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Narratives of homelessness and displacement : Life testimonies of Cameroonian asylum seekers in Johannesburg

Pineteh, Ernest Angu

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

> *…Exile, unlike nationalism, is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past… Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstruct their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people…*
>
> *(Said 2001: 177)*

This study on the narrative construction of the experiences of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees was motivated simultaneously by the rising preoccupation with refugee issues globally and the long-standing debates on the socioeconomic and political existence of forced migrants in South Africa. Above all, it was also sparked off by the desire to explore alternative research paradigms to the seemingly monolithic approach, which has so far dominated recent studies on African refugees in the South African context. One key interest of this study is therefore to explore fresh directions for research on asylum seekers and refugees in post-apartheid South Africa.

1.1 Aims and Context of Study.

Through an analysis of Cameroonian oral testimonies, the study seeks to understand the experiences and conditions of exile and homelessness of this community of forced migrants. The main thrust of this thesis is based on an analysis of life testimonies, oral narratives and the stories that Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees living in Johannesburg tell about themselves; their past, present and future; their journey to exile; and their aspirations, memories of home and sense of identity as forced migrants. It focuses primarily on the narrative construction of migrant experiences and how varied narrative strategies are used to articulate broader exilic discourses such as the construction of memory, identity and spaces. Against this backdrop, I hope to access

individual lives and the subjective and collective experiences of Cameroonian forced migrants in Johannesburg and how they interpret and construct these experiences. Finally, this thesis attempts to collate creative and imaginative patterns of narration into a discursive text, which exemplifies how Cameroonian displaced persons have succeeded in reconstructing new identities, remembering their experiences and representing migrant spaces as they sojourn in Johannesburg as refugees and asylum seekers. On this journey, the locus of interest will be to investigate the literary genres and strategies utilised by my interviewees in a bid to narrate their social experiences.

The thesis draws significantly on the theoretical conception that narratives provide a fascinating space for the expression of personal experiences and the complex realities of forced migration as well as assessing and evaluating broader migrant discourses such as identity, space and memory (Tonkin, 1992; Swindells, 1995; Kenyon & Randall, 1997; Fortier, 2000; Whitebrook, 2001; De Fina, 2003). It is also positioned around the disturbing fact that since the end of the Cold War and the advent of globalisation, the number of involuntarily displaced persons around the world has risen significantly, assuming particular importance and new characteristics (Van Hear, 1998; Black, 1999; Spencer, 2003). This increase is due to two pertinent forces. Firstly, the increase in global capitalism and cross social, cultural and technological exchanges has led to the upsurge of migration (Chambers, 1994; Castles, 2000; Castles & Alistair, 2000). Because of these global trends, not only economic migrants but also refugees and asylum seekers have been forced to relocate to viable economies in pursuit of better lives. Secondly, the extraordinary proliferation of violence, armed conflicts, terrorism and authoritarianism in developing countries has also contributed immensely to involuntary displacement. In

Africa alone, an estimated fifty million people have been forcefully displaced from their homes with the largest number coming from countries seriously affected by politically motivated armed insurgents and ethnic conflicts. Some glaring examples include the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia, and Côte D'Ivoire. Moreover, with the exacerbation of socio-economic deprivations and political tensions around the African continent, the numbers of involuntarily displaced persons have continued to soar. This form of migration has been described as the most dehumanising if compared to other forms of cross border mobility, and the people affected constitute "the most vulnerable and marginalised members of society" (Spencer, 2003: 75). Thus, The age of migrancy is symptomatic of the deepening waves of globalisation which have increased the mobility of people far away from their home, a trend that was not very noticeable fifty to a hundred years ago. It is also symptomatic of the upsurge in global violence, as well as natural hazards. These characteristics have provided a formidable terrain for the theorisations and critical examinations of the dynamics of migration and migrant discourses.

In South Africa, "refugee problems" have repeatedly and increasingly come under the spotlight especially in political and, most recently, in academic arenas. This rising preoccupation with refugee issues has been the result of the influx of involuntary migrants from other parts of Africa and the world since the demise of the Apartheid regime. Immediately after the demise, South Africa shifted from a refugee producing to a refugee accepting country. Also, the legitimacy of forced migrant claims has preoccupied politicians and the media, as have repeated remonstrances by humanitarian agencies against seemingly inhumane treatment of refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa.

The relatively tranquil political atmosphere that has reigned in South Africa since the collapse of the apartheid regime and the growing economy of South Africa have been two major pull factors for the rapidly increasing numbers of immigrants in South Africa (Peberdy, 1999; Timngum, 2001; Landau, 2004). Alongside the steady increase in voluntary and involuntary migration over the years, the social existence of refugees and asylum seekers[1] in particular has been defined by increasing experiences of xenophobia, racism and social exclusion within the "host" country.

Against this broad background, this chapter argues for the importance of this study, outlines key assumptions underlying the research, and provides an overview of political trends in Cameroon as well as a historical perspective of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees in South Africa, two important frameworks relevant to this study. It also examines the theoretical illustrations that have informed my analysis of testimonies of Cameroonian asylum seekers, describes the methodological paradigms and provides a summary of chapters in this thesis.

1.2 The Importance of the Study.

As a number of scholars have pointed out, involuntary migration is unquestionably a problem of considerable magnitude and has always been a sphere of immense interest for political and academic debates. While the South Africa government, on the one hand, is trying relentlessly to implement viable and more pragmatic approaches to dealing with

[1] In this study, I have used refugees and asylum seekers concurrently because involuntarily displaced persons in South Africa are either refugees on grounds that they have been granted refugee status by the South African government or asylum seekers on grounds that their applications for asylum are still pending.

the increasing numbers of voluntary and involuntary migrants in South Africa (Refugee Act, 1998; Revised Immigration Law, 2004), students at academic institutions have found fresh research opportunities in the field of forced migration. This is evident from the array of recent studies, especially from the University of the Witwatersrand's Forced Migration Studies Programme and from other South African universities. These studies are aimed at exploring the politics and complex trends of forced migration problems in post-apartheid South Africa. For example, the University of the Witwatersrand's Forced Migration Studies is rapidly growing into a landmark programme for forced migration research in South Africa, attracting visiting researchers and postgraduate students who have carried out a variety of research projects on African forced migrants in South Africa. One of these projects culminated in a publication in 2004 entitled *Forced Migrants in the New Johannesburg: Towards a Local Government Response,* providing an insight into the social experiences and the livelihoods of forced migrants in post-apartheid Johannesburg.[2] This global crisis has therefore produced a corpus of studies on displaced persons and has also attracted attention from humanitarian bodies such as the Human Rights Commission and Jesuit Refugee Centre. These international organisations seek primarily to make a contribution to finding viable solutions to the problems of forced displacement as well as protecting the interests and rights of displaced persons in the South African context.

Yet "not only do refugees and asylum seekers flee from situations of racial and ethnic discrimination and violence, but they are increasingly confronted with such hostility in their countries of refuge" (Human Rights Watch, 2001:2). It seems rather unfortunate that

[2] Also see Timngum (2001) and Atam (2004), unpublished MA Research Reports on Congolese and

in the pursuit of a safe home, displaced persons go through different crippling experiences as they are often caught in even more insecure spaces, exposing their individual and collective lives to excruciating pains and even greater danger. One example of these painful experiences is the recent attacks on Somali immigrants in Cape Town, resulting in more than twenty deaths. From this perspective, Said (2001) describes forced displacement as:

> … Strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unbearable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever… (P: 173).

Said's quotation captures the realities of forced migration and its emotional effects on the people uprooted from their ancestral spaces and thrown into alien spaces. According to him, the continual uprooting of people usually causes a generalised state of estrangement and anguish. Moreover, he contends that the terminal loss of home and the pathos of living in exile have increasingly rendered the experiences of displacement complex and often extremely pathological. Thus, the issues raised by Said are relevant to this study because they capture some of the key metaphors, images and complex networks about forced migration, which recurred vividly in Cameroonian testimonies as they narrated

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Cameroonian forced migrants.

their experiences of displacement. From this vantage point, studies such as Nobel (1987), Malkki (1995), Crush (2000), Timngum (2001) and Landau (2004) have continued to address the challenges and livelihoods of involuntarily displaced persons in different political and social landscapes, as well as unpacking the slew of complex issues at the epicentre of forced migration. Some of these issues include the rights and obligations of involuntary displaced persons, the decline in humanitarian support, questions of racial discrimination and xenophobia as well as the misrepresentation of forced migrants and identity formation. The issues also encompass the United Nations High Commission for Refugees' definition and categorisation of an asylum seeker or refugee, and the problematic of this definition in the South African context. This definition describes a refugee/asylum seeker as a person who has fled his/her country of birth because of "well-founded fears of persecution due to race, ethnic origin, political and religious creed and membership of any particular groups" (Landau, 2004: 16), obliging countries including South Africa to provide humanitarian support for people with such well-founded fears of persecution.

The majority of studies on involuntary migration in South Africa have repeatedly focused on the recording of actual experiences, evident from studies by Sommers, (2000); Palmary (2001), Peberdy (2001), and Landau & Jacobsen (2004). A noticeable particularity of these studies, including those on West and Central African forced migrants by Morris & Bouillon (1999), Timngum (2001), Landau (2004) and Chamba (2005),[3] is their purely sociological approach. Here, the researchers have largely

[3] Chamba (2005) is an empirical study of West Africans in Johannesburg focusing on both voluntary and involuntary migrants.

chronicled the collective experiences of refugees in South Africa and their studies are generally focused on representative samples, on the basis of which other researchers seek to make generalised conclusions. The studies have to a large extent neglected the "highly spontaneous character of narratives" (De Fina, 2003: 6), or overlooked the personal voices of these exiles as well as the importance of narratives for the construction of immigrant experiences. They have also failed to consider the primacy of narrative analysis as a key methodological tool for both qualitative and quantitative research in most academic disciplines, including sociology (Labov, 1972; Jefferson, 1978; Whitebrook, 2001; De Fina, 2003). By contrast, Luiisa Malkki's appreciation of the high value of narratives leads her to use narrative analysis as one of her methodological paradigms for her ethnographic study of the experiences of Burundian refugees in Tanzanian. In general, there is still a dearth of studies on the way the socio-political experiences of asylum seekers and refugees are constructed in narratives. To this end, this first empirical study on the narrative construction of the experiences of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees in the metropolitan city of Johannesburg attempts to tread a "road less travelled" (Hofmeyr, 2001: 4) in the field of forced migration in South Africa

Though the research was riddled with challenges and initially appeared to be quite a daunting task, particularly because of the volumes, "looseness" (ibid: 4) or ambivalences of the testimonies collected from my informants, it was nonetheless a worthwhile venture, especially since it has the potential to break new grounds in the field of forced migration studies in South Africa. In this light, the study hopes to introduce not only fresh ways of thinking about refugees and asylum seekers but also, most importantly, place the Cameroonian refugee community strategically on the map. Moreover, it also hopes to

place the often-neglected stories of displaced people in South Africa centre stage especially since there have been repeated outbursts by humanitarian organisations against the alienation and ostracising of refugees and asylum seekers. Finally, this research also creates an opportunity to make a valuable contribution to our understanding of exile and forced migration in Africa and in Johannesburg in particular, as well as enhance our understanding of shifting identities in a global context. It is not an advocacy of the legitimacy of Cameroonians' claims for asylum but primarily an academic engagement, which seeks to explore and analyse the narratives of a group of forced migrants, and to access and understand the individual and collective conditions of the Cameroonian refugee community in the post-apartheid city of Johannesburg as well as the complex networks of forced migration in the age of globalisation.

1.3 Relevant Assumptions.

This thesis is structured around the proposition that the Cameroonian refugee community in South Africa comprises different individuals with different identities and varied experiences of displacement. Thus, the following assumptions are an important departure point. Firstly, since members of this community come from different socio-cultural, economic as well as political settings, the testimonies have the potential to reproduce multiple and shifting narratives. Secondly, with the growth of studies on oral narratives of personal histories in different academic disciplines, *the way the narrator transmits* different episodes has become equally important for our understanding of these histories. It would therefore be interesting to shift the locus of interest from 'the song to its singing'. Thirdly, I am also hypothesising that the invention of the self and the

construction of social memory and space are aestheticised by various patterns of narration or linguistic expression embodying sets of metaphors, symbols and images (Eakin, 1985; Tonkin, 1992; De Fina, 2003).

1.4 The Political Developments in Cameroon.

In order to understand the Cameroonian refugee community, I commence with an overview of the political developments in Cameroon from independence till the present. It is also crucial to explore the history of Cameroonian forced migrants within the patterns of West and Central African involuntary migration and of course some of their claims for seeking political asylum in South Africa. Also, these historical foundations will help to conceptualise and enrich our understanding of Cameroonian testimonies.

