrant’s experiential knowledge of that same domain’s injustices and dangers. In instances such as these, the lens through which the historian assesses the performance sensibilities of Al Assifa has less to do with the laborer-actor’s visual signification than with a late twentieth century sensibility that renders “experience” itself the condition for entry into the political.

Al Assifa’s archival remains however, reveal discussions that undermine a sharp distinction between expertise and experience, highlighting the degree to which the troupe was conscious of the technical expectations trained on their work:

All forms of struggle implicate the mastering of its techniques...

Last year’s example from the Cartoucherie is clear: at the last minute, the Arab comrades who were present were all enlisted. The result: chaos on stage. The newspapers the next day: They [Arabs] would do better to learn French before throwing themselves in to the theater.

Every time that we forget this, we will be unable to serve our cause....

However, careful: “technique” must not be the tree that hides the forest from us. Two things are important to note.

The bulldozer can construct or destruct, it all depends on the person behind the wheel.

And technique is not fixed. With our creative imagination, it renews itself...

This concretely implicates a certain way of engaging and investing with an eye to acquiring all the techniques in order to put them to the service of what one wants to say.

(Al Assifa “Bilan”)

Taken from a 1975 meeting, this passage is indicative of a number of themes that encircled what we might call immigrant performance work. Firstly, “technique” was clearly identified as the metaphorical “bulldozer” that could “destruct” the “forest” of militant responsibility. Key to militancy was mastery over the “bulldozer” rather than a rejection of the extra-daily force it provided. Secondly, the very word “technique” was necessarily fungible when applied in relation to the capacities and abilities of Arab immigrants, as its absence could mean both the absence of a minimum of stage vocabulary (e.g. the prohibition against turning one’s back to the audience) and adequate knowledge of the French language (as the incident from the Cartoucherie implies). What the “chaos” on that day clearly unraveled was that the absence or presence of theatrical technicality stood at the threshold of the far more racist query at which the newspapers in question gestured: could Arab immigrants participate in *any* form of cultural action? It is no wonder then that in my dialogues with Tancelin, key milestones in the troupe’s life were showings at the Saint Bruno Church that had drawn the recognition of “the entire left intelligentsia” rather than the inhabitants of the Goutte d’Or.

Conversely, the kinds of activities identified in Les Tiers Idées reveal three distinct kinds of actions that were neither “a theatrical representation” (16) nor a report on current events, they produced instead “interventions” (35) into the everyday and “gests” (233) that mimed those of specific forces in social life, such as the police: first, street interventions that took the form of a “théâtrale invisible” within Paris (85), second, an ongoing presence in the immigrant neighborhood or *quartier* of Barbès and third, interventions in villages throughout France.

The prioritized relationship between the artwork and its environmental space, best encapsulated today in the term “site specificity”, was by no means specific to Al Assifa’s early 70s usage in the context of “théâtrale invisible, when those who walk by do not know that what is happening is a representation, an intervention” (85). In fact, it had already emerged by way of a decade of North American and French performance art: Allan Kaprow’s late 1950s Happenings, John Cage and Merce Cunningham’s chance collaborations and Guy Debord’s Situationist critiques of urban capitalism. While theoretically divergent, these pre-1968 movements all imbricated the viewer in the materiality of their varied performances, in Nick Kaye’s words, situating “the viewer-participant’s activities between an unfolding artwork and everyday activity” (111). If influence was to be had however, neither Al Assifa’s texts nor my conversation with Tancelin mentioned it. Instead the performance mode of “intervention” was identified as a 1968 sensibility, a continuation of the critique of functionalism.

It is possible to relate this artistic divorce to the role of the “street” in Al Assifa’s discourse as a space both materially “specific” and experientially universal, in other words, a mutual space shared in an unequal manner. Consider for example an intervention from 1972: one troupe member tore down an un-specified street while two others began to yell, “Stop him, stop him, he stole yoghurt, he’s an Arab” (85). In their narrative of the incident in Les Tiers Idées, Clancy and Tancelin note that those who joined the fray and tore after the “Arab” had no way of knowing whether the individual being chased “had the air of a Gaulois or a woman” (85). The confusion would eventually be settled with the announcement that the actors were “merely playing something which has actually happened, some time ago: shots were fired on an Arab worker for a pot of yoghurt” (85). Amidst the questions that followed from those revealed to be “spectators” (ranging from ‘why would you do this’ to ‘all I heard was that an Arab had stolen’ to ‘but this is not true’) troupe members would declare: “What is true is that we all had the same reaction, as though it really had happened” (86). In instances such as these, while “the street” was a specifically chosen location of communal relations, (a space with its own “functions” (64) such as collective punishment and “constraints” (64) on the physical security of those of Arab appearance), it also functioned as an undefined universal, nothing more than the most ubiquitous of entities: “l’espace” or space (64).

The primary goal of the intervention, whose efficacy few diagnostics could measure, rested with a re-presentation of events having taken place elsewhere, rather than new scenarios generated in the moment of performance. This approach differentiated Al Assifa’s technique from that of Brazilian director Augusto Boal’s Théâtre Forum, for example, whose format encouraged an endless iteration of situations of conflict. Boal, who maintained an intermittent presence in Parisian performance activism during the 1970s, wrote in his 1971 publication The Theater of the Oppressed that the theatrical spectator’s ability to comment on and intervene in the dramatic action was “a rehearsal of revolution” for the spectator-turned-actor produced “a real act even though he does it in a fictional manner” (141). The “liberated spectator” (122) in

other words, *implicated* itself in a concrete manner in theatrical acts that themselves no longer functioned as “finished visions of the world” (155) but an iteration of its possibilities.

Al Assifa, conversely, found meaning in the possibility that “real acts” when revealed to have been fictitious ones, could serve as the grounds from which a self-critique could be generated. Additionally, the fictive act’s status as “fiction” was itself under consideration, given the invisibility of the violence that interventions such as “Arab man with Yoghurt” tried to render visible: “so then, how to bring to the streets, to debate, an event which happened elsewhere, and which was thrown into silence?” (Clancy and Tancelin 20) In Jacques Rancière’s terms then, the technique of “théâtrale invisible” did not afford the “Arab man with Yoghurt” emancipatory visibility, despite the visual component the name suggests. Instead, “Arab man with Yoghurt” simply generated onlookers.

The “street” that was “taken back” in the larger metropolitan interventions of the troupe, was figured differently when situated in the immigrant neighborhood of Barbès. Suddenly, “taking back a neighborhood, taking back the terrain, taking back a space” (208) were understood as encroachments on spaces that would greet interventions as a “coup de force” (Clancy and Tancelin 208). These spaces, unlike the street, were vulnerable to the “consequences” (208) of top-down impositions. Thus, the troupe was forced to ask, both mirroring and expanding the cultural policy discourses of their time: “What is a true activity of implantation and popular creation in a neighborhood?” (208) The differentiation between “street” and “neighborhood” is important to mark here for it highlights the universal characteristics attached to a form of architecturally arranged communal space taken to function openly even when peppered with “constraints” (64): the wide, accessible boulevards of Paris. Conversely, in 1976, the neighborhood of Barbès presented the members of Al Assifa with a sociological make-up that they found difficult to decipher. Functioning as a site of initiation for the newly arrived, and as the locus of larger communal gathering when accommodating the North African immigrant populations who descended upon the space on weekends, Barbès provided Al Assifa with the same enigma that had drawn *enquêteurs* in the aftermath of the *affaire Djellali*: what were the “habits”, “traditions”, “principles” and “freedoms” (209) of which its inhabitants partook?

Although *Les Tiers Idées* does not provide answers to these questions, awareness that forms of “communication” and “solidarity” (209) already crisscrossed the neighborhood led the troupe to employ a method that combined the *animation* sensibility of the mid-1970s with the *enquête* tradition of 1968:

To animate a neighborhood is not to drive a specific content, a program... it is far more substantial, and humble, politically, to respond in precise terms to the difficulties that people encountered, the needs that they expressed and to respond to these along with them... if certain elements were missing that would help the neighborhood access leisure practices, then these were elements that needed to be found together, and constructed. (209)

That “leisure practices” were deemed missing from Barbès in passages such as the one quoted above are interesting given the text’s depiction of Barbès as a space significant in large part *due* to its hybrid identity as one of communion and co-habitation. The leisure practices to be “constructed” together then were necessarily *arts* practices, *recreation* a matter of *creation*. The

result was the creation of a performance space that quickly became a “habitual” (211) space of visit and encounter for community members outside of the twice weekly performances of Ca travaille and La vie de chateau.

One significant way in which Al Assifa’s presence in Barbès resonated with the larger policy worries of its time was exemplified in the work of cultural theorist Pierre Gaudibert. Writing a postface in 1977 to his 1972 work, Cultural Action: Integration and/or Subversion, Gaudibert argued that culture concerned a “set of objects, signs, gestures and rituals” (95), within which artistic work was one element. The work of *animateurs*, once implanted, needed to grow beyond their influence: “The objective is to help this population to take charge of its own development, to govern and control its daily life; strictly speaking, once the initial impulse has been given, the animation as such should disappear, since self- management is the distinguishing characteristic of a population that ‘animates itself’” (95). Central to Gaudibert’s need to distinguish between *animation* for community ends and the promotion of “self-management” seems to have been a profound belief that autonomous self-expression and artistic creation were the groundwork for civic participation, that integration, ultimately, was a matter of *self-management*.

While it would be over-determined to suggest that the ideals of self-government and integration were present in Al Assifa’s work as policy objectives, it is important to notice the nature of the exchange that nevertheless took place between policy makers and militant activists. Gaudibert critiqued a ’68 sensibility that had disintegrated into an ideological enterprise. “Those among them [progressive *animateurs*] who are pursuing a revolutionary project,” he wrote, “have amalgamated this conception of animation with the strategy of ‘daily struggles’ (around the living environment and the habitat, women, abortion, the young, immigrants, etc.) pursued by the extreme left since May 1968” (96). His critique of the leftist *enquête* tradition was less concerned with radicalism than with the *moral* threat that overly involved *animateurs* posed to underserved, immigrant populations. While entirely committed to *enquête* traditions, Al Assifa was equally cognizant of the hazards of over-involvement and dedication to “driving a specific content.” Although these nuances were not yet articulated as “empowerment” techniques, they nevertheless took place in an environment where politicization increasingly meant *integration*, a conflation that, as the coming chapters will show, continues to influence contemporary practices, and will emerge full force in the later work of La Kahina.

Meanwhile, although specific given its performance content, the format of Al Assifa’s relationship to Barbès very much mimicked the practice of surveying or investigating, the *enquête*, which emerged from various *comité* during May ’68 and flourished in the years that followed. Begun by Maoists in 1967 (Ross 109) and employed throughout Paris and the countryside, the *enquête*, in the words of Ross, took a methodology attached to market surveys and sociological studies and used it to cull “revolutionary aspirations existing in a latent state, encouraging their expression, then synthesizing them and returning them in the form of political propositions” (Ross 110). Most Maoist *enquête*-based projects involved communal authorship to be rallied around a “text acting as a unifying force” (112). Al Assifa’s products were equally investigated yet transitory in nature, aiming for the creation of an “evening” (Clancy and Tancelin 212), rather than a finely tuned piece of propaganda. Performance functioned as another kind of text, equally communal, yet delight in its circulation was dependent upon its time-based form and cheerful expenditure. The hope was to establish patterns of habit and bodily repertoires that would re-create encounters on the days that separated performances from one another.

The problems that emerged from *enquête* projects that “synthesized” and “returned” to subjects their own thoughts, were especially flagrant in the non-Parisian milieus in which they were conducted. The *Forum Histoire* collective provides an example of “synthesis” and “return” turned sour. Drawn to the success of a farmer’s rebellion in the southern city of Larzac, the collective had headed to the town. However the encounter between the Larzac farmers’ pressing concerns and the Parisian militants’ historical questions had led to “readjustments” (Ross 124) that revealed the genre of “political propositions” to be a non-transcendent category of literary output and social action. Al Assifa’s own “readjustment” happened in the southern village of Ardèche. Having arrived trusting in the recognizability of the “taking” of public spaces, Al Assifa found that their militant project did nothing for the villagers of Ardèche. In Paris, viewing practices accommodated the “expression” of individual histories, “my history, that of my friend”, for there was “interest in having them be expressed” (Clancy and Tancelin 113). In Ardèche conversely, the troupe found that the villagers knew each other inside out, the self-expression of individuals did not merit spectatorship. *Les Tiers Idées* dryly concluded, “nobody could become the spectator of any other person” (113). Theatrical spectatorship revealed its pretext as human nature to be tied to its urban and commercial status.

During the troupe’s two week stay, re-adjustment then became a continuous rather than solitary experience, culminating finally in one particular night of celebration. Soon after their arrival in Ardèche, Al Assifa had found that the specific topic that they had wished to animate, the abolishing of capital punishment, wasn’t landing on hospitable ears. The villagers were polite but dis-interested, and found multiple ways of turning Al Assifa’s attempts at discussion into differently hospitable encounters: dinners, ceremonies and house visits during which they were introduced to village life. On this specific night, the troupe was participating in *la Vogue*, an annual Ardèche celebration which culminated in a communal meal eaten on a large field behind the municipality (117). During the dinner, a villager turned to the troupe:

To finish this little ceremony, I would like to play for you a small tale in my own fashion. As the oldest member of this village, I carried out this morning the heavy task of killing our sheep. It is beautiful and it will be tasty, and I would like, for our friends from Paris, who arrived the other day to do theater (*faire de la comédie*), to tell the tale of the dead sheep.” He descended from the table and began, in a wonderful caricature, to mime the scene with the executioner and the sheep, coupling his gestures with phrases that could have made a marvelous La Fontaine tale... It was difficult to emphasize the reaction of the crowd, which, while laughing and applauding the humorous recounting of the old man, was for the first time in maybe twenty years adjusting (*régler*) its own history, by way of the tension and the refusal that they had shown against our interventions on capital punishment. We were a little bothered, not knowing what to say or do, but the old man had put us at ease... Once the laughter and conversations around us resumed, the old man descended from the table and approached us: “I hope you are not angry... I don’t wish to disappoint you, we all understood what you meant to say that day, but that is for us to say, nobody likes being given lessons... it is important that it come from here (he points at his stomach) now it’s over, you had forced us a little bit now you are a little bit like friends, we have said things to each other... (117-118)

In the pages that follow this event in Les Tiers Idées, the members engage in little moralizing, admitting simply that there are “limits” to the “functions of theatrical *animation*” (122) and that their “errors” had been plenty upon their initial arrival in Ardèche. In fact, they wrote, “the *animation* had been operative” despite their being lack of a consensus around the issue of capital punishment, “the villagers had accepted a confrontation between their history and our interjections on current events” (122).

What went unmarked about this encounter, was the role of performance in the communication of discomforts, amusement, humor, and ultimately, self-possession: the old man’s mimed slaughter, rather than deliver a judgment upon the act of ritual sacrifice, had merely re-presented it to those absent from the initial killing (much like Al Assifa’s metropolitan practices). And it had done so not as part of a project of faithful reportage but in order to “play” with an event’s habitual reoccurrence. Al Assifa’s interpretation of this play, highlighting a “confrontation” between history (attributed to the villagers) and the present (embodied by the visiting Parisians) in a sense missed the far vaster critique offered by the old man: that the *animateurs* were burdened by an equally weighty “history” of their own.

While the “readjustment” in question here could serve as a far vaster critique of the parochialism of French cultural decentralization and policy, it also lays bare a moment of performance that sidesteps the universalist constraints from beneath which the MTA, Al Assifa, and as I will soon detail, La Kahina performed. Their status as “immigrants” generated terrains of intervention that then forced the actors to partake of various techniques whose origins and assumptions would perhaps not have been avowed. In Ardèche however, the question of “identity” paled in comparison with the far greater life of performance: an ability to re-call and make witness events, sensibilities and expectations that may or may not have been shared but whose unfolding could provide the groundwork for communication. The work and life of La Kahina provides an excellent example of how difficult it would become to frame performance practice along these lines when those undertaking the “witnessing” shifted from the dually politicized identities of immigrant/worker to woman/immigrant.

La Kahina: Identity, Integration, Theater

La Kahina was founded in 1976 by Salikha Amara, a young woman of Algerian origin whose family had settled in the northern Parisian suburb of Aubervilliers. “I was frustrated,” Amara related to me, “by the discourse that said immigrants are men, they come here to work, they don’t come with families, they have one suitcase, they live in *bidonvilles*... How could we show that we exist in this country?” During the years immediately following the OPEC crisis, Amara found not only that the gendered dimensions of immigration discourse remained identical but that the phenomenon as a whole was growing further stigmatized, with little room to address women immigrants. Amara contacted her friends, brothers and cousins, as well as other activists and soon debuted her play, Pour que les larmes de nos mères deviennent une légende, which focused on the Algerian woman in France and in Algeria, surrounded by some traditions such as forced marriages, *la nuit de noces* or wedding night, and histories of colonial war and rape. A second play on familial life and generational conflicts, La famille Bendjelloul, en France depuis 25 ans would soon follow, touring both within the networks established with the first play and beyond, to Algeria. By 1981, the group’s silhouette would morph, focusing on a concern that emerged during their theatrical work, that of housing for young immigrant women who had fled

their homes. One month after the Mitterand government lifted the prohibition against immigrants' right of association; the members of La Kahina founded Association de la Nouvelle Generation Immigré (ANGI) and set up a dormitory in Aubervilliers, continuing their collective work via a different set of methods.

For Al Assifa, the claim to aesthetic innovation was in-dissociable from their distinctiveness as an Arab-French troupe, for this was what both distinguished and labeled immature their "cultural" work. Their struggle was not quite a workers' struggle, for the injustices they decried were specific. As immigrants however, they were barred from the domain of the cultural for reasons of technical deficiency. As a result, their only possible claim to "new cultural forms" depended heavily on what we might term "immigrant aesthetics", the visibility of ethnic difference. La Kahina, grounded within a suburban context and animated largely by the voices and bodies of French-Algerian women, faced this dilemma in somewhat different form. As Claudie Lesselier notes, the mid-1970s witnessed the emergence of a number of women's groups attached to larger militant associations, both immigration-based and not and animated by a desire for a militant personality of their own (159). What Amara soon found, was that the "identity" claims that thus began to emerge in militant circles sequestered the various categories to which she and her family belonged: "immigrant", "woman", "second generation", "banlieue youth" etc.

What emerged during my conversation with Amara, was that each of these identities experienced their exclusion from the seeming universal to which they were attached (e.g. woman to man) via a politicization that was then barred from merging with other forms of mobilization. Consider for example, the case of Les larmes, a production which Amara laughingly describes as being "too visual", since it did not shy away from showing elements that troupe members knew would shock their immigrant audiences: bed sheets stained with virginal blood. This example of "immigrant aesthetics" was enthusiastically invited to a feminist celebration at the Faculté de Vincennes. However, when the troupe arrived, they found that the organizers were reluctant to let the men inside, prompting Amara and her colleagues to "explain to them that we were a theater troupe and we needed to act, the men had roles, and it was precisely to denounce their roles that they were acting." In the end, the show began smoothly, showcasing female actors for the first couple of scenes however with the arrival of a scene depicting a French officer torturing an Algerian woman, Philippe Tancelin stepped onto the stage, in the role of the torturer. "The audience began saying," Amara remembers, "'Men outside! Men outside!'" The actors' pleas were rejected and the troupe left the stage. Later that day, Amara was watching the press conference that had been arranged to advertise the celebration, when she noticed that there were male press members in the hall. "I ran onto the stage, grabbed the microphone and yelled, 'You wouldn't let us speak about the conditions of the immigrant woman because we have four male actors, and here, men are everywhere.' From then on we left the French feminist realm."

In relating this anecdote to me, Amara was clearly frustrated with the exclusionary feminism she had encountered, as well as the identity categories such feminism upheld. The "immigrant woman's" distinguishing feature was a dual oppression from the merger between her gender and socio-ethnic status in France. The fact that this status emerged in the midst of a constellation of related positions, some of them occupied by those of the opposite gender, risked blurring the boundaries of her silhouette, and thus of her emancipatory political project.

However, there were other dimensions to the conflict that Amara related. It is important to take note of the specific scene which the audience' chanting had brought to a halt: a torture

scene presided over by the silhouette of the white, French-born Tancelin. The white torturer embodied the outermost ring of social suffering to surround the Algerian immigrant woman in the world presented by *Les larmes*. Thus, it tethered what political scientist Wendy Brown would refer to as “the political significance of their [in this case, female immigrant] difference” to “the white masculine middle-class ideal” (61) and thus her social emancipation to his transcendent presence. This male presence was entirely different from those of the reporters whose uninhibited entry had rightfully outraged Amara, who had experienced, in her own words, “the famous feminists’” refusal of her work as yet another denial of her community’s existence in the French militant landscape.

The dynamics brought to light here are crucial to understanding the critical imperatives that would become attached to immigration derived cultural products as the 1970s gave way to the 1980s: immigrant self-expression, the consistent cultural policy worry and “integration” technique of the 1970s, would be re-formulated as a relationship between performer and spectator, rather than one internal to the person on stage. If the refusal at Vincennes was indeed premised on a rejection of a seeming universal, it too based this refusal on the assumption that La Kahina’s emancipatory work primarily engaged those outer rungs of social grievance in which the “immigrant woman” met the “white torturer”. The fact that La Kahina placed young men of immigrant origin on stage, denouncing the patriarchal structures of their community in front of members of the same immigrant community, went unnoticed in a scheme where the primary actors were necessarily the torturous duo identified above. In a brief scene from Anne-Marie Autissier and Ali Akika’s 1979 documentary *Les larmes de sang*, the actors of La Kahina try to explain the significance of their work in the context of the larger Algerian immigrant community. The political project at stake is premised less on the claim to an “identity” than on the public revelation of a set of new relationships between men and women, mothers and daughters, fathers and sons.

The image of the stained bed sheets, what I earlier identified as the epitome of “immigrant aesthetics” in a scheme dependent upon the visual imperatives battled by Al Assifa, could also be seen as the cornerstone of this effort. Amara remembers the scene of the *nuit des noces* as one that drew the most protest from their immigrant audiences, an audience which on various occasions had called them “prostitutes... not from good families, for daring to say what we said.” What Amara remembered as being “too visual” was also what sociologist Adil Jazouli would label the site of “a cultural laboratory” (103), a place of experimentation with the ostensible givens of a community as well as with the larger civil society within which that community occupied a place.

Jazouli’s *L’action Collective des Jeunes Maghrebins de France* is one of few works to interrogate in depth the manner in which immigrant youth’s “theatrical engagement was lived as a rupture, full of doubt, psychological instability and solitude” (95). Far from the confident cries of a militant machine, the work of La Kahina, Week-end à Nanterre, and La Troupe Ibn Khaldoun, provided both actors and spectators with moments of discomfort. The stained bed sheets were only one in a series of what many audience members, according to Jazouli, considered “a shameful ‘strip-tease’” (101) of a community’s strained inner workings. Smiling, Amara told me, “with the blood, my mother was shocked. My mother came to our showings and she saw everything, everyone was shocked.” Later, she added, “it took a lot of courage to get up on that stage.” Amara’s comments reveal the *bodily life of theatrical engagement*, what Jazouli

refers to as “a work on the self” (92) as well as on “those close to the self and those who watch it, sometimes with sympathy and sometimes with incredulity” (98).

That the question of “immigrant aesthetics” cannot quite accommodate the “self-work” available in La Kahina’s theatrical ventures underlines the two choices to which artistic projects engaging immigration would become beholden. As Jazouli notes, “on the one hand, there is the necessity to witness (*témoigner*) and analyze familial and interpersonal relations, but on the other, there is the need to exit from these old schemes that were imposed by a certain “militant” theater, where the immigrant is often presented in a miserable fashion, as a “poor victim of the system.”” (94) In the words of one Week-end à Nanterre member, the actors wanted “real theatrical roles” rather than “their own roles” (94), having found that *témoignage* had not only evolved into the “poor victim” genre but that “militant” theater necessarily stood in contradistinction to “real” theater. In “real” theater, actors took on roles entirely divorced from their own lives, and the co-incidence between actor and role was no longer the primary axis of engagement with an audience.

This was a pressure that Amara felt as well, and in our conversation she stressed the fact that the troupe’s second play, La famille Bendjelloul en France depuis 25 ans, was a more “professional” effort than Les larmes, with a professional actor cast in the central role of the father, and his domination depicted via methods slightly more conceptual, such as showing the rest of his family as marionettes manipulated by his hand. Nevertheless, La Kahina members often found during their habitual post-show debates that audiences wouldn’t always take them up on this bargain. Amara was approached once by an older gentleman who wished to speak to her father, only to find out that the actor who had performed father Bendjelloul had already washed the white streaks out of his hair and transformed back into his daily self, frustrating the audience member who felt implicated by the stage action and wished to intervene within it. The fact that Amara still finds herself approached at gatherings as “une fille de La Kahina” is indicative of the degree to which the transition from *témoignage* to “real” theater was premised on a notion of theatrical activity both concrete and abstract: First, it assumed that actions undertaken on stage were registered as “unreal” by all involved, and this wasn’t always the case. Second, *témoignage* was assumed to be a plea for recognition from French civil society, while doing “real” theater meant entering an expert domain. Neither assumption correlated with the lived experience of theatrical activity.

La Kahina’s slow transition into ANGI is perhaps the best possible elaboration of Jazouli’s analysis that theatrical practice implied “working” on oneself and on one’s community and implicated both actor and spectator in each other’s worlds in new ways. For Amara, La Kahina’s slow conclusion had less to do with disillusionment with theatrical militancy than with the concreteness of the situation that they found themselves facing. In 1983, the group established a hostel that would provide temporary residency to women who fit the residence’s three criteria: they were to be of Maghrebi origin, over 18 years old and have fled their homes (Boussaa 25). Member Youcef Boussaa, who would write his doctoral thesis on the hostel’s social work, linked the beginnings of this project to La Kahina:

Every presentation is followed by a debate between the actors and the spectators. These debates provide an opportunity for people to narrate their own experiences, experiences of constraints that were imposed on them, of being runaways, and the outcome of this for both them and their families...“I saw your piece, I recognize myself in it, it’s my history,

I ran away as well, and now please help me for I am alone, sometimes I feel lost but it has done me good to meet you.” And so the reality left the stage and entered back into the everyday. It was necessary to respond to these demands, to respond fast and above all respond well, to the degree that that was possible. (5-6)

Far from being a source of individual emancipation or enlightenment, theater instead conjured individuals in need of housing. Furthermore, it conjured them in such a way that those who had orchestrated the event were now responsible for addressing the material consequences of having exchanged personal narratives.

During the summer of 1984, ANGI would further establish what they referred to as a *Université d’été Beur*, a summer school for Seine Saint-Denis youth in the eastern French mountain range of the Jura. Housed in a center run by former Lip workers and animated by association members and various Maghrebi professionals of immigrant origin, the goal of the school was to provide “for each individual the means to develop his or her confidence in themselves by way of a research into an individual performance” (Boussaa 118). Boussaa’s use of the term “performance” is specific here, for a quick glance at the summer school’s pedagogical units revealed the extent to which the association wished to cultivate immigrant youth of a “nouvelle génération”. The schedule begins with sports, later moving on to “the search for a new communication”, whose subtitles include “inventing new kinds of behaviors” (157) before moving onto writing and film workshops and culminating in the creation of a theater piece (157). The goal, Boussaa would write, was ultimately to “enter or re-enter these youth into a global historical dynamic” (155) rendering their “individual performances” in step with those of the society within which they lived.

Once again, it is important to note the degree to which Boussaa and ANGI’s language was influenced by the cultural policy imperatives attached to the early 80s celebration of “difference”: personal expression and personal performance were placed in service of professionalizing the desires and comportments of immigrant youth labeled as being in “a state of failure” (Boussaa 154). Today, assessing the conceptual foundations of such activity is impossible without reference to the broader socio-political changes of the early 1980s.

Key to President François Mitterrand’s 1981 reform platform had been a political agenda now referred to in shorthand as *droit à la différence*: the state’s recognition of cultural plurality and the right to difference (Hargreaves, *Immigration* 194). Driven less by a desire to re-write the central Republican creed of universality than to re-think the state’s relationship to existing forms of ethnic mobilization, Mitterrand’s programs were designed with an eye to increasing state intervention in realms previously deemed unacceptable threats to national cohesion. In 1981, Mitterrand would lift the prohibition on immigrants’ right of association, and fund the resulting associations through the Ministry for Social Affairs’ *Fonds d’Action Sociale* (FAS) (Hargreaves, *Immigration* 89). With the 1981 establishment of the French-Arab-Berber *Radio Beur* and the heavily publicized 1983 *Marche des Beurs*, Mitterrand’s policy changes coincided and co-created a new era of politicking in relation to immigration: the *Beur* movement, comprised of the diverse political projects that were arising from within second-generation Maghrebi communities.²³

²³ The term *Beur* is the inverse of *Arabe*, a reference to the second generation of North African immigrants who came of age during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Despite the term’s continued currency in administrative circles today, in my conversations with *associative* circles and individuals working on questions of immigration, *Beurness* emerged as an identity that was primarily institutional. I was routinely told that SOS Racisme, France Plus and other

Importantly, the strength of the Socialist party's policies of "difference" rested on the shoulders of what Alec calls "an elite stratum arising from within the Maghrebi minority" (Hargreaves, "*Beurgeoisie*" 89). Organizations such as the government funded France-Plus were led by Maghrebi professionals and political actors who were recruited to produce North African candidates on municipal election ballots. Yet these candidates were "career-minded individuals detached from their ethnic base" (93), thus disconnected from local struggles and collective programs and charged with "emphasizing the primacy of individuals over group identities" (93). In other words, although positioned to harness grass-roots needs, they were paradoxically charged with diffusing "ethnic clientelism" (93), and in later years, calming *banlieue* tensions.

ANGI's militants, often rooted as they were in the world of local performance, were by no means illustrative of such a stratum. Neither state-appointed, nor recent transplants to the Seine Saint-Denis, they possessed a far more organic connection to the needs of Northern Parisian *banlieue* populations. Nonetheless, the language of "individual performance" revealed that their conceptual as well as practical strategies necessarily resonated with the broader imperatives that were becoming attached to the *Beur* movement: individual integration and professional insertion.

In turn, the cultural program of *droit à la différence* itself resonated with the principles associated with *animation* during the preceding decade. The practical policies and initiatives designed to include multiple avenues of cultural production resembled "cultural rehabilitation" projects geared to jump-start "integration" (Dubois 280). The 1991 Hip Hop Dixit project is one example of a "cultural project with a social vocation" (Dubois 285). Designed to "welcome *banlieue* youth in Paris museums" (285), the project brought the work of young graffiti artists from the Parisian suburbs to the city's galleries and museums, arranging for press conferences with the artists and extended exhibitions. Assessing the project's livelihood, Dubois writes that "'culture' was from then on doubly a factor of integration: first of all as a vector of 'affirmation' and 'social recognition' and later as a professional market" (286). The goal of Hip Hop Dixit, in other words, was not simply to valorize cultural marginalia but, to quote as Dubois does, the official documents, "realize a professional insertion in cultural domains" (286).

This distinction is key to understanding what the terms "immigrant populations" and "cultural difference" implied in the early 1980s climate within which ANGI was formed. On the one hand, the point at which cultural policy discourses had arrived involved what one cultural policy agent called "a valuation of and exchange between cultures, groups, communities (*communautés*) and ethnicities (*ethnies*)" (Quoted in Dubois 280), significant if for no reason other than its references to *ethnies* and *communautés*, the forbidden terms of the 60s and 70s. However, the expanded criteria of cultural valuation implied here were put to practical use through structures that targeted youth in need of "rehabilitation" and "insertion" into the primary labor markets of the nation. Thus, the imperative of *integration* emerged where creative autonomy met market rationales, and, as I have hoped to demonstrate, this market increasingly demanded compartmentalized identities: woman, immigrant, *Beur*, youth etc. The endeavors of the early 1980s provide evidence that the conjoining of arts and social survival for immigrant

immigrants associations had been "co-opted" by the state. Part of the distaste the term *Beur* now generates is due to its fixation on a specific moment in the ongoing elaboration of North African identity, one which keeps later generations within the bounds of the second, destined to juggle and collapse under an imagined "dual identity".

populations have been, despite changes in format, a continuous project rather than a recent phenomenon.

From *Prendre la Rue* to *Prendre la Parole*

Kristin Ross' observation that by the mid-1970s, the political acts and cultural products of marginalized populations could only be recognized as "identity" claims is continuous with the ideological underpinnings of *droit à la différence*. What I have aimed to establish throughout this chapter has been that the emergence of "immigrant identity" (rather than class-status or exploitation) and its eventual connection to "immigrant integration" (rather than non-vocational expression and creativity) were multi-faceted processes in which both state and civic actors participated. By the early 21st century, the link between social integration, survival, and creative self-expression would be fused into one, homogeneous project. Conversely, the transitions outlined here provide a glimpse into projects and collectives that emerged prior to the sedimentation of these links.

The 1980's firm turn toward "identity" is clearly visible in the presentation of the few documented theatrical projects of the era. Cherif Chikh and Ahsene Zehraoui's *Le Théâtre Beur* for example, was published in 1984 and contains the scripts of three plays that were written and performed by second generation North African immigrant youth in the late 70s/early 80s: the all-female Troupe de Théâtre de l'étang de Beurre (Rhône-Alpes), Troupe Théâtrale des Flamands (Marseille) and the Troupe de Théâtre de la Zup de Valence, which was formed from a theater workshop run by the Association de Soutien aux Travailleurs Immigrés de Valence. In his introduction to *Le Théâtre Beur*, Guy Jacquet writes:

Actors. They want to be actors. This doesn't necessarily have to do with theater but simply with no longer being objects of our indifference, of our contempt or, even better, of our "benevolence". The actors of their own lives. This is what they would like to be first. And because acting also means climbing onto a stage, speaking out (*prendre la parole*) they will also be that kind of actor. But their theatrical reality is that the two kinds are intimately related. (11)

In their prologue to the scripts, Chikh and Zehraoui echo Jacquet's reference to vocalization, adding, "What animates the girls and boys making up these troupes, is a profound desire to narrate stories (*raconter*), to narrate their own stories (*se raconter*), a desire to analyze and denounce" (Chikh and Zehraoui 17). What is significant about Jacquet, Chikh and Zehraoui's framing of these youths' works is the insistence on aesthetic practice as partaking of a quasi-psychoanalytic zeal in its self-narration, indicative of a new performance sensibility. Verbs such as *raconter* and *se raconter* in effect replace the dominant terms of the 1970s: *prendre la rue* (taking back the streets) gives way to *prendre la parole* (taking the floor, and doing so specifically through speech), suggesting that self-narration is the only form in which militancy could survive by the early 1980s.

Significantly, the addressee of self-narration is necessarily imagined in these critics' views as the "others", the French. Jacquet in particular, posits these youths' roles as social agents ("the actors of their own lives"), as contingent upon reversing the disabling of that same agency. This process is allegorized via theatrical activity and thus requires spectators. Yet who are these

onlookers? Although the editors do not present detailed information as to who these troupes' audiences were, it is probable that they were those of immigrants' aid associations, hence, immigrant audiences. It becomes important to ask then what is secured politically, both then and today, when the material conditions of "marginal" cultural products are ignored in favor of interpellating an imagined, "French" audience, reprimanded symbolically for their "benevolence" but depended upon for the exercise of that very same virtue. Such an articulation of audience composition will emerge throughout the contemporary practices detailed in the coming chapters: the absent French audience who is symbolically hailed in Chikh and Zehraoui's text will continue to be imagined into place, alongside an equally robust community of migrants and refugees. This heterogeneous combination will be central to articulating the utility of performance.

Jacquet, Chikh and Zehraoui's framing of theater provides a foundation for understanding theatrical aid work's contradictions in two significant ways. First, theater is primarily conceived as a matter of "speaking out" and "narrating" oneself. Second, aesthetic practices hold little potential for positioning the speaker in a new kind of relation to itself, the only relationship into which the theatrical actor can enter is with the audience, and preferably a French one. This brief outline might seem an awkward entry into the body-conscious, *practical* and personal orientation of theatrical aid work. Yet, it is indicative of some of the key trends that will emerge throughout the coming chapters. The bodily life of stage activity will often be referenced via the role of stage speech and the self-work entailed by performance will go hand-in-hand with the centrality of audience recognition.

CHAPTER THREE

REHEARSING THE ROLE OF THE INTEGRATED INDIVIDUAL: A FOCUS ON THE WORK OF AGO AND CIMADE

When I met with Jeanne in the spring of 2008, the young actor, writer and director was already a veteran of various Parisian social aid networks, and had recently concluded a theatrical aid project that had brought together a diverse group of immigrant women. As Jeanne narrated to me the circumstances of the project, the process of preparing these women for a performance piece and what she herself had learned, I inquired as to how participants would respond to her suggestions and activities. While Jeanne felt that the work had been successful overall, she remembered that there had been one hesitant participant. Her progress had been enormous, she had worked tirelessly during rehearsals, but she had chosen not to perform. Jeanne narrated her situation thus: “There was one woman that just didn’t act at all. She was very very religious... Then of course this created problems with a lot of the others, they would say, ‘Well, we are observant as well, but we are going to do this.’ In the end, she didn’t act. But she never said that it was for religious reasons, she said it was because she couldn’t play in front of people. So, I don’t know, because she never actually gave it a try.”

The fieldwork narratives that comprise this chapter are structured so as to understand the larger political, associational and ethical spheres in which theatrical aid work such as Jeanne’s took place. In particular, I aim to illustrate what this seemingly ordinary exchange between Jeanne and her unwilling participant might indicate to us about theatrical aid work more generally. What was Jeanne’s dilemma, and what was her assessment of it? A brief analysis of Jeanne’s anecdote reveals her subjectivity to be multiple: the acting teacher who yearns to have her students “give it a try”, the theater director nervous at the thought that one actor’s ideological tendencies towards stage activity could unravel the entire collective’s commitment to the work, and finally the young social worker who is struggling to understand a set of bodily and emotional obligations other than her own. What was significant about Jeanne’s understanding of this exchange was that she had necessarily labeled these obligations *ideological* and not *pragmatic*. In other words, she had attributed the participant’s refusal to “play” in front of an audience and in a space alien to the speaker to a religious doctrine that she had all but indicated but had not named: Islam. The fact that the participant herself had denied a religious rationale had been rendered irrelevant in a scheme where corporal involvement was imagined to stem from a set of inner commitments.

The contrasting notions of individuality, community, liberty as well as embodied subjectivity that emerge from this brief exchange provide the background for this chapter’s driving questions: how is the relationship between embodied acts and social identity re-imagined by NGOs, state-funded neighborhood associations and artists working on questions of immigration in France today? Given theatrical aid work’s interest in facilitating participants’ social integration, what specifically is the relationship between theatrical practice and assimilation to a set of both intellectual and corporal norms? In answering these questions, I will make ongoing reference to two sets of dynamics: first, the relationship between individualism and collectivity imagined by the French Republican tradition of autonomous selfhood, and

second, the manner in which embodied life serves as the grounds from which such a relationship can be established.

In the introduction to this dissertation, I had established the central trope of French Republicanism to be an understanding of abstract individuality that could incarnate the common good and universality of national citizenship and serve as a counterpoint to the constraining forces of communal identities. Dominique Schnapper, Pascale Krief and Emmanuel Peignard summarize this tradition thus: “Universalistic principles have always been favoured over acknowledging the particular characteristics of migrant populations. The principle of French policy is to be ‘colour-blind’. No “minority” policies exist, nor the very idea of minorities. According to this approach, multiculturalism or ethnic cultures should remain in the private sphere, and should not be recognized in the public domain” (15). Abstract individualism, in other words, signifies a retreat from identity markers towards a silhouette not burdened by commitments other than those citizens hold vis-à-vis the larger political community: the French nation. At the start of the 20th century, these principles served as the foundation for associational life: French law mandated that while individuals could come together to found a variety of political, vocational, educational or cultural associations, their overarching commitment needed to remain wedded to the French state. Associational work would be secular, tread lightly around the question of regional or ethnic identities and respect the integrity of the state. The aftereffects of such legal mandates are especially visible in a ban on immigrants’ right of association that lasted until the Socialists’ victory and subsequent legal reforms in 1981.

In this chapter, French associationalism’s complicated history will serve as a background to the notions of individuality and collectivity that theatrical aid work tries to impart. For example, central to the process of integration and acculturation that the association L’Accueil Goutte d’Or (AGO) wishes to engender, is an emphasis on the “autonomy” that participants would begin to acknowledge as their own. However, given AGO’s position as a publicly funded neighborhood association, such a project tempered this individualism with a reminder that it need align with the larger statements of the “collective” of which it was a member. Seeds of this paradox are visible in Jeanne’s anecdote as well: the hesitant actor’s decision to contribute in a manner independent from those of others could in fact be recognized as the sign of a sovereign, self-sufficient sense of one’s own actions. Yet, it is evaluated from within a worldview where its sovereignty poses a threat to the unity of the theatrical collective. Therefore, it is understood to be the sign of having forsaken one’s independence to another collective force: religious patriarchy. The encounter between Jeanne and the hesitant actor further illustrates the degree to which notions of individuality and collectivity are experienced and articulated via *bodily practices*. The “collective” which this actor risks unraveling is a theatrical one, a rehearsal collective that stands as a metonym for the larger collectivity of the French nation. And the mode of participation within this collective is theatrical acting, “playing”, which in turn emerges as a metonym for political participation.

The notion of “freedom” espoused in theatrical aid work often pivots on the assumption that the liberated self can distinguish between urges and needs that arise from within, and constraints that are imposed from without, typified via religious practices assumed to be inherently patriarchal. When approached from within this framework, the actor’s evident religiosity necessarily serves as the constraining force against which theatrical aspiration struggles. From the angle of the actor however, theatrical acting *is* constraining, humiliating, and potentially life-altering. Throughout this chapter, I will emphasize the two contrasting visions of

bodily practice that underlie this dilemma: on the one hand, outward acts necessarily reflect inner truths. On the other, the physical force of the body generates habits that are primarily experienced *as forces*, outside of a discursive, ideational frame.

Finally, despite its focus on bodily practice, the chapter's inquiry into the principles that underlie "emancipation" will reveal the paradoxes with which the previous chapter concluded: bodily involvement and its liberatory potential are often concretized through reference to *discursive* practices. In other words, references to stage speech will reveal an ongoing investment in the power of "*prendre la parole*". The late 1970s/early 1980s focus on linguistic narrative will thrive, even when organizers emphasize the mastering of bodily life.

The ethnographic tales that follow are offered so as to ask three sets of questions. How does the figure of the integrated immigrant emerge in theatrical aid work as both an individual and collective figure? How does the embodied nature of theatre provide the venue for this emergence? And what is the larger notion of liberty with which these practices then leave us? In order to begin this inquiry, I will turn to the work of the neighborhood-based association and *centre social* or community center L'Accueil Goutte d'Or (AGO) and provide a portrait of AGO's theatrical aid work as a prototype of associational work. AGO's understanding of community will provide an entry into a larger history of French associationalism and what the increasing presence of immigrants associations have revealed about the principles of this history more generally. Having established this background, I will then turn to the theater workshops of Cimade, a humanitarian organization that provides juridical as well as general quotidian aid to refugees and asylum seekers. Finally, I will end with a brief question: how do theatrical models of emancipation both cushion and chastise these "individuals" within a multicultural society?

In my analysis of both institutions, I will be basing my observations on oral historical interviews conducted with workshop organizers as well as the institution's publications. Readers will note that my writing will replicate the "abstractions" that my interlocutors utilized: the text will rarely make reference to participants' religious, ethnic or racial composition. Instead, they will emerge as the neutral category that they are intended to be: "participants" united on the basis of having arrived, recently, in France. In turn, occasional vignettes that deal with conflict situations will reveal the impossibility of maintaining such a neutral view. Conversely, it is important to state at the outset that with the exception of Leila, the theatrical aid workers introduced here are all "native French" individuals.

AGO: Practicing Individuality in the Goutte D'Or

The 18th arrondissement Parisian district of the Goutte d'Or is home to a variety of state sponsored and independent social organizations, each of which position themselves differently with regards to the sociological make-up of the district. The Goutte d'Or is emblematic of what the mainstream French media refers to as "the other Paris" (Christine Ockrent quoted in Deltombe 146): a tightly woven neighborhood that is transformed with every new migrant wave. Although the quarter has historically connoted a North African identity, it is now home to communities from West and Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the Middle East. The association L'Accueil Goutte d'Or (The Goutte d'Or Association for Welcome (AGO)), was founded in 1979 to address the many needs of this immigration saturated, diverse community, from juridical aid and language classes for newly arrived members to day care centers for their children. The association began receiving regular funding from the state in 1996 and is currently

run by both salaried members and volunteers. In 2007, their collective labor force addressed the needs of a neighborhood numbering around 22,000, 36% of whom are not French-born (Rapport d'Activités 9-10). In a 2007 association report, the Goutte d'Or is depicted as a district with "high levels of vulnerability" (10), "unsatisfactory housing conditions" (11), lacking in social services such as "sports facilities and employment agencies" (11) and marked by widespread unemployment.

While this brief summary of the Goutte d'Or's socio-economic circumstances allows a glimpse into one facet of this neighborhood's complex identity, an equally important element of neighborhood life is the ubiquitous presence of a network of civic and state actors. As outlined in Chapter 2, the Goutte d'Or had been home to civic activism as early as the mid-1970s, when troupes such as Al Assifa and members of the leftist formation Gauche Proletarienne had settled in the neighborhood to *animate* local issues and grievances. During my conversations with present-day neighborhood activists, vestiges of the Goutte d'Or's extensive history as a site of civic intervention were visible in how individuals articulated their activist principles. Cultural practices and creative expression continued to serve as vehicles for the rehabilitation, insertion and integration of underserved populations. And aesthetic expression remained a privileged site of both emancipation and militancy.

Nowhere are these elements more visible than in the theater workshops with which AGO began experimenting in 2002. An inquiry into the principles and practices that have since surrounded *Parole de Femmes*, AGO's annual women's theater workshops and performances, reveal the various political, cultural and aesthetic forces with which I began this chapter. AGO's identity as a publicly-funded association reveals an ideology of aid where the relationship between aided individuals and the larger collective of the neighborhood is a forum for recognition. The individual is positioned such that the act of expressing grievances to a social worker launches this person's entry into a global collective suffering from similar oppressions. Thus, the particularity of their need is imagined to be a universalizing, acculturating condition. In turn, this tendency situates theater as the medium for such instances of identification, with AGO workers insisting that participant-actors perform narratives from their own lives to lay the groundwork for recognition *and* emancipation. Their understanding of bodily engagement is intimately linked to the larger relationship between individuals and collectives. The bodily work of integration, which theater is enlisted to accomplish, is reduced to spoken narratives which are imagined to render confident the speaker. In order to understand the logic undergirding these relationships, it is important to look at the precise capacities that AGO attributes to theater, and the relationship of theater to the larger role of the immigrant rights association in individual's lives.

What characterizes the wide range of services that AGO provides the inhabitants of the "vulnerable" Goutte d'Or is their emphasis on "individual" needs (such as a *titre de séjour* or residency permit) as the needs of the "collective". AGO paints the goal of individual accompaniment as a process which allows the individual to "discover their demand as partaking of a far more global crisis: housing, legislation on residency laws, etc" (Rapport d'Activités 13). In turn, this demand "allows the collective to advance" (13). It is possible to conclude that the goal of providing a "global" vision to the aid-seeker is to encourage forms of "solidarity" (13) that will survive beyond the walls of the social center. However, it is equally important to note the specific ideology of individuality and collectivity being imparted: aid-seekers are not only asked to experience the personal "self-confidence" (20) that "being listened to (*l'écoute*)" (20)

can engender, but to link the moment of having been isolated *as* a speaker to participation in a global struggle. Individuals are hosted in the spirit of “rendering the person as much of an actor as possible (*rendre le plus possible la personne actrice*)” but becoming an “actor” necessarily means entering into the “exchange” implied by “solidarity” (20).

The notion that private moments of aid have the potential to engender a sense of social multiplicity is equally visible in the various socialization activities of the association. In the context of women’s programs, the goals of “autonomization” (25) and “personal development” (25) mask dual needs: they are step towards independence *and* ways to become “like everyone else... accessing knowledge and living a good life in France” (Rapport d’Activités 25). In turn, this two-fold understanding of what speech can *do*, especially when grieving an element of social life unavailable to the speaker, is central to how AGO understands *theatrical* speech: speaking on a stage is both personal and distinct *and* public and familiarizing.

A wider glance at twentieth century discourses of neoliberal development reveals the instrumentalization of “individual” development for the good of the “collective” to be a pervasive theme, not a mere instance of theatrical thinking. Importantly however, AGO’s turn to theater is positioned as having resulted from their awareness and rejection of these larger tendencies. In order to articulate its break from the “marketization” (Rapport d’Activités 75) and increasingly expert-ridden tendencies of the social service sector, AGO adopts an attitude that privileges the beneficiary over the expert. The expert, they write, must “depend on the capacities of inhabitants” (75), the “competences and the richness” that are “the fruits of original histories.” In turn, the inhabitants will “discover themselves to be different but complementary” (75) vis-à-vis the capacities of others.

AGO’s turn to theatrical practice in their women’s language classes needs to be understood in the context of this shift in social work: theater not only reveals the “competences and richness” of immigrant women and allows them to be expressed before an audience, it also cultivates techniques for individuals to “complement” the capacities of others. During our conversations, coordinator Sylvie took care to note that the question of “capacity” was the first one to be directed at participants: “What is your body capable of doing? As a woman, what are you capable of saying?” Habituating participants to the daily negotiations of life in Paris, from simply “getting by (*se débrouiller*)” in the Goutte d’Or to managing the densely patterned Parisian *métro*, were understood as capacities that theater could cultivate.

AGO had been experimenting with theater classes for approximately six to seven years when I met them in 2008. As the final component of the series of French language classes offered to the women of the Goutte d’Or, the theater workshops were proposed those women who had reached the most advanced stage. “I say proposed,” Sylvie told me with a smile, “but in fact it is imposed.” The theater workshops had been run by different members and affiliates of a Goutte d’Or-based theater company, Graines de Soleil and the conventions of the workshops had become such that the women would produce writing on their own lives, rehearse their staging and then perform these excerpts to the Goutte d’Or public at the annual neighborhood-based multi-media Festival au Féminin. For example in 2007, this had resulted in a project on “dreams”, where the women of the workshop had been urged to write, improvise and perform short skits based on their imaginings for a desirable future. There had been one year however,

when a workshop leader had tried a new approach: handing the women a pre-written script that had been adapted from a short novel and letting them choose roles.²⁴

The conundrums that arose from this shift in approach are key to understanding the kinds of aesthetics imperatives that both “capacity cultivation” and “global individuality” placed upon theater practice. The decision to shift the emphasis of the workshops from self-written works to the interpretation of dramatic literature prompted questions within the *alphabetisation* bureaus at AGO. For AGO, theater held a dual role. First, it facilitated AGO’s wish that the public pronouncement of grief on the part of immigrant performers interpellate a Goutte d’Or collective participating in the same “global crisis”. Therefore, the decision to use a professionally written text and encourage experiments in assuming theatrical characters prompted a rather significant ideological re-evaluation. Identification was only imagined to function when the words uttered on stage implicated the person uttering them. Second, theater offered women what Sylvie referred to as an opportunity to “work on the body” in ways that language study conducted at a table did not. However, references to the “body” and the “work” of the “body” often only entailed speech. Leila, an actor who had led an AGO workshop, told me that being on stage meant that the women would exercise their “imagination” and “take the floor (*prendre la parole*)”, and in doing so, speak on their own behalf. This belief counteracted the assumption that the openness of dramatic texts could also signify an imaginative relationship to the stage, allowing the women to assume, both linguistically and bodily, characters other than their own. Instead, performance emerged as a matter that first implicated the immigrant’s speech, rather than his or her body, and second implicated their actual selves, rather than their potential theatrical transformations.

While the questions that emerged from contrasting personal narratives to dramatic texts are certainly specific to the organization of AGO’s language workshops, it would be a mistake to consider these discussions solely in the context of language learning and theatrical expression. Sylvie’s emphasis on the use of personal narratives are revelatory of the group’s larger understanding of the relationship between individuals and collectives, and directly indicative of the kind of audience that AGO wished for the immigrant rights association to have. This audience, imagined via the theatrical event, would be presented with two distinct avenues of identification, thereby positioned to derive two distinct kinds of pleasure from the narration of immigrant experience. First, this imagined conglomeration of spectators was characterized by an “immigrant” presence. As mentioned previously, this collective of aid-seekers were imagined to snap into place upon the utterance of a grievance or crisis. Of course, in the context of the theater workshops, the “crisis” at hand was an oppression that was gender-based. This particularizing circumstance however, rendered the theatrical event all the more powerful for introducing that “crisis” to the members of the male half of the “globe”: “These women are,” Sylvie told me, “speaking for all women who are lacking the words to express themselves.” In effect, the “immigrant French” portion of the spectators was asked to prolong their sense of being the immigrant “other” as a temporary condition of solidarity and expedient associational activity.

Second, present in the audience were the “native French”. This group directly contributed to the “confidence” and “courage” that stage presence would provide the performing women. This confidence was premised on the fact that the speaker would not only be “known, indirectly,

²⁴ AGO’s workshops were for the most part composed of women from North, West and Sub-Saharan Africa. The specific year’s workshop was a reflection of this trend; however it also included several women from China.

by others”, in one interlocutor’s words, but she would also “speak French in front of French people, to rise above the fear of that.” Theatrical practice then, not only cultivated confident and courageous speech within the self, it provided the speaker with a kind of recognition that only the linguistically apt could proffer: the “native” French. This group’s experience of empathy and compassion would render the actor’s linguistic act and therefore presence on French soil legitimate, especially in view of the kinds of content these personal narratives were expected to reveal: “human beings with emotions,” Sylvie told me, “who have an attachment to France and who lived through very difficult times... they have traversed the Mediterranean for the land of their lives”. This was a sentiment that the “native French” portion of the audience were deemed responsible for acknowledging and recognizing.

Given the highly distinct understanding of spectatorship that emerged from my conversations with AGO, it is not surprising that the suggestion that these “actors” actually memorize lines of pre-written dramatic text was met with confusion. While these conversations reveal the intimate links between the association’s philosophy of collectivity and their expectations of what theater could provide, they are equally indicative of the vision of bodily integration such a philosophy could accommodate. That is, although AGO sought to cultivate individuals with the embodied confidence of a body on the *métro* platform or issuing declaratives in front of a French audience, these bodily experiments were irrelevant if the self that participated lost herself into the body of a dramatic character, thus breaking her own. In other words, bodily integration was theoretically positioned as central to cultivating an everyday aptness with life in France (“what is your body capable of doing?”), but was nonetheless subordinate in practice to how personal narrative would resonate within the affective world of the association (“what are you capable of saying?”). The confidence of the stage had less to do with abandoning one’s life particulars, than with re-stating them before a heterogeneous public.

In what follows, I would like to examine how AGO’s theatrical conundrums reveal a far broader set of issues surrounding French associational history. Specifically, I am interested in tracing the discursive makeovers that immigration-related associations have undergone since the early 1980s as a larger background to the theories of collectivity suggested above. Before drawing this section to a close however, it is important to return briefly to the notions of individuality and bodily being that AGO’s work reveals, and understand what it suggests about theatrical aid work more generally.

A brief return to how the French Republican tradition understands individuality and political community is helpful here. The Republican tradition dictates that this relationship is one of direct participation, a line of communication that particularizing identity categories can only rupture, not aid. During my conversations with and observations of individuals participating in theatrical aid work, these dictates were central to their understanding of their labor: while theatrical aid work sought to create a comfortable space for individuals to “express” themselves as what Sylvie called “human beings with emotions”, theatrical self-narration was a site in which they both displayed this “difference” but were then liberated from it. Nowhere is this transformative process more visible than in AGO’s two-sided audience: while one half of this imagined conglomeration provides the larger foreign community for which the performing immigrant’s narrative becomes the prototype, the other half’s presence and recognition legitimates the performing individual’s efforts at speaking French and declaring their desire to be in France.

During my conversation with Jeanne, the actor stated that theatrical acting was “speaking in a space of liberty”, a sentiment I heard repeated in many theatrical contexts. Her statement allows us to suggest that this embodied practice *is* a sign of liberty and participation in political community. Such a statement resonates with AGO director Christine Ledésert’s suggestion that the atelier’s goal is to provide women with an opportunity to “exercise their citizenship in our society” (“Prendre La Parole!”)²⁵. Refraining from participating, as this chapter’s opening anecdote illustrates, is the opposite: a sign of obedience to forces other than those of the nation-state. Importantly, the “embodied” nature of theater, while significant in the discourses surrounding theatrical work, is often only a reference to stage presence and the far more powerful effects of personal speech. The body is an instrument of political participation only in so far as it can house a true self, rather than a character. And this principle is continuously re-instantiated, despite the fact that the bodily habits that AGO wishes to engender are, at least initially, foreign enough to participants that they can, in and of themselves, constitute characters.

The fact that AGO’s theatrical workshop participant can symbolically rehearse for both autonomous individuality *and* participation in global crises of inequality, may appear paradoxical. However, it is a paradox that resonates with the history of French associationalism.

Associational Life and the Practice of Safe Communalism

While the figure of the “individual” surfaces throughout AGO’s understanding of theatrical activity and associational work, the “collective” that is imagined to recognize themselves in the narratives of this individual are rarely referred to as a *community*. Interestingly, both theatrical aid work and the larger project of social work surrounding immigration are invested in producing individuals in “solidarity” with one another. Solidarity however, does not entail group-ness, despite the unifying geography of the Goutte d’Or. In order to understand the reasons for this particular approach, it is necessary to examine the models of operation to which all civic activity in France is increasingly beholden, and the larger history of how French associationalism has configured individuality and collectivity. Examined within this framework, AGO is exemplary of the French associational norm.

The history of *associationisme* in France is in dissociable from the Republican tradition’s rejection of *communitarisme*, the mobilization of communal or group identities over those of the nation. Joan Scott notes that “in theory there is no possibility of a hyphenated ethnic/national identity-one belongs either to a group or to the nation” (11). As a group formation, the association thus occupies an odd position within the organization of the French polity. As prescribed by the Association Law of 1901, the term “association” refers to the right of any two or more individuals to come together in pursuit of a common set of goals and with common means. The guarantee that these organizations function as both the conduits of an assembly *and* a subsidiary element ultimately belonging to the state, are found in the subsequent 1905 law on the separation of state and church. Beneath the umbrella of state secularism, these laws leave the French Republic with two tasks. The Republic is to assure the liberty of conscience of all citizens and in doing so, offer no recognition to religions or cults. In other words, the basis on which associations are formed are necessarily secular, the common goals of the group always

²⁵ This response is chronicled in an interview published on the Orange Foundation’s blog. The theater workshop that had spanned 2008 and 2009 received funding from the French telecommunications giant Orange’s foundation as part of their initiative to combat illiteracy, itself one slice of a broader commitment to facilitating “communication.”

subordinate to the goals of the state. Ultimately, the entity at stake in the 1901 and 1905 laws is neither the state nor associations: church and state are rendered autonomous on behalf of *the abstract individual* whose emancipation from the shackles of religious constraints is the responsibility of the political order.

The figure of the abstract individual thus illustrates one of the fundamental paradoxes of French Republicanism. The autonomy of this individual is guaranteed by the state. However, it is also this autonomy that renders the individual open to the influence of secondary attachments: “lifestyle, values and politics” (Scott 127) that are vulnerable to punishment. In view of this contradiction, Jocelyne Cesari notes, French law maintains a binary commitment to “the coexistence of the right to auto-determination *and* procedures that tend to declare illegal those movements that would harm the integrity of national territory” (Cesari 158, emphasis mine). The relationship that the republican tradition has established between the state and civil society follows accordingly: “In France, a republican state does not just separate itself from civil society but it leads civil society by creating a political culture that is opposed to clericalism” (Modood and Kastoryano 166).