The Central African state known today as the Republic of Cameroon is a product of different colonial experiences under the Germans, British and French (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 1998). The history of this country has always been written within the ambits of these differences. This peculiar division of Cameroon into French and British spheres of influence dates to 1916 when the erstwhile German Protectorate, established in 1884, was partitioned between Britain and France "first as 'mandates' under the League of Nations and later as a 'trust' territory under the United Nations" (Ibid: 208). The partition of Cameroon between the British and French was as a result of the defeat of the Germans by a joint Anglo-French force. After the partition, the British were to administer Southern Cameroon, known today as Anglophone Cameroon, and the French East Cameroon, known today as Francophone Cameroon. Consequently, Cameroon was to be

administered by two different colonial masters with two distinctively different political, social and cultural ideologies. It resulted in Cameroon being administered as two autonomous states under British and French administration. However, in 1960, East Cameroon was granted independence and it took up the name La République du Cameroon, and Southern Cameroon was given the option to either join Nigeria or East Cameroon (Le Vine, 1964; Rubin, 1971; Eyoh, 1998). Interestingly, a majority of Southern Cameroon indigenes voted overwhelmingly for a reunification[4] with East Cameroon following the February 1961 plebiscite. Thus, on 1 October 1961, a new state was born following the union between East and Southern Cameroon and this new union was immediately accompanied by the renaming of Cameroon as the Federal[5] Republic of Cameroon[6] (Johnson, 1970; Delancey, 1989; Eyoh, 1998). The name 'Federal Republic' signaled with immediacy the fact that the estranged partners in this union, namely Francophones and Anglophones, would have to cohabit in some form of a federated state thereafter.

The union therefore marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of Cameroon and unfortunately "what was expected to mark the start of a unique federal experiment in Africa soon turned out to be more a shadow of reality" (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 1998: 209). Contrary to the expectations of Southern Cameroon and to the complete dismay of the Southern Cameroon elites, the pioneer president and leader of the Francophone delegation during the historic Foumban Conference in 1961 was able to dictate the terms

[4] I use the term 'reunification' because, under the German Protectorate, Cameroon was a single state until after the defeat of the Germans and the partition of Cameroon between France and Britain.
[5] Federal because prior to the plebiscite, both parties agreed they had to exist as federated states.
[6] See Cameroon Constitutions of 1961, 1972 & 1996

of the federation. Albeit the Southern Cameroon delegation had tabled the proposition of a loose federation system, they were however forced to accept a centralised system of governance (Delancey, 1987; Eyoh, 1998). The federal system was on the brink of a complete erasure on 6 May 1972 when President Amadou Alhidjo made clear his intentions to transform the federal republic into a unitary state. On May 20 that same year, following the highly controversial[7] referendum, Cameroonians were lured into voting for the "establishment of the United Republic of Cameroon" (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 1998: 210).

Amidst this controversy, the president tried to justify his unconstitutional action by arguing that "federation fostered regionalism and impeded economic development" (Ibid: 210). This new unitary state resulted in the suppression of the minority Anglophone community and the emergence of Francophone hegemony. Since then, Francophone Cameroon has become the dominant partner of the union partly because it is more populous than Anglophone Cameroon and also because of the existing Francophone leadership. The Francophone hegemony therefore incited reactions from the Anglophones as a number of articulate Anglophone elites began "to resent their region's loss of autonomy and the allegedly subordinate position of the Anglophone minority in the unitary state" (Ibid: 211). Amongst the grievances were the under-representation and subordinate role played by Anglophones in the new unitary state. Moreover, Anglophones were angered by "the neglect of their region's infrastructure and the rape,

[7] Controversial in the sense that by announcing his intentions to change Cameroon into a unitary state, the president was actually abrogating clause I of article 47 of the Foumban declaration which stipulated that 'any proposal for the revision of the present constitution, which impairs the unity and integrity of the Federation shall be inadmissible'.

and drain of its rich economic resources, especially oil by successive Francophone regimes" (Ibid: 211). The resentment against Francophone domination escalated to what is today known in Cameroon history as the 'Anglophone problem' or 'the struggle for an Anglophone identity'.

Sensing the growing Anglophone fraternity and frightened by the uncertain consequences, President Alhidjo immediately began to disband this united force by dividing the erstwhile Southern Cameroon into two provinces, Northwest and Southwest province respectively. By so doing, he adopted a divide and rule stratagem, which pitted the two provinces against each other and to an extent succeeded in suppressing the Anglophone tension. Unfortunately, Alhidjo's regime collapsed in 1982[8] and was succeeded by that of the current president Paul Biya. The beginning of Biya's political leadership was marked by another change of name, from United Republic of Cameroon to the Republic of Cameroon,[9] completely annexing Anglophone Cameroon. Needless to state that despite two attempts to find lasting peace between West and East Cameroon or Anglophone and Francophone parts of Cameroon, first in 1961 and then 1972, the union between these 'two Cameroons' has so far proved to be a futile venture, as the antagonism between the two parties remains a sphere of unprecedented tension even in contemporary Cameroon politics (Ngoh, 1990; Eyoh, 1998).

[8] It has however remained an allegation that the French Government tricked President Alhidjo into resigning after twenty-two years in power and appointing his Prime Minister Paul Biya as his successor. After his resignation, Alhidjo went into exile and eventually died and was buried in Senegal.
[9] The Republic of Cameroon (La Republique du Cameroon in French) was the name of the part of Cameroon administered by the French during the colonial period, and referring to Cameroon as the Republic of Cameroon meant a complete annexation of the English part of Cameroon.

Other factors exacerbating political tension in Cameroon today are the monolithic political system of government that has dominated Cameroon's political arena from 1960 till 1990, on the one hand, and its rich cultural and linguistic diversity on the other. In fact, the country prides itself on being one of Africa's most culturally diverse states with approximately two hundred ethnic groups and indigenous languages. This highly centralised and autocratic state and its extraordinary pattern of cultural diversity have been to a large extent the main factors behind the decrepit political and socio-economic life in contemporary Cameroon. During the above-mentioned epoch, the system of administration succeeded in bringing Cameroon into a fragile and precarious state culminating in an array of ethnic and regional conflicts as well as a dictatorial order characterised by corruption, tribalism, nepotism, mismanagement, unlawful arrests, torture and political murders (Gobata, 1993 & 1996; Eyoh, 1998; Konings, 2002). Significantly, this array of ethnic and regional conflicts clearly undermines Alhidjo's justification that federation was a catalyst of regionalism. Today, despite the manoeuvres against a federation, Cameroon still remains a country with fierce ethnic and regional tensions, and it is one of the countries with the most appalling cases of human rights abuse on the African continent. Transparency International has also ranked it amongst the most corrupt countries in the world.

However, the period from 1990 till the present marked a renewed phase in the history of Cameroon. The political wind of change that swept across different countries of Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa around 1990 signaled the introduction of new political dispensations in countries like Cameroon, Senegal, Benin, Côte D'Ivoire and so on. In Cameroon, this period was marked by political and civil rights demonstrations,

interrogating the omnipotent one party system as well as advocating democratic reforms through the institution of multiparty politics. Irrespective of the ruling party ignoring public demands for multiparty politics, many Cameroonians defied the repressive laws and recurrent military attacks, and resuscitated multiparty politics outlawed during the regime of Amadou Alhidjo (Eyoh, 1998; Ebune, 1990).

The struggle for multiparty politics culminated in the launching of a pioneer opposition political party, the Social Democratic Front, on May 6 1990 and this pioneer opposition party emerging from the subaltern Anglophone part of Cameroon. Having failed in all its strategic attempts to bar multiparty politics, Biya's government had no option but to reluctantly embrace and legalise multipartism. The launch of the first opposition party, especially from the Anglophone part of Cameroon, rekindled the struggle for an Anglophone identity and pursuit of self-determination, despite the attempts of both the Alhidjo and Biya regimes to silence this struggle. This movement for self-determination pioneered by earlier Anglophone Elites was an advocacy for either a return to federation or formation of an independent Southern Cameroon state.[10]

From this account of Cameroon's political history, it is clear that there are several reasons why Cameroonians would wish to leave their homeland. But before I state some of these reasons, I would like to point out that the majority of Cameroonians in South Africa are yet to be granted refugee status because the South African Department of Home Affairs

[10] Though the Social Democratic Front has tried to stay clear of the Anglophone struggle, some Cameroonian scholars such as Francis Nyamnjoh have argued that the party is deeply rooted in the Anglophone problem. Also, the Anglophone case has been presented at international organisations such as the Africa Union, Commonwealth and the United Nations and Anglophone Cameroonians in the diaspora

has categorised Cameroon as a 'low-risk zone'. Also, the claims of Cameroonians seeking political asylum seemingly do not fall within the ambit of the UNHCR's framework of legitimate claims for asylum. As illuminated earlier, one of these legitimate claims is clearly the issue of well-founded fear of persecution.

However, the claims of Cameroonian asylum seekers are framed around the premise that though Cameroon has not been dismembered by devastating wars as in the cases of DRC, Côte D'Ivoire or Somalia, it is noticeable that since independence, the people of Cameroon have been governed by a dictatorial order, characterised by visible political instability. This disguised autocratic[11] country has been dominated by arbitrary arrests, press and speech censorship, severe economic crisis and exclusion of certain regions of the country from power, as well as political murders, thus placing Cameroonians' lives in severe danger. Moreover, some Cameroonian asylum seekers seem to be arguing that the Anglophone struggle for self-determination and the proliferation of ethnic conflicts in Cameroon are indeed clear examples of the politics of marginalisation, regionalisation and suppression that have dominated Biya's presidency. Today, the history of Cameroon is written from different political directions because of the multitude of regional and ethnic formations, under the dominance of part of the Francophone region and the Beti ethnic group. For example, the suppression of Anglophone Cameroonians is repeatedly blamed on the fact that since independence the locus of power has resided in the hands of Francophone elites. From this perspective, Cameroonian asylum seekers are perhaps

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are also trying to create the awareness in their host countries that the Anglophone problem is indeed a serious one.

[11] I use the phrase 'disguised autocracy' because since the inception of multiparty politics, Cameroon seems to be emerging more and more as a single party polity. Interestingly the ruling party has always projected Cameroon to the rest of the world as a multiparty democracy.

claiming that with the existing precarious political and socioeconomic atmosphere and the increase in the number of arbitrary arrests and murders registered daily, Cameroon today is in a generalised state of fear and insecurity. As a result, most Cameroonians have realised that the only way to survive this 'military junta' is to flee and seek political asylum in other countries.

Though the above-mentioned claims are indeed poignant and seemingly credible, the position of Cameroonian asylum seekers in South Africa has been complicated by Cameroon's three presidential elections after the re-institutionalisation of multi-party politics, in 1992, 1997 and 2004. These presidential elections have culminated in the overwhelming victory of the incumbent Paul Biya, and despite reports from Independent Electoral Observers such as the Commonwealth Observer Group Report (2004), dismissing the transparency, fairness and legitimacy of the polls and massive post-election demonstrations, the presidency of Paul Biya has been recognised and supported by international organisations including the African Union, United Nations and strangely also by the Commonwealth countries. For example, though the report from the Commonwealth Observer Group[12] described the 2004 presidential election as marred by irregularities and electoral fraud, the overall impression of foreign media and some African states, including South African, was that the 2004 presidential elections were conducted in a democratic atmosphere and were free and fair. Such an overall impression has undoubtedly turned the tables against most Cameroonian asylum seekers whose applications are still pending.

[12] See Cameroon Presidential Elections 11 October 2004,Report by the Commonwealth Observer Group.

1.5 A Historical Perspective of Cameroonian Asylum Seekers in Johannesburg.

Though there is an extensive literature on refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa such as those by Peberdy (1999), Crush (2000), Sommers (2000), Landau (2004) and so on, the literature on Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees remains sparse. However, the past few years have seen the publication of a number of scholarly and journalistic articles, generally on West and Central African refugee communities in South Africa. On Cameroon in particular, we still have to rely on unpublished theses and on-going doctoral research on Cameroonian migrants in South Africa.[13] This paucity of literature on Cameroonian forced migrants might be a consequence of the fact that contemporary Cameroonian politics is hardly under the spotlight or strict scrutiny especially by international media, or that the claims of Cameroonians for political asylum are often considered skewed and not legitimate enough to attract attention. Thus, for the purpose of this discussion, I will have to rely to a large extent on the existing literature on West and Central African refugees, information gathered from my interviews and my own impressions, to give an overview of the history of Cameroonian asylum seekers.

The first extensive and published study on Francophone migrants in South Africa is by Morris & Bouillon (1999). The study explores the socio-economic and political existence of migrants from Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa in South Africa from the 1990s.

[13] Timngum (2001) explores the socio-economic experiences of Cameroonian refugees in Johannesburg while two Wits doctoral candidates are in the final stages of their doctoral theses, one on West African refugee children and the other on West African migrants in Johannesburg.