This brief introduction to the political parameters of civic activity and social movements in France elucidates the dynamics of AGO’s associationalism: the aid-seeking individual’s “autonomization” and personal development are key to the association’s social project, yet care is taken to position this autonomy as an instance of broader, *national* subjectivity. Even the “solidarity” of shared pain due to migration, displacement and poverty are geared towards living a “good life” whose parameters have already been set by the autochthonous.

In fact, the immigration-related contexts of theatrical aid work are excellent sites for examining how French politics have transformed associational life in order to manage a multicultural polity. The political actions available to present-day associations concerned with immigration were shaped by developments that fundamentally altered the contours of *associationisme* during the 1980s and 90s. Yasemin Nuhoglu identifies the most significant of these as the emergence of “human rights as a world-level organizing principle” (3). Discourses of universal rights, Nuhoglu suggests, have permeated migrant movements to have emerged from postwar Europe because of their fluid discursive boundaries: “the rationalized category of personhood (and its canonized international language, Human Rights), has become an imperative in justifying rights and demands for rights, including those of nonnationals in national polities” (Nuhoglu 42). In Chapter 2, I had argued that immigrant labor movements such as the 1970s *Mouvement des Travailleurs Arabes* had fought for their rights as foreign laborers but also positioned themselves as members of the broader French proletariat, juggling both particularist and universalist claims. Following the Socialist Party’s reversal of the ban on immigrants’ right to associate in 1981, the “universal” referent available to immigrants associations expanded from the French working class to universal personhood. Although the identity practices of immigrants associations remained ethnic, they increasingly used a set of global vocabularies that rendered them supra-national political agents.

The introduction of the vocabulary of human rights into associationalism is most significant for the ways in which it corralled the “identity” demands of newly emerging immigrants associations. In effect, the notion of the larger “nation” circumscribing associational activity merged with that of the “universe” to create safer forms of communal organization. Coinciding with Socialist President François Mitterrand’s pathbreaking *droit à la différence* (right to difference) policies, the notion of universal personhood became part and parcel of state

support for acceptable ethnic communalism. For example, following on the heels of 1983's much publicized North African *Marche des Beurs* and the emergence of anti-police slogans such as "*Touche pas à mon pote!* (Don't touch my friend!)", the anti-racist organization SOS Racisme was modeled on what Catherine Wihtol de Wenden and Rémy Leveau refer to as American ethnic communalism. Independently conceived but soon sponsored by the state, SOS Racisme rendered ethnic communalism a *universalist* gesture by identifying it as anti-racism.²⁶ Thus, the primary axis along which immigrants associations were understood was as part of a larger, national struggle *against racism* as opposed to a struggle *for immigrant political rights*.

During my conversations with a variety of theatrical aid workers operating in immigrant rights contexts, the turn to "universalist" principles revealed itself in subtle, indirect ways. Since most theatrical aid contexts were explicitly concerned with the defense of immigrant rights, the language of universalism was tempered with reference to the specificity of immigration-related grievances. Nevertheless the notion of "human" rights such as dignity (as opposed to political rights such as the ability to vote in municipal elections as a resident non-citizen) emerged via an alternative set of principles, such as an unwavering belief in individuals' innate desire to "take the floor" (*prendre la parole*), a principle readily visible in Sylvie's approach to theater. In effect, ease with and proclivity for theatrical self-revelation emerged as the assumed "universality" underlying the recipients of theatrical aid work.

In the wake of the events of September 11, 2001, it is possible to add a final element to the late century transformations of French associationalism: what Valerie Amiraux refers to as the "'ethnicization' of Islam" (32). In France, the late 1980s and early 1990s were marked by disputes ranging from the headscarf debates to the Salman Rushdie *fatwa*. While the era's anti-racist associationalism castigated criminalization on the basis of racial criteria, political shifts legitimized the criminalization of cultural difference, for which the most prevalent marker soon became Islam. Two developments followed. On the one hand, there emerged the figure of what Ruth Mas calls "the secular Muslim" (586). A paradoxically Republican product, the secular Muslim was endowed with a hyphenated membership in both a "minority community" and a "common political community" (Mas 605) however, the "minority community" was stripped of its theological elements. The "individual" in question here, could only enter the political community *as* an autonomous citizen, of which the signature sign was a *secular religiosity*.²⁷ On

²⁶ The fact that "anti-racism" was the over-determined axes along which SOS Racisme was mobilized is related to a wider development in sensibility that emerged in French political circles during the 1980s, what historian Tyler Stovall refers to as a "a national crisis of conscience for France" (92). Throughout the 1980s and 90s, the French public were repeatedly exposed to the sensationalized trials of former Vichy collaborationists, re-igniting a discussion of France's role in the Holocaust and the larger presence of racism in French social life. Unlike the climate surrounding the emergence of the French state's initial anti-race laws in the early 1970s, the 1980s slowly witnessed a discursive link between anti-Semitism as a specific form of race-based injury and anti-immigrant racism as another.

²⁷ The Conseil Français de Culte Musulman (CFCM), the organization initiated by Nicolas Sarkozy in response to the grassroots conglomeration Union des Organisations Islamique de France, is the most visible end of this secular, state sponsored Islam (often referred as an *Islam de France* as opposed to an *Islam en France*) as the harbinger of a set of social solutions. The Institut Cultures d'Islam, a committee that will host and coordinate the activities of associations who present and study the plurality of Islamic cultures, provides an interesting example of an *Islam de France*. Supported by the mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, and presided over by his counselor Hamou Bouakkaz, ICI's self-presentation displays the discursive maneuvers necessary for civic associations involving Islam to remain afloat:

the other, representations of the immigrant, (by turns “the muslim *intégriste*, the delinquent, the excluded, the badly integrated and of unstable equilibrium between two cultures” (Wihtol de Wenden and Leveau 159)) not only served to further Islamophobia but *painted immigrants associations as responsible for integration*.²⁸ Wihtol de Wenden and Leveau suggest that this led to the cultivation of a “Beurgeoisie” (107), entrepreneurial social workers who would act as mediators between immigrants associations and the state but only if they kept “communitarian practices at a minimum level” (110-111) and worked through “the principles of secularism that characterize the French model of integration” (110).

It is at this juncture that the paradoxical imperatives assigned AGO, as well as any association that addresses immigration-related needs become clear. Immigrants associations are both allowed and funded by the French state, with the expectation that the over-arching themes of their labor remain secularism, anti-racism and universalism. However, the very existence of this imperative and of a class of mediators burdened with implementing it, suggests official

Inspired by the best successes of the Golden Age of Islam, and inscribed in a context both secular and modern, ICI’s approach is resolutely working class, living, and open. Its ambition is to offer solutions to the tensions of proximity (*voisinage*), to be an establishment that is proud of its neighborhood and to contribute to the international *rayonnement* of Paris. (“Le Futur Institut des Cultures d’Islam” par.4)

The “openness” that is offered here as a palliative to the “tensions of proximity” posits the Golden Age of Islam, referring to the “Islamic Renaissance” of scientific and philosophical discovery from the 8th to 13th centuries, as a “modern” phenomenon of secular intellectual growth capable of offering social solutions to present-day heteronomy in Parisian life.

²⁸ Within this paradigm, associations devoted to the needs and lives of immigrant women provide especially contradictory discursive examples. Patterns of immigration to France reveal that immigrant women are typically “represented as both the bearers of ‘tradition’ and agents of ‘modernity’, responsible both for perpetuating the boundaries of ethnic groups within France and for ensuring that these boundaries are made permeable to French culture” (Freedman 15). This liminal position often leaves women’s associations intervening in both familial, communal *and* governmental settings, balancing what Catherine Quiminal refers to as “new forms of daily citizenship” (46). Over the course of the previous decade, the overarching end to which these forms have been indexed is that of integration, a dynamic that is especially visible within the context of feminist organizations. Ni Putes Ni Soumises (Neither Whores nor Submissives (NPNS)) is one of the most visible examples of what is increasingly being referred to as Republican feminism, a call for the equality of the sexes that derives its terminology from a combination of Republican *laïcité* and post-Mitterand *droit à la différence*: “*laïcité*, equality and mixity are the key principles of our struggle and the pillars of our movement for they are the guarantee of the equality of the sexes” (“La campagne *Laïcité, Egalité, Mixité*” par. 2). NPNS was born in 2002 in response to the highly publicized murder of Sohane Benziane, a young woman of immigrant origin burned alive by gang members in Vitry-sur-Seine and the publication of Samira Bellil’s book on gang rape and violence in the *banlieues*, *Dans l’enfer des Tournantes*. In 2003, NPNS members staged the *Marche des femmes des quartiers pour l’égalité et contre le ghetto* with the aid of SOS Racisme, and were received at the end of their journey by then Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin and Nicolas Sarkozy. The movement’s founder and most visible face, Fadela Amara, is currently a cabinet minister in François Fillon’s conservative government.

Within the emerging discursive landscape that pits the secular Muslim against religious communitarianism, Amara and NPNS occupy a controversial position: they are uniquely situated to speak of the French state’s ongoing withdrawal from what are widely perceived as communitarian ghettos, yet often risk homogenizing the pluralism of French Islam beneath the banner of “basement Islam”: “the shadowy Islam of religious obscurantism” (Amara and Zappi 93). Amara often posits the headscarf as “a means of oppression, of alienation, of discrimination, an instrument of power over women used by men” (Amara and Zappi 100), identifying secularism as the only groundwork for gender equality. As a result, Amara and NPNS are frequently cited by individuals and institutions wishing to legitimate a historical antagonism between feminism and Islam, as well as obscure the problematic role of Republican universality within the history of the struggle for gender equality in France.

recognition of a *difference* that remains beyond the boundaries of the state's reach: a category of persons who have increasingly been referred to as "un-integratable", a pseudonym for Muslims whose day-to-day bodily practices remain foreign.

Coupled with the French state's far longer project of managing "the control of immigrant bodily practice" (Silverstein 123), these transformations in associationalism have created new models for achieving French personhood: moral autonomy no longer serves as the only ground for individuals' inclusion in the category of the abstract individual, *embodied life* is equally relevant. In other words, secular individuality and bodily integration have become interchangeable, connected elements for living the "good life" in France. In turn, the immigrant's "body" is increasingly available to both state and civic actors as fundamentally dislodged from individuals' interiorities, available to be fashioned at will and with abandon. And theatre provides an excellent context for the exercise of such skills.

Of course, it would be a mistake to deny that the embodied and participatory nature of theatrical practice is also merely an efficient means for AGO to create potentially appealing, dynamic language classes. Theater brings with it the added advantage of exercising a corporal flexibility that may or may not seed a new bodily future for the participants. However, as both AGO and the following example of Cimade illustrate, the emergence of this public and corporal practice as a form of social work has been indelibly ideological. Although considered the conduit for an active pedagogical experience, it is first and foremost a charged site for the exercise of *moral integration*: autonomy, ease with making public pronouncements, living in the metropolis and declaring one's grievances openly to others. While the example of AGO examines these dynamics in the context of activities for relatively settled (albeit economically precarious) immigrants, Cimade illustrates the urgency and imperatives of bodily work in the context of humanitarian aid for newly arrived, undocumented immigrants and refugees.

Cimade: Integration and the Idea of "Living Together"

Whereas AGO's work is site-specific and bounded by the immediate needs of the ever-shifting Goutte d'Or, Cimade is a non-governmental organization whose offices span the nation. Cimade (*Comité Inter-Mouvements Auprès des Evacués*) was founded in 1939 in Bièvres, largely in response to the refugee crisis that followed the evacuation of the German occupied Alsace and Lorraine territories. In contemporary France, Cimade's public profile is indelibly linked to international immigration, a fact underlined by their motto: "Because there are no strangers on this earth!" (*Parce qu'il n'y a pas d'étranger sur cette terre!*) and their provision of juridical aid to refugees and asylum seekers. Until recently, this fact was especially highlighted in the public imagination by their presence in retention centers and prisons across France as the only non-governmental organization allowed access to the premises alongside state employees. In practice however, this vast network of nation-wide salaried workers and volunteers provide a much-wider range of services. As part of their mission to "accompany (*accompagner*)" (*Migrant' Scène*) asylum seekers and immigrants in a manner both juridical and social, Cimade sponsors an Education and Training wing (*Service Formation*) whose resources range from language classes to vocational training and recently, to theatrical practice.

Cimade's turn to the theater is due in large part to changes in legal structures regarding immigration. For example, recent policy changes have directly affected the duration of an asylum application's evaluation, leaving individuals without work, in temporary or non-existent

housing situations and in vague administrative categories for lengthy periods.²⁹ Thus, these legal changes are directly responsible for the transformation of “accompaniment” from a *durational* to an *ongoing* service that the aid organization provides to asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented immigrants. The *Service Formation*’s turn to theatre workshops is intimately connected to the elongated waiting period that increasingly marks asylum evaluations. As members of *Service Formation* told me: “They wait, they wait, and a large majority of asylum seekers wait one year, a year and a half, two years, three years. So, during this time, what are these people supposed to do with their lives?” The answer to this question came in the form of a series of activities that would allow participants to make use of this interlude in their lives and take constructive steps towards integration.

The fact that Cimade workers imagined theatrical practice to constitute just such a step allows a broader glimpse into how theatrical aid workers positioned the *moral work* that acting on a stage entailed. As was the case with AGO, this work continued to center around the relationship between individuals and collectives and the role of bodily practices in establishing this link. During our conversation, *Service Formation* workers assigned the term “integration” a specific meaning, separating it from the economic insertion into labor markets that the term often implies. Instead, integration was a moral project that involved a day-to-day self-fashioning on both cognitive and corporal registers. Theatrical practice laid the foundation for such a fashioning. First, it imparted a set of corporal competencies and their attendant emotional experiences. Second, it involved individuals in a project that entailed their responsabilization vis-à-vis a larger collective. Note how the notion of collective responsibility seems to differ from the individualist norm that I have thus far assigned theatrical aid work. Importantly however, an in-depth examination of how this responsabilization and collectivism played out in day-to-day interactions shows a far more vexed understanding of collectivity *and* bodily life. In the end, the guiding principle is one where individuality is nevertheless instantiated as the basis for a life

²⁹ Currently, an individual seeking asylum in France must contact the prefecture of the administrative region within which he or she is installed. The prefecture then presents the asylum seeker with a temporary authorization of residency, which legitimates their presence on French soil for the duration of their application’s assessment by OFPRA (*Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatriés*). During this time, the asylum seeker is not legally allowed to work. They are eligible either for temporary financial allocations designed to support them during the waiting period or they can request to be housed in various *Centre d’Accueil (CADA)*, where few spots are available (Cimade, *Votre Voisin* 191). OFPRA’s evaluation of the application can take anywhere from 6 months to 3 years, during which time the applicant must continually return to their prefecture to renew their temporary authorizations for residency. Finally, if their application is rejected by OFPRA, one final appeal may be made to the *Commission des Recours des Réfugiés*, where decisions are rarely overturned. Approximately 85% of the applications examined by OFPRA and the *Commission* are rejected, and within the period of one month, applicants receive an *invitation à quitter le territoire* or are directly arrested by the police to be driven to the closest borders or airports (192). OFPRA was originally attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While the provision of *titres de séjour* (residency permits) were traditionally regulated by the Ministry of the Interior, asylum seekers were jointly handled by both Ministries, a decision Cimade interprets as a need to establish a “consulate for the stateless” (Cimade, *Main Basse* 32) separate from the office dealing with larger migratory flows. A series of legal changes instigated by successive Ministers of the Interior Dominique Villepin and Nicolas Sarkozy, which began in 2003 and continued on through 2006, made modifications to this arrangement, maintaining OFPRA’s ties to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but ending its autonomy from the management of other *titres de séjour* and joining the evaluation of demands from those seeking refuge to all categories of applications. Simultaneously, legal changes such as the Loi Sarkozy of November 26, 2003 as well as European-Union wide modifications to the Geneva Convention such as the Dublin II Regulations of 2003 have made the conditions and criteria surrounding the request for refugee status increasingly harsh, leaving asylum seekers facing administrative procedures that they can neither master, nor avoid.

integrated to French norms. In what follows, I will present the notion of integration in Cimade's work and what it reveals about individuality and collectivity, how theater emerged as an integration strategy and how it positioned individuality in relation to integration.

During my conversation with coordinator Liliana, the aid worker referenced the oft-used metaphor of integration as a route, or way or road. Noting the fact that French law guaranteed every child of school age the right to be educated, Liliana would state that younger asylum seekers would be sent to school and set "on their integration route" ("*sur leur chemin d'intégration*") while older generations were left to stagnate. In Cimade's institutional vocabulary, the technical facet of integration was referred to by the term *insertion*. For Liliana, this term was concerned with "all of the plans and processes that allow an individual to train themselves, find a job and insert themselves into the system, mostly in an economic sense." Conversely, *integration* was a matter of personal effort, intersubjective learning, and day-to-day self-fashioning. "Integration," Liliana noted, "for me this is a personal path (*une chemin personnelle*), it is a process undertaken by a person on a path, on his/her own path... a person relative to others, it is always an exchange, an ebb and tide between people." Later, she added, "it is a process that permits one to evolve in relation to others."

In other words, integration was both personal, indicated by the image of the solitary "path" that one would take, but also relational, as in the exchange implied by the "ebb and tide" of human contact.³⁰ Unlike AGO, whose notions of "capacity" and "autonomization" were far more atomized, Cimade's workshops suggested that individual life "paths" were permeable: it was the degree of control one could exert over the human "exchanges" on the path that served as the barometer of having assimilated a set of cultural habits. Being an integrated individual did not translate into shedding layers of social others, it involved tempering one's relationship to them according to specific norms, norms that theater was imagined to cultivate.

Cimade's experiments with theater began in 2003, when funding from an Exchanges Partnership³¹ between French, Hungarian and British aid organizations paved the way for four

³⁰ A brief note is necessary here. Although these definitions were certainly specific to Liliana, they nevertheless encapsulate aspects of how haphazardly the term integration can be elaborated in France today. Consider an example Liliana gave of a successful integration:

There was a person who waited three years; I met her because she was a member of our first theatre workshop in 2004. Anahid, she was from Azerbaijan and she was given refugee status in 2008. She is a hair stylist. During her four years in France, she was a volunteer for an atheist organization; I don't remember which one exactly, which works with very poor, homeless individuals in Paris. She volunteered to style people's hair for this association. Then, she was sent to a *foyer* in the north of France, and she was nervous, she told me, "I've always worked in capitals, now I'm going to be in the middle of nature, I'm going to die." She did everything she could do; she joined a chorus, entered into the social fabric of this tiny town in the north of France. She volunteered and invested herself in two, three other places... These contributed as much to her integration in France as the official system.

Liliana's choice of a successful integration story is revelatory of a number of qualities marking my conversations on the topic. Unlike the ideal *chemin* to be undertaken by the integration-seeker, Anahid's story reveals a woman who "enters the social fabric" of a remote French town partly out of a matter of desperation, encapsulated in the words "I'm going to die". The narrative presents Anahid "investing" herself in different and differently meaningful contexts. However her presence in each context is voluntary, an act of survival with no guarantee of a livelihood, acceptance or futurity within that context. While Liliana presents these efforts as evidence of the refugee's persistence and how such persistence can be rewarded, the story is equally characteristic of a deeper and larger arbitrariness regarding the pragmatic assessment of integration in France today.

³¹ Exchanges was itself funded by The Equal Programme of the European Social Fund (ESF), a community initiative program which funds several "themes". Funding for Theme 1: Asylum led to the FAAR (*Formation, Accueil des*

consecutive years of theater workshops. Although *Service Formation* had occasionally worked with actors and directors for impromptu workshops in the past, the partnership that led to the 2003-2007 workshops was forged with a single actor, Monique. The workshops themselves were designed to last six months per group. The initial two months would be spent sitting at a table, where for three hours per week language lessons would be accompanied by Monique's articulation exercises. During the four months that followed, Monique would hold theatre workshops for approximately four to five consecutive full days per month. Monique's work phases, which are reproduced in full below³², begin with bodily preparation and vocalization exercises before moving to targeted improvisation projects that ask participants to work with both introduced circumstances and objects and from personal memories and experiences. These improvisations eventually form the material of a performance piece and once solidified, serve as the basis for a renewed series of bodily and vocal exercises (pronunciation, memorization, etc). Finally, the workshops focus on the onstage as well as backstage choreography of participants,

Demandeurs d'Asile et Refugies) Development Partnership, which funded the theatre workshops from 2005-2007. From 2003 to 2005, the project was funded by the similarly structured Euraccueil (*Accueil et Formation des Demandeurs d'Asile*). Over the course of the four years, the number of participants would range from 25 to 50, with certain years where participants' attendance would become less frequent with time and others where the numbers would remain steady throughout. Participants' national origins ranged from North to Sub-Saharan African countries to the Middle East, the Balkans and Russia and the Caucasus, with every year's influx reflective of the period's migratory flows. Cimade reports show that particularly during the 2006 and 2007 workshops, one of the largest group of participants would be Chechen men and woman, partly as a result of the ongoing conflict in Chechnya, and partly the fruits of a collaboration between Cimade and the Franco-Chechen Cultural Center, who, along with various Centres d'Accueil, supplied Cimade with potential participants (Cimade, *Bilan 2007* 2-4).

³² The following table, available in the Cimade booklet *Empowering Asylum Seekers to Integrate in Europe: a Transnational Report based on Experiences in Hungary, France and Europe* summarizes the theatre workshops' sets of activities.

<u>Work Phases</u>	<u>Types of Activities</u>
Warming Up	Body Voice Movement
Improvisations	(From guided to free improvisation) With an Object In a Particular Situation From a Memory
The Creation of a Show	(Writing Up Improvisation Work) From oral improvisations, put in writing and/or From texts directly written/life stories, in French or in another language then translated into French (Working on the Texts) Individual and collective readings (articulation, pronunciation, intonation, voice projection) Memorizing the texts (individual, pair or group work) (Putting the Show Together) Rehearsals Complementary improvisations if needed Fixing moving and timing on stage Organizing backstage work (all done by the actors) (35)

from the arrangement of stage action to the coordination of behind the scenes labor. In its totality, these six months were imagined to present participants with a theatrical experience that provided the tools necessary for regulating their “exchanges” on the “path” of integration. We might summarize these tools beneath two broad categories. First, expanding participants’ bodily vocabularies to accommodate French corporal norms and second, offering theatrical participation as an experience in living as a member of a collective.

What was the role of corporal training in the context of language learning? Service Formation’s volume, Théâtre et Apprentissage du Français: Experiences de Formations avec des Adultes Primo-Arrivants en France, relates that the “gestural competence” (Laurens 15) they hoped to impart to the participants was based on an assumption that “didactic work on the gests and on the body is premised on the fact that the learner must not only assimilate to the verbal and vocal signs of a language but be capable of understanding the gestures of a society, be capable of producing them, understanding what is implicated by them, to seize the adequate ones in any given situation” (14). In other words, the Cimade workshops considered language acquisition one dimension of a larger project of acculturation, complete only when the broader signs of such familiarity were made visible. Elsewhere, Apprentissage quoted J.P. Ryngaert’s definition of theatrical play: “that which is researched is neither the perfecting of gests nor of imitation, but a comportment that is lucidly elaborated from inside a situation of communication” (12). Ultimately, the purposeful regulation of social exchange was at stake.

During my conversation with Monique, the actor concurred, while stating that the stakes of “gestural competence” were not merely those of intentional communication. In addition to guaranteeing the “lucidity” of a moment of exchange, repeated engagement with the physicality of gestures held for Monique the potential to engender new emotions and sensibilities. Monique elaborated upon this dynamic through detailing the relationship between the rehearsal of a physical gesture of rejection and the asylum seekers concomitant ability to inhabit a defensive sensibility in day-to-day life:

[Monique scrunches her shoulders for me and shakes her head from side to side, mimicking the gesture she showed her students] I don’t want to! I’m tired! I hate this, I’m sick of it! This will come back to them, in the moment, and they will be able to say to someone, “You don’t have the right to speak to me this way, I won’t take it!” And I provoked all of this.

The gesture of defiance and self-confidence which Monique asked her students to study and repeat was not only meant to come to their aid in times of disenfranchisement, but to serve as the corporal vocabulary for what Liliana had referred to as the “exchanges” on the “path”. While this brief lesson in exchange was certainly an instance of *bodily learning*, it held for organizers the far more weighty potential of an *ideological* acculturation as well: a readiness to act with cognition of and reference to one’s “rights” and the rights of others.

Central to how the workshop understood acculturation and subject formation, was a concern that such bodily work not negate existing physical repertoires. Monique’s exercises were not meant to hammer bodily dispositions into the self. Rather, the goal was to plant the seeds of a new bodily life that would then flourish as the individual translated their desires *via* these new norms: formulating a defiant response precisely because they would come to conceive of themselves as rights-bearing individuals. We might understand this contrast with reference to the

distinction that anthropologist Saba Mahmood makes between the terms “cultivation” and “inculcation” (151-152). Cimade’s bodily learning was meant to provide a cultivating process, rather than a forceful impression or indoctrination: “they will acquire a better knowledge of their desires, their capacities, their objectives, of the reality of the path that must be traveled to prepare serenely and to succeed with their professional insertion and individual integration” (Apprentissage 46).

Visible in this reference to participants’ own needs however, is a paradox that deserves attention. Approached from a liberal framework, the notion that a bodily repertoire imposed from outside the boundaries of the subject wouldn’t by definition contrast or even negate one’s own “desires”, “capacities” or “objectives” warrants pause. This framework would identify intentional subjectivity as the eradication of all outside constraint. In fact, during my conversations with Monique and Liliana, I found that this contradiction lay at the root of many of the conflicts the workshop would witness. While Monique and Liliana were themselves steeped within the vocabulary of intentional action (as earlier anecdotes on exchange revealed), their understanding of bodily learning in fact drew from a far more nuanced and variable understanding of human anthropology: “intent” could be constructed with reference to forces originating outside the subject. In turn, participants responded to these contradictory propositions in ways that questioned the very premises of the workshop, a subject I will return to later in the chapter.

For Monique and Liliana however, these critical paradoxes were subsumed beneath a far more immediate awareness: the only conditions under which participants’ own “objectives” could mature in the host country was if they were expressed in line with “the reality of the path”. And ultimately, for Cimade as well as for AGO, there remained a far larger theoretical stronghold: Repeated engagements with the host country’s gestures would also *shift* the contours of the individual’s “desires”, “capacities” and “objectives” themselves, suggesting that the line separating the interior from the exterior of the self would eventually fall away through repetition. Bodily practice therefore, could serve as the gateway to both enacted, outwardly visible, and incorporated, inwardly durable integration.

If assimilation to French corporal norms was one element of making one’s way down the “path of integration”, learning to conceive of oneself as an individual within a community was the other. Monique related to me that “immersion in pure theatrical creation” necessitated a “collective”. This rule allowed her to articulate to the participants their presence as a “need” that others had for them: “when someone said, ‘I can’t do this, I can’t’, we would say, ‘But we need you (*on a besoin de toi*), the collective needs you.” In effect, individuality and collectivity were seamless modes of existence. In Monique’s words, “there are no individuals without a collective and there is no collective without individuality, I’m not talking about a mass, no, each individual creates something individual in a collective form. I apply this same vision to my own company.” Note how in instances such as these, Monique’s understanding of collectivity resonated with the paradoxes of the history of French associationalism. Individuals were both encouraged to “create” as individuals, but such creations could only be the reflections of a final, “collective” form.

In our conversation, Liliana linked these concepts to the “responsibilization” that the workshops hoped to engender, offering individuals legally allowed to stagnate to “have work to do”. In turn, the creation of a public performance piece emerged as the site *par excellence* through which to exercise the mechanics of such a community of need and responsibility.

Cimade workshop actors would be responsible for stage acting, clearing the stage between scenes, setting up the costumes of others backstage and generally staying responsible for the smooth run of their collective product (Laurens 75). On levels slightly more conceptual, participants were asked to understand and articulate their relationships to other participants as ones of need, responsibility and obligation, qualities that Cimade deemed necessary to realizing “individual integration”.

As was the case with AGO, Cimade’s decision to bookend their workshop with the creation of a show, changed and to a certain extent determined the content of the process leading up to rehearsals. Most significantly, Monique’s improvisation exercises began to be geared towards asylum seekers’ own narratives. As noted in *Apprentissage*, “She [Monique] wished that, by way of theatre, each person would find the strength to reveal (*dévoiler*) one or more personal experiences” (Laurens 68). The desire to combine the workshops with a public presentation thus signaled a shift from bodily work to emotional resonance. In *Apprentissage*, an observer to Monique’s work remarks that the actor:

wanted the participants to speak about their difficulties with integration on French territory. Thus, the scenes that they acted out were intimately related to their daily lives. And, to guard the authenticity of these scenes, participants could even play in their mother tongues. Translations were made only after sections were selected for presentation.” (70-71)

In my conversation with Monique, she confirmed that the selections were made by her, and described the need for utilizing the mother tongue as a way for her to access histories difficult to articulate in any language, let alone a new one. “I understood nothing,” the actor told me, “but I have the advantage of my command of observing, listening, memorizing and recording.” Thus, Monique watched performances unintelligible to her, recording the physical gestures she witnessed. Afterwards, she was able to talk to her actors about how this corporal script could be recreated in the French versions of stories.³³ While the emphasis of these performance-oriented improvisations paid equal attention to the body, they reversed the workshop’s larger

³³ The improvisational context of *dévoilement* is important to note. One such improvisation exercise is that of the vest: a chair sits in the middle of the stage space with a vest on it. An individual enters this space in one emotional state, notices the vest, goes to the chair and puts it on, whereupon he or she expresses a new emotion. Then, the individual checks their watch, signaling to the audience that they have an important meeting coming up, and leaves. Exercises such as these, in Liliana’s narrative of improvisational training, served Monique as the gateway for tapping into her participants’ traumatized pasts. Emotional mimicry, in other words, could trigger personal investment. My conversation with Monique regarding the relationship between language acquisition and bodily training however, articulated the link between the two registers (cognitive and corporal) from the opposite direction:

In the kind of theatrical work that I teach, the body enforces emotions, and to do so, it moves this way and that, and that is not even to say that the body moves as a mass. The lips, eyes looking left, right, there is a microscopic work there, speaking of a microscope, as though you are a scientist, a researcher.

For Monique, a trained actor could master the crevices and corners of their body with an acuity that would allow them to bolder the emotional worlds they were attempting to portray. This approach is very much in line with the defensive “I don’t want to!” that Monique had demonstrated for me, its repeated rehearsal a guarantee of its spontaneous expression and embodiment in everyday life. The improvisation with the vest however, imagined a different relation between bodily life and emotional expression. There, the body’s contact with a potentially evocative object dictated the individual’s emotional tone in a way that bypassed their bodily being.

understanding of bodily life and emotional expression. Whereas imparting “gestural competence” involved training the body first, creating a show involved allowing the emotionality of traumatic memories to dictate the individual’s comportment.

This inquiry into Cimade’s theatrical aid work thus leaves us with understandings of individuality and bodily being that both resonate with and depart from AGO’s conclusions. For AGO, individuality was an experience deeply imbricated in being a member of a collective, as declarations of individual grievance were noted for the way in which they rendered the person a metonym for a larger public. Cimade similarly defined individuality as a necessary part of a whole, but denied AGO’s strict emphasis on autonomization by considering integration a relational process, an “exchange” with others. Despite this departure however, a closer look at Cimade’s corporal work indicated an ongoing investment in the notion of individuality, whether via the ideological entailments of gestural repetition (as in the example of rights-related defiance) or in their eventual turn to the presentation of individual stories of suffering as the appropriate public staging of participants’ achievements and integration. Public performance in particular laid bare this paradox. On the one hand, Cimade’s top priority was *bodily integration* and transformation. On the other, the need to generate an evocative performance prompted a return to “foreign” psychic experiences and hence bodily repertoires. As an aid technique, Cimade’s emphasis on cultivating a “path to integration”, what anthropologist Talal Asad might refer to as a set of “learned capacities” (*Genealogies* 76), revealed a similar paradox: participants did not “learn to be capable” of artistry but “learned to be capable” of their own veracity.

What these brief inquiries into both AGO and Cimade’s internal contradictions reveal are parallel desires on the part of both organizations: an irresolvable yearning to have these “individuals” both transform radically into “integrated” citizens and yet remain “other” for the duration of that transformation, most crucially at moments when the transformation is to be shared with an appreciative, compassionate public. While I have aimed to illustrate the conflicting expectations that are attached to theatrical practice in aid contexts, an investigation of the broader origins of these tensions is perhaps beyond the scope of this chapter. However, it is possible to offer a rationale as to how the public-ness of a performance product can become attached to process-driven aid projects, with such little consideration of its consequences (e.g. the many psychic after-effects it may have on the participants themselves). The recognition offered by the theater-going public far exceeds an everyday social humanitarianism. During my conversations with both AGO, Cimade as well as a number of other aid organizations, it became clear that these practices directly implicated the participants’ official statuses in France. Cimade workers found that the more they were able to engage individuals in “empowering” activities (essentially offering services to blanket state-induced incapacitation) the higher these individual’s chances at being recognized as worthy applicants by the very same state. “This is the arbitrariness of the system,” Liliana confirmed to me, “when these people are taken care of, in the context of a project like this [referencing theatre]... asylum seekers have a much higher chance of obtaining refugee status. This is not normal.” Similarly, an AGO worker told me about writing residency recommendation letters on behalf of an undocumented young woman who had played a lead role on stage. Her devotion to her acting stood as a reflection of her investment in her neighborhood and larger life in France.

Anthropologist Aihwa Ong has characterized such state-civil society partnerships as ones where the work of caring for the displaced is subcontracted to non-governmental entities. Ong might refer to these as NGOs that “enhance the capacity of the state” (201). While such a task is

certainly applicable to the practices portrayed in these pages, what I have also aimed to establish are the often unaccounted after-effects of such partnerships. The interventions of civic bodies such as Cimade and AGO also *change* the semantic domain designated by the state: the definition of administrative terms such as “integration”, which bring with them specific procedural lives, multiply beneath the caring gaze of humanitarian and immigrant associations and generate their own embodied and ideological norms.

Contrasting Visions of Theater and Liberty

Having traced in detail the varied notions of individuality and embodied subjectivity with which AGO and Cimade work, it is now possible to ask how these notions inform the larger understanding of liberty and human personhood that these organizations imagine. The section that follows re-elaborates the meaning that terms such as “freedom” and “liberty” are assumed to carry within theatrical aid contexts. It then draws on my conversation with Liliana to provide an example of workshop interaction that directly illustrates theater’s capacity to generate contrast and conflict, both on the level of bodily involvement, and that of ideological commitment. My objective throughout, is to illustrate the fragility of the connection between theatrical practice and autonomous individuality, as well as the specificity of the human person such a connection takes for granted.

At the start of this chapter, I had noted that the establishment of autonomous individuality was central to the liberal political theory at the basis of French republicanism. This autonomy is taken to originate within the individual self and is then exercised in defense of constraining social forces and to various degrees depending on the specific organization of sociality within which that individual functions. Theatrical aid workers often subscribed to such a model of personhood, visible in Monique’s exercise of defiance, and Jeanne’s expectation that the “liberty” of the stage could quell all other social attachments. Despite this investment however, both groups also asserted that theatrical practices could *cultivate* autonomy. Of course, the chapter’s opening anecdote reveals that they often cloaked the process of cultivation *itself* as “liberating” a submerged self from the grasp of cultural influences that had entered the private realms of the individual. However, by employing the very suggestion that autonomous subjectivity was a matter of implementation, they negated its *a priori* existence.

This suggestion that “liberation” could be *practiced* via methods that the individual receives from others functions along a pragmatic model of ritual activity that no longer distinguishes between the interior and the exterior of the subject as realms of aspiration and constraint. In the context of a grassroots women’s piety movement in Cairo, anthropologist Saba Mahmood identifies this re-writing of interiority/exteriority as a situation where “socially prescribed forms of behavior constitute the conditions for the emergence of the self as such” (149). Monique and Liliana’s statements that their participants would “better know” their “own capacities, own desires, own objectives” via the tools of embodied work suggests a similar investment in *freedom* as that which can only be built in reference to the prescriptions of one’s environment, whether worldly or other-worldly.

Nevertheless, there remained a paradox. For the purposes of integration, AGO and Cimade’s rehearsal processes *merged* the self with the dictates of the outside, in this case, those of aid workers. And yet, in order to participate in the performance product, members had to imagine themselves as composed of the “fixed inner self” (Scott 127) central to liberal accounts

of individuality: a self for whom relationality, culture, religion and ultimately, history all follow this prior fixity. This self could step on a stage despite potential codes of conduct that told her not to, share a series of woes in order to shed them and narrate her life story in order to provide evidence of an acculturated persona beneath. In all of these instances, individuals found themselves participating in moral schemes where the spectatorial presence of the social was *the only stage on which liberty and autonomy could be exercised*.

Such a moral scheme begs a series of questions. Are we yearning for autonomy and freedom from constraint impulses that underlie all human life? Or do they, much like “capacities, desires and objectives” that emerge from certain cultural categories, compose a relatively specific vision of the human person? Can theatrical practice serve as a privileged sign of and venue for universal, autonomous personhood? Or is it a situated, *cultural* practice requiring its own conventions of the human? A final example, drawn from the Cimade workshops, displays the aftereffects of leaving such questions unanswered. Here, a workshop participants’ “autonomous” refusal to engage in certain stage activities are first identified as the effects of his “culture” (unnamed but signified as non-Western, patriarchal and Islamic) and second as a politico-religious act, rather than the vestige of a bodily repertoire.

In 2006, during the third annual installment of Cimade’s workshops, Monique began to notice that there were tensions within the Chechen community, tensions that soon revealed gendered, familial and potentially generational, as well as intercultural dimensions. In March, during an exercise that involved dancing, a number of the Chechen men had begun to fidget, sending what Liliana remembered as “dagger-like” looks in the direction of the Chechen women. Once the turmoil was calmed, Liliana was able to sit down with the Chechen men, one of whom told her (in her own recollection): “In Chechnya, one does not touch oneself like that (*on se touche pas comme ça*), one doesn’t do things like that, men and women together, it’s too provocative... and plus, women don’t have the right to do this.” To this, Liliana replied that theatre was “an artistic space, one expresses whatever one wants; it’s a space of liberty.” In turn, the men had added, “Liliana, in France, a little liberty, a little liberty, a little liberty, in the end there’s too much liberty; it scares us (*ça fait peur*).”

During our conversation, Liliana related to me that this exchange had left her “terrorized.” Yet, in an effort to “dialogue”, she would tell the men: “We are going to continue, men and women have the same rights and the same right to respect, this is fundamental to this project, and for you in your new life here in France and in Europe. If this is not possible for you, everyone can decide for themselves, you can stop or you can continue.” Following the March outburst, there remained only one young Chechen man who wished to continue.

In June, ten days prior to the group’s final performance, another incident erupted. During another dance rehearsal, an exchange between the remaining young man and his cousin, a young woman, sent her fleeing from the room. It was later revealed that the young man had forbid her to continue to dance, especially with men. According to Liliana’s recollections, this iteration of the dance exercise had in fact involved same-sex dance partners, thus, it was unclear exactly which dimension of the activity the young man considered inappropriate. What remained clear however was that it was the kind of bodily activity entailed by dancing on stage that had generated discomfort on both occasions. Following the incident, Liliana had sought ways to speak to the young man and had finally been able to meet with him in the privacy of her office. She remembered him saying:

You know, Liliana, in Chechnya, men are like this [physically, Liliana mimicked the young man's earlier gesture, one hand up in the air] and women, like this [the other hand, also in mid-air, below the first]... I know what you will say, you will say that in France it is the opposite but my grandfather was a certain way, and my father was a certain way and I am as well... [Liliana picks up] I said that I understood, since he would stay in France, I wished for him, so that he lives well here, that he thinks about this (*reflechir a ça*). Here, men and women are at the same level. [Liliana repeated for me the gesture she had used with the young man, she placed both hands in the space in front of her, at the same level.]

After leaving Liliana's office, the young man did not return to Cimade, and the young Chechen woman's spot in the show remained intact.

In her retelling of the incident to me, Liliana's conceptual vocabulary was deeply steeped in the world that she and Monique aimed to create, a world where collectivity encompassed individuality, interpersonal obligations and needs. "We were at the heart of a confrontation between different ways of living together" she noted, later adding, "The heart of this work is to live interculturally, every individual finds their place with all of the cultural aspects of their composition." This, Liliana insisted, was not "multiculturalism", a language of "tolerance" which placed individuals at a distance from one another. Rather, every individual was a "kaleidoscope" within themselves, and a member of the collective despite the plurality such an image entailed.

In analyzing these incidents, it is possible to note that the young man had rapidly revealed the limits of "living together." Despite a commitment to including "all of the cultural aspects of [individuals'] composition", interculturalism required that no one way of living restrict or inhibit the growth of another, especially when the other set showed far greater promise of embodying aptly the corporal gestures of the host country. However, such an analysis would obscure a far more interesting element of Liliana's recollections: the two principles that had been employed to make sense of this event. The first of these was that embodied acts were necessarily ideological and the second, that ease with public behavior was cross-cultural.³⁴

Following both instances of conflict, Liliana had had similar conversations with the men. The Chechen men were habituated to certain sets of public bodily practices, within which these new acts constituted a rupture. During our conversation, Liliana herself identified the "act" as that which had marked a transition from "life from before." However, Liliana's remedy for such a rupture was intellectual, not pragmatic. She referenced two sets of abstract principles. The first of these was the French tradition of equality between men and women ("fifty years of feminist history" as she later told me) and the second, the positioning of the stage as a space marked by "liberty".³⁵ While both principles were couched in widely acknowledged discursive traditions from the host country, their use ran counter to the logic of the workshops.

³⁴ In attempting to understand the dynamics that followed, I by no means wish to undermine the severity of the event, nor its balance of power. The uncomfortable fact remains: one individual, a man, had in the presence of others, embarrassed, scared and threatened another, a woman, causing her such discomfort that she could no longer physically remain in the space in which the interaction had taken place. I merely pursue here how this rupture is articulated.

³⁵ It is important to note that while there exists a rich and complicated past to which Liliana refers with her statement regarding French "feminist history", this statement seems to position this history as an evolutionary rather than

To reiterate, this logic was that 1. the body could be used as an instrument to communicate an emotional state and to make demands and 2. the stage was a space where one did not shed one's identity at will, but re-donned it, beneath the guidance and decision making of a leader, Monique. In her approximation of the young man's anger, Liliana had repositioned these key elements. Counter to the notion of embodiment their workshop dispensed, Liliana had assumed that bodily acts were necessarily the outer reflections of private beliefs (in this case, belief in men's superiority) rather than the means of acquiring new ones and negotiating the remains of another bodily repertoire. Thus, her solution had been to offer the man an ideological imperative. Additionally, while larger traditions of stage "liberty" might have left participants with the impression that "art" did not implicate "selves", the workshop had purposefully placed the immigrants' *selves* on stage. As such, their actions on that stage implicated the entirety of their history.

Perhaps the best possible evidence as to how complicated emotional and gestural transformation could be was laid bare in Liliana's own reaction to the scene. In the young Chechen man, Liliana saw a theatricality counter to the ones they hoped to advance and felt what anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli might call "repugnance" (Quoted in Mahmood 37), a term used to describe subaltern practices deemed beyond the boundaries of even the most "tolerant" of multicultural regimes.³⁶ Liliana's repugnance operated on multiple levels. In witnessing the young man's communicative skills operating at peak capacity, Liliana glimpsed the workshops' desired attachment between cultural norms and physical expressions. However these expressions not only emerged from a culture other than that of the host country, they constrained another actor's ideological accession to theatrical "liberty". The young man had denied the material life of his stage partner the "freedom" of the theater by openly acknowledging the fact that her physical actions would implicate her in a new moral order, *not* stand in a symbolic relation to a new, imagined life.

Despite her ideological commitment to "intercultural" patience, Liliana had been left to negotiate the complexity of her own psycho-somatic reaction. On the one hand, she was "terrorized" by what she had witnessed, yet on the other, she was acutely aware that an opportunity for dialogue was slipping away, that the young man had also been injured. My analysis of Liliana's anecdote is by no means meant to fault the aid worker's approach. Far from it, my goal has been to suggest that Liliana's approach could not have been otherwise in a context where participation in performance was primarily made to signify freedom.

The narrative of the Chechen men illustrates a series of contradictions. Foremost, it provides us with a rare glimpse into how theatrical aid work was both lived and *narrated* when forced to acknowledge gender, racial, cultural and religious difference. During my conversations with theatrical practitioners working in a variety of contexts, "participants" remained a neutral category, an ethnographic fact I have tried to retain in this chapter. AGO's women were simply

cyclical one, assuming progress rather than inconsistency. In fact, the Republican theory of the abstract individual (the very basis of the discourses of equality that emerged from the French Revolution) is based on a notion of "human commonality" (Scott 6) that paradoxically *excluded* gender difference from the very beginning, leaving women without the right vote until the relatively late date of 1944.

³⁶ In her introduction to an earlier essay, « The State of Shame: Australian Multiculturalism and the Crisis of Indigenous Citizenship », Povinelli connects the evocation of « intimate communal aversion» (578) to "savage practices" (in this case, that of female genital mutilation) as the grounds from which "national collective will" can be construed.

les femmes while Cimade's participants were ungendered members of the collective, *les gens* or perhaps on rare occasions, refugees, *les réfugiés*. Liliana's narrative reveals the difficulties of maintaining such a vision of the abstract individual on even the narrative level, her recollection of these events, as well as Monique's, were littered with reference to these men's "Chechen" backgrounds, a reference that seemed to carry almost tautological value. In other words the abstraction, uniformity and liberty entailed by being a mere "participant" were remnants of the very Republican bias Liliana hoped to rectify as an "interculturalist". In Joan Scott's words, "abstraction allows individuals to be conceived as the same (as universal), but sameness is measured in terms of concrete ways of being (as Frenchness)" (13). "Interculturalism", similarly, could serve as a check on the biases of universalism only in so far as its subjects adhered to universalist values. The Chechen man who rejected the notion that human life was free and self-willed and not subject to custom, tradition and coercion thus became interculturalism's "other": a source of "terror" who would eventually fall outside the boundaries of the acceptable, even from a project whose organizing principle was the unconditional relationality engendered by performance labor.

The Multicultural Individual?

Earlier, I had suggested that French associationalism had had a vexed relationship with the notion of individual autonomy. While the Republican notions of civic society introduced here and in Chapter 1 are premised on protecting the auto-determination of citizens, the history of associational life illustrates how the very exercise of individual autonomy can serve as the basis for policing the integrity of a collective. As I have hoped to establish throughout this chapter, the paradoxes of relationality on offer in AGO and Cimade's work are best considered against this associational grid. Their understanding of the role of bodily practices in particular show us how deeply intertwined the notion of individual autonomy is with a specific vision of corporal life. In turn, both the opening and closing anecdotes reveal how contrasting bodily repertoires can be identified as threatening, provocative instances of human subjectivity. In doing so, the organizers of theatrical aid work also negotiate contrasting theoretical terrains: they suggest that embodied activity can serve as habit-generating phenomena, while denying "other" habits their life-constituting force.

While such qualms are certainly specific to the circumstances of theatrical aid work, they nevertheless encapsulate the far larger question of how a French version of multiculturalism can be articulated. Defined in much the same way that Liliana understands interculturalism, multiculturalism is generally referred to in Euro-America as a notion of social equality predicated on difference. Often dismissed in France as "promoting fragmentation, ghettoization, of aping the Americans" (Rosello 136), multiculturalism functions largely as the institutional partner to the dreaded social organization that is communitarianism. However, Mireille Rosello has identified newly emerging forms of associational community that continue to service national belonging as a *French* multiculturalism: "a politically effective hybrid discourse that combines multicultural tactics and universalist philosophical values" (139). Theatrical aid work, as a practice premised on the reality of difference *and* the necessity of its transformation, provides us with a glimpse into the day-to-day life of this discursive hybridity.

CHAPTER FOUR

SELF-NARRATION, RACIALIZATION AND SPECTATORSHIP IN THE THEATRICAL AID ENCOUNTER

May 2nd, 2007 was a significant day for the nation-wide aid network Réseau Education Sans Frontières (RESF). Recognized throughout France for its work with undocumented immigrant or *sans-papier* (literally, without papers) youth, the organization had recently arranged a writing workshop for undocumented youth living in the Ile-de-France department of Essonne. They had published the results as a small volume, La Plume Sans Papier, and shortly thereafter decided to stage excerpts with interested writers, in an effort to bear witness to the experiences these selections revealed. On May 2nd, the youth's first performance took place in a theater in Viry-Chatillon, to an audience packed with Réseau members and other aid workers, local spectators and the youths' friends and families. Highly experienced in using media outlets to render visible undocumented youths' achievements to the Prefecture of Essonne, RESF had invited both local and national journalists. The next day, coverage in Libération began thus:

On Saturday, the Viry-Chatillon theater (Essonne) played to a packed audience. The program: a performance by eleven undocumented immigrants, aged 16 to 24, whose origins are either from the Maghreb or Sub-Saharan Africa, and directed by the actress Rachida Brakni. In the auditorium, the air is festive. The militants of Réseau Education Sans Frontières, a network who defends undocumented youth educated in France and their families, are present, both from Viry-Chatillon and beyond. From one end to the other, they call out to each other and give each other news of foreigners supported by the network. "X did a very stupid thing: he went to the Commissariat without us. He was arrested," says one female spectator to another. "Oh, he was already expelled four times, and he always came back," replies the other.

On the stage, a young black man comes forward: "You, who don't want me, I chose this country, not you."

...

Wednesday, the militants of RESF Essonne are going to submit some fifty-plus applications for regularization to the Prefecture, all of them for youth who have been educated here, including those of the amateur actors. (Coroller)

A brief analysis of this excerpt suggests that beneath the veneer of the theatrical event, the true identity of RESF's "amateur actors" was readily visible: undocumented youth in need of the network's aid. Similarly, far from allowing the spectators of theatrical aid work an opportunity to shed their identities as aid workers, the auditorium at Vitry-Chatillon instead re-emphasized their true mission: to share the work of caring for individuals under threat from the French state. The recipients of this care were immediately racialized and attributed a grievance, as evidenced by the introduction of the "young black man". Having positioned the relationship between actor and spectator as both power-laden and dependent, the article further suggested that this relationship was cyclical, as evidenced by "X". The undocumented foreigner who "stupidly" zigzagged

across the French border indicated that there was an element to aid work that was unending, that certain experiences of vulnerability and violence endured beyond aid.

The modes of spectatorship that characterized the Vitry-Chatillon performance are certainly dependent upon the particularities of the RESF community. However, this brief anecdote is indicative of the larger dynamics of spectatorship in both theatrical aid encounters and performance projects that explore immigrant experience. Several questions are prompted by this anecdote: If immigrant performances in aid contexts are imagined to cull forms of recognition that are both social and administrative, how have narratives of suffering come to be key to this recognition? If the ultimate goals of these projects are to generate both “integrated actors” and “compassionate publics”, what genres are deemed appropriate for such relations, and how do these genres position audiences and performers? What racialized and gendered identities result? The ethnographic, historical and oral historical observations that comprise this chapter shed light on these questions and present the two key dimensions of actor-spectator relationality in theatrical aid work and immigrant performance. These performances emphasize the urgency of pain, suggesting that narratives of suffering are central to how performance can transition particularized performers into universal persons. Second, performances that grieve a disadvantage such as undocumented status are taken to function as signs of belonging *because of* their critical attitude towards the source of the grievance: the French state.

To the extent that La Plume Sans Papier was an “immigrant performance” (a performance that staged North, West and Sub-Saharan African immigrant-actors both with and without professional accompaniment and concerned itself with the after-effects of migration and documentation), its emphasis on the narration of undocumented status and distress resonated with the dramaturgical principles of a larger body of theatrical work. During my conversations with a variety of theater artists working on questions of immigration, the underlying goal of performance often emerged as a desire to relieve the suffering of those whose personal narratives provided the backbone of the work. Further conversation would reveal that such performances were considered most potent and evocative when those performing were palpably non-Western individuals, especially women. The racialization and gendering of the performing immigrant however, was balanced by a secondary expectation: although performance addressed the urgency of pain, it also served as a practice that allowed the performer to shed the particularities of her identity to accede to a “universal” silhouette unburdened by negative experience. The details of this process will be illustrated via examples drawn from an annual performing arts festival dedicated to women: the Festival au Feminin.

A secondary dimension of pain in performance is detailed by the figure of “X” from the opening anecdote. “X”’s embodiment of a kind of suffering that refuses to come to an end is revelatory of how the figure of the immigrant functioned in performance. Despite performance’s ability to engender universal personhood, “immigrant performances” often remained venues where narratives of pain and suffering proliferated. In other words, such work assumed that bodies that were raced and gendered in certain ways could never fully be relieved of their pain, nor of the desire to announce it. In the passage above, “X” references an undocumented immigrant with a *structural* problem, one which requires visits to the Commissariat. Yet, in the space of the aid conversation, as well as the newspaper article that presents this conversation to a broader public, “X” transforms into a figure with an almost incomprehensible compulsion to repeat its own incarceration and expulsion. Such a transformation resonates with Pierre Tevanian’s analysis of how immigrants’ demands for political rights and public demonstrations

become visible and audible: “Their speech is systematically taken to refer to something “more profound”, having to do with suffering, anxiety and distress” (Tevanian 60), in other words, problems with *personal* rather than political roots. The practices examined in this chapter reveal that even when performance, a vehicle of public self-expression, was positioned as *alleviating* a certain kind of political torment, it was nonetheless the expectation that audience members would respond first and foremost to a perceived “cry of suffering” (Tevanian 59). Theatrical presentation’s position as a consumer practice asked of narrators that they merely present their suffering with *skill*, a theme that will emerge throughout this chapter.

In what follows, I suggest that processes of racialization and politicization in immigrant performance are best understood in light of late-twentieth century French discourses of “anti-racism”. Chapter 3 noted that the Socialist government’s reform practices in the early 1980s were characterized by a turn towards anti-racism. In an effort to transform ethnic communitarianism from a divisive, unacceptable practice to the basis for a renewed universalism, the Socialists would suggest that all associative life (including immigrant associations) would focus on battling racism. Organizations such as SOS Racisme or France Plus, which began as civic efforts but were swiftly incorporated into the structures of government, would set the standards for the political culture of the era, as evidenced by slogans such as “*Touche pas à mon pote!*” (Don’t touch my buddy!) that chastised racist behavior. The act of being another’s “buddy” would be exemplary of citizenly relationships and “racism” soon served as the key axis for understanding processes of social victimhood. Given the official turn towards universality and anti-racism, raced or ethnicized identities could thus be narrated *as* victimized, through pain and suffering. This trend not only marked the representational practices of the era, but continues to emerge in contemporary political discourses (and hence, performance) in distinct ways (Eric Fassin, “Aveugles” 106).

Finally, a closer look at the dynamics of La Plume Sans Papier reveals a third element to how actor-spectator relations are articulated in theatrical aid work. While the question of pain will surface throughout this chapter, RESF’s work will also demonstrate that “immigrant performances” can emerge as sites of transformation and healing. I will argue that this emergent dynamic then serves as the rationale for identifying theater as a practice of “integration” that will be recognized and rewarded by the French state. Therefore, an important element of securing both audience and administrative recognition in theatrical aid work will be to demonstrate a critical consciousness of the administration itself. In other words, declaring a grievance will signal both powerlessness *and* a critical, participatory attitude towards the life of the nation. This quality has not only been a key element of Republican citizenship, but functions today as evidence of an acculturated, integrated citizenship.

In order to elucidate the actor-spectator relationship in theatrical aid work and immigrant performance in detail, I will begin by returning to one of my dissertation’s most important sites, the immigration saturated Goutte d’Or neighborhood in the 18th arrondissement of Paris. Drawing on interviews, promotional materials and performance texts, I will focus on how a number of artists working within the context of the Goutte d’Or based Festival au Feminin position narratives of suffering. The racial and gender dimensions of the suffering performer will be presented in light of how “race” is discussed in post-1980s France. In the second half of the chapter, the theatrical aid work of RESF and the women’s theater workshops of the suburban social center Maison des Tilleuls will provide two contrasting examples of how narratives of immigration-derived pain and suffering can be presented, and what they can be imagined to

secure, publicly. Oral historical interviews with performers from both organizations will provide an entry into how actors themselves inhabit performance. Finally, I will end with a brief question: how do these investments in the public exposure of wounds engage with a liberal understanding of the place of pain, in both politics and individual life?

The Festival au Feminin: Pure Theater and Anti-Racism

The annual Goutte d'Or based Festival au Feminin is a week-long celebration dedicated to women and the performing arts. Previous chapters drew attention to the 18th arrondissement Parisian neighborhood of the Goutte d'Or as a multi-dimensional locality. On the one hand, the Goutte d'Or's public image invariably reflects its historic significance as a resting place for immigrants from beyond Europe's borders. On the other, living in the diverse, immigration-saturated neighborhood today means being surrounded by a dense network of civic activism, from arts associations to youth rehabilitation centers. The Festival au Feminin's origin is to be found in the work of one such neighborhood entity: the theater company Graines de Soleil. Begun by Moroccan activist Khalid Tamer, the decade-old Graines de Soleil's original mission had been to lead a theater workshop which would function as a self-expression atelier and language course for immigrant women: *Parole de Femmes*. Shortly thereafter, the workshops would be included within the fold of the women's activities led by the Association Accueil Goutte d'Or (AGO), whose practices were introduced in detail in Chapter 3. With support from a variety of neighborhood associations³⁷, the Festival au Feminin grew around *Parole de Femmes*' annual performances and soon included work by both amateur and professional artists. By 2008, Graines de Soleil was producing the Festival's fifth installment, which included concerts, dance pieces, poetry readings, story hours for neighborhood children as well as theatrical performances, many of which continued to be based on workshops conducted with women in underserved neighborhoods and their narratives of work, marriage, domestic violence and immigration.

In 2008, one such piece was an episodic performance that playwright Angela had constructed from the many women's narratives she and her company had collected since 2003. The formal mechanics of Angela's work encapsulates what we might refer to as the genre-life of immigrant compassion. Angela's text interwove personal narratives performed by professional actors with quiz-like episodes. These lulls, which borrowed the call-and-response aesthetics of game shows, ranged from information on legislation regarding conjugal violence to the reading of controversial excerpts from holy texts and inviting audience members to guess which text the excerpt had been culled from. Definitions of a variety of violent non-Western cultural practices, such as sati, were interspersed with narratives of forced marriage in contemporary hyphenated French families. Periodically, one of the actors recited to the audience the proper physical comportement of the female sex, parodying bodily stances from a humbly perched sitter to a demure greeting.

In turn, the audience's empathy was dependent on the heterogeneous mix of census data and personal narrative related above. In other words, the moral condemnation beckoned by a staged narrative of personal suffering (for example, narratives of marriage at a pre-adolescent

³⁷ These included financial, administrative as well as logistical support from the Institut Cultures d'Islam, the historic arts association ProcreArt and its performance space, the Lavoir Moderne Parisien (recent renamed Lavoir Multi-Culturel Parisien, still LMP), now in its twentieth year and AGO.

age) entered this moment of painful memory into a larger historical process whereby violence done to women was rooted in the beginnings of divinely narrated history and presently placed most spectacularly in the non-Western world. This factual and non-factual mix authorized the audience's collectively imagined lists of ethical violations, and the political alternatives that they might imagine for building towards a shared resolve.