It includes a brief discussion of Cameroonian migrants as it attempts to explore the experiences of Francophone migrants in South Africa. Nevertheless, it gives an in-depth statistical representation of Francophone immigrants such as Congolese, Ivorians and Senegalese with the intention of examining the social experiences of these migrant communities in the metropolitan city of Johannesburg. From a global angle and without any particular focus on forced migrants, Morris & Bouillon (1999) uncover issues of xenophobia, racism, stereotyping and exclusion experienced by Francophone immigrants in post-apartheid South Africa. The study is therefore a systematic exploration of Francophone African migrants and how they deal with key challenges bedevilling migrants in South Africa. Apart from Morris & Bouillon (1999), other studies like those of Handmaker (1999), Maharaj & Rajkumar (1997), Peberdy (1992) and Landau (2004), using multiple migrant communities as their case studies, have also dealt from a broad perspective with the experiences of voluntary and involuntary migrants in South Africa since the collapse of the apartheid regime. Again, the common trend of discussion in these articles and books has been the somewhat hostile treatment of displaced persons by South Africans and the increasing instances of xenophobia, racism and social exclusion in post-apartheid South Africa.

These studies have revealed that statistically between 1988 and 1990 there were more than ten thousand immigrants in South Africa, predominantly from the Southern African region. The West and Central African presence was still to be felt. In fact, it was only from 1990 that a relatively small number of West Africans, including Cameroonian asylum seekers, could be spotted around major cities in South Africa. According to Morris & Bouillon (1999), by March 1993 Mozambicans constituted the largest grouping

of immigrants, and between 1993 and 1996 Angolans, Zairians and Nigerians followed suit. However, after the complete dismantling of the apartheid regime and the institution of democratic structures after 1994, the number of economic and forced migrants including Cameroonians has been increasing steadily. Yet, the rapid increase of Cameroonian entries is still nothing compared to the influx from other West African countries such as Nigeria, Côte D'Ivoire or Ghana (Morris & Bouillon, 1999; Landau, 2004). Sadly, as victims of repressive laws of a dictatorial regime and political as well as ethnic persecution, Cameroonians and other Africans imagined the new and transformed South Africa as the most politically stable space on the African continent. Thus, the fall of the apartheid era has often been misconstrued by millions of displaced persons as a transformation of South Africa into a haven for other Africans (Peberdy, 1999; Landau, 2004).

However, given the problems challenging most African forced migrants in Johannesburg, most Cameroonians are yet to find a home in South Africa and they still remain strangers in a strange land. Their search for a haven has been increasingly impeded "by powerful new xenophobic discourses around immigration and migration" (Peberdy, 1999: 2) in post-apartheid South Africa. Also, Amnesty International (1997), Human Rights Watch (2001) and Morris & Bouillon (1999) have demonstrated that in exile, refugees and asylum seekers are resented by the locals and are victims of racialised attacks.

It must however be noted that many researchers have been a little too emotive and sympathetic towards refugees and asylum seekers and their predicaments, resulting in a seemingly biased assessment of forced migrants. In the course of my research, I

ascertained and established that refugees and asylum seekers have equally created an aura of resentment and rejection of South Africans as a kind of defense mechanism. One could also argue that refugees and asylum seekers have also played a major role in enforcing social and ethnic exclusion in South Africa, a contention supported by the fact that most displaced persons see themselves as sojourners with recurrent dreams of an eventual return to their ancestral roots (Malkki, 1995). The feelings of being a sojourner expressed by some Cameroonian forced migrants in their narratives of early days in exile were displayed in their passionate urge to maintain connections with home, which often resulted in clearly definable migrant spaces created to "resist erasure through the normalizing processes of forgetting and assimilating" (Clifford, 1997: 255).[14]

Nevertheless, the argument foregrounded by Amnesty International (1997), Human Rights Watch (2001) or Landau (2004), cited earlier, is still pertinent because though a few Cameroonian refugees and asylum seekers have managed to survive the harsh realities of post-apartheid Johannesburg, the majority of them are yet to find their niche in South Africa. Regardless of the fact that most Cameroonian asylum seekers are highly educated,[15] they have survived largely as hawkers or street vendors because of a lack of reliable employment documentation.[16] Moreover, in public spaces such as hospitals, they are sometimes denied treatment or required to pay exorbitant fees for basic health services simply because of their ethnic origins, even though the South African Refugee

[14] This resistance to erasure is also seen in the way refugees and asylum seekers attempt to protect their cultures and avoid making friends with the host nationals partly because they are scared to be assimilated or simply because they resent the host nationals.
[15] Most Cameroonian refugees and asylum seekers are graduates with Bachelors and Masters Degrees and just a few with primary and secondary school certificates.
[16] Most employers are not very keen on employing asylum seekers because of the uncertainty of their lives in South Africa although their temporary permits allow them to work and study in South Africa.

Act stipulates that forced migrants are entitled to free medical assistance at government hospitals (Timngum, 2001; Landau, 2004). The "global trend of xenophobia and growing hostility towards refugees and asylum seekers" (Human Rights Watch, 2001:2) predominantly on the part of South Africans, is indicative that there was no sense of brotherhood between Cameroonians and South Africa nationals especially during Cameroonian forced migrants' early days in Johannesburg. Refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa are in a constant state of limbo, caught between the challenge of making peace with the trauma of displacement and the new waves of traumatic and dysfunctional experiences in their new home.

The reputation established by Africa from the sixties to the eighties as the continent with generosity towards refugees and asylum seekers has largely disappeared (Crisp, 2000; Spencer, 2003). Today, most African countries "routinely reject refugees at the frontiers or return them to their countries of origin even if the conditions from which they have fled still persist" (Rutinwa, 1999: 1). This sudden loss of the culture of humanitarianism by many African states is a result of the following factors: the limitation of humanitarian support from organisations such as UNHCR; the rejection of refugees by European countries after the formation of the European Union; and the collapse of dictatorial regimes in Africa (Chambers, 1994; Spencer, 2003). For example, the collapse of dictatorships has strangely affected the situation of displaced persons negatively because the decision to grant political asylum in most of these emerging democracies is no longer the divine responsibility of a single autocratic leader but rather part of the state's domestic policy, which has to be decided by a broad-based body such as the parliament. This means that in some cases the parliament might vote against the acceptance of

asylum seekers or promulgate stringent immigration laws as precautionary measures to curb the entry of asylum seekers. Also, the decline in humanitarian support has shifted most of the burden to the governments of host countries and some of these governments like that of South Africa do not have the capacity or resources to handle large numbers of asylum seekers, so they tend to simply identify clear-cut political applications and very often reject Cameroonian applications en masse without careful and rigorous scrutiny.

These factors have affected most African refugees, including the Cameroonian refugee community in Johannesburg, because they too have also been entrapped in this new wave of "humanitarian pessimism" (Crisp, 2000: 160). At the moment, the survival of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees is predicated on their ability to challenge not only the stringent immigration policies of the Department of Home Affairs but also the largely xenophobic South African population. Firstly, the Department of Home Affairs has so far operated on the erroneous assumption that most African refugees and asylum seekers in general have a negative influence on South Africans. The department has therefore embarked on enacting very stringent laws against both voluntary and involuntary immigrants.[17] These laws are often enacted to target only migrants from other parts of Africa and are designed not only as a precautionary measure to curb the entry of displaced persons but also to make their stay in South Africa nightmarish if they succeed in crossing the frontiers. This strategy of using strict laws and fortified borders to reduce the entry of involuntary displaced persons is akin to the practices of some developed countries like America, Australia and most European countries today (Reitzes,

[17] See the Revised Immigration Law (2004).

1997; Manby, 1997; Crisp, 2000; Spencer, 2003; Landau, 2004).[18] Ironically, these measures have somehow produced negative results, as it has become obvious that:

> …Restrictions on legal entry for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants have forced many to resort to services of corrupt and dangerous human trafficking syndicates that are able to circumvent routine migration controls often with serious repercussions for the individual… (Human Rights Watch, 2001: 2).[19]

The Human Rights Watch's statement is less astonishing if we underscore the fact that most asylum seekers and refugees, notably from West and Central Africa, are repeatedly linked to illegal operations in South Africa. Over the past years, West and Central African forced migrants have incessantly been identified as leaders of notorious crime syndicates in the major cities of South Africa. Clearly, some refugees and asylum seekers, including Cameroonians, cannot be exonerated from these illegal operations. However, these criminals constitute only a minority of the refugee community in South Africa. In addition, during my research, interviewees argued strongly that most West and Central African asylum seekers and refugees including Cameroonians have been pushed to their limits by the existing South African immigrations laws, leaving them with little

[18] In Europe, while the European Union ensures the free movement in and out of member states, these same states have however fortified their borders against the infiltration of people in search of a safe place. In North America, the Mexican borders have also been fortified with electric fences to curb the entry of immigrants from South America. In the Pacific, there have been shocking reports on the treatment of refugees especially in Australia and New Zealand.

[19] In Belgium for instance, renowned Congolese musician Papa Wemba has been apprehended several times by the Belgium government for trafficking Congolese into Belgium under the pretext that they are members of his musical bands. In South Africa, immigrants have been able to cross the borders using specialized agents who work in collusion with immigration officials.

option but to rely on illegal means of survival. Moreover, the outcomes of a study conducted in Johannesburg in 1994 by Septi Bukula, quoted in Reitzes (1997), revealed that refugees and asylum seekers as well as other immigrants in South Africa are:

> …engaged in a range of economically productive activities including hawking fresh produce and selling artifacts. These activities also include running spaza shops, barbershops and hairdressing salons as well as working as technicians and artisans, for example mechanics, plumbers etc. In so doing, they sometimes create employment for others to whom they impart certain skills… (Reitzes, 1997: 4).

Whilst some Cameroonians and other forced migrants have been involved in illegal activities, we cannot underestimate the positive contributions to the growth of the South African economy by migrants in general. Most Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees have been making worthwhile contributions to the growth of the new South Africa in the educational, public and private sectors. My field study also revealed that Cameroonians and Nigerians have been contributing, though minimally, to the ANC's policy of black economic empowerment scheme in South Africa by employing black South Africans to work in their businesses, emphasising the view that:

> …The activities of these immigrants go hand in hand with a proliferation of points of contact and transactions between the local, regional, continental and global economies. These migrants are helping the reinsertion of South Africa into the continent and beyond… (Morris & Bouillon, 1999: 34).

From this premise, we can clearly ascertain that despite the repeated misrepresentations and alienation of displaced persons by some South African locals, they are indeed endowed with entrepreneurial and research skills that have helped and are still helping the South Africa economy significantly. Modern democracies including South Africa should begin to accept that involuntary and voluntary migrants bring "diverse skills, values and experiences, creating a multicultural society" in their quest for a sanctuary (Spencer, 2003: 1).

Conversely, most South Africans still feel insecure and threatened by the presence of Cameroonian refugees and other immigrants in South Africa (Peberdy, 1999; Timngum, 2001). They seem to uphold the misleading assumption that after fighting for decades to dismantle the apartheid regime, they deserve the rights to be the sole beneficiaries of the fruits of their struggle. Overwhelmed by this prejudice, they have tended to describe displaced persons erroneously as parasites with a latent agenda to snatch their jobs, wives and husbands (Morris & Bouillon, 1999; Timngum, 2001). Today, some South Africans still attribute their failures and miseries to the presence of African immigrants in South Africa. As pointed out earlier, in the eyes of some South Africans, Africans from outside South Africa are simply leaders of crime syndicates, drug kingpins, the cause of the HIV pandemic and the reasons for South Africans roaming the streets with no jobs.

According to this category of South Africans, for peace to reign in the new South Africa the government must cleanse South Africa of displaced persons, especially West Africans

derogatorily known as 'makwere kwere'.[20] At times, this group has sometimes resorted to violence against refugees and immigrants as a way of dealing with their grievances. As a result, Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees as well as other immigrants have been victims of increasingly violent attacks from South Africans and rampant arbitrary arrests by the South African police service (Morris & Bouillon, 2003). Because of misrepresentations emanating from racial and xenophobic tendencies, there has been "a radical change in the way of life of the refugees themselves and their long term viability" (Maharaji & Rajkumar, 1997: 289). This radical change has been reflected in intermarriages, new dress styles similar to those of South Africans and the usage of slang common among South Africans as strategies to challenge exclusion and/or stigmatisations.