In what ways could Angela, as well as the broader Festival au Feminin, be considered metonyms for the larger world of immigrant performance in Paris today? Although she had used professional actors for her Festival piece, Angela positioned her broader formal choices as an artist, as elements of what she termed "pure theater". Also referred to as "direct speech", "pure theater" was premised on the presence of truthful narrators whose personal stories of pain and suffering were most evocative when the speakers were racialized, non-Western subjects. Additionally, their deliveries were positioned so as to allow audience members to retain a sense of the "imagined" capacities of theater, even when offering a "pure" subject of pain. Angela's performance logic was certainly revelatory of her own dramatic preferences. Yet during my conversations with a variety of artists working on the question of immigration, I found that the capacities attributed to the theater as a forum remained the same. Performance emerged as an act that displayed pain, yet signaled the speaker's liberation from it, entering her into a universal representation and allowing her to function as a metonym for a larger collective.

In what follows, I will suggest that these developments are best considered in light of a cultural milieu that increasingly positions "racism" and "universalism" as oppositional terms. As indicated in Chapter 3, during the early 1980s, the newly elected Socialist government seemingly ruptured the longstanding French Republican tradition of universalism in the name of what was referred to as "the right to difference". Immigrants were allowed the right to associative organization; however the underlying quality of their "ethnic identity" work needed to remain a commitment to universalism, secularism and anti-racism. In turn, anti-racism was largely acknowledged as a broad category of action on behalf of equality, rather than a specific category of political progress around immigrants' rights. Today, these trends have shifted such that North, West and Sub-Saharan African and Middle Eastern communities stigmatized for their so-called lack of integration and self-enclosed tendencies are also labeled *racists*. "The problem is no longer "our" racism but "their" racism," write Eric and Didier Fassin, with the "their" referring to youth who participated in the 2005 *banlieue* demonstrations protesting police violence, chronic unemployment and structural inequality (6). Noting the ways in which political, intellectual as well as journalistic circles subsumed the protests' "social" dimensions beneath racially and religiously oriented dissent (namely, that it was undertaken by "Arabs", "Blacks", "Muslims"), the writers note that such moves are indicative of new discursive formulas: "the racialization of society interpreted not as the effect of discriminations but of communitarianism" (Fassin and Fassin 6). In other words, signs of belonging to communities defined along racial, ethnic or religious lines beckon accusations of communitarianism *and* racism, further suggesting that communitarianism is the only contemporary guise in which race-based injury might be experienced or inflicted.³⁸

While it would be a mistake to suggest that Angela's work is entirely determined by the parameters of such developments, it is important to note the ways in which it resonates with

³⁸ A phrase coined by the public intellectual Alain Finkielkraut is further revelatory of the kinds of discursive connections that were made in the wake of the 2005 protests: the protesting youth were said to be undertaking "anti-republican pogroms (*pogroms antirépublicains*)" (Finkielkraut quoted in Didier Fassin, "Déni" 150).

these binaries. The performer of “pure theater” exhibits a racialized identity, yet only in so far as this identity gestures towards a universal human. What allows for her distance from the supposed universal (an emancipated, native French woman) to be re-politicized is the fact that those particulars come in the form of an elegy for her suffering. In other words, the “urgency” of trauma guards particularity from communitarianism. In order to understand how this idea functioned, it is necessary to take a closer look at Angela’s definition of “pure theater” and what it entails for both performers and spectators.

When I met with Angela following the conclusion of the Festival, she related to me that the years of work that she had been doing in the Parisian *banlieue*, with “a working population of multicultural origins”, had engendered in her a sense of what she called “pure theater”, premised on the “urgency of speech (*l’urgence d’une parole*)”:

When speech or words that are staged arise out of a necessity to speak and also come from the person who is speaking, a person who wants to express all of this, and not from the words of another, but with urgency from the speaker herself... what results is much better than the work of professional actors on a piece of fiction.

For Angela, “pure theater” was in effect an effort “not to do theater” but to hand the mechanics of the performance encounter to the owner of a truthful narrative. And this, Angela added, explaining the logic that undergirded the assorted quality of her Festival piece, was an entry into a universal tale: “reciting a history that can itself recite many other histories.” Universality, in other words, referenced a tale’s ability to “address everyone” present in the audience, as well as its status outside of the imperatives of traditional theatrical representation. An example Angela gave of the universality she felt inherent to personal narrative performance, was based on her experience working with amateur performers in the *banlieue*. “For example, a woman who performed a Kabyle [the language spoken by North African Berbers] song is not entering a relationship of representation, but she is in a relationship to direct speech (*la parole directe*)”. Direct speech, in other words, did not correspond to comprehensible speech. Rather, it conjured a stage presence that could serve as the opposite of displaying a *souffleur*, an offstage prompter who fed a disoriented actor her lines.

In effect, speech that sidestepped traditional “representation” and bore the closest resemblance to its “real” moment of utterance had three characteristics. First, it was marked by the “urgency” of pain, an urgency that belied the speaker’s “necessity to speak” and desire for public self-expression. Second, direct speech emerged from a non-native French woman: a Kabyle woman whose untranslated song was expected to move a French audience to tears. In the festival piece, stories of subaltern practices were similarly expected to secure a sense of collective determination that would end the transcendent waves of violence of which these practices were taken to be a part. Therefore, the kind of theatrical encounter which Angela was invested in cultivating was premised on the pain of minoritarian subjects. Whether performed by the subjects themselves or by professional actors, these personal narratives were imagined to impact both individual and collective senses of self.

Importantly however, there remained a third characteristic to “pure theater”. Despite her emphasis on direct speech, Angela nevertheless defended the stage as a space that was “sacred and imagined”, a principle that she re-iterated at the beginning of her workshops. The sacrality of this space guaranteed that no matter what the women recounted, she, as an audience member, did

not “want to know the reality of what you are saying, I don’t want to know if it is true or not.” While this statement might sound contradictory, it is in fact entirely indicative of how work like Angela’s imagined “direct speech”: references to verity were less concerned with the accuracy of any given statement. Rather, “pure theater” concerned first, what formal qualities and genre conventions would guarantee the illusion of “direct speech” and second, what “direct speech” would secure for both speaker and community.

Such an orientation towards theater elucidates a seemingly paradoxical element of Angela’s work. Despite her focus on the stage potential of “urgent” speech, Angela often used professional actors to portray her workshop participants’ narratives. This decision is a reflection of a key imperative attached to “direct speech”: its skilled delivery. In other words, Angela’s interest was not only in the potency of amateur stage presence, but in the kinds of aesthetic and disciplinary practices through which stage *professionals* could cultivate such a non-representational presence. Likewise, compassion did not always have to emerge as a relationship between audience members and an authorized version of a story of suffering *or* the authorized speaker of that story. Rather, compassion emerged when faced with the abandon and ease with which the speaking subject could relate their story.

Once again, it is important to indicate the extent to which Angela’s understanding of self-narrative and performance was specific to her own theatrical experiments. Yet elements of “pure theater” resonated with what many artists understood to be the socially legitimating function of stage presence. Celine for example, another director who had worked with immigrant narratives, sharply opposed the use of “real” narrators in performance. She argued against the often unquestioned assumption that the ritual nature of staged narratives was necessarily therapeutic. Instead, Celine employed professional actors. Yet Celine, much like Angela, felt that staged narratives “no longer showed a single person but a collective, and became a character”. This character needed to be transmitted with the utmost clarity, for that which was “represented”, was also in effect entering the “collective imaginary” as a possible, legitimate form of life. The capacity of the *experienced* individual to function as a metonym for the collective was risked, when that individual was presented as having housed the suffering referenced. Presentation was the work of actors. Unlike Angela, who retained an interest in working with amateur performers, for Celine the “collective imaginary” was *always* best nourished when the director could secure in the audience a sense of the presence of “direct speech”, not access to the original speaker herself.

Whether with trained or untrained performers, what remained at stake for both writer-directors was the degree to which immigrant pain was taken to bind actor and spectator in a relationship that would make a material difference on self and society. This, in turn, was the philosophical basis of the Festival au Feminin: performance served as the glue binding racialized pain and universal personhood.

A brief glance at the broad contours of the Festival au Feminin, as well as its specific 2008 version on women and violence, will help elucidate how these notions operated on a broader register. In an interview for *Evene*, Khalid Tamer rooted the Festival’s origins in distinctly non-French phenomena: “At the beginning,” the director noted, “we were touched by the condition of Afghani women” (Yadan par.4). Interestingly, Tamer tied Afghanistan directly to the multiplicity of life in the Goutte d’Or and added: “Humanity is to be able to look at the other without judging it and to have the insatiable desire to want to meet it” (par.11). The 2008 Festival was premised on the relation between “humanity” and performance. Tamer illustrated

this through the figure of an African woman in Paris, who had been forced into prostitution and who had written him a letter outlining her woes. Tamer suggested in the interview (as well as more broadly in the numerous notes that outlined the festival's program) that this woman's body told tales where words no longer could: "the body can render visible what words cannot say" ("Festival au Feminin" 1). Elsewhere, he would note, "it is exactly this body, treated violently, violated and sold that interest us this year" (Yadan par. 6). Yet despite the visuality of the "violated" body, the festival's overwhelming focus nevertheless remained the emancipatory potential of speech: *Paroles de Femmes*. The manner in which the "African woman" could enable both visual *and* discursive communication is revelatory of how racial and gender difference was imagined to function in immigrant performance.

What was the perceptual imperative with which the Festival left its audience? The Festival au Feminin's visual aesthetics of racialized, broken female bodies resonates with what Michel Foucault refers to as a fissure between graphic representation and linguistic reference. Meditating on the Marcel Duchamp painting This is not a pipe, which presents a drawing of a pipe and beneath it, the words, "This is not a pipe", Foucault suggests that the painting reveals the hierarchy between the two orders of reference: does one trust language, or image? The philosopher goes on to note what spectatorship often assumes: that all representation is preceded by a sovereign "model" (Foucault 44) against which the verisimilitude of later depictions will be judged. In other words: how closely does this pipe resemble that which I know to be a pipe? The image of the "African woman" was in effect positioned to address a similar communicative quandary. Tamer notes that the African body encountered while "sold" on the street could be the cause of moral reprehension, but that would be because "one can't know where she came from, what her history is" (Yadan par.6). When this history was narrated however, the only guarantee that linguistic narrative (or "direct speech") would not constitute a false reference would be the fact of her violated materiality, taken to be a visible signifier of the speaking, suffering subject.

Presumed here is a familiarity with an imagined original entity: the transhistorically violated African female body, a model against which the verity of later versions would be judged. If the celebration of "humanity" was a primarily spectatorial relationship with an as-yet unknown other, as Tamer suggested, it conjured performers that could evoke "an insatiable desire to want to meet" in the viewer. But what kind of performer does such a mode of spectatorship and hence, human relationality, require? With what discursive and embodied particularities must such a performer be adorned in order to, at least temporarily, "sate" such a desire? The hyper-embodiedness in question here, need of course be balanced with the reminder that this "African woman" enters Tamer's discourse as a *textual* emblem of the violence which the Festival will attempt to redress; her image is transmitted to Tamer across the lines of a letter. Yet this anecdote is indicative of the politics of many of the "immigrant performances" I witnessed over the course of my fieldwork.

While both Angela and the Festival au Feminin more broadly allow us a glimpse into the performance politics of immigrant narratives, it would be a mistake to consider these dynamics only in relation to conventions of racialized theatricality. As mentioned previously, the racial components of the "insatiable desire" of which Tamer speaks cannot be understood outside of the structures through which "race" has come to be legible in post-1980s France. The universalism and "humanity" on offer here is ironically designed so as to *combat* racism, but does so by depicting anti-racism as a *moral relationship* the audience has towards the "victim" on display. As previously noted, early 1980s discourses of *droit à la différence* had shifted the

perception of ethnic communitarianism from a separatist impulse to an anti-racist one. This shift would not only curb the imagined, potentially separatist tendencies of newly formed immigrants associations, it would install a new, anti-racist civic order. A brief glance at the central slogan of the state-led SOS Racisme, the organization around which this call was rallied, reveals a specific distribution of racialized subject positions. The phrase “*Touche pas à mon pote!* (Don’t touch my buddy!)”, would position anti-racism as a relationship that native French subjects could have to each other *on behalf of* non-native ones. In philosopher Pierre Tevanian’s words: “The one who is speaking [in this quote] is an anti-racist white person, who addresses a racist white person and tells him to not touch his friend ‘of color’” (53).

The representational practices that accompanied the official turn to anti-racism would mimic these dynamics, suggesting that the victimization and consequent emancipation of the non-native, non-white French resident’s body could serve as the groundwork for generating unity, community and resolve over brutality. Such an imperative renders the Festival au Feminin the offspring of earlier representational trends. Gérard Noiriel identifies one significant trend as the “‘anti-racist’ reporting” (“Color Blindness” 169) of post-1980s French television programming, where non-native French nationals emerged as the casualties of racist criminality and “good bosses who recruited employees with the aid of “anonymized” CVs” emerged as the “heros of the combat against discrimination” (Noiriel, “Color Blindness” 170).

By the 21st century, staging the non-native French subject or subjects of “color” (regardless of whether they had actually been French *citizens* for several generations or not) involved addressing the racism, discrimination and prejudice they encountered *and* as mentioned previously, portraying “discrimination” and “racism” as phenomena linked to communitarian tendencies, specifically “Islamist communitarianism” (Noiriel, “Color Blindness” 170). Such a juxtaposition may appear inherently contradictory: one representational tendency highlights the immigrant’s wounded nature, the other represents its potential threat to French sociality. Additionally, these representational dimensions are stratified within themselves. For example, “woundedness” might be attributed to women carrying the imagined signs of communitarian social pressure, such as headscarves. Or, as Chapter 5 will examine in detail, refugee status might connote immediate injury.

Rather than conceive of these as oppositional prototypes, Pierre Tevanian suggests that they are the different, fluctuating facets attached to individuals already labeled *corps d’exception* (35) or bodies of exception, permanently viewed as the out-of-the-ordinary, governed subjects of social space. *Corps d’exception*, Tevanian argues, can transition between racialized prototypes (his principle examples being the invisibly body [*le corps invisible*], the infirm body [*le corps infirme*] and the furious body [*le corps furieux*] (38)), with their *own* comportment often being the very phenomenon that instigates the transition (56). Tevanian’s analysis is helpful for understanding the politics of framing in immigrant performance: even if performance work displays a docile *corps infirme*, the presentation provides a doubled assurance that such docility does not mask the *corps furieux*. Narrating the Festival au Feminin’s ongoing success, Tamer himself would note: “Above all, the festival has grown increasingly more open, without communitarianism” (Yadan par.5). In other words, the imperative of creating “anti-communitarian” work meant actively representing the *pote*, whose gender was overwhelmingly female, as the wounded recipient of French care. These have been the conventions, both aesthetic and political, that would come to constitute the formal requirements of immigrant performance.

While I have thus far presented the racial dynamics of the larger world of immigrant performance, the following section will reveal the manner in which these representational strategies are being borrowed by a larger set of civic entities. In the theatrical aid work of the humanitarian network Réseau Education Sans Frontières (RESF), the decision to endow undocumented immigrants or *sans-papiers* with stage presence will reveal the extent to which performance can influence administrative recognition. RESF's work, much like that of Angela and the Festival, operates under a set of related assumptions. First, pain and suffering serve as elements of human experience that can trump genre conventions and function affectively whether presented as truthful, in a body, outside of that body, or as a lie. Second, pain and suffering implicate individual and community in a way that will both draw on and reframe how "universality" is perceived and "universal personhood" is understood. The experience of identification and sameness between the minoritarian performer and the majority native audience is established as a phenomenon that can only happen via the most intimate and vulnerable of narratives. And performance, for the minoritarian subject, continues to serve as the pathway *par excellence* for accession to the universal.

Réseau Education Sans Frontières and Dispensable Spectators

While the activist network of the Goutte d'Or represents one dimension of social work in France today, RESF represents another. Founded in 2004 by parents, educators and human rights activists increasingly concerned with the status of undocumented students, today RESF refers to a loosely connected, nation-wide network that specializes in aiding undocumented youth. Although RESF's services (which include accompanying students to prefectures, aiding families with their residency applications or providing impromptu juridical advice) are often tailored to the specificity of the population they address, they nonetheless resonate with those of a number of groups working with undocumented immigrants or the *sans-papiers* in France today, as well as with a broader history of protest on behalf of anti-immigration policies.

The question of *sans-papiers* rights and experience has occupied a key position in both party politics and social life in France since the early 1990s, when the immigration laws authored by then Minister of the Interior Charles Pasqua rendered formerly legal categories of migratory movement unlawful, and severely restricted access to residency permits for foreigners already dwelling in France. As these so-called "zero-immigration" policies went in to effect, undocumented laborers and families, together with both impromptu and high profile social aid organizations, came together to stage a series of public occupations and protests, which now serve as the historical origin of what would eventually be called the *sans-papiers* movement. While the political as well as representational strategies of *le mouvement des sans-papiers* and its supporters will be examined in depth in Chapter 5, it is important to note the degree to which RESF inherited an extenuated movement's struggle to achieve both juridical recognition *and* a social identity based on juridical status (the fact of being undocumented, *sans-papiers*) rather than the abstract notions of criminality and invisibility signified by earlier media labels such as *les clandestins*.

Despite their connection to a longer lineage however, RESF members rarely voice concerns that borrow from the generalized human rights discourses employed by the larger *sans-papiers* movement. Instead, they argue that youth who are educated (*scolarisé*) in France cannot be injured by *national* laws while they are under the protection of *international* conventions

protecting familial life.³⁹ In fact, much of the rhetoric surrounding RESF's call for mobilization is based on the determining power of secondary school education: their concerns are with teenagers, their education and the familial environment necessary to structuring the educational experience⁴⁰.

RESF's transformation from a humanitarian organization that responds to basic needs, to one that also serves as an agent of creative output is best understood in light of their focus on education. In 2006, RESF 91 of the Ile-de-France district of Essonne decided to offer a creative writing workshop to the *sans-papiers* youth with whom they worked. The workshop led to the publication of *La Plume Sans Papier*, a volume which brought together the youths' writings on living clandestine lives in France. Soon afterwards, the group began rehearsing for a staged version of *La Plume* with popular film actress Rachida Brakni and by 2008 they had already completed several performance engagements in the Parisian periphery.

The principles that surrounded RESF's turn to theatrical practice were due in large part to the larger administrative world in which the organization functioned. As immigration policies and regularization criterias grew increasingly harsh during the period of 2006-2008, RESF workers found that the evidence of integration requested by prefectures could be provided in more ways than one. The image of the "integrated teenager" with which RESF worked concerned this individual's ability to present itself as an entrepreneurial, self-governing subject that nevertheless exhibited social relationality. Theatrical rehearsal and performance emerged as a venue that would offer training in both criteria: the youth would openly "reveal" narratives of clandestinity, loss and administrative critique that could signal critical, self-sufficient individuality. Yet, the very embodied, relational nature of performance would signal a sort of subjectivity that could only be labeled integrated. In what follows, my goal will be to explain how this functioned and suggest that it illustrates a secondary element of the mechanics of theatrical aid work: the performance of socio-political critique functions not only as a sign of universal personhood but *as a sign of national belonging*. My secondary goal will be to balance this imagined link between Republican citizenship and theatrical performance with the youths' own understanding of the work, and how they came to inhabit performance.

During my conversations with RESF members from various Ile-de-France regions, what I heard repeatedly was that the organization's work was tangible: "What a militant does," one member, told me, "is concrete." In turn, the emphasis on tangible, material forms of aid structured members' understanding of what integration was and how it could be secured. This member, who had supported a *sans-papiers* mother and father who worked late-night shifts, had taken to babysitting their two sons in her home. When I asked how this practice related to her

³⁹ RESF's emphasis on such a distinction serves as an antidote to security discourses that continue to merge *sans-papiers* experiences and populations with other stigmatized groups, such as second and third-generation immigrant youth living in metropolitan *banlieues*, who in turn serve as the catch-all cause of a variety of social ills such as unemployment. As a result, RESF members' own moral justifications become complex: differentiating between the healthy lives of undocumented families and the oft-vilified, allegedly un-integrated suburban neighborhoods of France, at times unwittingly participates in the re-criminalization of such spaces.

⁴⁰ This language is readily visible in RESF's many leaflets, of which a March 24, 2008 press release is one example: "The Prefecture of Essonne Refuses to regularize 14 high schoolers. These youth arrived in France having already turned 13 (or 10 in the case of Algerians and Tunisians). They have been living in France for many years. Having attended secondary school, they are working towards completing their various professional qualifications, national diplomas, or university diplomas. They believed that, just as their peers had the right to study, they did as well, but on the day that they turned 18, they became "sans-papiers", threatened with expulsion. Their lives were shattered."

work as an RESF member, she told me: “If we really want these kids to become French, we have to open our doors; we can’t just treat them administratively.” Although highly specific, her response was indicative of the interpretive tools generated by and around RESF: if integration was the order of the day, it would be provided via a specific set of practices.

The association that this member made between lobbying on behalf of a child’s right to an education and practical solutions to the cultivation of “integrated” teenagers was itself a response to legal windows generated by the French state, such as the Sarkozy Circulaire of June 13, 2006 on the regularization of foreign families. The “real will to integrate”⁴¹ rewarded by this Circulaire was calculated based on the scholastic capacity and cultural aptness of undocumented teenagers (Cimade, Loterie 4). The Circulaire took their skill with the French language to be a sign of how enmeshed they were in their social milieu. Conversely, their inability to communicate in the language of their parents indicated that their past was a “clean slate (*table rase*)” (24) on which France had imprinted its ways. The conditions for this “exceptional and humanitarian” admission to residency not only contributed to the larger arbitrariness surrounding the definition of social integration⁴², it made available a new set of vocabularies to the aid worker mediating the legal encounter: the goal of generating enmeshed, culturally apt teenagers.

If a connectedness to their habitat was one sign of these youths’ integration however, an equally important one was their ability to remove themselves from that same habitat. An anecdote that wraps up the RESF written conclusion to La Plume reveals the additional quality that an integrated teenager would have to possess:

The final word will be that of a youth from the group who, without intending to, made us the most beautiful compliment that one can make to an adult. [He said to us:] You are useful, but you are not indispensable. After hearing this, who would dare to doubt their integration? (RESF, La Plume 68)

In this anecdote, RESF workers engaged with the youth on a day-to-day basis emerge as oddly positioned authorial figures. They are not parents, yet they occupy “adult” positions in these youth’s lives that resemble kin relations of dependence, utility and sustenance, shaken off at the moment when the child enters social life as an independent player. As a result, two different relations, aid and kinship, are folded into each other. Finally, their successful completion, the production of a self-governing individual to whom structures of aid are dispensable, is also a sign of *integration*. In other words, the aided individual’s declarations of dispensability and dismissal serve as evidence of moral autonomy, which in turn signifies the existence of a self-sufficient adult, apt with the ways of its social world. Additionally, the anecdote positions aid-workers as individuals who provide “concrete” outlets of self-sufficiency *and* social enmeshment. For RESF, theatrical practice provides just such an outlet.

⁴¹ The full text of the Circulaire is available at http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/sections/a_votre_service/publications/circulaires/2006/intk0600058c/view and the quotation is my own translations from the second page of the document. Retrieved July 7, 2008.

⁴² While the Sarkozy Circulaire’s emphasis on the “will to integrate” was a defining element of this particular legal opening, many stress that French national education’s emphasis on cultivating a common culture renders the same imperative a must for all middle and high school students. In Trica Danielle Keaton’s words, “acceptable progress in the school system is measured not only by the acquisition of knowledge, but additionally by students’ capacity to assimilate the dominant behavioral forms and cultural norms that are presented to them as their own” (97).

The RESF Essonne writing workshop began in January 2007 with 16 Essonne youth, and would take a number of months to complete. During our conversations, RESF members considered writing to be an act of self-revelation. According to the parameters of the original writing project however, sharing was limited to a circle of individuals with the same administrative status. The question of creating a small-scale publication would emerge later, eventually being followed by the even more public move to performance. Nevertheless, RESF members surrounding the performance project, as well as the Parisian press reporting on the peculiar event, would claim that the youth were driven by a need to *make public* their “suffering and anguish” (Legrand 1). In the introduction to the slim publication, RESF Essonne would note: “How does one find the force to reveal oneself (*se dévoiler*) when the fear of being found out is constant? This concern is what gave birth to this book: the ability to witness/speak of (*témoigner*) their lives” (RESF, La Plume 3). In other words, the introduction of theatrical practice into the repertoire of RESF’s practical activities would retroactively identify all creative output as characterized by a propensity for self-revelation.

In media coverage of the rehearsal process and performance period, theater further emerged as an activity that not only *relieved suffering* but prepared one for *social integration*. A reporter for Le Parisien observed the group’s first rehearsals with Rachida Brakni and quoted one of the choreographers, Jean-Marc: “Put all your sensors on alert! Learn to react as a group, be attentive to the gestures of others” (Legrand 1). Applauding the teenagers for learning to work with Jean-Marc’s orders, the article went on to quote Brakni, who added: ‘I have to familiarize them with the theatre, the space and the approach of the other.’ (1) A few weeks later, another article appeared in Le Républicain tracing the actor’s work: “This [becoming an actor] happens through work that is ludic but also serious and demanding. Thus, they must learn what an exchange is, what playing with the other is, leaving the comforts of one’s shell, agreeing to lower one’s guard” (Hourdel).

In effect, the desire to instill the embodied sensitivity of actor training into these young bodies emerged as a metaphor of preparation for an integrated, collective life. Similarly, one RESF member, who had been central to the realization of the project, emphasized to me how important it was to Brakni that the participating North, West and Sub-Saharan African youth become actors. As the newspapers’ commentaries revealed, being an actor involved a heightened sense of one’s spatial presence in relation to others. On stage, one was responsible for “approaching” others in specific ways, as well as employing one’s sensory faculties to the fullest in order to stay aware of when and how one’s motions within the “group” reflected on their physical composition as a whole. In other words, theatrical rehearsal functioned as the build-up to a performance of social integration.

During my conversation with several of the youth of La Plume, the importance of actor training emerged as a source of pride: “Rachida wants us to do theater,” they told me with visible delight. Yet, their perceptions of the collectivity that theater could engender, differed significantly. What remained of being actors was feeling the gaze of a collectivity, not the experience of feeling as though one were a part of a collective. As one told me: “The look (*le regard*)... how they are going to see the show... this I want to keep for myself.” “I was afraid of suddenly coming out of anonymity,” another added as a third chimed in, “This is so personal, talking about all of this... it’s really revealing yourself to the entire world.” Another, shaking his head as he remembered, laughed: ‘They asked for our signatures! Look, they are *sans-papiers!*’

Along the spectrum of reactions the youth had to the stage, there emerged a pattern that could most accurately be labeled a discomfort with performance practice in aid contexts. Being approached as a person whose signature was worthy of archiving was ironic given the world they were trying to depict on stage: their narrative related the fact that despite their long stay and maturation in France, their presence in the country had no official trace, no recognition beyond their high school grade files and pictures in the albums of a few friends. The “public”, embodied nature of performance thus combined the “pleasure”, in the words of one, of appearing on stage and in the press, with the ambivalence of encountering that performance’s documentation. As the conversation turned to press coverage, several noted that pictures of their rehearsals were still online, their faces often completely visible. “There’s a video too,” a youth added, which caught another off guard:

- What video?
- When you search for “sans-papier” online, there are photos, there’s one of you!
- What’s the video called?
- “Youth without papers”!

The bittersweet amusement of moments such as these revealed that the larger spatial entailments of theatrical work (specifically the way in which it influenced their lives post-performance), rarely resembled the embodied spatial skills that accounts of the project seemed so eager to impart. Two of the actors jokingly recalled incidents where they were taking the suburban public trains, the *RER* from Essonne into Paris. The teenagers had ended up in wagons where other riders were reading local dailies with their faces plastered on them. Both, suddenly nervous, changed wagons. While the “look” of the theatrical collective was desirable *in* performance, the aftermath held injurious potential.

In fact, in a variety of *sans-papier* narratives the space of the *Métro* and *RER* emerge as locations where the bodily, violent entailments of undocumented status are most visible. In 2007, there was a sharp increase in arrests in public transit centers and many undocumented immigrants avoided riding public transportation if they could possibly do so.⁴³ A short excerpt from the published version of *La Plume* depicts a similar scene:

Outside of my studies, I was fearful of going outside. One day, after finishing classes, I took the train to go back home. As usual, before entering the station, I checked to make sure there were no police. On this day, there wasn’t anyone there but unfortunately, I wasn’t done with surprises for the day. I was sitting with classmates who didn’t know that I was “sans-papier”.

All of a sudden, police officers opened the door, approached our group, and pronounced one phrase, the phrase that killed: “Identity check”. My heart was beating so fast that at one point I thought that it would stop. All my friends passed through the controls but on this day, God was with me: they did not control me, I descended at my stop; my heart was still beating but my head told me, “It’s good, it’s over.” (47-48)

⁴³ The *Métro* and *RER*’s identity as “a space of harassment, racism and alienation” (Silverstein 113) for suburban travelers stands in tension with what anthropologist Paul Silverstein identifies as the state’s own designation of transit lines: as racialized spaces of “disorder” (111) in need of security.

Although the geographical location of this scene is crucial to the events evolving within it, the unnamed protagonist's relationship to the space is at best tangential; the self is sharply removed from his or her surroundings the moment the police officer enters the scene, one previously identified as safe. And as the controls continue, sensory and spatial relationality fail to construe collectivity and "the gaze" of the existing collective is imagined to invest in another kind of "revelation": illegality.

During our conversation, this was the contrast that underlined the comic exchanges of the youth: the sensory relationality that the theatrical aid encounter was expected to engender stood in opposition to the actual, equally embodied life of illegality. As a result, sudden visibility in spaces that could not be monitored entailed withdrawal into the self. Spaces that were virtual (the internet), spaces multiple and ubiquitous (the flat surfaces of newspapers) and spaces that were exposed (a stage) signaled more than an entry into a collective body.

This brief inquiry into the period preceding and following theatrical performance is revelatory of the dynamics of theatrical aid on a number of levels. On the one hand, it provides a glimpse into the larger moral blueprint that results from La Plume. The dynamics of the play suggest that the *narrative basis* for imagining oneself as spatially whole with a spectatorial collective is complete isolation. Furthermore, although this narration is "restored" (35), in performance theorist Richard Schechner's words, from a terrifying *métro* ride, or re-lived on another such journey post-performance, it is imagined to hold remedial potential. On the one hand, these dimensions of La Plume resonate with the broader emphasis on pain and suffering in immigrant performance. On the other hand however, La Plume begs the question: if the goal of the performance is to both engender and signal the training of *integrated* youth, how do narratives of isolation and clandestine living secure such an objective? Having constructed the larger context of immigrant performance via the Festival au Feminin, we might suggest that such narratives likewise function as the gateway to an acculturated, universalized presentation of self. Yet the text of La Plume, (which provided the script for the performance) resists such a reading.

What the youth of La Plume are trained to share with the audience are far from the happy utterances of the connected lives sought by the prefecture of Essonne: "You, who don't want me," writes one youth, "I chose this country, not you" (Quoted in Coroller). Another adds: "I hate France, I dislike it, but I am in love with it. Why do they treat us so?" (RESF 30) Yet another: "France has taken my grandfather to fight on her side during war, then, she took my father to help rebuild herself afterwards, so why doesn't she want me? I am still waiting for the response" (49). Why then was La Plume an important element of proving to the Prefecture of Essonne that these youths' were acculturated individuals?

The paradox to which La Plume gives rise is easily dismissed if it is assumed that theatrical skills are merely necessary for any successful application for regularization. The performance *does* afford the youth a chance to render understandable their journey and render visible their desire for its closure via full, legitimate inclusion in the life of the French nation. Yet, such an understanding of the link between performance and the dimensions of French personhood addressed in residency applications obscures the secondary element of how the performance functions. The logic that emerges from La Plume suggests that it is not only *content* that performs "Frenchness" or initiates universal personhood. Rather, it is the cultivation of a *skilled* and public transmission that serves as a sign of connectedness to the collective that is the

host country. In other words, the *form* of one's suffering is the connection *itself*, theatrical acuity signaling both self-sufficiency and collectivity.

The media's reactions to La Plume are revelatory of this dynamic: not only do the youth display their "suffering and anguish", they do so with trained bodies. Theatre's ability to offer such training differentiates it from other forms of creative expression such as writing, whose relationship to the self is taken to be "therapeutic", in one RESF worker's words. Performance cannot stand outside the self, for its successful completion engenders corporal sensibilities that have little to do with that individual's lived reality, thus securing the attainment of a new self rather than its representation. In turn, this self's new affective abilities are borrowed from familiar aesthetic forms that have historically been imbued with *moral* value: modern realistic acting technique as practiced in Western contexts and its training of the actor's proprioceptive abilities.

A closer look at the *content* of the youths' narratives however, further reveals the multiple dimensions of the performance. Although theatrical acuity serves as a key sign of the residency applicant's investment in French culture, theatrical narratives of administrative critique further establish the individual's affective ties to the personified entity that is France. In other words, the actor's relationship to the collective implied by performance as well as by the aid network is not merely one of entry and acculturation. Collectivity functions best as an aid strategy when it is in fact not one: in the afore-mentioned, RESF-written epilogue to La Plume, the youths' outward exhibition of "integration" is intimately bound to their ability to dispense with the aid strategy itself. We might suggest that La Plume similarly provides the performer with an opportunity to render collectivity "dispensable", even as spectatorship remains the very condition of existence of performance. Much like the theatrical aid work of AGO and Cimade, RESF presents yet another version of the complex bonds linking individual performers, aid communities and the Republic: while performers emerge from the material practices of specific communities, they nonetheless accede to (symbolic) citizenship as *individuals*, thereby guaranteeing a relationship to the French state unsullied by "intermediary bodies" (Schnapper 44).

Additionally, in doing so, the youth forge a bond with an even more abstract collective body, that of Republican citizens whose participation as national subjects happens by way of an inherently critical stance. This paradoxical relationship of need and dismissal is one which historian Gary Wilder identifies as fundamental to the origins of French Republican citizenship: "Republicanism and citizenship were defined not only by institutions but by a mental attitude and a type of behavior that is informed, critical and participatory" (159). Additionally, the French citizen-subject's rights are imagined as "a product of political association and participation, not the natural property of pre-political individuals" (Wilder 159). In other words, political participation, protest and critique serve as the practices through which rights are assumed.

The political status of the North, West and Sub-Saharan African youth who perform La Plume resonate with what Wilder has identified as a "citizenship to come" (159). Wilder uses this term to denote the literary and political practice of the mid-century Negritude poets Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sedar Senghor, who took the normative ideal of the Republican citizen-subject as the basis for their critique of its blatant racial bias. In other words, if French citizenship entailed an intrinsic appraisal of the French state, black humanism could be positioned as an intrinsically *French* practice. La Plume's imagined administrative appeal draws

on just such logic: the youth display a “citizenship to come” whose performative gestures involve theatrical acuity, critique, as well as collective choreography. These expectations obscure the otherwise familiar racial dynamics of such a performance experiment: a group of mostly black youth or *potes* whose narratives of social isolation are once again positioned as the basis for the majority white French audience’s experience of collectivity and hospitality.

While I have approached the “immigrant performances” of the Festival au Feminin and RESF through two specific lenses, my analyses in no way exhaust the plurality of identifications and experiences that can emerge from such performance encounters. Similarly, while the vocabularies and ethical imperatives recounted here were central to my conversations with artists, it would be a mistake to suggest that anti-racist, anti-communitarian universality is the *only* axis along which the question of immigrant experience, integration and rights is addressed in Paris today. In what follows, I will present the womens’ theater workshops of the Blanc-Mesnil based association Maison des Tilleuls and their performance piece Le bruit du monde m’est rentré dans l’oreille (The sounds of the crowd entered my ear) as a counterpoint to the kinds of “immigrant performances” engendered by anti-racist imperatives.

The Maison des Tilleuls

Le bruit du monde m’est rentré dans l’oreille (The sounds of the crowd entered my ear) is the joint theatrical product of the collective *Quelques uns d’entre nous* (A few from among us), a group that formed out of the women’s workshops held at the Maison des Tilleuls (MDT). MDT is a social center situated squarely in the heart of Blanc-Mesnil, a small, highly industrialized commune in the department of Seine-Saint Denis. The population of Blanc-Mesnil is a combination of older generations of working classes settled around the industrial complexes of the town, and recent waves of immigration from North, West and Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. MDT provides services for the Tilleuls quarter of Blanc-Mesnil, which numbers slightly more than 14,000, 28% of whom are foreign born (“L’environnement”). During the highly publicized *émeutes* (riots) of 2005, the mixed inhabitants of the Tilleuls would experience symbolic disputes over the ownership of public spaces, an experience which would galvanize the social center’s womens’ group to create the collective *Quelques uns d’entre nous*.

Although the documents of the MDT as well as my conversations with collective members dated the birth of *Quelques uns* in the violent fall of 2005, the collective’s seeds had in fact been sown by then MDT Director Samia in the months leading up to the *émeutes*. Newly appointed as Director of the *Maison*, Samia had instituted cooking ateliers. During our conversation, she would elaborate: “Why cook? What is the rationale behind this act? It is to be together, to discuss things.” Beneath the guise of an ongoing, productive act, the Maghrebi, Turkish, West African as well as European women with whom Samia worked took breaks, chatted, and above all else tried to situate themselves in relation to the *quartier* they all felt attached to in complicated ways. Soon, a collaboration with a French-founded *Maison de Femmes* in Afghanistan resulted in an exposition that took them to the Festival des Libertés in Brussels, where they encountered the French stage actress Rachida Khalil. This paved the way to a writing workshop, and finally a theater piece, stitched together by director Phillip Boulay and writer Elsa Solal from the women’s writings and oral narratives. They presented their work at the Forum Sociale des Quartiers Populaires in Blanc-Mesnil, the Festival des Libertés, the Théâtre

Fontenay-sous-Bois and the prestigious Parisian institution Théâtre du Rond Point. Soon after I met with the collective, they would pack their suitcases for a Portuguese engagement.

Quelques uns and *Le bruit du monde* present a set of questions that differ from those animating the work of Graines de Soleil and RESF, as well as the two organizations that served as the backbone for Chapter 3, L'Accueil Goutte d'Or and the humanitarian group Cimade. MDT's intergenerational "immigrant performers" produced, in both written and oral form, the kinds of pained personal narratives that all organizations authorized as worthy of public pronouncement. Yet, the women who participated in *Quelques uns* were not at risk, vulnerable to expulsion (to the best of my knowledge) or waiting out transitory lives. A large number of collective members were first generation immigrant women who had entered the final quarter of their lives or young adults who had been born in France to parents of immigrant origin. Le Blanc-Mesnil, the *quartier* that housed their work and loomed over it like a protective shield despite its temporary conflagrations provided a permanent, rather than a transitory home. And Samia's imperative was neither narration nor *responsabilisation*, but an inquiry into the kinds of political subjectivities these women put forth when faced with life-altering events.

The following section provides a brief sketch of the political situation that led to the collective's formation, emphasizing the degree to which the multiply injurious circumstances of the 2005 *émeutes* influenced the kinds of narratives the women produced. While the substance of these narratives of precarity and suffering will resonate with those staged in the context of the Festival au Feminin and RESF, they will not be positioned as particularized elements composing a victimized "identity". Nor will they generate a set of performers trapped within a narrative of suffering on behalf of an audience whose cathartic release is dependent on such entrapment. Rather, the *émeutes* will serve as the basis for rendering visible the materiality of the collective that performance generates: one whose presence in the performance encounter overwhelms the enormity of the suffering narrated.

The *émeutes* of 2005 refer to the succession of violence and unrest that erupted in a number of French towns in October of that year. Responding in part to the deaths of teenagers Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré while being chased by police in the Parisian suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois, the public unrest that began in the town quickly spread to surrounding towns and urban centers throughout France. The disorder that resulted lasted for approximately three weeks, resulting in an official declaration of a state of emergency on November 8th and dying down shortly thereafter. While media coverage of the events relentlessly highlighted the "children of the banlieue" ("*enfants de la banlieue*" (Hajjat, "Révolte" 249)) as suffering from lack of social integration and deep-seated immigrant resentment, few focused on the widespread unemployment and economic precarity that cut across racial and ethnic categories in the suburbs in question. Further obscuring the systemic discrimination and alienation experienced by the hyphenated citizens of suburban France, was Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy's infamous characterization of the youth burning cars and social centers as "scum (*racaille*)" (Fassin and Fassin 7) who needed to be washed with a cleanser no less strong than the industrial pressure washer "Karcher".

During the period of unrest that soon engulfed Blanc-Mesnil, the Maison des Tilleuls was set on fire. Although physical damage to the building was controllable, the mixed population who considered it a public yet intimate home was left wondering how they were to position themselves in relation to the harm. Sociologists Stéphane Beaud and Sabrina Hamache's chronicle of female members' reactions for MDT's quarterly periodical, *Vu d'ici*, reveal these

ambivalences in detail. Nadia notes that while she “understood why it was hard for these youth, especially given their relationship with Sarkozy and what he had said” (Beaud and Hamache 4), the revolt itself left her braving widespread “aggression” on the streets on a daily basis. Indeed, many interviewees mourned the fact that it was their town and their neighborhood that was being “disfigured” (4) by the anger of those whose actions threatened to tear at the fabric of the Tilleuls quarter: Fatiha recounted how her grandchildren refused to visit her in the Tilleuls “because there were trucks that were burning [in the streets]” (3). For many of the hyphenated women who regularly attended the MDT, their critique of the French state was permeated with the visceral fear that quotidian acts of violence produced, acts that the French state was positioned as the only force strong enough to quell.

Collective member and *Vu d’Ici* writer Sabrina Bousekkine notes that the questions to which the violence gave rise revealed two themes that members identified: the more they felt that they had entered the social fabric of the town where they had long felt like strangers, the more it was revealed to them that their *quartier* was loaded not with attachment but anger. What then could their reaction be to this “despair” (Bousekkine 5)? What was significant about their Tilleuls trajectories as female immigrants or daughters of female immigrants?

As was the case with RESF and *La Plume*, *Quelques Uns*’ initially posed these questions in the context of a writing workshop. The performance that would eventually result from participants’ output was based on the text of *Le Bruit*, which professional playwright Elsa Solal would construct from the womens’ narratives. Yet, for a number of the female participants, the entirety of the creative process would be an oral experience: those who were illiterate would narrate their stories. Once Solal had transcribed and re-worked these narratives, the women would re-memorize these adapted versions by way of oral recitations. The oral immediacy of *Le Bruit*’s rehearsal and performance methods might resonate with the stage presence that director Angela associated with “direct speech”. Yet, the personal narratives at the core of *Le Bruit* differed from the performance of “pure theater” in two distinct ways. First, “pure theater’s” dependence on genre conventions that connoted a coincidence between actor and role were rendered irrelevant. In other words, “roles” were not understood to implicate “actors”. Second, neither the pain associated with the *émeutes*, nor the broader memories of anguish to which it gave rise, were racialized. The cyclical nature of contemporary suburban as well as historical colonial violence were not depicted as afflicting particularized, non-French subjects.

While the “characters” that populated *Le Bruit du Monde* were based on the members of the collective, they were re-named, nominally fictionalized and randomly cast from among the group. The side effects of the non-aligned relationship between actor and character was visible in the very few rehearsals I was able to visit in April 2008. Due to the absence of several of the original actors, including a much loved member who had recently passed away, the troupe had regrouped and cast new collective members in old roles. The director, Philip Boulay, had returned to MDT to gently re-choreograph the piece and refresh his actors’ muscle memories. In between side conversations, laughter and sips of mint tea, the work of acting emerged as an effort to slip into the words and gestures of a character whose world did not coincide with one’s own and remained at a distance even when familiar. This Brechtian sensibility is reflected in the chronicle of participants’ reactions that accompanies the text of the performance piece. “What Philip asked me,” Arlette notes, “was to forget about myself and invent a character” (Solal 45). Sabrina identifies her character’s message, the question of the headscarf, as “a role that I was happy to carry” (44). Fatiha notes that her character Rahma’s life is a “mirror” (43) of her own,

yet differentiates between “her life” and “mine.” Taous eschews reference to characterization altogether, declaring simply that she “would like to play (*jouer*) every day!” (48)

In turn, such a relationship between actor and character required that the women enact emotions and gestures that had the potential to lie outside of their emotional or embodied repertoires. Thus, acting posed a challenge that a writing exercise did not: to merge oneself, publicly, with an attitude and its concomitant actions. In the context of La Plume, this challenge might perhaps have validated the very skills that performance could endow: the cultivation of certain sensibilities and behaviors via embodied practice. Conversely, Samia’s vision dismissed the embodied life of theatricality altogether, de-emphasizing the relationship between actor and role. During our conversation, Samia related to me that following every round of applause that the women’s performances received, she would remind them that they did not have to continue, “the decision to continue was always their decision.” The suggestion that these acts did not *bind* the actors to the words or the theatrical event itself is revelatory of the kind of information economy theatrical practice was imagined to take part in: one which provided “the best space for talking to the world”, in Samia’s words. Although the women rarely declared a desire to stop performing, their investment remained with the work as a whole, rather than with their parts.

Such a de-privileging of “character” further contradicted what Angela and Celine imagined to be theater’s ability to transform “persons” in to “characters”, thereby instigating a transition towards *universal* personhood. Instead, for the actors of Le Bruit, theatre emerged as a relationship of exchange governed first by the ethics of neighborly sociability and second by a vision of political life that members repeatedly connected to “le Théâtre Grecque”, functioning as a reference to an urban *agora*. Within this *agora*, staged acts did not implicate actors, nor render their persons into “collective” figures, in the words of Celine. The theatrical skit served as the moral exercise from which pleasure would result, if momentary and intangible. Theatrical rehearsal served as a place where human bodies could be asked to collectively explore the limits of their politico-emotional capacity. They could walk through the motions of a transcendence of those limits as a political act in and of itself.

These distinctions are important to note, for they are not immediately visible in the substance of Le Bruit du Monde. As is the case with many of the narratives referenced throughout this chapter, Le Bruit’s stories are not pleasurable and my use of the term “pleasure” is not meant to stand for a relationship of contented bliss in the self’s release. Le Bruit recounts colonial violence, discrimination on both sides of the Mediterranean (“How many generations are necessary to be able to say, legitimately, “I am French?”” (Solal 21)) and at times unkind partnerships that resonate with the narratives comprising the Festival au Feminin. In *Quelques Uns*’s work however, the perceived “directness” of “speech” is not imagined to anchor audience recognition, nor render spectators politically responsible for the consequences of such speech. Rather, it is the speaker who emerges as “responsible for the world” (33).

The theatrical text of Le Bruit weaves in these moments of self-assumption by way of a structural repetition, the “noise that enters one’s ear”: “The other day, all the noise of the world entered my ear, perfectly! It wouldn’t stop speaking to me and it told me: go, liberate your country Rahma. Go my girl!” (Solal 31) Here, the text positions the impetus for speech, for establishing a communicative relationship with the audience member, as a continuation of the relationship that other voices have established with the self. Thus, the actor/citizen serves less as a vehicle of recognition; rather, she is the conduit for such a voice.

While I have positioned *Quelques uns d'entre nous* and *Le Bruit* as alternative examples of “immigrant performance”, it is equally important to note the ways in which MDT’s theatrical work sits at the cross-section of the ideological lineages this dissertation has traced. The Maison des Tilleuls is classified as a *Centre Social* (Social Center) that houses a variety of associations, public services and educational resources whose goals are to valorize local “citizenly participation” (“Une maison au service”). Not surprisingly, part and parcel of the instruments of “citizenly participation” are the arts: “access to tools of communication and expression (imagery, photography, writing)” are the gateway to such participation (“Le collectif”). In other words, the turn to creative expression as a participatory act resonates with the underlying principles of theatrical aid work. However, what renders *Le Bruit* distinct from the performance pieces discussed earlier in this chapter, is the manner in which it positions the “expressions” it depicts: stories of pain and suffering are less oriented towards structuring and maintaining an excluded “identity” to be bartered publicly, than towards declaring a desire for change that the associative structure has in fact already instigated. Rather than declaring its distance from its own universal (an affluent and “harmonious” urban neighborhood) the MDT instead positions itself within a suburb where visions of cultural unity are ruptured by violence, yet where that same violence engenders the need to declare an attachment to civic life.

Investing in the Performance of Pain

Theatrical aid work, as well as the broader category of immigrant performance, reveal contradictory impulses. Throughout this chapter, I have argued that a variety of organizations and venues imagine performance as a vehicle that both validates minoritarian bodies and voices, and liberates them from minority status, allowing them to accede to a universal, abstract silhouette. At the same time, performance re-instantiates those same particularities as the basis for constructing a “collective imaginary” that will be more inclusive, more compassionate. Thus, the pain experienced by minoritarian subjects is depicted as unrelenting, ceaseless and unabstractable. Furthermore, audience compassion itself emerges as a fraught phenomenon. It is both desired and cultivated, and simultaneously shunned. This dynamic is especially visible in RESF’s understanding of theatrical performance as evidence of an “integrated” lifestyle: self-sufficient youth embody skills that can harvest empathy; yet, they emerge as morally autonomous creatures that can dispense with such affect.

What emerges throughout this brief foray into contemporary Parisian performance practices is the pivotal relationship between compassion and notions of abstract citizenship. Compassion, as well as its object, another’s suffering, appears at the heart of how abstract individuality is to be secured in the non-abstract citizen. Especially in the work of RESF, audience investments in shared, affective experience and excess, imagine citizenship to be an experience with a fundamentally aesthetic component, and audience to be central to its realization. Yet, in an article on French secularism, anthropologist Talal Asad notes that secular state formations, including the French Republic, have a tendency to identify modern individualism with reason rather than worldly or otherworldly suffering. (Asad identifies the celebration of the fervor of the French Revolution as a kind of “secular passion”, different from passion associated with religious experience and suffering, slowly ejected from the public realm as part of a broader “bourgeois cultivation of self-presentation” (Asad “French Secularism” 515)). Elsewhere, he clarifies the relationship between pain and secular modernity: “first,

because in the sense of passion, pain is associated with religious subjectivity and often regarded as inimical to reason; second, because in the sense of suffering it is thought of as a human condition that secular agency must eliminate universally” (Asad, *Formations*, 67).

Performative emphasis on the pain and suffering of excluded “identities” as well as in their occasional recognition as exemplary of citizenship, trouble the rigidity with which notions of secular individuality continue to structure French political and cultural life. Performance, and in particular the performance of immigration, reveal that modern individuality and secularity fail to provide the only moral background against which citizens might sense and feel. Such an analysis would seem to align these practices with those of contemporary political movements like *Les Indigènes de la République*. The organization’s founding 2005 call or *appel* relentlessly underlined the the lingering vestiges of colonial oppression, violence, slavery, and social humiliation, labeling their members *Indigènes*: colonial subjects who were accorded theoretical participation in and duties toward the life of the French nation, yet whose lived experiences were marked by a host of discriminations and exclusions. Being a contemporary *Indigène* meant not only inheriting “the sacrifices, the efforts that were deployed, the suffering endured” (“Appel” par. 1) by one’s parents and grandparents, but suffering at the hands of an ongoing “colonial past-present” (“Appel” par. 6) that was more than a memory of times past.

However if *Les Indigènes de la République* comprise one dimension of the contemporary struggle against secular and universalist doctrines, not all of the performances of immigration outlined here can align with such a fight. As my analyses of some of these performances makes clear, even when social exclusion and suffering are recognized for their structural and historical pedigrees, they tend to be re-traced to *personal* roots, and celebrated for their *individual* expression, before being released into the assumed-to-be liberatory space of performance.

The political implications of such depoliticization, as the coming chapter will reveal in detail, aren’t bound by the borders of the French nation but expand outwards via global exchanges of humanitarian feeling and action.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEATER WITHOUT BORDERS: EXPERT WITNESSING AND HUMANITARIAN REPRESENTATION

The earlier chapters of this dissertation focused on four organizations that engaged in theatrical aid work, with occasional reference to performance trends that borrowed from the larger world of immigration-related performance in Paris. The final chapter complements the emphasis on theatrical aid work with a focus on humanitarian theater, an equally significant, emergent sub-genre of immigration-related performance. The phrase humanitarian theater refers to a variety of commercial and non-commercial works that portray narratives of exile, displacement and suffering from undocumented immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers from North, West and Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe and the Caucasus and the Middle East. This definition might divorce humanitarian theater from the kinds of practices that have thus far characterized theatrical aid work, such as an emphasis on theatrical participation's social, personal and administrative revenues. Yet the standard of selection that underlies my portrayal of "humanitarian performance" is linked to the sphere of theatrical aid work: the underlying principles of the humanitarian performance encounter borrow from medical humanitarianism, legal aid and immigrant social movements, the larger contexts within which an ever-growing number of theatrical works on migration are undertaken in France. In this chapter, I suggest that the values, ideals and representative practices of these domains increasingly influence both how Parisian artists articulate the capacities they attribute to humanitarian art, and the explanatory principles they put to use to position themselves in relation to the suffering they wish to portray.

In order to examine humanitarian theater in detail, the chapter provides a set of examples that include a neighborhood-based presentation with mostly suburban visibility, a performance project at an arts center in Paris and two recent examples from the transnational work of the famed Théâtre du Soleil. Drawing on interviews, performance documents and filmed artifacts, the chapter will present the dynamics of the humanitarian theater work at ever-widening scales. Despite an emphasis on the differing breadths and reach of these projects however, humanitarian theater will emerge with two unifying characteristics. First, its narrative focus will be on poignant anecdotes and individual tales with emotional appeal, rejecting accounts that endow the narrators with political personhood. Second, individuals will take part in ethical configurations that revolve around the borrowed identities of experts and amateurs, imitating newly constructed systems of reporting from the global information economy. Within this configuration, narrators' stories will often be portrayed by professional actors. Yet the immigrants and refugees themselves will figure in the performance in ways that will both authorize and authenticate the work of the professionals.

Throughout the chapter, I note that such representative strategies remain in conversation with a number of political, legislative and humanitarian shifts. The emphasis on affect and compassion is best considered in relation to a political context which increasingly positions immigration policies as a set of compassionate measures that reward those in true need. In turn, the specific dramaturgical strategies by which such compassion is culled will be read in light of the tradition of "witnessing" that anthropologist Peter Redfield identifies as key to medical humanitarian movements to have emerged from France during the twentieth century. Finally, a

turn to the media practices of the undocumented immigrants' movement will outline the kinds of representations that have accompanied immigration and refuge in the public sphere. Although the chapter positions these domains as sources of influence for humanitarian theater, it will also consider these emergent aesthetics forms as the basis for new practices of exchange, communication and intimacy, however fraught they might be.

Importantly, this chapter will not focus at length on one of the most apparent dimensions of humanitarian theater: a focus on *individuated* narratives of immigrant suffering, as opposed to the collectives by whom such narratives are shared. Although the question of the individual has been key to the analyses of earlier chapters, and will emerge throughout this chapter as well, my decision to background it to humanitarian theater's other dimensions is a reflection of how unsatisfactory the binary of "individual" vs. "collective" will prove to be. Studies of compassion often utilize such a binary to understand the representational strategies of political movements and "engaged" art works. In *On Revolution*, her classic study of compassion and political upheaval, Hannah Arendt suggests that compassion is inextricably bound to the "co-suffering" (Arendt 75) of the observer alongside the individual inflicted. Therefore, it can not align itself with the pains of "mankind as a whole": "Its strength hinges on the strength of passion itself, which, in contrast to reason, can comprehend only the particular, but has no notion of the general and no capacity for generalization" (75). In other words, the particular and the general, as well as their respective abilities with regards to the generation of passion are distinct, dichotomous.

Arendt's distinction was by no means foreign to the artists with whom I spoke. Often, particularity would emerge as the antidote to the amalgamating rhetoric of state discourses that labeled all non-nationals, from refugees to undocumented laborers, illegitimate. Identification, they felt, was better forged with a seemingly accessible body, as opposed to an unwieldy mass. A closer look at the performance projects that resulted from such preferences however, revealed that the notion of the "individual" was then allocated to various embodied agents who *shared* the work of representing the individual's conditions. The dichotomy between "individual" and "collective" gave way to a third figure: variously positioned bundles of co-creators who nevertheless recognized that "compassion speaks only to the extent that it has to reply directly to the sheer expressionist sound and gestures through which suffering becomes audible and visible in the world" (Arendt 77). Providing "expression" via "sound and gesture" had become the business of multiple rather than particular individuals and viewing practices had to adjust to these new ways of making suffering "audible and visible in the world."

In what follows, such developments are illustrated via the afore-mentioned elements of humanitarian theater. The dynamics of co-creation will require labels such as "professional" and "amateur" and the delivery of individual affective narratives will be distributed amongst persons operating beneath such labels.

The chapter begins with a focus on a performance piece exhibited in various fundraising venues for humanitarian groups, such as Réseau Education Sans Frontières. A brief analysis of this performance will lead to an outline of the larger political, legislative and humanitarian domains with which its strategies resonate: changes in immigration policies, the representational techniques of medical humanitarianism and the undocumented immigrants' movement, *le mouvement des sans-papiers*. Having traced these key sources of influence, the following section will re-examine the two most significant characteristics of humanitarian theater via a performance presented at an arts center in Paris. A turn to the highly successful Théâtre du Soleil play *Le Dernier Caravansérail: Odyssees* will reinforce the ubiquity of these characteristics, as

well as counter them with a differently positioned humanitarian theater project: the Soleil's theater workshops in Kabul, Afghanistan. Analyzed via the Soleil's own documentation of their trip, Un Soleil à Kaboul, this final project will highlight the questions associated with theatrical practices of humanitarian intervention.

Presenting Aminata: Humanitarianism, Witnessing and Representation

In 2008, a Réseau Education Sans Frontières (RESF) chapter, the nation-wide network dedicated to lobbying on behalf of the French-educated children of undocumented immigrants, held a fundraiser in suburban Paris. While this effort included multiple kinds of activities, it revolved around the presentation of a play that had been written and directed by Natalie and adapted from testimonies the artist had collected from undocumented immigrant women.

The performance began with the story of an actor, Aminata, who had left Abidjan for performance engagements in Switzerland in 2003 and found that she was unable to go back when war broke out.⁴⁴ Her thoughts with the son she had left behind in the Ivory Coast, she had entered France illegally where she held clandestine jobs, lodged in peripheral hotels filled with refugees and was ultimately rendered homeless. When the lights were turned on stage, there was a woman of African origin sitting downstage right and a white French woman downstage center, who narrated the Aminata's story in the first person. Barely moving from her designated spot yet talented at maintaining momentum, the actor often glanced at her stage partner in a reciprocal gaze that was later revealed to have been the signal identifying the woman downstage right as Aminata herself. Soon the two Aminatas, real and rehearsed, were joined by Fatma, a Kurdish refugee from Turkey who broke into the monologue with her own story, centering on the child for whom she had decided to leave the miserable home of her father-in-law. She was joined by Mariama, from Senegal, who had left her country of origin in order to provide her daughter with a better education, and finally, Amira, from Algeria, who had arrived with her husband and children to join her sister-in-law in France only to find that familial hospitality was easily spent. Shortly after Amira was introduced, approximately sixty women would flood the stage from the sidelines and stand distributed, all of them as motionless as the Aminatas but swiftly breaking in to the parts of the four stories that they wish to contribute to. As the play drew to a close and the lights faded, they lingered on the only black woman on stage, the real Aminata, who had remained speechless throughout.