Moreover, though most literature on refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa has to a large extent captured the predicament of displaced persons, the results of this study have also shown an interesting shift of perceptions of both foreigners and South Africans towards each other. Some of the testimonies of Cameroonian asylum seekers richly captured the fact that the negative representations of South Africa by African migrants and the stigmatisations of foreigners by South Africans are gradually dying, opening space for positive attitudes from both parties. The impression that the perceptions of some South Africans towards African migrants in general is changing and that Johannesburg has become safer, is illuminated in the following testimony from one of my interviewees:

[20] During my research, I learned that the term 'makwere kwere' means 'stranger' and has been a common term in South Africa long before the coming of African migrants. It was used to describe South Africans

> …Great changes! I have just talked of xenophobia fading, which I think it is because South Africans especially are beginning to accept us and this has opened the way for most Africans in Johannesburg. Crime has also reduced, thanks to improved security measures around places like Hillbrow, Berea, Yeoville. Johannesburg today is better place to live in though some people think crime has only shifted from these places to the suburbs. It is indeed my new home…
>
> (Informant 4: Interview 3, 10 October 2003)

According to this respondent, the strong waves of xenophobia and misrepresentations of African migrants that characterised their early days in Johannesburg have been overcome by new realities such as the new sense of brotherhood and intermarriages. Furthermore, some of my interviewees also believe that this shift in perceptions is the outcome of the new political rhetoric of the African Renaissance and the struggle for a unified Africa continent with the South African president as one of the forerunners.

Thus, another key concern of this thesis is to address these visible shifts as represented in the testimonies, and how they are brought to bear on the geographies of identity and multiple representations of spaces in the testimonies. Drawing on the quotations above, one could argue that having lived in South Africa for several years, most Cameroonian forced migrants seem to have adapted rapidly in their new space. Consequently, the negative representation of South Africa as a severely racialised and xenophobic society

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who have migrated from their natal provinces and settled in others. Most recently, it has however become a term used to describe other Africans.

that characterised the early days in particular has gradually faded giving way to a new set of discourses that seems to represent South Africa as a relatively better country than Cameroon. The new representation of South Africa is owed to the positive changes that have happened in the lives of some Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees. On the one hand, this new set of narratives attempts to contend that most South Africans are gradually coming to terms with the presence of African migrants in South Africa. On the other hand, Cameroonian forced migrants have achieved a lot in South Africa economically and academically. Above all, they seem to be enjoying the relative political serenity and the freedom of speech in South Africa.

1.6 A Description of the Cameroonian Refugee Community in Johannesburg.

As stated in section 1.4, after the first democratic elections in South Africa, the number of Cameroonian immigrants into South Africa has continued to increase steadily. And though it is possible to give a rough numerical estimate of Cameroonian forced migrants in South Africa, it is however difficult to give accurate figures for the city of Johannesburg. This difficulty could be attributed to the following reasons: the Department of Home Affairs seems to archive records of all Cameroonian forced migrants in South Africa as a whole without a statistical breakdown of the number in each city; some Cameroonian asylum seekers have immigrated to other countries without cancelling their applications for asylum; and lastly, others have decided to change their status through marriages with South Africans, by so doing annulling their applications for political asylum.

Nevertheless, Johannesburg remains the main host of Cameroonian forced migrants, though the figures in most studies on Cameroonian forced migrants "vary greatly and often are based on conjecture" (De Fina, 2003: 32). For instance, Timngum (2001) and some of my informants estimate there are approximately two hundred and fifty Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees in Johannesburg. This number is made up of Francophones and Anglophones as well as Cameroonians from different ethnic groups. Amongst the two hundred and fifty, it is estimated that Anglophones constitute 65%, Francophones 35%, with about 80 % males and just about 20% females. To explain this demographical representation, some of my respondents pointed out that the disparity between Anglophones and Francophones could be attributed to the fact that Francophones previously were not very keen on immigrating to South Africa because of language difficulties. Also, female interviewees stated that most Cameroonian females are not keen on immigrating to South Africa because of rumours that the experiences of female migrants in South Africa are more excruciating than in other countries like the United States, Britain or other European countries. However, it is possible that these figures might have increased or reduced after 2002, so they should be treated simply as approximations.

In terms of habitation, though Cameroonian forced migrants are scattered all over Johannesburg, they mostly live in the inner city Johannesburg, particularly in Hillbrow, Berea, Braamfontein and Yeoville. Furthemore, because of the large numbers of African migrants living in these neighbourhoods, sections such as High Point and Pretoria Street in Hillbrow as well as Rockey Street in Yeoville are fast becoming migrant ghettos. Particularly noticeable within the Cameroonian refugee community is the idea of living in

a cluster. Here, the cluster is defined to an extent by the ethnic and regional origins of these forced migrants as well as the politics of interdependency, key features amongst African migrants in South Africa. For example, most Francophones live in Yeoville whereas most Anglophones live in Hillbrow and Braamfontein. The testimonies revealed that most Cameroonian forced migrants live in these spaces because the rentals are relatively cheap compared to other more upmarket places and also because most of them are students and petty businessmen/women and these places are ideally the most suitable for their businesses. Finally, one aspect that defines the organisation of the Cameroonian refugee community is the politics of national, cultural, and social associations, a migrant trajectory that I have addressed in great depth in chapter four.

1.7 Review of Relevant Theories.

One challenge that shaped this study was to decide on the most suitable theories for a solid theoretical thrust for the study. After meticulously analysing my interviews, it was evident that the testimonies were constructed around questions such as representing home and exile or identity formation, and were primarily reminiscences of Cameroonian experiences. Moreover, one aim of this study is to show how Cameroonian testimonies are constructed in narratives. Given the nature of this data, I turned to debates on the politics of memory, identity and space, as well as literature on the theory of narratology. In fact, the chapters in this study are also framed around these categories and I have revisited some of the recurrent debates foregounded in these categories, interlacing them with my analysis of Cameroonian testimonies. Therefore the discussion that follows is not an in-depth engagement with the key issues argued in these categories but rather a

preview of central issues that will continue to surface in the ensuing chapters of this thesis.

1.7.1 Migrant Narratives and the Politics of Identity.

Though global migration has always attracted a great deal of scholarly attention, we have often tended to analyse migration as a postmodern phenomenon. Yet, since the origin of mankind "people have always moved whether through desire or through force" (Mallki, 1992: 24). However, recent surveys on the movement of humankind around the world have shown that since the eighties, migration has increased steadily (Brah, 1996). This rapid growth in migration has been triggered by increasing labour demands in the West, the increase in global capitalism, as well as political strife, armed conflicts, and ethnic persecutions in developing countries (Castles, 2000; Spencer, 2003). Thus "exile and other forms of territorial displacement" (Mallki, 1992: 24) have been addressed by different scholars and from varied perspectives. Some of these perspectives include studies on migrant narratives and key theoretical shifts "which have arranged themselves into new conjunctures that give these phenomena greater analytic visibility than perhaps ever before" (ibid: 24). These migrant narratives are enmeshed in diasporic discourses that provide us with a systematic way of thinking about displacement, territory and identity.

Therefore the fundamental question posed by Clifford (1994) which fits into this study is: how do diaspora discourses represent experiences of displacement and the construction of socio-cultural identities away from home? Here, Clifford illuminates and addresses the

implications of identity in the debates that "explore the subjective terrains of diaspora and migration" (Braziel & Mannur, 2003: 13). He focuses on the notion of constructing new homes in exile, throwing into perspective the way space is theorised through displacement and how migrants forge communities away from home (Appadurai, 1996; Fortier, 2000; Braziel & Mannur, 2003). Clifford's article therefore addresses the way "space of diaspora weaves new webs of belonging that trouble spatial fields of nation, home, community" (Fortier, 2000: 16). This contention is noticeably important to this study because it hinges on the way diaspora experiences and migrant narratives translate issues of space and belonging, aspects particularly essential for my analysis of the representation of home and exile in the testimonies of Cameroonian forced migrants.

To be able to explore Clifford's question further and weave it into my study, we need to revisit and review studies on migrant narratives in other contexts. One of these by Amit Wilson (1978) concerns the experiences of Asian migrants in Britain. Wilson compiles a collection of testimonies that captures the lives of Asian women as they face racial challenges in Britain. This study examines the way Asian migrants attempt to challenge assimilation and maintain their culture in Britain, and argues that the central dilemma facing these women is how to cope in a racialised society like Britain and at the same time stay rooted to their culture. In attempting to overcome these challenges, these women often become victims of isolation and loneliness, and are emotionally dependent on their husbands. Like her contemporaries, Wilson argues that narratives of displacement entail "a particular conceptualization of space and place which in short can be characterised as merging of territory, culture and identity" (Olwig & Hastrup, 1994: 143).

Similarly, Malkki's ethnography of Burundian refugees in Tanzania is premised on the tension between territory, culture and identity. In her seminal text, she explores migrant narratives from two categories of Burundian refugees: 'town' and 'camp' refugees. By 'town' refugees, she refers to refugees living freely in the cities. 'Camp' refugees refers to those living in refugee camps. Here Malkki contends that whilst camp refugees still show a strong attachment to their culture and connection to home, town refugees are caught in new waves of assimilation and acculturation. The strong attachment to home and roots expressed by camp refugees is possibly the result of seclusion in refugee camps and lack of exposure to other cultures. Thus, the body of narratives produced by these refugees shows the multifaceted dimensions of displacement and how "place is constructed and experienced, how identity is located and how belonging is achieved" (Ward, 2003: 80). Migrant narratives therefore exude the way refugees "construct, remember and lay claims to particular places as homelands or nations" (Malkki 1992: 25). Her ethnography investigates the "narrative construction of homeland, refugee-ness and exile" (ibid: 25) using the two categories of Burundian refugees in Tanzania, bringing to full visibility notions of culture and territory and how they impact on the construction of migrant identities.

Furthermore, the relationship between culture, identity and territory has also been explored by Buijs (1993) in her collection of essays on the lives of women migrants from different political and socio-cultural origins. These essays provide readers with a comparative analysis of how males and females attempt to reinvent their cultures either as economic migrants or refugees. Here, the dominant argument is framed around the view that women refugees and other migrants appear to show greater resilience and

adaptability than men. Ubiquitous in migrant narratives is therefore the expression of a strong attachment to culture, origin or ancestral roots, which is often used as a tool to fight assimilation or acculturation (Bauman, 1996; Fortier, 2000).

At one level, the protection of national culture and remembering of home in exile emanates from the fact that migrant communities are often categorised as ethnic minorities. Rex (1996), in his study of migrant cultures, explores the intricacies around the question of ethnic minority and observes that migrants' search for recognition in exile is crippled by the fact that they are defined as ethnic minorities because their cultures are seen as inferior. He argues that "members of migrant communities who have been successful in adapting to the demands of their host societies understandably fear that if they represent themselves as culturally different, they will be treated as inferior…" (Rex 1996: 97). The attempt to maintain and reinforce natal roots is partly challenged by the fear of being represented as inferior. This trepidation sometimes forces migrants to search for new identities which are acceptable to their host countries and "seek ways of assimilation and/or inhabiting multiple, shifting identities derived or borrowed from the social context…" (Malkki, 1995: 3).

The expression of migrant cultures in the diaspora is often denigrated through "expulsion, physical attacks, racial and cultural abuse and racial and ethnic discrimination, which gives immigrants less rights than those of full citizens" (Rex 1996: 110). As a result of the denigration, some Cameroonian asylum seekers have resorted to linguistic code switching or dressing in order to mingle with South Africans without being easily identified. In my chapter on identity formation, I examine how the narratives of

Cameroonian asylum seekers uncover the tension of juggling identities by attempting to maintain old identities while at the same time inventing new ones in South Africa. Here, the boundaries of inclusion and belonging are increasingly marginal and a critical examination of displacement should be governed by the fact that it "is not experienced in precisely the same way across time and space, and does not unfold in a uniform fashion" (Lavie & Swedenburg, 1996: 4). The symbiotic relationship between culture, territory and identity is therefore framed around the premise that migrants' experiences of diasporic spaces affect the way they construct their identities in those spaces.

Migration and the construction of different identities can partly be blamed on the forces of globalisation and transnationalism. Because of these forces, "identity is in a constant state of flux and can never, nor will ever, be static and… that identity is variable" (Kershen, 1998: 2). Living in an era of deepening waves of global politics, I argue that "belonging to the nation places people in the world but for many this is a world on the move, a transnational world with ever-increasing levels of migration and settlement in places beyond the borders" (Westwood & Phizacklea, 2000: 12). One consequence of these forces is the exposure of people to different cultures and identities including cultural, political, social, ethnic and so forth (Harris, 1995; Romanucci-Ross, 1995; Brah, 1996; Kershen, 1998; Fenton, 1999; Gilroy, 2000). In this light, the constant blurring of boundaries as a result of the new global rhetoric has engendered a reconsideration of the politics of identification and how identities are constructed by different migrants.

From this background, though migrant narratives often promote a strong sense of ethnic and cultural identity, the construction of identity in general should not be disassociated

from the broader context of globalisation and transnationalism. Given the symbiotic relationship between global trends and migration, migrant identities today are defined conjointly by ethnic and cultural as well as political, social and geopolitical trajectories. These trajectories have increasingly emerged in literary scholarship and bodies of writings that focus on the experiences of migrants and the construction of their identities. Life testimonies of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees become a fascinating body of narratives, constructed through sets of metaphors, and images that express Cameroonians' sense of identity in Johannesburg.

1.7.2 The Politics of Space and Time.

Another melting point in the discourses of displacement is the politics of space and time. In my foregoing discussion, I started to illuminate the relationship between identity, culture and territory and how these different trajectories impact on the construction of migrant identities in the diaspora. When we talk of displacement, it immediately signals the global mobility of people across different spatial demarcations and time frames. In narratives of displacement, this global mobility is deconstructed in different words and phrases such as ancestral space, borderlands, imagined homelands, multiple sites of belonging and so forth (Anderson, 1983; Appadurai, 1988; Ward, 2003). Hence, "there is a certain logic then… in how place is constructed and experienced, how identity is located and how belonging is achieved" (Ward, 2003: 80).

To tease out the debates around space, time and migration, Anne-Marie Fortier's *Migrant Belonging: Memory, Space and Identity (2000)* excavates the relationship between memory, space and identity in migrant discourses. Scrutinising the Italian migrant

population in Britain, she provides a macro perspective of spatial trajectories such as ‘home’, ‘origin’, ‘root’, and ‘belonging’ in the context of migration and how they are brought to bear on identity formation and the construction of migrant memories. Through her collection of migrant narratives, political debates around memory, space and identity as well as episodes of war memories, the text “explores the constitutive effectiveness of memory and the power of enunciation in identity formation” (ibid: 41). It interrogates complex philosophical concepts such as ‘deterritorialization’ and ‘reterritorialization’, imagined homeland, multiple sites of belonging, frames of memory and so forth (Clifford, 1986; Hoffman, 1989; Probyn, 1996). This seminal text illuminates and addresses the interlocking notions of memory, space and identity in migrant narratives, providing another theoretical dimension for my analysis of the testimonies.

These scholarly studies on the politics of space and time contend that “people are on the move, crossing borders and living in increasingly diasporic cities”, articulating that “a sense of belonging shifts over time and space” (Westwood & Phizacklea, 2000: 13/15). Narratives of displacement therefore “illuminate the complexity of the ways in which displaced persons construct, remember and lay claims to particular space(s) such as ‘homeland’ and ‘nation’ and how they operate within different temporal demarcations” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997: 53). We cannot write about migration in general or involuntary displacement in particular without revisiting and deconstructing the multiple strands that constitute the politics of spatiality and temporality. Here, I am attempting to show how spatial and temporal trajectories impact on the reinvention of self especially in diaspora discourses. Narratives of dispersal write and speak about spaces and events in history and are inextricably anchored in a particular space and historical moment (Hall, 1990;

Hetherington, 1998). They also attempt to establish a kind of cohesion between discrepant idioms such as home and exile, and the past and the present. To be able to understand diaspora experiences, there should be a continuous reference to the dynamics of space and time, a conceptual basis for my analysis of the representation of 'home' and 'exile' in testimonies of Cameroonians forced migrants in chapter five.

1.7.3 The Politics of Memory.

The representation of exile in narrative is also a gradual process of memory work. It is a "journey into the memory and imagination that negotiates between old and new, past and present, self and other, safety and danger" (Henderson, 1995: 4). From this perspective, another key theoretical paradigm relevant to this study is the politics of remembrance. The need to engage in memory work usually emerges from the fact that there has been a major rupture in the life of an individual, which needs to be remembered or forgotten. Memory is a journey into the past and how it helps us to make sense of the present and the future. When an experience is remembered, "it assumes the form of narrative of the past that charts the trajectory of how one's self came to be…" (Freeman, 1993: 33)

The debates surrounding the politics of memory show clearly that life testimonies are tradeoffs of memory work and narratives of homelessness as well as the trauma of exile. According to Passerini, (1992) and Thelen, (1989; 1994), the meanings of our lives are often buried in our memories and the transformation of memories into narrative gives us a sense of place and time. Therefore, the "representation of past examples of participation in life events in a life story format, provides continuities of that participation across time

and place" (Chamberlayne et al, 2000: 265). My chapter on memory exemplifies the process of remembering or forgetting in testimonies of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees, and how this process helps Cameroonian forced migrants to deal with the challenges of displacement and the construction of identities in South Africa. The chapter is predicated on the contention that "the process of remembering and the content of our memories are our ways of defining who we are in the present, of framing choices for the future, of finding solace from immediate troubles…" (Thelen, 1994: 119).

Furthermore Eckardt (1993) reinforces these ideas when she argues that the process of remembering enhances the ability to challenge tragic happenings in life. She introduces a new dimension when she claims that collective memory creates a cohesion between members of communities and nations. Here, her argument is premised on the view that "memory enables us to know who we are; it is at the core of our identity" (1). The notion of collective memory is also addressed by Minkley & Rassool (1998) who foreground the assertion that subjective experiences are facets of collective memory. In an essay entitled "Orality, Memory and Social History in South Africa" Minkley & Rassool posit that "collective memory… [is] analogous to the remembrances of individuals, linked by the group experiences of race and class in communities and shared by the ideal memory and identity of these individuals" (93). Drawing on this position, the different patterns of narration that constitute the process of remembering of subjective experiences of Cameroonian forced migrants could be represented as the collective memory of Cameroonians in South Africa despite these forced migrants' varied exilic experiences.

However, the politics of memory is governed by the logic of ambivalence between remembering and forgetting. Memory work as therapeutic or as healing can work in two directions: while some people would prefer to deal with crucial events in their lives by talking about them, some would rather prefer to suppress them and let the past reside in the past. The politics of remembrance is therefore structured around the way memory is realised, textualised or ruptured or suppressed, buried or avoided. My chapter on memory focuses on Cameroonian forced migrants' attempt to remember their experiences in Johannesburg and also how they attempt to 'let sleeping dogs lie'. These trajectories of memory have therefore provided another key theoretical framework for my analysis of the process of memory work in chapter three of this thesis.

1.7.4 The Theory of Narratology.

Finally, since the main concern of this thesis is to critically examine how testimonial narratives or diaspora experiences are conveyed in narratives, it is relevant to theorise the strategic role played by the theory of narratology in interpreting the complex networks of testimonies of displacement. As a study of narrative construction of Cameroonian experiences, this thesis also focuses on different narratives genres such as tragedy and autobiography, and literary idioms such as metaphors, images, symbols and the important role they play in the construction of broader diaspora discourse such as identity, memory and space. This study underscores the importance of languages and also argues that "language is used to perform actions, and that different social situations produce different language" (Stubbs, 1983: 2). To this end, the theory of narratology at one level becomes a vital theoretical illustration for my analysis of Cameroonian testimonies. The theory

provides the conceptual ground for a heuristic approach to the study of narratives (Prince, 1981; Bal, 1985; Onega & Landa, 1996). Here, I do not focus on a macro perspective or all its conceptual nuances such as its relationship to formalism and structuralism; rather I delimit my review to three key analytical features foregrounded by narratologists, which are relevant to this project.

For the purveyors of this theory, narrative analyses are often constructed against the backdrop of three key features namely the 'fabula', 'story' and 'text' (Onega & Landa, 1996). Since the practitioners understand narratives as "complex organizational schemata, which involve agents, time, events, consciousness, memory, judgment [and] language" (Whitebrook, 2001: 10), they argue that the three features are the vignettes for the unpacking and enhancing of our understanding of these 'complex organisational schemata' of narratives. For example, Bal (1985) states that the 'fabula' is the function of events in narratives, the 'story' is the events narrated and 'text' is the 'narration' of the events. The fabula examines the different linguistic features of events and their functions in narratives. It also interrogates the deeper and even psychological implications for the characters in the plot of the narrative. Here, the characters are signifiers of key events and ideas in the narratives such as conflicts, class, culture, identity and so on (Prince, 1981; Bal, 1985). This aspect of narrative analysis is relevant to my discussion in chapter two in that it helps to show how events in the testimonies are resonants of personal histories, political orientations and experiences of Cameroonian forced migrants.

The 'story' on the other hand is literally the plot of the narrative. It capitalises on the actual events and how they interlace or intersect as a piece of narrative unfolds. The

'story' translates narratives as "a way of recapitulating past experiences by matching a series of clauses to a sequence of events" (Labov, 1972: 360/1). The importance of the 'story' to an analysis cannot be underrated because it attempts to mediate the concept of time and space, and invokes the way in which the notions of temporality and spatiality are interlaced in narratives (Chatman, 1990; Cortazzi, 1993).

Finally, narratologists also contend that each narrative must have a 'text'. Here, the 'text' refers to the type of narration in the story and its relationship to the characters and how this relationship impacts on the plot of the narrative. It is a focus on the literary techniques used in the presentation of the story and the "arrangement and display of events in time, which most clearly illustrates the relation between the story and the telling" (Cohan & Shires, 1988: 83). Again, this aspect of narrative analysis is useful because it provides the framework for an analysis of the different genres and narrative conventions embedded in the testimonies. I have therefore drawn on the theory of narratology and used the above-mentioned features as my tools for the construction of chapter two.

1.8 Research Methodologies and Field Work.

As this is a pioneer study of the testimonies of Cameroon forced migrants, there was relatively little existing theoretical material to draw on regarding the Cameroonian refugee community in Johannesburg. The choice of relevant methodological paradigms was also an issue of considerable concern. However, as this project is concerned primarily with narrative construction of social experiences, the study had to rely on existing literature on oral narratives or life testimonies for viable research methods.

Therefore the works of Grele (1975), Thompson (1978), Bertaux (1981), Tonkin (1992) and Yow (1994) became vital sources of inspiration for a number of reasons. Firstly, they reaffirm the importance of oral testimonies as a model for the exploration of social experiences. These studies also argue that in dealing with traumatic social experiences or past histories, life testimonies provide an extraordinary platform and a privileged site for understanding myriad experiences of displacement. Here, "the analysis of life histories does not primarily aim at individual particularities, but seeks to unravel what general elements they contain" (Bertaux, 1981: 62). Secondly, the studies provide ways of collecting and analysing testimonial narratives, including the suitable types of interviews and interviewing methods for studies on testimonial narratives. Some of the techniques proposed by these theorists include the use of multiple interviews, open-ended questions, participant observations and so on. Drawing on these methodological approaches, I decided to use semi-structured, open-ended questions and a multiple interview approach because of "the ways that the narrator attributes meanings to experience" (Yow, 1994: 10) and gave my informants enough space to freely narrate their experiences. Moreover, since this study is a qualitative study of the lives of Cameroonian forced migrants, the above methodological strategies gave me the space to meticulously explore and document episodes of Cameroonians' individual lives and the complex networks of this refugee community.

The research focused exclusively on the Cameroonian refugee community in Johannesburg. I decided to concentrate on Johannesburg because Cameroonians in this

city are easily accessible and because most Cameroonian refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa reside in Johannesburg.[21] In fact, it is not only the initial point of arrival for almost all Cameroonian migrants but houses Cameroonians of all walks of life, thus providing this thesis with the most appropriate case study for this kind of research. I also focused on Cameroonian asylum seekers in Johannesburg because I have a long-standing relationship with these Cameroonians. In fact, most of the interviewees were known to me before I commenced the research. From a narrow sociological view, the use of such informants may be considered somewhat unusual. However, as this is primarily a literary thesis where the object of the exercise is to generate texts for analysis rather than provide positivist explanations of social phenomena, the method is justified. In terms of geographical coverage, I decided not to cover the whole of Johannesburg but to focus on asylum seekers and refugees residing in the inner city, particularly Hillbrow, Yeoville, Braamfontein and Berea and I focused on these areas because demographically, most Cameroonian forced migrants live in these places.[22]

Furthermore, the data for this case study was gleaned from interviewees with twenty Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees from an estimated population of two hundred and fifty asylum seekers and refugees. All the interviews were conducted in Johannesburg.[23] The participants were selected from a composite Cameroonian refugee community and consisted of fourteen males and six females between the ages of twenty

[21] Johannesburg alone is home to about one thousand Cameroonian migrants. Of these, an estimated two hundred and fifty are asylum seekers and refugees.
[22] Today, Hillbrow, Berea, Yeoville and Braamfontein are the habitations of most West and central African migrants because they are the boom areas of Johannesburg and very suitable for their businesses. Some examples of these businesses include internet cafés, restaurants, grocery shops, computer accessories shops and so on.
[23] See appendices.

and fifty. This age range and the dominance of male participants in my case study accurately reflect the composition of the Cameroonian community in South Africa, clearly explained in section 1.5. Also, the participants were drawn from the two linguistic groups, French and English, although with the dominance of English-speaking Cameroonians because they constitute the majority in South Africa. However, all the interviews were conducted in English because all the participants could communicate in English irrespective of their linguistic origins. The interviewees were mostly graduates from various universities in Cameroon and postgraduate students in Johannesburg. These academic levels reflect the high educational level of Cameroonians in South Africa and also foreground the fact that Cameroon is one of the countries with the highest literacy rates in Africa. Finally, the method of selection was based on the willingness of the individuals to participate in the study and on the condition that such volunteers had lived in South Africa for at least three years between 1996 and 2002. As illustrated in my historical perspective of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees, the period between 1996 and 2002 was characterised by an unprecedented influx into South Africa of Cameroonians seeking political asylum. This could be blamed on the deepening waves of political instability in Cameroon between 1990 and 2002, and also on the outcome of South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994.