In what follows, I will suggest that both the ethical propositions and the peculiarities of reception that issued forth from this performance embody what we might call the politics of the humanitarian theater work. During our conversation, Natalie would label the play an example of *témoignage* or witnessing, referring to the theatrical event's ability to render visible clandestine lives. However, the documentary connotation of the legal context from which the term was drawn, would be subsumed beneath the larger imperative to relay the individual, "emotional" life of undocumented status, rather than its significance as exemplary of larger political trends. Paradoxically however, emotionality was best conveyed through a conduit, a white French actress was charged with delivering Aminata's narrative of displacement.

While it would be a mistake to consider Natalie's performance choices entirely outside of the material restrictions with which the director worked, it is equally important to place them in

⁴⁴ I have changed the names utilized in the actual play, as they refer to the real names of the individuals represented.

conversation with the larger discursive trends surrounding questions of immigration and refuge in France today. Natalie's emphasis on the "emotional" dimensions of *political* suffering (i.e. suffering as a result of one's political status in France) resonate with what scholarship has referred to as the broader "humanitarianisation" (Didier Fassin "Compassion", 368) of immigration and asylum policy. Additionally, the use of the term *témoignage* and the formal requirements associated with this particular way of reporting suffering are indelibly bound to the term's development in medical humanitarian contexts. Finally, the focus on "individual" experience is indicative of the broader strategies that *le mouvement de sans-papiers* (the undocumented immigrants movement), had had to adopt in the years leading up to the proliferation of "humanitarian theater". In order to elucidate these links, it is important to return to the particularity of Natalie's choices as a director and examine the ways in which they resonate with broader vocabularies.

The possibility of creating a theatrical piece based on *sans-papiers* testimony had come to Natalie in 2007, when her path crossed with those of the four women portrayed in her work. When I inquired as to the particulars of their meetings, the director replied:

When I met with these women, they trusted me because they knew who I was, I explained why I was doing this. Aminata came to my home. I met Fatma at a friend's place and Amira at her home. I had a recorder. We drank tea and coffee, we had some cake. Amira was very factual. Mariama also, she only talked about her daughter. But Aminata and Fatma, they gave me so much material, they cried, that's where the emotion was. One of my qualities is that I am really capable of listening. And then I just let things flow out... This was the first time that they were talking to people about these things, and they played (*jouer*) with absolute sincerity. What's true and what's false, that is not important. I actually know that some of what they told me was false. Memory deforms things, some things you can't say, I just want to hear what can be said, not search for the truth... Theatre is like this though, it's not like TV, and it's a place where we can say false things as though they were true.

Natalie's depiction of the relationship between the veracity of past experiences and their re-telling in the oral historical⁴⁵ encounter was less concerned with the representative function of words (referencing an elsewhere and long ago that are not present in the room) than with the forms in which they survived the moment of utterance. Her recorder (crucial to the actual material conduct of the project) occupied a space outside her, a space where "facts" could enter whether or not they passed through her physical presence as an intermediary. But the tea, the cake, the comforted tears and her own body were what were capable of transmitting the "emotion" she witnessed, sights and sounds which she associated with *play* undertaken with *sincerity*. In other words even "emotion" (as opposed to "facts"), was perceived by Natalie to be at a remove from the reality of the speaking self.

⁴⁵ While Natalie herself does not use the term "oral history" or its French equivalent, literally "histoire fondée sur des interviews enregistrées", her understanding of her practice falls closely in line with Della Pollock's definition of oral history in *Remembering: Oral History Performance*: "a tacit agreement that what is heard will be integrated into public memory and social knowledge in such a way that, directly or indirectly, it will make a material difference" (3). Natalie, rather than focus on her work's contribution to a body of existing knowledge regarding past events, conceives of it as an alternative link to contemporary experiences that escape mainstream attention.

Natalie's understanding of the mediated nature of "emotionality" can be linked to the term the director used to denote a person's act of relating their history or experience: *témoignage*, which literally translates as testimony or witnessing. Despite its use in legal contexts however, the judiciary encounter is not the term's sole referent. The root of the word is *témoin* (the witness), a figure who can appear in a range of social circumstances (from the groomsman approving the legitimacy of a marital union to a passerby who can legitimate the facts of a past event) to distribute a particular set of social, physical and legal relationships. In his writings on archival documentation, Paul Ricoeur links "the use of testimony in ordinary conversation" to its historical and juridical usages, suggesting that everyday reference to testimony "preserves those essential features of the fact of testifying" (Ricoeur 163). In other words, a declaration labeled testimonial in quality initiates a set of unique relationships based on what Ricoeur calls "credit granted to the word of others" (165). Similarly, Natalie's use of *témoignage* drew on the term's multiple valences: it carried both a documentary connotation that privileged speech, and it indicated that *témoignage* was a specific category of speech, both personal *and* performed for an audience.

During my conversation with Natalie, it became clear that the ambivalent nature of the term had directly influenced the audience's perception of the work. Throughout the week preceding the performance, RESF had hung fliers of the play, featuring pictures of Aminata and declaring that the narratives would be based on true *témoignages*, what Ricoeur might refer to as "the certification or authentication of the declaration on the basis of its author's experience" (Ricoeur 163). The advertising drew even Aminata's attention, who, according to Natalie, told her, "Well, the police now know where to find me." Aminata's statement, laying bare the precarious bargain of the theatrical experiment, forewarned Natalie of what was to come. Alerted by the term *témoignage*, the audience assumed that the words they were hearing were "true", that they did in fact originate in an individual named Aminata. But like the words exiting the body of the interviewee, they assumed their utterance before them had only a tenuous link to the physical existence of Aminata in the world. In other words, everyone noticed the one, speechless black woman on stage. Few realized that she was Aminata herself. "There were a lot of people," Natalie exclaimed to me during our interview, "who didn't imagine that it was her."

An inquiry into why Aminata's presence was "missed" by audience members soon revealed that it was the amount of violence revealed in Aminata's *témoignage* that had caused confusion. Friends and audience members related to Natalie the impossibility of conceiving that the woman sitting silently in front of them was the receptacle of the brutality referenced. While the specificities of this response need be analyzed against the larger array of viewing practices to which these spectators had been exposed, it is nonetheless indicative of the larger position offered to audience members engaging with the humanitarian theater work. Spectators are asked to lay faith with the authenticity of narrative, yet they are accustomed to judging the conduit of the narrative to be other than its source. Natalie's specific choices had contributed to this scheme. The director had dismissed the dimensions of her interlocutors' narratives that dealt with "facts", focusing instead on performing "emotions". The term *témoignage* thus remained divorced from the structural realities that were plaguing Aminata. Moreover, Aminata's blackness was made to signify nothing but a generic image of silent pain, her affective appeal directly rooted in her racial background. As a result, the audience sat confused amidst a number of theatrical and extra-theatrical signals, unable to place Aminata's pain in a body, walking away with the impression that the receptacle of these experiences was nowhere in the vicinity.

In what ways did Natalie's formal choices draw from and resonate with a larger set of representational practices? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to turn to the kinds of images and discourses that have been generated around immigration policy and humanitarian activism generally and around the undocumented immigrants' movement more specifically.

The question of undocumented immigrants, their fight for regularization and lack of legal protection has occupied a steady position within the French public imagination since the mid-1990s. However, part of what is specific to the contemporary discourse surrounding immigration policies is the increased use of a language of compassion and affect, what Eric Fassin refers to as "the political theatre of emotions" ("Guy Môquet" par. 1). Exemplary of this emerging stance are French President Nicolas Sarkozy's frequent rhetorical references to the relationship between compassion and social action. In a 2007 campaign speech in Toulouse, Sarkozy signaled a humanitarian shift in immigration policy when he re-phrased an earlier, oft-quoted statement from Michel Rocard, Socialist Prime Minister (1988-1991): "One cannot welcome all the misery of the world" (*On ne peut pas accueillir toute la misère du monde*) (*Cette France-la*, 370-371). Sarkozy's statement modified Rocard's original declaration and stated that "the Left does not want to see the impossibility of welcoming all the misery of the world *with dignity*" (371, emphasis mine). The combat against illegal immigration was in effect presented as a compassionate measure, in Eric Fassin's words, "protecting the *sans-papiers* from themselves" ("Guy Môquet" par. 11) and halting the French state from unleashing potential violence.⁴⁶

Anthropologist Miriam Ticktin reads these trends in light of what is now referred to as the larger "humanitarianisation" (Didier Fassin "Compassion", 368) of immigration policy, whereby long-standing legal promises to honor familial reunification and political asylum have increasingly been classed under a 1998 "private and family life" clause (Ticktin 37). This vaguely defined legal category (whose practical implementation is judged in a variety of ethnographic accounts to be entirely arbitrary and affect-based), signaled what would become under Nicolas Sarkozy's tenure a larger transition in immigration policies: an evolution from a dependence on objective, legal criteria to the urgency of ending human suffering, in other words a humanitarian stance. As outlined in Chapter 1, this emerging stance approached residency applicants with dual criteria: on the one hand measuring his or her "integrability" to French norms (*Cette France-la*, 98) and on the other, rewarding seemingly visible bodily signs of pain and persecution experienced elsewhere.

In 1998, this burgeoning commitment to biological integrity was most salient in what Ticktin calls the "illness clause" (33). This provision made rights contingent on evidence of an illness not treatable in the immigrant's county of origin, establishing bodily need and pain as the guarantee of a chance at residency. In a larger context where already precarious distinctions between economic immigrants and those seeking asylum were regularly eroded, "those asking for the protection it [the law] affords," writes Ticktin, became "entirely dependent on eliciting the compassion or pity of those enacting it" (37). Developments such as these have led a number

⁴⁶ In 2001, when Nicolas Sarkozy (then Minister of the Interior) decided to close the refugee transit camp that had been operating in the Northern coastal French town of Sangatte, the reasons animating his decision were multiple: the issue of a passage mafia that sold camp members passage to the UK had made relations between the two countries tense (Henley, par.1). Additionally, violence had erupted within the camp, which had exponentially swollen in size since its 1999 opening. However, the most flagrant reason Sarkozy had given for his decision to end the camp's operations, was that the image of a concentration camp (a Holocaust analogy used by many in the press and on the Left) did not befit the French nation (Didier Fassin "Compassion", 364).

of scholars to label a broader turn towards “humanitarianism as politics” in French political affairs (Ticktin 33).

In order to fully depict the significance of this humanitarian turn, a slight interlude is necessary here. Earlier chapters noted that the discourses of difference that had emerged in France over the course of the 1980s had been contingent upon the portrayal of difference and the “right” to ethnic identification *as* universal “human” rights. Thus, these discourses gestured beyond the borders of the French nation to a transcendent ethics of recognition and plurality. Of course, given the overwhelming debt of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, the basis of this claim was itself mired in paradoxical origins, since the French tradition of personhood has proven durable in the face of claims to difference. What is important to note here however, is that the transition from human rights to humanitarian discourses attempts to cast an even wider net around the notion of the “human.” How is this so?

Although the rhetoric of human rights is grounded in discourses that elevate secular, universal humanity above communal claims, anthropologist Talal Asad notes that “the identification and application of human rights law has no meaning independent of the judicial institutions that belong to individual nation-states” (*Formations* 129). Thus, the practical dispensation of “human” rights remains guaranteed as *national* rights, contingent on their exercise by any given nation state. In contrast, humanitarianism emerges as a philosophical tradition that is indebted to religious worldviews and projects where the “human” in question transcends citizenship.⁴⁷ As Christiane Vollaire points out in a study of the philosophical basis of humanitarian intervention, the Geneva Convention of 1864 is concerned with an entirely different application of “rights” - their international, non-state bound accountability and concern with the “humane treatment” (15) of all those who suffer, irrespective of their national status. The recent turn to “humanitarianism as politics” suggest that both state-run and civic organizations charged with caring for the displaced now draw from vocabularies that provide a secondary layer of universalization around the figure of the human.

Natalie’s treatment of undocumented immigrants’ narratives reflects the de-politicizing dimensions of humanitarian sentiment. While Aminata, Fatma, Mariama and Amira’s grievances are a direct result of their precarious legal positions in France, presenting these grievances requires abandoning juridical particulars. This tendency was evident in much of the work I encountered over the course of my research: artists repeated the refrain that nobody wanted to hear about facts, laws, legalities, rights discourses or as one simply put it: “politics”. The social efficacy of performance was imagined to lie in its ability to appeal to human sentiments such as compassion and empathy. While governmental humanitarianism is responsible in part for this pervasive attitude, the emergence of humanitarian theater work has an equally relevant connection to medical humanitarianism. Key to understanding the formal qualities and vocabularies of humanitarian theater are the representative techniques associated with the most visible face of French humanitarianism: medical institutions such as Médecins Sans Frontières

⁴⁷ For a fuller account of the relationship between religious identity and humanitarian accountability, see David Brion Davis and Thomas Haskell’s contributions to Thomas Bender’s volume *The Anti-Slavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation*. Although Davis and Haskell disagree on the precise historical roots of humanitarianism, both offer significant ways in which to think about how “new moral universes” (Haskell 129) can be associated with forces as seemingly disparate as religious revival and capitalist expansion.

(Doctors Without Borders (MSF)) and its later offshoot, Médecins du Monde (Doctors of the World (MDM)).

MSF was founded in 1971, following the return to France of a medical collective working in Nigeria during the Biafran war. Accounts of the collective's rich history of debate reveal that from its inception, this medical humanitarian organization battled the question of how to relate the urgent nature of their medical interventions to their potential roles as global reporters. MSF's most immediate intellectual referent was the Swiss-originated Red Cross. However, this organization's traditional commitment to the neutrality of non-governmental presence had left many MSF members disillusioned with their silence in the face of the Holocaust during World War II. Those MSF members committed to publicly reporting and denouncing the crimes to which its members were *témoins* or witnesses, would eventually leave the organization (Feher 778) and found MDM in 1978. Bernard Kouchner, who was at the forefront of this spilt, writes in a personal history of the organization that "humanitarian action and journalism maintain watchful, often brotherly (*fraternel*) relations" (210) and that their fraternity would "tomorrow, determine politics" (212). While MSF's later leadership downplayed the role of *témoignage* or witnessing, thereby reorienting the organization's commitment towards medical intervention, anthropologist Peter Redfield notes that the question of witnessing remains in "a state of constant tension" (10) for both MSF and other organizations who participate in the medical humanitarian arena.

The "constant tension" to which Redfield refers, is due in part to the emergence of a discourse of "expertise" alongside that of witnessing, bringing about the figure of what he calls "the expert witness" (Redfield 5): a health official whose medical training engenders an objective curiosity that is at once coupled with the moral imperative to denounce suffering. As scholars of non-governmental politics often note however, the "tensions" surrounding *témoignage* are also rooted in concrete examples of expert witnesses being co-opted by state structures. As Esther d'Halluin and Michel Feher both note, organizations such as Comede (Comité Medical Pour les Exilés) and MSF are increasingly being asked to bring their "expertise" to bear on the state's "bureaucratic needs" (d'Halluin 113) and to justify non-domestic "humanitarian interventions" (Feher 782) undertaken by armed military personnel. Bernard Kouchner, who was named Minister of International and European Affairs in François Fillon's conservative government, has become especially synonymous with *le devoir d'ingérence* or the "duty to intervene" (Fox 1609), leading many on the French Left to criticize his military humanitarianism. The figure of the "expert witness" therefore, stands at the crossroads of non-governmental and international politics.

Given the ubiquity with which the term *témoignage* now appears in the context of non-governmental work in France, it is not unexpected that it would emerge within arts contexts as well. My conversation with Natalie revealed that theater could "report" a grievance while indicating the possibility that it wasn't necessarily in the business of *reportage*. This distinction was embodied in the director's statement that "theatre is like this though, it's not like TV, and it's a place where we can say false things as though they were true." Dependence on the theater's "illusory" status however, is precisely what resonates with medical humanitarian *reportage*. Redfield suggests that MSF's "representational persona" (5) combines the expertise of medicinal aid with the weight of a moral discourse of universality to offer a "motivated truth" (5). Natalie's understanding of the utility of representation similarly suggests that the concern with the "truth" of another's suffering is a matter of *motivated* performance, combining information, testimony

and a moral discourse to argue for an end to suffering. The underlying assumption, confirmed in the visions of the many artists I interviewed is that theatre, much like medicine in the words of Bernard Kouchner, “presents the advantage of having a utility without borders, and being in the interest of a universal ethic” (Kouchner 10).

While it is impossible to suggest that the subjects, experts and techniques of theatrical practice can be mapped precisely onto those of health or legal professionals in humanitarian contexts, it is essential to note how the interchangeability of “geopolitical and moral codes” (Ticktin 35) has influenced other domains. Therefore it is important to evaluate the ways in which the linguistic tropes of humanitarianism exhibit themselves in the representational practices surrounding the undocumented immigrants’ movement.

Le mouvement des sans-papiers began in the meeting rooms of a number of immigrant workers’ *foyer* in Montreuil and first emerged publicly during the 1996 occupation of the St. Bernard church in the 18th arrondissement of Paris. Exasperated with a clandestine labor market maintained by a demand for invisible workers, loosely networked groups of *sans-papiers* laborers (of mostly West African origin) created an organizational infrastructure that could link different foyers to associative circles engaged in securing greater rights and freedoms for immigrants. In summer of 1996, the group began to occupy several public spaces in Paris, finally ending up in the St. Bernard church in Montmartre, welcomed by a priest familiar with and sympathetic to the cause. Both during and after the occupation of St. Bernard (now synonymous with the term *sans-papiers*), the group was aided by artists, filmmakers and public figures who surrounded the church both physically and symbolically to show their support.

The most famous of these collaborations happened when theater company Théâtre du Soleil helped move the approximately 300 individuals evacuated from St. Bernard after an exhaustive police operation to their rehearsal and performance space, the Cartoucherie in the eastern Parisian suburb of Vincennes. In accounts of the group’s sojourn at the Cartoucherie, the figure of famed director Ariane Mnouchkine looms large, as do the voices of the various associations that were engaged in providing the basic needs of the political agents themselves (Cissé 59). Where was the group to move next? How were basic day to day needs such as food and hygiene to be met? How were the *sans-papiers* and their supporters to handle this switch from the fast-paced momentum of occupation to the maintenance of a long-term collective existence that few architectural spaces and few metropolitan human rights organizations could support?

As the material reality of the movement became mired in the question of communal survival however, aesthetic representations of the *sans-papiers* began to shift towards individualized portraits and specific stories; a shift that was still visible in Natalie’s staging a decade later. A significant example was the short film *Nous, sans-papiers de France*. Created by a group of supportive filmmakers, this short showed the movement’s best known *porte-parole* or spokesperson, the Senegalese activist Madjiguène Cissé, standing against a dark background and reading the text of the *sans-papiers* manifesto that had appeared in the newspaper *Libération*. For a few weeks, the short would precede movie showings in countless theaters. Jacques, a high-profile aid worker associated with the movement, confirmed this shift to me and offered an explanation as to why it functioned:

This was the first time in the history of France that French people were exposed, literally on a daily basis, to the stories and words of a *sans-papier* every night on TV... In the

past, his image [notice the gender attributed to the representative figure of the *sans-papier*, this will shift over the course of Jacques' response] was that of someone who was just not to be frequented... and there we have all the ingredients of a melodrama, there is someone who is honest, who is pursued by forces as though in a tragedy, who tries to escape these... and just as in a tragedy, there is fortune. This no longer belongs to the world of men, but Gods... the French state is in the role of the state... the *sans-papier*, a heroic actor. In my opinion, this is a new kind of reflection from performing arts people (*des gens du spectacle*). Here we have a character who is a fiction but who is also real. I promise you that Racine, if he were a contemporary of the *sans-papiers*, he would have written a tragedy about Madjiguène Cissé. Maybe Iphigenia would have been Madjiguène Cissé.

A brief return to Natalie would remind us that the director had dismissed the “facts” of Aminata’s suffering as non-evocative. Jacques in turn, as an aid-worker trained in the law and concerned with the efficacy of public performance, found that it was the “facts” themselves that were now becoming the stuff of dramatic personhood. The presentation of the fact of a *sans-papier*’s condition of precarity was the grounds for elevation in to a new cognitive universe such as melodrama, by way of *formal, aesthetic* changes. The *sans-papier* was not merely a pawn tossed about in the endless circulation of individuals and capital in the new Europe; he was also subject to the winds of fate and fortune. Finally, this transformed his gender, as evidenced by Jacques’ choice of historical character for Madjiguène Cissé: the hapless Iphigenia, sacrificed to the Gods for the safety of a sea voyage.

Jacques’ comments summarize the various representational strategies embodied by the humanitarian theater work. First, Cissé would emerge in representations of *le mouvement* as a singular face. This decision obscured her position as conduit to a group whose collective legalities were considered too unwieldy to be representable. Second, the mediatization of the *sans-papier* struggle necessarily rendered all agents caricatures of themselves (“the French state is in the role of the state”), trespassing the lines between the fictional and the real. The subjects in question were surrounded by the verities of their individual suffering, which would then sweep them up and into the winds of ancient Greece and classical France where “forces” plagued the “honest”, eliciting the compassion of all those watching rather than invoking the structural problems of residency requirements. And third, this “new kind of reflection [was] made possible by performing arts people”, whose specific expertise *was* the performance of tragedy, heroism and melodrama. Therefore, the kinds of “witnessing” they could offer would be suffused by the particulars of the kind of expertise they possessed.

Jacques’ interpretation of the movement’s strategies reveals the extent to which humanitarian politics have permeated the vocabularies of those who oppose it. Yet, they are also indicative of the opposite: how representational practices in turn have the capacity to influence the strategies available to humanitarian aid. One RESF worker, who had been involved in the organization’s varied theatrical endeavors, revealed this influence when she explained the group’s focus on sensationalizing individual suffering. Seeing that immigration policies increasingly favored what the aid workers called “case-by-case” evaluations, RESF would respond in kind: when a *sans-papier* youth in Essonne had, by chance, saved a woman in her 80s from a fire, RESF had used every possible media outlet to render the “heroic” story impossible to ignore. The Tunisian youth, whose chances at residency had previously been labeled extremely

low, would be awarded a 10-year residency permit. “Heroism” in other words, functioned as more than an interpretive frame; rather, it served as the basis for an advocacy strategy.

Having sketched a brief outline of the political, ideological and activist histories that inform humanitarian theater work, it is important to pose a series of further questions. What is the exact relationship between witnessing, expertise and representation? If humanitarian theater, much like humanitarian aid, has a “utility without borders”, who are its experts, what are its techniques and how does it witness? While the example of Natalie’s play approaches these questions on a neighborhood-based scale, I will now turn to a number of projects whose reach expands the boundaries of humanitarian theater. First, I will examine the dynamics of a mid-sized Parisian production based on refugee narratives. Second, I will return to the transnational work of the Théâtre du Soleil, which will include a focus on their activities in Kabul in 2005, following the US-led invasion of Afghanistan.

Thirty Refugees: Expertise and Witnessing

The performance project that serves as a second example of humanitarian theater was conducted under the direction of artistic director Michel at an arts center in Paris in 2003. Composed of the narratives of approximately thirty refugees, the performance was created by ten volunteer actors from a highly prestigious theatrical association, composed of the graduates of the national conservatories. In preparation for the production, each of the ten actors was asked to pick three refugees from a thirty person group gathered via Parisian aid organizations and residence halls for immigrant workers.⁴⁸ The actors then met with these individuals, whose origins ranged from Morocco to Argentina, throughout a six-month period and produced thirty minute presentations on each person’s narratives. Michel and his artistic team would eventually string these various episodes into a spectacle that would play once in its entirety, as a day-long spectacle, and otherwise as rotating sets of 3-4 narratives.

In what ways did this performance embody elements of the humanitarian theater work? During our conversation, Michel would relate that he had designed this project with two constraints: first, the necessity that the story engage only this individual’s “voyage”, rather than their lives from before or after, and second that the refugee whose story was being narrated appear on stage at one moment in the performance. Michel’s elaborations upon the rationale for these constraints reveal the multi-dimensional investments of humanitarian theater. The focus on the “voyage” entailed by immigration and refuge would take on an ethical weight that obscured the political dimensions of life on either end of the journey, instead offering the fact of displacement as indicative of a certain kind of moral truth. In turn, by positioning professional actors as the conduits of such narratives, while coupling their stage presence with brief images of the narrative’s *source*- the Refugee- the project re-instantiated “expert witnessing” as the representative practice *par excellence* of humanitarian theater.

⁴⁸ In order to gather the eclectic group of 30 refugees that he felt would offer a panoramic view of the contemporary French reality, Michel contacted numerous aid associations (including Cimade, GISTI, the Ligue des Droits de l’Homme, MRAP, Médecins du Monde and France, Terre d’Asile) asking if they knew whether any of the individuals they supported would be interested in participating. Next, he visited Parisian *foyers* (residence halls for immigrant workers), various municipal meetings regarding immigration related issues and French language classes offered by aid groups, tempering his presentation accordingly.

The first constraint with which the arts center had presented the actors involved with the project was that the story recounted on stage would be about these individuals' voyages, rather than their previous or present-day lives. In a statement recalling Natalie's emphasis on the irrelevance of the truth, Michel elaborated upon this constraint:

The theatre is not a place where one recounts the truth, sometimes it's the truth, sometimes it is whatever I want it to be, wouldn't you say? So, I want the stories to be only about voyages, why is that? Because, it is not because Sarkozy says that immigrants smell bad that the theatre is obliged to say the opposite, that they smell good. This is not the role of theatre. So, it is important to sidestep the moral posture that consists of saying, the government mistreats immigrants, so we are going to say that they are in fact good people. No. Maybe these aren't good people, but they have gone on voyages, and this is the story that we are going to tell.⁴⁹

Visible in instances such as these was Michel's refusal to counter contemporary state logic and its moral double standard on its own totalizing terms. The director refused to claim that refugees were categorically good people, their pasts upright and their futures wholesome. Rhetorically however, Michel's argument then proceeded to use the same organizing principle he sought to dismiss: the space of the "voyage" emerged as a new template for what philosopher Giorgio Agamben might refer to as "bare life" (8), the neutered dimension of human life necessary for all portrayed to be equal on an essential footing.⁵⁰ The "voyage", or rather, the experience of geographical displacement willed or forced, served as the universalizing principle uniting the "good" immigrant and the "bad" immigrant and offering them both the privileged shelter of an un-truthful art form. Similarly, this art form escaped scrutiny as a social practice with connotations both complex and ambivalent. Theater's only defining quality was that illusion would be integral to its identity, and thus would not be punished as it might be in other social contexts. Thus, theatre told stories both neutered of circumstance yet couched in a practice whose techniques, in Michel's own, English words, "make them [people] laugh, make them cry."

Michel's second constraint regarding the creation of the performance was that the person whose story was being told would be present on stage at one given moment in the performance. Michel's explanation as to why the refugees themselves needed to appear on stage revealed an investment in the theater's ability to proffer recognition:

⁴⁹ While the "Sarkozy" speaking in Michel's response is clearly a caricatured version of the politician, the comment regarding the "smells" of immigrants is a reference to an oft-quoted statement by former President Jacques Chirac in which the politician referred to the "noises and smells" (*le bruit et l'odeur*) of immigrants (Cimade, [Votre Voisin](#) 12).

⁵⁰ My decision to borrow Giorgio Agamben's phrase is a reflection of the fact that scholars Redfield, Ticktin and Didier Fassin often turn to the work of philosophers Agamben and Hannah Arendt to argue that terms such as *bios* (civic, full life) and its opposite, *zoë* (bare, physical life) are helpful in understanding current trends in immigration policy, specifically the illness clause. Fassin writes: "In Agamben's (1997:9) terms, the full life (*bios*) of the freedom fighter or the victim of repression has less social value than the bare life (*zoë*) of the immigrant suffering from a severe disease" ("Compassion" 371). Thus, compassion in the context of humanitarian reasoning is particularly dependent upon witnessing and ailing *zoë*, less concerned with offering political remedies for establishing the fuller presence of those individuals in civil society. In humanitarian theater, the "bare life" of the refugee refers to his and her potential as a source of emotional appeal, rather than political livelihood.

Why? Because we live in a world where there is the question of the look (*le regard*) and there is also the question of witnessing (*témoignage*). A man who traverses the Atlantic, on the other side he arrives a hero. In France, he becomes a celebrity for his courage. But sometimes, a Kurdish woman arrives by way of the mountains of Iran, two children in her arms, and who waits for her? Border police or, nobody.

For Michel, the narrator's brief yet evocative appearance on stage would provide a makeshift, retrospective hospitality. In instances such as these, *témoignage* referenced testimony's social dependence on an "echo response" (Ricoeur 164) from those on the receiving end. While it might have been possible to expand this suggestion outward into a performance that actually included participants delivering their own narratives, Michel dismissed this possibility on two grounds. First, the director argued that despite his emphasis on recognition, he was not a "humanitarian" who was "doing good" to the refugees:

I was invited to a conference... there were psychiatrists who had worked with victims of war, refugees who had been tortured, individuals who had suffered enormously. Their first question to me was, 'Sir, I am a psychiatrist, I try to do good for the refugees, what do you do for refugees in your work?' I replied that I don't try to do good for the refugees; I try to do good for the audience... This doesn't mean that I harm the refugees but that we are going to create a show... and a show is emotion, laughter, tears, magic.

In this response, Michel dismissed the dimensions of performance labor that other contexts may have deemed therapeutic. Instead, the director grounded the *emotional work* of performance within the domain of the spectators. And much like Natalie, Michel assumed that spectatorship carried a privileged link to both emotionality ("tears") and illusion ("magic").

The secondary element as to why Michel preferred professional actors would build upon the "magical" aspects of performance. Precisely because his show was merely "entertainment", Michel felt he needed the best actors around: "I didn't want poor (*pauvre*) actors to depict poor stories. I wanted the best actors... to depict poor stories." Referencing refugees who wished to have greater control over their piece, or act themselves, Michel related his reply: "if you want to tell your own story, then you have to come meet with me, every morning, and you have to do this: ba, be, bi, bo, bu [Michel mimes an articulation exercise]. Then again. Then again... Of course there is always the desire to serve a humanitarian purpose, but it [the show] won't serve a humanitarian purpose if it is mediocre." In moments such as these, the explanatory principles that Michel used revealed contrasting ideas of what "humanitarianism" actually was. When Michel would dismiss the claim that he was "doing good," the terms of his dismissal labeled humanitarianism an active betterment of the individual involved. Yet when Michel opposed the efficacy of humanitarian theater (with professional actors) to "mediocre" theater (with unarticulating amateurs), he revealed a deep understanding of the second dimension of humanitarianism in France: a set of representational practices that privileged expertise. In this case, the expertise in question was theatrical: articulation, physical acuity, etc.

During my conversation with the director, he revealed a number of rehearsal anecdotes that further illustrated the representational strategies of humanitarianism. For example, when actors complained to Michel that their refugees were enthusiastically relating the political

circumstances of their countries of origin, he asked them to concentrate on their “lives” instead. This distinction reveals a separation between the political selfhood of the refugees, and an investment in their universal “humanity”. Similarly, on the first day of performances, a Kurdish man from Turkey had showed up wearing a fancy suit, sunglasses and smoking a cigar. He was told by Michel: “What are you doing? You are a Kurdish refugee, not a Mafioso.” He kept the costume, but lost the glasses and cigar. Anecdotes such as these resonate with what Liisa Malkki refers to as the manner with which refugees are often treated in aid contexts: “obliquely, despite themselves” (384). In this case, theatrical representation maintains a similar investment in offering a certain kind of recognition, but not necessarily the one that the refugees themselves wish to obtain.

In the ethical schemes to which the performance gave rise, bodily life could thus be given a public home (literal bodies on stage) but that life’s facts were removed from their actual, physical architectures. In many ways, Michel’s work is exemplary of the circular economy of representation that scholars Redfield, Vollaire and Malkki deem essential to humanitarians’ self-justified position as global reporters: the transmission of stories travel from (biological) sources of *truth* to expert conduits of *facts*, shielded from criticism when coupled with an image of the source.⁵¹ Refugees were thus asked to participate, yet this brief and over-determined participation was justified as the desire to sidestep the therapeutic claims of humanitarianism and instead offer another kind “*regard*” or look. In other words, theater emerged as a practice of moral value, whose efficacy was dependent on the talents of experts.⁵²

Having framed a series of aesthetic trends as the side-effects of the workings of political humanitarianism however, it is equally important to consider, if briefly, a different conceptual move. Presenting the performance as the aesthetic reflection of recently solidified political structures (such as the “fraternity”, as Kouchner put it, between medical humanitarianism and the global information economy) obscures the world that is generated as a *result* of Michel’s formal choices. My conversation with Michel were marked by a specific understanding of the kind of

⁵¹ Although she had used different principles, Natalie had arrived at the same formal conclusion. Aminata was present on stage but she could not serve as the conduit of her own pain. Her identity (and race) as the source overrode her *expert* abilities as a *trained* actor.

⁵² Importantly, the question of expertise and the larger professionalization of social/art work is in no way specific to the kinds of projects that I have bundled together beneath the label of the humanitarian theater work. In different ways, RESF, AGO, La Maison des Tilleuls and Cimade were all concerned with the hierarchical language of experts, victims and beneficiaries. While many Parisian performance projects dealing with immigration placed a premium on actorly dexterity, associations who worked for extended periods of time with groups of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers instead sought to break the “marketization” (Rapport d’Activités 75) of social work. Cimade’s Empowering Asylum Seekers to Integrate in Europe booklet rejected the subject-positions of the “beneficiary” and the “expert”: “empowerment requires a change in the balance of power- away from the ‘expert’ to the ‘beneficiary’. So, it signals a major change which needs fresh thinking and new approaches” (20). Part of the reason workshop leaders tried to create an environment where participants could slip on and off various corporal gestures was to further erase barriers between the bodily-apt and the bodily-foreign. Similarly, AGO’s dependence on the “capacities of inhabitants” (Rapport d’Activités 75) was part of an ongoing effort to avoid treating their beneficiaries as blank bodily slates. As previous chapters have shown however, the decision to avoid placing the corporealities involved with the theatrical aid encounter into a bodily hierarchy often resulted in an emphasis on emotional life as that which both expert and beneficiary could represent with equality: the first via training, the second via experience. In other words, rather than eradicate the figures of the “expert” and the “amateur”, these practices simply shifted the larger configurations borrowed from humanitarian work and legal aid, positioning theatrical experts as integral to the process of self-representation.

recognition that performance could offer, however it is possible to suggest that the rehearsal period offered another, more intimate kind of identification between narrator and listener.

While the refugees' presence on stage was hasty and instrumental, their work with the "experts" was long, tedious, draining for refugee *and* actor. One of the actors with whom I met, recounted to me that her experience of the project was so knitted with fear of "speaking for" her two narrators, (a refugee who had recently arrived in Paris, and another who had lived there in exile for a number of decades) that epiphanies were hard to come by. She expressed her hope that her translator's ears had been as sensitive to nuance as she hoped she was in recording for herself the bodily lives of her two subjects. The bodily life of the recent refugee for example ("he's a large man, with a heftiness (*costaud*) and sense of propriety (*pudeur*)"), then became the ideal to be attained, however loosely, in public settings. The relationship between the actor and the refugee in effect reversed the way that the foreignness of bodily repertoires is often addressed in immigrant aid contexts: as brakes on integration. In this instance, aesthetic practices reversed, if temporarily, the lines of mimicry. Certainly, these less visible dimensions of humanitarian theater pale in comparison with the larger questions posed by the dramaturgy of the piece. Nevertheless, they undermine the assumption that aesthetic innovations are merely the rigid byproducts of political change, instead allowing us to point towards social experiences that emerge from within aesthetic practices.

In sum, the performance leaves us with a form of politicized art with a specific moral code. Compassion is elicited by way of a highly specific formal narration: this telling originates in selves who are enlisted to self-narrate, yet it also denies the same selves the opportunity to serve as their own narrators. This denial is premised on two contradictory beliefs. First, it is assumed that political identity is far less evocative a stage presence than bodily integrity. Second, despite its supposedly transcendent appeal, bodily life is also at its most performative when coupled with a subject whose expertise *is* the craft of manipulating the human body. In other words, the "truth" of expert witnessing and representation entails presenting audiences with both a truthful fact (the refugee and her story) and its performer. This performer will be skilled in the specific form in which this story is to be told, and the refugee will have to accommodate herself to this form. It is important to note here the extent to which work such as Michel's posits an alternative connection between aesthetics and human subjectivity. In order for amateur performers to elicit the desired outcome from their audience, they must in certain ways manifest a readiness with the *forms* expected of them. The psychological consequences of such a state remain beyond the scope of this chapter, yet their very mystery is indicative of the broader ethical consequences of humanitarian theater.

In order to delve more fully into the forms of intimacy and sociality associated with humanitarian aesthetics, I would now like to turn to the practices of the Théâtre du Soleil, the single most visible theater company working in France today. Two recent Soleil products, Le Dernier Caravansérail: Odyssées, a panoramic 2003 production on refugees and Un Soleil à Kaboul, a documentary depicting the troupe's brief theater workshops in Afghanistan in 2005 will allow a further outline of the intellectual life of theatrical humanitarianism. Caravansérail and Kaboul provide particularly important entries into this domain, for their material methods resonate with the dual dimensions of humanitarianism: recording the suffering of others, and formulating an intervention, respectively.

The Théâtre du Soleil: Humanitarianism and Intervention

The Théâtre du Soleil was founded in the late 1950s/early 60s by a collective of theatre students studying at the Sorbonne. Their early work flourished during the period of labor unrest that led to the general strikes of May 1968. Immediately following the events of May, the group made two decisions that have since characterized their position within the French cultural imagination: equal salaries to all those involved in production work, and the collective creation and authorship of performance works. The first and perhaps still most significant example of this work was their 1970 production of *1789*, a collective narrative of the French revolution as experienced by a diverse multitude. While the principle of collectivity was evident in the performance product, it was also a significant aspect of the Soleil's rehearsal processes: although artistic director Ariane Mnouchkine would be responsible for the company's work in general, collective members' control over the arrangement of rehearsal "data" (video-taped improvisations stored for internal use) remained significant.⁵³

These brief references to the Soleil's "performance data" gathering practices are important to note, for while scholarship on the company's internal rehearsal methods have been extensive, few have commented on the processes with which the Soleil approaches outside sources. A brief glance at the techniques that accompanied *Le Dernier Caravansérail: Odysées* (a 2003 production that presented stories of exile and suffering from across the globe), as well as the company's earlier experiments with interview-based art works and the undocumented immigrants' movement, will reveal key elements of the company's theatrical humanitarianism. Drawing on interviews as well as promotional materials, I will argue that these include familiar qualities: first, that theatre cull stories of quotidian and emotional suffering (as opposed to political livelihoods), and second that the display of theatrical authority and expertise be coupled with "real" refugees. Finally, a closer look at the kinds of performance labor visible in *Un Soleil à Kaboul* (a 2005 documentary that relates the troupe's work with amateur actors in Kabul, Afghanistan), will illustrate the politics of using theater as a method of intervention in "humanitarian" sites.

Ongoing scholarly interest in the Théâtre du Soleil's rehearsal processes is due in part to those performances that have come to define the group in the international theater circuit: these are characterized by works that utilized international performance vocabularies such as those of Noh drama or Kathakali dance (*Richard II* and *Les Atrides*, respectively) or a repertoire of pieces that addressed fictionalized historical moments from the formerly colonized world (*L'histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge* and *L'indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves*). The precursor for later work such as *Caravansérail* however, would be a somewhat less opulent production from 1975. In 1973-74, much like Al Assifa and a variety of other performance troupes, Soleil members were performing their political sketches in factories and schools and interviewing audience members on their grievances and complaints. This led to the

⁵³ Mnouchkine's public profile is complex and her name has often been associated with the popular televisual topics of the previous decade. From comments on Islamic fundamentalism to criticisms of hardening immigration laws, Mnouchkine serves as both the public face of the Soleil, and an independent public intellectual whose scathing critiques of the state draw little backlash in funding. In 2007, Mnouchkine was nominated, amidst much chaos and confusion (primarily on the part of the director herself) to the prestigious academic institution of the Collège de France. The director initially refused the offer, stating her much-publicized dislike of the Sarkozy administration, and then proceeded to retract her refusal upon realization that the offer did not come from Nicolas Sarkozy himself but merely, as a state institution, required his approval. ("Mnouchkine accepte") This highly publicized ritual of refusal and retraction is a sign of the privileged space that the company now occupies in the public sphere.

immigration tale L'Age d'Or, which the play's program notes would designate as depicting "a mosaic of worlds that are unequal and impermeable between themselves" (Théâtre du Soleil 50). A collective creation filled with stock characters from Commedia dell'Arte and Chinese Opera, L'Age d'Or told the story of Algerian immigrant worker Abdallah, who would die at the end of the play during a construction site accident.

In a 1974 interview with Denis Bablet, Ariane Mnouchkine would state that although events such as the period's Lip watch factory strikes were central to their narrative, personal "situations" were what drove the troupe's work (Bablet 52). Recalling the experience of interviewing workers and militants in factories, Mnouchkine articulated a principle of selection that has since guided much of the troupe's work: "listening to them [workers and activists] is a bit like reading passages from Libération, Politique-Hebdo, L'Huma. So after a while, we say: Yes, we know that, we read the papers. But what we want to know is the other side of all of this" (53-54). While these comments are indicative of how the Soleil positioned itself in relation to the contending *enquête* or survey traditions of the era, they also articulated a method of interviewing that I encountered during my Caravansérail interviews more than three decades later. The interviewed individual, whether a member of the French proletariat or an Afghan refugee, held for the Soleil a source of affective potential that overrode the political particularities of their lives.

The explicitly "humanitarian" turn in Soleil's public profile came in 1996, when Ariane Mnouchkine collaborated with former Minister of Health Leon Schwartzberg and MSF to move the undocumented immigrants of the St. Bernard occupation to the Cartoucherie, the company's sizable grounds and buildings in Vincennes. The work of caring for the more than 300 *sans-papiers* fell to the actors, administration and staff of the Soleil, who struggled to keep domestic maintenance under control. "I didn't know what a baby of four months eats," one actor, Claire, told me, "so I called my mother." Another related: "I was in charge of cooking, and it was like... a tsunami." Mnouchkine herself conceded, in an interview with Fabienne Pascaud that the experience had rendered them all a bit "crazy" (Mnouchkine 102):

Our territory was invaded, our rhythm totally messed up, our hospitality at times severely put to the test. The high idea we could have of our patience, our tolerance, of our generosity was a bit dented. We experienced moments when we were neither patient, nor tolerant, nor generous. But, in the end, we held on. We wanted to tell this story. Our ideas being put to the test by the concreteness of life. (102-103)

Following the St. Bernard group's departure, troupe members collaborated on a performance piece, Et soudain, des nuits d'éveil. The work featured a fictional troupe of actors from Tibet who would perform at the Cartoucherie, and then apply for asylum from the French state and be summarily refused. "Et soudain, des nuits d'éveil is like a bridge," Mnouchkine would note, "and it prefigures Le Dernier Caravansérail" (Mnouchkine 104).

Soleil's brief episode with the intimacies and infrastructures of humanitarian work provide glimpses into what might constitute their theatrical humanitarianism. During my conversation with Claire, she related that watching MSF workers tend to the needs of the St. Bernard group had led her to think of expertise as a "tool" of aid, raising the question: "What can I do, given my line of work?" The fact that Soleil's collective answer to this question emerged first as a fictionalized account of the kind of (failed) hospitality that the company could offer, to

an epic project which took Soleil actors themselves to the far corners of the earth in search of refugee camps and detention centers, reveals the kind of “expert witness” the actor can be. While the MSF *témoign* combines medical knowledge with moral outrage, the Soleil *témoign* combines moral outrage with embodied representation.

Le Dernier Caravansérail was a collective creation based on stories that company members began collecting in 2001 from persons in exile at refugee centers around the world. These included the controversial Sangatte Refugee Camp outside Calais, the Villawood detention center for refugees in Australia and several locations in Indonesia and New Zealand. The result was a two-part performance that lasted for seven hours (McEvoy 212). The show was structured in episodes, with each short vignette staged on platforms that actors could roll on and off the stage. Eschewing continuity, the performance skipped between scenes set in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan to those set in the Sangatte refugee camp, where migrants from various countries were depicted experiencing camp politics. Refugees’ stories passed through various intermediaries before arriving on stage: certain scenes were improvised by actors based on their recordings, other transcriptions and tape-recordings were left in the care of playwright H  l  ne Cixous, a long-time company collaborator, who provided additional written material. One of the actors served as translator, accompanying Mnouchkine on trips and transcribing the majority Persian, Arabic, Dari and Kurdish stories that troupe members had collected, revealing the dominant migratory routes of 2001 and 2002.

During our conversation, one of the actors revealed an anxiety over being the conduit of others’ stories. “I became obsessed,” she related, “with finding the correct words.” Indeed, comments from Mnouchkine, as well as Cixous, reveal that transmission was a constant source of tension, as the company’s materially heavy visual aesthetic was traded in for a new approach that would not “betray”, in the actor’s words, “the etymology of words, their culture, religion and politics.” In moments such as these, the actor’s comments revealed a tension between the desire to replicate with perfection the emotive moments of recorded encounters and an awareness of the un-transmittable nature of trauma. Indeed, this tension emerged throughout my conversations with humanitarians and theater professionals. One aid worker, who ran a humanitarian aid organization and had been invited to comment on Caravans  rail, noted to me that the play in fact “told its story too well.” In humanitarian work, he suggested, “the narrative of a refugee, it is unsayable, this is a story that cannot be told, there is a dimension that is void.” For all the public pronouncements on ethical responsibility⁵⁴, this aid worker felt, the play seemed relentless in its narrative zeal and relied on the simple communicability of “good people and evil people”.

An equally important element of the Soleil’s transmission practices was a familiar insistence that interlocutors focus on evocative narratives. As the actor related, refugees were told that troupe members were less interested in hearing their political narratives than in stories of “their daily lives, their daughters, their homes, their gardens... these were the treasures that they really gave us.” This emphasis on the “treasure”-like and gendered quality of emotional life over political personhood resonates with the broader tendencies of humanitarian reporting, where human beings emerge as the repositories of either biological or affective appeal.

This trend was equally visible in the production’s somewhat ambiguous positioning of actual refugees and interlocutors within the body of the work: such placements worked to imbue

⁵⁴ For an in-depth analysis of H  l  ne Cixous’s comments on the ethics of re-writing recorded narratives, see William McEvoy’s article “Finding the Balance: Writing and Performing Ethics in Th   tre du Soleil’s Le Dernier Caravans  rail.”

the performance with authenticity. One actor had himself lived as a refugee in various countries before being granted a residency permit in France. Conservatory trained, he had met Mnouchkine through aid collectives while in Sangatte and was cast in Caravansérail. “At first,” he told me, “I didn’t want to talk about all of this. I had just come from a three and a half year voyage and I had been in the position of a refugee for a longtime. I wanted to be in a Shakespeare play or something that had nothing to do with my life... later, I began to see it as an exercise in writing, and staging.” In the filmed version of Caravansérail, the actor inhabits characters in various scenes, but is also portrayed sitting in the Cartoucherie, writing a letter addressed to his father and referencing his theater work in France. In a different Cartoucherie scene, yet another narrator and now Soleil member sits at a table writing out the words to French poet Paul Eluard’s “La Liberté”, embodying the not-so-subtle suggestion that the Cartoucherie provided the setting for such freedom (Le Dernier). In addition, several other individuals whom collective members had met along the way were temporarily integrated into their international performances, at times corporally, at times only through their recorded voices. In the filmed version of Caravansérail, short scenes portray Soleil members recording the narratives of several individuals who recur throughout the work, and it is not always clear whether the un-translated voices belong to the individuals, nor whether the individuals we see are the narrators themselves. While it is important to note that such ambiguity resists a certain kind of essentialism, its overall effect is to ground the company’s fictive, even stylized work in the “real” circumstances of field study.

While the company’s decision to juxtapose (or in certain instances, seem to suggest a juxtaposition of) actors and refugees resonates with the larger dimensions of humanitarian theater, it is perhaps best understood in light of the company’s broader philosophy of performance. The Soleil’s theatrical expertise has been premised on what Alan Filewod refers to as “the dialectical interface of exposed theatre practice and peak disciplinary facility” (Filewod 2). In other words, the performance structure exposes actors seated at their dressing tables to the viewing public, and then stuns them with an opulence that is equally actor-based. In a sense, the presentation of emotional life and suffering in untrained “authentic” narratives (and at certain moments, bodies) serves as a similar “exposure” that the “peek disciplinary facility” of the Soleil’s ultra-trained actors then renders aesthetically rich and structurally accessible. As was the case in Michel’s production, narratives are dispersed among their true sources and their true performers.

In various published accounts of the production, as well as in reviews of the performance, the ethical dimensions of this juxtaposition have been subsumed beneath a broader assumption: the company’s presence in camps and detention centers is itself presumed to function as aid. During our conversation, one actor related that the Soleil’s work had given refugees “hope”. Despite the optimism with which the actor viewed their ethnographic experience however, it was also clear that their presence had been mystifying: “most of them [the refugees] had no idea what theater was, they came from places where they had no theater.” In other words, what drove collective members to feel that their work could operate as a source of hope and vindication, was the belief that theatrical activity was in fact *without borders* and able to tap into a set of universal needs such as self-narrative.

Whereas Caravansérail’s performance principles build upon the key characteristics of humanitarian theater, the documentary Un Soleil à Kaboul allows us a further glimpse into how the company articulates their own identity as a humanitarian force. Directed by troupe members

and affiliates Duccio Bellugi Vannuccini, Sergio Canto Sabido and Philippe Chevallier, the documentary narrates the company's workshop trip to Kabul. In 2005, the Théâtre du Soleil was approached by the Kabul-based and foreign sponsored Foundation for Culture and Civil Society, to lead a series of theater workshops with Afghan actors. Led by Ariane Mnouchkine, a group of company members traveled to the city for several weeks to aid the non-governmental organization dedicated to Afghan arts and culture. Following the troupe's departure, two Soleil actors would stay behind to stage William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet with actors who had been chosen from amongst workshop participants. By 2006, these individuals had formed the Théâtre Aftaab, which has since been travelling to and performing regularly at the Cartoucherie.

Un Soleil à Kaboul's objective is to illustrate the proceedings of a theater workshop, thus the strategies by which it "witnesses" its injured subjects differ significantly from those of humanitarian theater. Instead, the documentary's primary task is to record the manner in which the Soleil's teachings of Commedia dell'Arte, Balinese mask traditions and classical French farce resonate with the amateur actors. Despite this pedagogical emphasis however, the filmic form endows the documentary with opportunities to portray the young Afghan participants *as* recipients of aid rather than students. In what follows, I will suggest first that the documentary's emphasis on theatrical pedagogy renders theater into an "interventionist", civilizing and universalizing force. Second, I will suggest that such openly politicized humanitarianism positions troupe members as on-the-ground interventionists. As a result, the fears that the actors are shown negotiating reveal the asymmetrical dynamics of such involvement.

Given Un Soleil à Kaboul's emphasis on documenting a workshop process devoted to teaching different theatrical styles, much of the camera's work remains within the walls of the garden where the workshop takes place. Despite this focus however, the documentary reveals an attendant interest in portraying the amateur participants *as* Afghans, the victims *par excellence* of the early 21st century humanitarian imagination and certainly key figures in Caravansérial. In other words, scenes of actor training that position the Afghan students as learners are juxtaposed with references to gender violence under the Taliban, and images of women wearing full-body coverings on the streets of Kabul. The joyful and carefree space of the workshop emerges as a distraction from excerpts offered as evidence of day-to-day suffering, and the documentary quotes various voices confirming that "inside art there is something" (Kaboul).

While images from the city establish a larger portrait of life in Kabul in 2005, following exposure to the United States-led bombing campaign, they also form the backdrop for Mnouchkine's articulation of theater's benefits. Consider the following example: After several experiments with costumes and masks, the workshop focused on the basics of assuming theatrical characters. Given the Soleil's emphasis on bodily training, this information was imparted through exaggerated bodily stereotypes, body-altering costume changes and even a session where participants watched the jerky movements and rhythms of a turtle that had accidentally made its way onto the stage. In order to emphasize the fact that embodying a character would come through repeated engagements with its outer form, Mnouchkine gave the following example to the majority male group:

For example, put yourself in the place of a woman and for one day, wear a chadari (the full-body covering) for one day, go out on to the street for one hour. You will be ashamed. Ashamed. This is the work of acting right there. (Kaboul)

A few moments later, Mnouchkine would re-refer to the covering as “the mark of infamy”, adding that “progress... not Coca-cola, but real progress” would be the actor’s “role, it’s your mission.” Evident in these brief exchanges is the way in which the attainment of “disciplinary” techniques and expertise is itself articulated through the paternalism of international humanitarianism. In effect, there is a merging of theatrical technique and humanitarian denunciation. The blend of Western theatrical expertise and moral outrage at local practices guarantees the emergence of a “moral truth”: a vision of progress based not on the relentless invasion of global corporate capitalism but that of “progressive” sentiment and moral righteousness *through art*. The theatrical assumption of character becomes a process of intervening within the lives of the un-initiated and civilizing them.

Conversely, in other instances, the universalizing tendencies of the workshop are addressed directly. A few moments after their arrival in Kabul, Mnouchkine is filmed while counseling her actors:

We haven’t come to show universal theater, even if, inside, [Mnouchkine smiles] we believe that we have come to show universal theater... [we are here to] show the work of one troupe, how to be an ensemble. (Kaboul)

Such tongue-in-cheek moments reveal the troupe’s awareness that what they present as “universal theatre” *is* the theatre of the Soleil. Nonetheless, what escapes critique is the larger notion that theatrical activity as such could ever be “universal” in the first place. Instead, the assumption undergirding the workshop is first that all theatrical action necessarily references Western theatrical traditions and second that participation in theater is necessarily therapeutic. When participants’ on-stage gestures are awkward or seemingly incommunicable, these are quickly dismissed and replaced with new gestures (mainly from the stylized tradition of Commedia). When the actors excel at these new gestures, presenting a short and successful scene on the interaction between a master seeking tea and his nerve-wracking servant, Mnouchkine smiles and notes to Soleil actors: “That was completely Molière.”

Equally evident throughout the documentary is faith in the theater’s ability to heal social wounds. During the workshop, the actors are encouraged to stage a comedic version of a beating that one participant had received under the Taliban. When this piece is finally performed by the amateur actors, the camera focuses on the impassioned and teary faces of Soleil members. Viewers are given few indications as to how the imagined, therapeutic dimensions of comedic performance are being experienced by Afghan audience members. In addition, the redemption inherent to theatrical participation is highlighted throughout as the act of taking part in an “ensemble”. The workshop establishes collectivity itself as a virtue. Yet again, the documentary provides us with few clues as to how the final selection of a set of more competent actors (to stage Romeo and Juliet) is then interpreted and experienced by the larger collective of participants. While theater’s psychological benefits are assumed throughout, little effort goes to assessing its psychological after-effects.

Although these observations are by no means intended to discredit the pleasurable dimensions of this experience, they merely serve to underline its un-calculated risks for participants. Conversely, “risk” emerges throughout the documentary as a phenomenon that concerns only Soleil members: theater personnel are portrayed as on-the-ground interventionists who risk their *own* lives by traveling to Kabul. The documentary opens with troupe members

debating whether or not to go through with the trip. These debates are juxtaposed with media images of foreign journalists held at gunpoint by the Taliban, which provokes one actor into stating: “I really believe that there are people who prefer to see us dead” (*Kaboul*). After listening to her actors’ concerns, Mnouchkine comments: “I don’t know what to tell you... but me, I am going in any case.” In the end, the Soleil’s trip is positioned as a *sacrifice* that troupe members make in order to intervene in Kabul.

While comments such as these reveal the deeply personal negotiations and involvement the trip demanded from troupe members, they also serve as an illustration of what Didier Fassin might call humanitarianism’s “politics of life.” In a study of how MSF members debated the possible conclusion of their medical work in Iraq during the 2003 invasion, Fassin identifies an ethical configuration specific to medical humanitarianism: a contrast between lives that can be “saved” (Iraqi lives) and lives that can be “risked” (French lives) (“Humanitarianism” 507). As MSF members debate pulling their own, non-Iraqi workers from Baghdad, they enter a complex negotiation between their “principles (to assist populations)” and the “efficacy” (507) of their mission (the knowledge that their awkward position in Baghdad could actually save too few lives to merit risking their own). Although moral humanitarianism dictates the equality of suffering regardless of national affiliation, Fassin concludes that such principles are compromised by a geopolitical order that values human lives according to differing scales. While theatrical intervention and medical intervention entail far different kinds of “aid”, they are nevertheless negotiated in the same vein: how many lives can be “saved” by its presence to merit “risking” so many more?

The Deliverable Outcome of Humanitarian Theater

Throughout this chapter, I have noted that humanitarian theater is characterized by two overarching qualities. First, its portrayal of refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants privileges the affective dimensions of these individuals’ life experiences, maintaining careful control over the kinds of narratives they are able to produce, as well as the kinds of narratives that are represented on stage. Second, the representation itself combines both the “source” of the narratives, whose presence on stage endows the project with an authenticity that mere reporting could not generate, and its “conduit”, a professional actor whose theatrical expertise is necessary for the evocative delivery of such a narrative. As noted earlier, Natalie’s play is exemplary of this emergent genre. Natalie’s staging places the Ivorian actor and undocumented immigrant Aminata front and center. The occasional non-French hymns she breaks into are exposed to maximum effect yet left un-translated. The white French woman reciting Aminata’s “emotion”-filled first-person narrative serves as the figure anchoring Aminata in *this* world- assimilable to its linguistic structures, racial profile and propensity for self-declaration.

Such a dramaturgical configuration, I have suggested, is best understood in light of a series of legislative, medical humanitarian and representational transformations that have increasingly made immigration, refuge and asylum into matters with *affective* resolutions, rather than political answers. In other words, Aminata’s positioning as a reservoir of “emotional” appeal is in direct conversation with a legal system that increasingly rewards such self-presentation, a set of humanitarian vocabularies that present individuals as models of universal “humanity” and social movements that represent the political sufferings of a multitude via

singular figures. In turn, I have argued that the normalization of the strategies of humanitarian theater have the potential to feed back into the political and ideological systems that fostered it in the first place, reversing the uni-directional pull often established between political change and aesthetic innovation.

Earlier in this chapter, I had suggested that “humanitarian theater”, despite its commercial status and complicated relationship to its “subjects” (the immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers whose narratives are presented and bodily presence required) was nevertheless best considered in the broader framework of theatrical aid work. For the greater part of this dissertation, the phrase “theatrical aid work” has referred to social work that positions performance practice as an instrument with which to secure a series of administrative, social and personal ends: socio-professional insertion, integration into the national community, an affinity for the host country’s cultural practices, an appreciation of aesthetic work and first-hand experience of its emancipatory potential. Humanitarian theater makes no such claim yet a closer look at its division of performance labor, as well as the vocabularies that surround this division reveal deep imbrications with the world of humanitarian aid and humanitarian witnessing. Above all, theatrical aid work and humanitarian theater are united by an implied certainty in theater’s social worth.

The manner in which Natalie’s play illustrates the event-ness of humanitarian theater is evidence of this certainty. While the representative practices of medical humanitarian organizations are essentially geared towards harvesting donations for specific causes, the desired outcome of the humanitarian theater work is the event *itself*. This dynamic is replicated in the play’s formal structure. Aminata is eventually surrounded on stage by approximately sixty women who are charged with providing the gaze of the “social”. Yet, their contributions are similarly pained offerings (although none more so than that of the “African woman”) and offer few attempts at redress. Thus, the outcome of exhibiting Aminata’s pain is the fact of having exhibited it. In the process, the “facts” of Aminata’s life will be erased to make way for evocative anecdotes and her voice, so to speak, will be sounded by another.

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