I conducted three interviews with each informant on different days, structured in three phases over an extended period of one year. Phase one focused on key areas such as individual background, the political atmosphere in Cameroon, the process of fleeing the country, Cameroonians' initial impressions about Johannesburg, and informants' refugee histories; phase two examined the respondents' early days in Johannesburg, their survival

strategies, and how they dealt with xenophobia; and phase three captured the period of their integration in the country in which they were exiled, their social activities and so on. I decided to divide the interviews into three phases, over the period of one year, because I was interested in an in-depth diachronic study of individual lives and the personal histories of this community. I also wanted to analyse each phase before proceeding to the next, allowing the phases to develop from one another in an organic way. I therefore conducted a total of sixty short interviews with the twenty interviewees between March and November 2003. I refer to the interviews as short because each interview took approximately twenty minutes to one hour, depending on the availability of the respondent. The first interviews were preceded by an explanation of the purpose of the study and all the respondents signed consent forms granting me the permission to conduct and record the interviews. A confidentiality agreement, in which I undertook to refrain from using their real names or any particulars that could disclose their identities in the interviews and/or in the thesis, was completed. As a result of this undertaking, each respondent was referred to as 'informant' with a suffix number between one and twenty, representing the number of interviewees used in this study. The one-to-one interviews were conducted in an informal and conversational manner, at venues and times convenient to the interviewees with no other respondent present. The questions were open-ended and allowed for in-depth responses, and each interview was recorded.

The analysis of data was also done in three phases. The first phase was undertaken after the first set of interviews, the second on completion of the second set of interviews and the third after the last set of interviews. I decided to use this approach because it provided an opportunity to follow up issues that were covered superficially during the first round

of interviews; it also gave me a clear perspective of issues to explore in the following phases and how to structure these issues, as well as allowing me to identify and edit the data, excluding material that was not directly relevant to the aims of the study. In the analysis of the data, I concentrated on the symmetries of events narrated, characteristics of the narratives, and the metaphorical and symbolic idioms used by the respondents in their descriptions and the construction of testimonies of displacement. I also focused on the way testimonial narratives are brought to bear on diaspora discourses such as the construction of identity, their sense of belonging, the politics of space and the working of memory as apparent in the testimonies I collected. After phase one of the interviewing, the data collected was thoroughly analysed before proceeding onto the second phase. Here, problems of lodging an application for political asylum, the treatment of refugees, survival strategies and Cameroonians' phobias in Johannesburg became apparent, and I had to explore them in phase two.

1.9 Summary of Chapters.

This project brings together different forms of discourses that help to unlock experiences of Cameroonian asylum seekers and in a broader sense give a voice to refugees in the South Africa context. The chapters in this thesis explore the following narrative trajectories: narratology, memory work, construction of identity, and the representation of spaces.

Chapter one has heralded the historical foundation of the study. It has outlined the aims and the importance of the study as well as reviewed the relevant literature. The chapter has also described the methodological paradigms of the study, overviewed the historical

and political backgrounds of Cameroon, and Cameroonian involuntary migrants in South Africa.

In chapter two, I explore and analyse two main narrative genres embedded in the testimonies namely tragedy and autobiography, as well as the narrative techniques used by my respondents to construct the testimonies. The chapter draws on particular features of the theory of narratology and how my respondents have used these features in their narratives.

In chapter three, I explore the construction of social memory in testimonies of displacement. Here, I examine the way the past is recollected and narrativised, and how it is suppressed or buried. The chapter also focuses on the asymmetries of memory work and the array of social, political and cultural constellations that inform the patterns of remembering. This chapter therefore focuses on the art of memory as an artifact for the recollection of past events and the reinvention of selfhood in the testimonies.

In chapter four, I address the relationship between exile, identity and narratives, and how Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees reinforce and reconfigure existing identities as well as invent new ones in the diaspora. The chapter focuses principally on mediums for the construction of national identity such as national associations, music and language on the one hand and those for the formation of cultural identity such as cultural associations, clothing and traditional cuisine on the other hand. It also looks at the way Cameroonian forced migrants attempt to juggle identities through marriages with host citizens.

Chapter five explores the representation of spaces in Cameroonian testimonies. It revisits the politics of spatialisation and how broader spaces such as 'home' and 'exile' are unlocked and constructed in the body of narratives. Here, I represent 'home' as Cameroon and 'exile' as Johannesburg or South Africa. The chapter also revisits the multifarious discourses of space and how they are deconstructed in testimonies of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees.

Finally, in chapter six, I revisit the history of migration in South Africa and how it has attracted scholarly attention, resulting in an array of publications. I also interrogate and attempt to reconcile the tradeoffs around the politics of displacement and how involuntary displacement has been addressed in existing literature on refugees and asylum seekers in the South African context. The chapter pays particular attention to the relevant shifts and different narrative paradigms in the testimonies as well as other central issues that have emerged from this study.

1.10 Ethical Considerations.

Before carrying out this research several ethical issues were considered. I made it clear that each respondent was not obliged to take part in the research and if he/she agreed to be interviewed, he/she was free to withdraw at any time. Furthermore, I also assured my interviewees that I would use pseudonyms or special codes rather than their real names, and that a copy of the transcriptions would be presented to each member of the case study before my analysis. I assured them that the questions would be open-ended in order to allow for a free exploration of their experiences. Prior to the first interview, the purpose and nature of the research were clearly explained to each interviewee. The interviewees

had to sign an individual consent and a permission form, agreeing to be part of my case study and also granting me the permission to record the interviews.[24]

[24] See appendices.

CHAPTER TWO

"It is the telling that makes the difference": Narrative Genres and Narrative Strategies in Testimonies of Cameroonian Asylum Seekers.

> *…It is a very long account but I will try and make it short and simple. I think the genesis; let me not call it the genesis because I don't think that was where it actually began. Prior to my being elected the student union president sometime in 1994, I had been actively involved in a lot of issues that had clear-cut political implications in Cameroon. I had been actively involved in the Anglophone Cameroon Movement. I led the final struggle that led to the installation of the GCE board in Cameroon… (Informant 13:Interview1, 5 April 2003).*

> *…Narratives are a primary embodiment of our understanding of the world, of experience, and ultimately of ourselves. Narrative's emplotment appears to yield a form of understanding of human experiences, both individual and collective, that is not amenable to other forms of exposition or analysis…*
>
> *(Kerby, 1991: 3)*

2.1 Introduction.

Migrant testimonies are constructed, collective and literary narratives which help with the transmission of past silenced histories of migrants, and are the mediums whereby displaced persons represent, rediscover, reconstruct, restore and recreate themselves (Kenyon & Randall, 1997; De Fina, 2003). These testimonies are often constructed through and/or rely on conventional literary forms and genres as well as different narrative techniques. To begin with, this thesis is constructed against the backdrop of the testimonial genre. However, embedded in this broad category are other literary genres and forms, forcing the stories told by Cameroonians "beyond the giving of testimony, towards creating new thoughts and new worlds" (Nuttall & Coetzee, 1998:28). The embedded literary forms and genres as well as the narrative techniques in Cameroonian testimonies have been used by migrants to facilitate the construction of broader migrant trajectories such as memory work, identity formation and the representation of spaces.

In this chapter, I have divided my discussions into two main sections. Firstly, I have focused my analysis on how Cameroonian forced migrants relied on two major literary genres, tragedy and autobiography, for the representation of their experiences. Secondly, I have examined the array of narrative techniques used to articulate these genres. Some of these techniques include inter alia, narrative frequency, maxims, temporal references and pronominal alterations, key narrative descriptors provided by the theory of narratology. I have selected these categories because of their relevance to the construction of the testimonies as autobiographies, the construction of memory and so forth. For example, the repetitive use of the personal pronoun 'I' was particularly important especially when the respondents attempted to construct their experiences as narratives of the self. Also, temporal reference technique was a key narrative strategy especially since the narratives at one level emerged as a process of memory work. Therefore, my analysis draws on aspects of the theory of narratology and, because I rely on this theory, my departure point for this chapter is a discussion of the relationship between the theory and migrant narratives, showing how it provides the tools for the construction of exilic experiences.

2.2 Narratology as an Analytical Tool.

The theory of narratology has a long-standing intellectual tradition and has always played an important role in discourse analysis. Firstly, as a literary theory, it has provided the framework and the tools for the discursive interpretation of different forms of narratives including oral histories, life testimonies and so on. Secondly, narratology has "paved the way for a systematic investigation of all forms and genres" (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001: 6). Also, the central role played by this theory in the analysis of discourses stems

from the claim that “narrating is a basic human activity. Persons understand their own lives as stories” (Whitebrook, 2001: 9), and these stories are often an avenue for myriad interpretations. Therefore, the tradition of transforming our lived experiences into stories has existed for centuries and has been showcased in novels, poetry, short stories, biographies, autobiographies and life testimonies. The process of narrating is clearly a process of reconstructing and reframing events in order to render such events meaningful within defined spatial and temporal contexts (Cohan &Shires, 1988; Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001; Whitebrook, 2001). Analysts of narratives have claimed that “we live our lives according to a script, which secures that our actions are part of a meaningful totality. Our actions are organised in such a way that we can give an account of them, justify them by telling an intelligible story about them” (Josselson &Liechlich, 1993: 7). The notions of meaningful totality and intelligibility as emphasised by Josselson & Liechlich can be addressed from the following perspectives: firstly, the notion hinges on the fact that the process of storytelling is inherently one of human beings’ social activities; secondly, it suggests that human lives are basically stories that need to be told and finally that personal histories, events and experiences are constantly constructed, reconceptualised and reconstructed in varied narrative patterns.

Furthermore, the theory has its roots in structuralism and formalism, and the purveyors of these benchmark literary theories have outlined the structural patterns as well as linguistic renditions of narratives. Though the theory of narratology is without doubt an offshoot of and cannot be distanced completely from formalism and structuralism, it seems to have an interest not only in the structural patterns of discourse but other factors that could enhance the meaning of narratives, as we shall see in the following sections of this

chapter. Today, narratology covers a vast spectrum with an extraordinary presence in disciplines such as literary studies, sociology, anthropology and so on, especially since it has become a model for interlacing the way "our meanings shape and are shaped by our social relationships, both as individuals and as members of social groups" (Lemke, 1995: 1).

However, despite the intimate relationship between narratology and other disciplines, the origins and developments of this theory and how it functions as a channel for the transmission of social and cultural experiences have remained the locus of polemical debates within academia. One perspective of these polemics has undoubtedly been the theory's relationships with structuralism and formalism. Given the existing relationship and the fact that the theory of narratology is an offspring of structuralism and formalism, there is always a tendency to naively critique the theory within the nexus of structuralism and formalism. However, this interpretation is clearly skewed because the theory has grown and broken way from it 'forefathers' and has become a distinctive phenomenological approach to the study of narratives such as personal histories, biographies and oral testimonies across different disciplines. This indicates that "narrative theory is extending its scope and cultural interest and has distanced itself [though not entirely] from the 'grand narratives of structuralism' and its focal concerns upon invariant rules, deep structures, sentences and dualism" (Brockmeier & Carbuagh, 2001: 5).

To this end, I consider this theory and its critical techniques as essential for the interpretation of testimonies of Cameroonian forced migrants. This consideration was nurtured partly because the testimonies bring together different forms of narration, which

are both multi-layered and structurally aligned. Also, the potency of the theory to the analysis of migrant discourses can be formulated around the premise that "narrative discourse is particularly illuminating of ways in which immigrants represent the migration process and themselves in it" (De Fina, 2003: 5). Of course, this means migrant narratives often reconstruct series of events, which do not only enhance our understanding of the discourse of forced migration but also help with the construction of generalised social processes of displacement. Here, I argue that testimonies are forms of "expression of individual feeling and representations and the reflection upon and construction of societal processes, ideologies and roles" (ibid: 7). Since testimonies provide the platform for discussing personal and collective socio-economic and political experiences of exiles, the theoretical formulations of narratology become important for the unlocking of these experiences with the hope of achieving the intelligibility and meaningful totality mentioned earlier (Bal, 1991; Prince, 1997; De Fina, 2003). It is against this framework that I have tailored my discussion of the literary genres and narratives strategies in the following sections of this chapter.

2.3 The Narrative Genres in Cameroonian Testimonies.

This section of chapter two focuses primarily on the representation of Cameroonian experiences as tragedies and autobiographies. It examines the way my respondents attempted to construct their personal and collective experiences in a tragic sense and/or as a process of self-styling. In this respect, the restorying of migrant experiences tended to manifest and take stock of their lives in different forms and genres. Here, I have decided to focus my analysis on the testimonies of two respondents*: Informants 10 and 13*. I decide to use these two respondents because, throughout the interviews, they represented

themselves as iconic figures in the political struggle in Cameroon and their testimonies embodied key features of tragedies and autobiographies. *Informant 13's testimony* will be used as a model for my analysis of the testimonies as tragedies while my analysis of the narratives as autobiographies will draw on *Informant 10's testimony*.

2.3.1 Cameroonian Testimonies as Tragedies.

Tragedy is a broadly inclusive word and despite an avalanche of critical writings on this genre, the term still suffers from definitional problems (Kelly, 1993; Drakakis & Liebler, 1998; Husain, 2002). So far, no definition of tragedy has seemed to satisfy our curiosity about what really qualifies as a tragedy and what does not. Its definition is further "complicated by the fact that it is also in common used to describe an incident or experience which arouses feelings of shock, horror, distress and sympathy" (Draper, 1980: 11). The search for an apt definition has often driven critics to consider the ideas of Aristotle, Renaissance drama and nineteenth-century philosophers such as Marx, Hegel and/or Nietzsche, or the explanations of psychoanalytical theorists such as Sigmund Freud and political scientists such as Althusser (Sewall, 1956; Leech 1969; Draper, 1980; Drakakis & Liebler, 1998; Husain, 2002). Sometimes we simply "rely on our intuitions for its meaning" (Draper, 1980: 11).

Nevertheless, the model definition and the entry point for most literary critics remains Aristotle's definition of tragedy in the *Poetics*. According to Aristotle:

> …A tragedy then, is the imitation of an action, that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; language with pleasurable accessories, each kind

> brought in separately in the parts of work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions… (Leech, 1969: 1).

The fulcrum of Aristotle's definition is the philosophical and hyper-aesthetic nature of tragedy. For him, a tragedy must be lofty or a meticulously scripted work of art with fulsome words, not "simply a cry of pain… [but] an apprehension of pain in relation to a sense - perhaps bleak, perhaps consolatory - of what it is to be human and therefore to belong to a species which must not only endure suffering, but also give voice to its awareness of suffering as its destiny" (Draper, 1980: 12). Also, the definition focuses on the inexplicable notion of fear and pity expressed in a meaningful text leading to a catharsis and articulated in performance and not narrative. While my discussions of Cameroon testimonies as tragedies hope to draw on Aristotle's definition, they will also use tragedy in a more expansive way and not entirely in the Aristotelian sense. Here, I look at tragedy not only as the expression of tragic experiences through dramatised action but also through different forms of narratives. My analysis also hopes to establish a nexus between the tragedy and common experiences, framing tragedy as a "series of experiences" (Ibid: 12) embodying fear, pity or simply as "a painful mystery, an experience articulated through the plight of the hero" (Drakakis &Liebler, 1998: 2).

Since this thesis is not entirely a study on tragedy, this section will eschew polemical debates about tragedy and focus on elements of tragedy embedded in the testimonies. As mentioned earlier, the entire section will focus on the testimony of *Informant 13* because of the way the respondent aligns his experiences, constantly imaging himself as the hero

and also the victim in a series of tragic events. I also consider the way his narratives capture the tragic notions of suffering, fear and pity, displaying him as the tragic hero in a true Aristotelian sense. The section looks at the testimony in three interrelated phases: his life at home, his experience of flight and his days in exile, illustrating the tragic features in each phase.

Like most Cameroonian forced migrants, this respondent repeatedly represents himself vividly as the tragic protagonist in his own story and also a victim of his own tragic vision. The informant commences his testimony by profiling himself as an exemplary Student Union President at the University of Buea,[25] who had a vision of transforming his university into a 'world class' centre for learning. This vision pitted him against the university's top management and eventually against the ruling party. He also describes himself as an ardent supporter of the ideologies of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), foregrounds the role he played in the fostering of these ideologies, and portrays himself as someone with strong opinions regarding the Anglophone problem in Cameroon.

These patterns capture the beginning of his political history which eventually resulted in a story of pain, suffering and despair. His testimony begins systematically with an elaborate and somewhat glamorous account of his political life:

> …It is a very long account but I will try and make it short and simple. I think the genesis; let me not call it the genesis because I don't believe that was where it

[25] The University of Buea is one of six universities and the only Anglophone University in Cameroon.

> actually began. Prior to my being elected the Student Union President, sometime in 1994, I have been actively involved in lots of issues that clear-cut political implications in Cameroon. I had been actively involved in the Cameroon Anglophone Movement. I led the final struggle that led to the installation of the GCE Board in Cameroon. I led that final demonstration. [sic] Everything that took place during that time was purely under my control. I did all the coordination from Yaounde to Buea to Bamenda, it was well known that I was behind everything. So at the point even before I came to the University, I was already noted for such activities but because it wasn't really an issue at that time, it did not hamper my entry into the university. But having been admitted and subsequently elected as the Student Union President, due to my beliefs…I had certain beliefs, aspects that I admired very much in terms of how to take the university as an institution ahead… (Informant 13: Interview 1, 5 April 2003).

This quotation attempts to image the respondent's political identity and destiny, epitomising him as a tragic protagonist by focusing on his actions that are ennobling. It also represents him as "the only man in action…action that involves the ultimate risk and pushes him to his very limits" (Sewall, 1956: 47) enforcing the claim that "the tragic protagonist must be a person of exalted rank" [sic] (Draper, 1980:18). Although he is not of royal background or a member of the nobility as we often see in Greek and Shakespearean tragedies, and neither is he an important political figure in Cameroon, he however recreates himself as an iconic figure in the democratisation process in Cameroon. Also, the testimony exudes the notion of tragic vision whereby the ensuing pain and suffering are the consequences of the respondent's sense of life. This tragic

vision is portrayed in his dreams of transforming the University of Buea into a Centre of Learning in a true academic sense, and his grandiose visions of a Cameroon devoid of inequality and the marginalisation of Anglophones, positioning him as a symbol of human aspirations analogous to Greek tragic heroes.

After the deification of his political profile, *Informant 13's* testimony shifts our attention to his gruesome experiences in a precarious political setting like Cameroon. His testimony traverses from imaging his aspirations to articulating his tribulations as a 'political figure' both at home and during the process of fleeing. Some of the experiences are captured in the following excerpt:

> …I remember sometime in June 1996, there was an attempted secession, a Gendarme post[26] was attacked and the next I heard over the radio that I was involved in the whole process. Everything that happened around the country was linked to or blamed for as for, I was the master minder [sic]. Sooner, I heard I was needed in Yaounde that I was sponsoring these things, inciting violence but I was never part of the process. At some stage, I felt my life was no longer secured in the country. My access to space and rights were no longer secured. It was a question of whether I could be arbitrarily arrested and detained or just killed. I knew it was one of the two options. I just thought this was the time for me to leave the country… (Interview 1, 5 April 2003).

[26] The Gendarme is a French military regiment and a legacy of the French colonial rule in Cameroon.

Here, the respondent's underlying image is that of a "flawless hero and the potent icon" (Swindells, 1995: 75) as well as political hero. However, the image of a political hero is immediately juxtaposed with the image of a fugitive because of his supposed role in the outcome of political events in Cameroon. While in the preceding excerpt the informant represents himself as a mythic hero, this identity fluctuates ambivalently with the identity of a victim again foregrounding the symbol of a tragic hero who usually achieves his vision through suffering and pain, and whose actions usually "achieve maximum tragic effect" (Draper, 1980: 19). He therefore represents himself in two narrative curves: firstly as the hero and secondly as the victim in his story, interlacing the narrative of heroism with that of victimhood. This narrative style was repeatedly used in most Cameroonian testimonies as it became the "favourite medium for articulating [their] outrage and frustrations" (Lindfors, 1997: 147).

As victims and fugitives in the political struggle in Cameroon, Cameroonians' narrative patterns involved describing how they escaped from their situation of victimhood. This entailed narrating their experiences of exile and escape, which were also captured in different elements of tragedy. Though I argue in the succeeding chapter that some of their experiences of flight were smooth and comfortable, most of the respondents' narratives of flight were clearly accounts of extremities of pain and suffering. *Informant 13's* experiences of flight were visibly peculiar, evident from the several futile attempts to leave Cameroon:

> …I made a number of attempts during a period of nine months to leave the country. At one stage I had a visa to Canada, I had an admission into the

> University of Toronto and at the airport, I was arrested and my passport seized and the only explanation was that my name was in the 'black book', a book containing names of people who are not supposed to leave the country. Somehow because I had meditated prior to attempting to leave the country, somehow everything was taken from me and I was asked to go back. I just think that everything held constant and typical of how the regime operates, I would have been arrested and detained… Now, that was actually the second attempt to leave the country; the Canadian attempt I could not make, my passport seized with a visa inside, the Germany attempt was also the same and so were many others. At that point I knew that I was not ever going to be able free myself from that bondage. It was certainly not through the airports in Cameroon. It was clear in my mind that I was being monitored at the airports. I thought, the only way out was to leave through the frontiers. I basically had to get another passport with a false identity and managed to leave the country through the Central African Republic borders. I left basically using road transport and managed to smuggle myself out of the country and found myself in Bangui… (Interview 1, 5 April 2003).

Narrating his experience of flight, the respondent's testimony again is fraught with ideas and elements of a conventional tragic story. This excerpt captures the figure of a tragic hero struggling through immeasurable episodes of misfortunes and disappointments. As a narrative of tragic heroism, he represents his life in the testimony as an embodiment of human suffering. Here, the mood of the story is clearly of despair, bitterness and disillusionment. Also, stating that he meditated before attempting to leave symbolises the respondent's intuitive idea to anticipate and deal with pain and misfortunes by

spiritualising them, signaling a "tragic vision [which] impels a man of action to fight against his destiny" (Sewall, 1959: 5). The episodes of disappointments and distress render his experience of flight as a narrative of the misfortunes of a sympathetic protagonist faced with the "facts of cruelty, failure, frustration and loss" (ibid: 46) and the tragic sense of exilic conditions.

Nevertheless, after successfully smuggling himself into the Central African Republic, the interviewee's history of misfortunes, pain and despair continues unabated, becoming even more theatrical. His journey of survival continues as a powerful narrative of sorrow and his tragic sense of life during this period is that of suffering. His ordeal gradually takes him into countries like DRC (former Zaire) and Zambia where the journey process is even more challenging and frightening as he faces the realities of war and human rights abuse. Here, he narrates his experience from Cameroon to Bangui and then Lubumbashi:

> …Subsequently, I had to go across the border and there was a huge checkpoint ahead. I knew they would get everybody and inspect them. So the only thing I had to do was to pay the luggage guys to pack me up as luggage amongst other luggage. I knew the customs were interested in the luggage while the Police in the people, I knew that as usual, these guys would bribe the customs not to thoroughly check their luggage. That was my worst experience… I thought I was going to die because it was so hot and I think I have never been in a hotter environment. It was like in the desert and I was tied up there and for that I paid the guys 100 dollars…We went past the checkpoint, the customs actually climbed on the luggage and I was actually under. They did their job and we went for

> another ten kilometers and the driver stopped and I was removed from the luggage. At that moment, I thought if they had driven for another fifteen minutes, I think I would have died because I could not breathe anymore and the floor of the van was very hot and I thought I was roasting… (Interview 1, 5 April 2003).

Again, this quotation echoes and triggers a reading of Cameroonians' experiences of flight as tragic episodes because of the way respondents repeatedly construct these experiences as accounts of disastrous events, despite which most of them survived intact. In the case of *Informant 13*, these disastrous events were dramatised in the different stages he goes through during the process of fleeing. The tragic features of loss of status and value are also displayed when the respondent is dehumanised and reduced to luggage and tied in the luggage compartment of the van. These extraordinary challenges and undeserving sufferings articulate strong feelings of pity and fear, displaying his narrative and those of most of my respondents as mimetic tragedies, whereby "pity and fear become respectively favourable and adverse moral judgment" (Draper, 1980: 160).

The final stage of the disastrous accounts of this respondent's escape from his homeland is seen in his narrative of his journey from Zaire (DRC) to Zambia:

> …In Lubumbashi, I applied for a visa to proceed to Zambia to seek political asylum…I knew all the French-speaking countries had very strong diplomatic relations with Cameroon and I would be arrested and deported to Cameroon if I asked for asylum. In Zaire, my application for a visa was rejected on ground that I had to seek asylum first in Zaire but I had a feeling that if I did so, something

> would go wrong…I rejected the Zaire option and went to the UN, said look, 'these are my fears and please process them the way you want, otherwise I strongly believe that I deserve political asylum'. I was interviewed and granted asylum. Two weeks later, I applied to leave the country and I was issued a 'laisser-passer' which I used to proceed to Zambia…I arrived at Kasumbelesa, the border town between Zaire and Zambia, I was arrested and when I showed the UN 'laisser-passer' they said 'we cannot recognize this because the country is under a state of emergency'… I was simply dumped in jail. I was in jail for six months without any judgment or access to lawyers… (Interview 1, 5 April 2003).

The arrest and sordid prison experience in Zambia continues to exude the tragic themes of suffering, misery, pity and fear. Here, the narrative of victimhood is again strongly articulated with the respondent representing himself in the same light as Shakespeare's *King Lear* who claims to have been more sinned against than the sinning. Pain and despair are inevitable and *Informant 13's* hamartia is obviously not a weakness in his character or some wrongdoing but "simply a matter of being a strong character in an exposed position" (Draper, 1980: 160). Also, the image of an existentialist character emerges forcefully as the respondent continues to take responsibility for his actions and destiny.

Therefore, his experiences in Zambia could be considered as the 'climax' of his experience of flight and his tragedy because after his release from prison, he acquires a job and gets married, and the tragic phrase is partially subdued, but not the end of his journey or tragic experiences. After a few months in Zambia, he decides to move to

South Africa to search for greener pastures in Johannesburg and just like many other Cameroonian forced migrants, *Informant 13's* early experiences seem reminiscent of the days in DRC and Zambia:

> …When I arrived, I couldn't get a job immediately, so I had to survive on financial assistance from my wife's parents. After a couple of months, my wife joined me with our baby and life was even tougher. Then I knew I had to struggle harder because I had a wife and kid to look after. In fact during those days we were living in a single room, sleeping on the floor…After struggling to get a job for quite some time, I began to think Johannesburg was not the city of gold after all. Moreover, the place was so risky and crime was all over the place and the people were terrible, and were not interested in opening their doors to foreigners… (Interview 2, 21 July 2003).

The narrative of violence and disillusionment is again articulated in this excerpt invoking sympathy and at the same time exuding one basic element of the "tragic sense of life" which is "the permanence and the mystery of human suffering" (Sewall, 1956: 6) characterised by irremediable misfortunes. The informant's state of joblessness and the increasing feeling of rejection by South African nationals illustrate the experiences of most Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees during their early days in Johannesburg. Despite the challenges that confronted forced migrants in Johannesburg at that time, this respondent does not despair and abandon life but continues to fight with a strong desire for success and with some degree of "self-assuredness" (Drakakis &Liebler, 1998: 29).

His heroic life and actions during the phases of struggle for survival culminate in a seemingly kinder phase as his life begins to take shape after years in Johannesburg. The end of the tragic personal experiences opens a new phase in his life after more than six years in the city:

> …I think my life today is better than it was a few years back. I have a good job today and driving a good car. I am also living in my own house with my family. I think I have achieved a lot and I want to believe the days of suffering are over…
>
> (Interview 3, 6 November 2004).

The ending of this respondent's testimony represents a kind of Aristotelian notion of denouement where there is a reversal of situations seen through a transformation of the events he experienced during the early days in Johannesburg. Again, this phase exemplifies the type of denouement whereby the hero abandons his tragic status, emerging victorious at the end. It also demonstrates the typical patterns of changes that have taken place in the lives of most Cameroonians I interviewed, after years in exile.

Reading Cameroonian testimonies as tragedy is engendered by the way my respondents located the self in political discourses and how their testimonies were constructed as episodes of tragic experiences. Like *Informant 13's* testimony and as demonstrated in the preceding analysis, many of Cameroonian testimonies focused extensively on retrieving the gruesome experiences of exile. These retrievals repeatedly captured episodes of pain, suffering, fear and the possibilities of overcoming these challenges. The plots of their stories were constructed against the backdrop of these episodes. Here, the respondents

represented themselves as victims in a tragic story at one level and at another level as self-made tragic heroes in a visibly Aristotelian fashion.

Using *Informant 13's* testimony as my model, I have attempted to examine two narratives trajectories, heroism and victimhood, found in most Cameroonian testimonies. My analysis has therefore illustrated how Cameroonian forced migrants have managed to invent themselves in public spheres and political discourses using these two trajectories. In this section, I have also attempted to show how they represent "human reality, reality as it is for beings, who live in situations or contexts, and who are self-creating in that context" (Kenyon & Randall, 1997: 18).

2.3.2 Cameroonian Testimonies as Autobiographies.

The invention of the self as a hero and a victim in historical and political events both at home and in exile has also placed Cameroonian forced migrants at the epicentre of those events articulating a "relationship between individual consciousness and the social world" (Swindells, 1995: 6). This relationship has established a strong self-representation and self-reflection in the narratives of Cameroonian forced migrants. The construction of self in the testimonies is achieved through the modeling of social experiences as autobiographical writings. In fact, autobiography is the genre that the voiceless and oppressed often turn to and it "has the potential to be the text of the oppressed and the culturally displaced, forging a right to speak both for and beyond the individual" (Ibid: 7). Autobiographies speak about individual consciousness and give accounts of individual lives in public spheres, eliciting how personal experiences are intrinsically political. We construe experiences and construct ourselves through autobiography since it is the

medium for the translation of our personal histories and the subjective representation of collective social and political experiences (Olney, 1972; Frame, 1990; Folkenflik, 1993; Swindells, 1995).

Chronicling their experiences both at home and in exile, Cameroonian forced migrants are also engaged in the construction of different types of autobiographies. On the one hand, the retelling of their stories as metaphors of the self positions the narratives as personal autobiographies and on the other hand, the interlacing of these metaphors with broader socio-political events tends to image their testimonies as political autobiographies. In this section, I focus on the testimony of *Informant 10* as my model for the representation of Cameroonian testimonies as autobiographies because of the way the narrator astutely and self-consciously fashions and constructs his personal life, and how he inserts his personal life into broader socio-political issues. Firstly, as a frequent pattern in most Cameroonian testimonies, this respondent's testimony begins with a reformulation of his personal background, before drifting into constructing his political identity and ending with his experiences at home and in Johannesburg:

> …There is no need telling you my name, you definitely do not need that unless you want to tell you do not know my name as well [laughs]. Well, I am a teacher and deputy principal of a private high school and a student as well…As you know I come from the notorious town of Bamenda, precisely Awing in the North west province…a very lovely city, quite cosmopolitan, welcoming and a peace loving people. But on the other hand as I said earlier, it is a notorious city when it comes to politics. It is the hardcore of the opposition, and the city that has given the

> ruling party the toughest of times. I think you know the place; it is the birth place of the SDF and multi-party politics in Cameroon. My parents are strong supporters of the SDF and so are my other siblings. I grew up believing in what my parents believed in... (Interview 1, 27 March 2003).

In this testimony, the characteristics of an autobiography begin to emerge as the respondent constructs his personal life, privileging his family and his ethnic origin. His political identity is formulated against the background of his family's political history and the fact that he is from Bamenda, a city considered by most Cameroonians as the most rebellious and the stronghold of the main opposition to the ruling party. Here, the metaphor of the family is brought to the fore as the interviewee crystallises the ideals of his family and the importance of the family's political affiliations in shaping his political life. Hence, he becomes an ardent supporter of the SDF partly because of his parents' affiliations to the party, seemingly continuing his family political history and partly because he is from Bamenda, a city where a majority of the inhabitants are purported supporters of the SDF.

Informant 10 uses family background as a prelude to his political career, and frames his testimony around this prelude. After narrating his family background, his testimony immediately delves into a representation of his own lustrous political history:

> …I had been very active in our political domain back home since the launch of the SDF. I was a member of the SDF; in fact I was the Secretary of my ward,

> member of the Amnesty International Group and also a strong activist in the Southern Cameroon National Council SCNC… (Interview 1, 27 March 2003).

In attempting to construct a captivating political identity, this informant tends to glamorise his political life and the significance of his persona in the political setting in Cameroon. By positioning himself within the realms of the SDF and SCNC, he becomes an iconic figure in two somewhat discordant but important movements in Cameroon's political history, namely the struggle for multiparty politics, represented in this case by the SDF, and that of the struggle for an Anglophone identity, represented by the SCNC. Because of the way he positions himself in the movements, his narrative emerges as a form of self-styling or "self-fashioning". This image is captured through the repetitive use of the personal pronoun 'I' and the "social construction" (Swindells, 1995: 16) of an icon in a context as dangerous as Cameroon. His political consciousness and the representation of the self as an important political symbol is clearly one of many strategies used by Cameroonian forced migrants to justify the claims that their lives were actually in danger and they had to flee the country. Significantly, his story attempts to illustrate powerful notions of "personal responsibility" (ibid: 27) and of an astute leader as well as a strong-minded political fighter.

As *Informant 10* illustrates, because of the supposedly pivotal roles played by Cameroonian asylum seekers in the political struggle in Cameroon, they could claim that they became the target of the ruling party and their lives were in danger. Here, the autobiographical trajectory continues and it is typical of the narratives of forced migrants who focus on their individual experiences of flight and exilic conditions in Johannesburg.

In the case of this respondent, his experience of flight was not as crippling as those of some other Cameroonian exiles:

> …I can tell you safely and soundly that I was lucky to have a brother with great connections. Through one top military officer, I was smuggled through Douala International airport and l flew straight to South Africa without a break...
>
> (Interview 1, 27 March 2003).

Though *Informant 10* describes his journey from Cameroon to South Africa as comfortable, his early experiences in Johannesburg were similar to those of other respondents. Again, the central features of autobiography are brought to the fore as the respondent captures and reconstructs his initial visual impressions of Johannesburg and juxtaposes these impressions with his early experiences in the city:

> …I told you during our last discussion that I was fortunate to have flown comfortably from Douala to Johannesburg. I really did not go through the fleeing trauma like most of my brothers who had to flee through different war torn countries like DRC, Rwanda and so on. I had a really smooth trip and that was how I got to Johannesburg. Back to your question, I was completely overwhelmed by the infrastructure of the city. It is quite a magnificent place that gave me a different perspective about home. But after living in the city for a couple of days, I discovered that the people were not as beautiful as the city itself. I thought a beautiful city without a welcoming population meant absolutely nothing. We were not welcomed here as you know; we were styled ‘makwere-kwere’, rejected and

> insulted. In fact the people were not friendly at all…It was a strange place then and you had to live life by the day not knowing what was going to happen to you the next moment. It was a tough place and I had to barely survive and during that time, you needed your survival instincts more than anything, to be able to live in the rough Johannesburg… (Interview 2, 16 July 2003).

The informant's story is a reconstruction of his personal experiences in Johannesburg and his perceptions of the city, narrating his difficulties as symptomatic of a wider social and economic problem affecting forced migrants in the city of Johannesburg (Smith, 1993; Folkenflik, 1993; Swindells, 1995). The testimony represents the displaced self caught in the web of social evils of post-apartheid Johannesburg, and emphasises how he courageously managed to survive with his 'survival instincts'. Furthermore, by constructing his personal life along the axis of broader social realities of Johannesburg, *Informant 10's* testimony is the restorying of the multiple personal versions of the city of Johannesburg common in many other Cameroonian testimonies. The narrative is thus an experience of the self in which the narrator becomes his own theorist, trying to locate and give meaning to his own life both at home and in exile.

As discussed earlier, the imaging of the self in the testimonies I collected was constructed against the backdrop of the subjective interpretation of political events both at home and in exile. For Cameroonian forced migrants, political issues had powerful bearings on the representation and invention of the self in the narratives. Firstly, the narrators continually constructed themselves as either victims or heroes in landmark political events at home and secondly, in the process of plotting the realities of their lives, their "autobiographical

discourse involves, at the outset, a discourse of witness: accounts of happening in which one participated" (Folkenflik 1993: 45). The construction of personal autobiography is anchored in the narrator's "development of political consciousness" (Swindells 1995: 74), thus refashioning the testimonies as political autobiographies. For example, the narrative patterns of *Informant 10's* testimony are clearly an assertion of his personal and political identity as well as his subjective interpretation of political institutions in Cameroon and South Africa:

> … I think it goes back to history and I would really not like to bore you with the gory details, which I presume you know. You know about the plebiscite and how Mr. Paul Biya managed to efface the agreement reached during that plebiscite. But the reason why I call it an 'unholy alliance' is because Francophones think they own Cameroon and want to dominate the whole nation. That is why you hear of the struggle for an Anglophone identity and the emergence of pressure groups such as CAM and SCNC fighting for an Anglophone identity. Secondly it is also a cultural issue because there is a big gap between Anglophone and Francophone cultures, making it difficult for the two to cohabit…
>
> (Interview 3, 26 October 2003).

Here, political significance assumes centre stage as the narrator attempts to assess and evaluate the relationship between Anglophone and Francophone forced migrants. Since in the preceding testimony he had claimed to be an activist in the SCNC movement, he recasts this political struggle with the air of a 'connoisseur' or someone with a strong political talent. The primacy of this testimony lurks in the significant shift from the

narrator's recreation of the self to a comprehensive account of the politics between Anglophones and Francophones. In this light, political discourse takes precedence over individual situations of his life. However, this interpretation is still linked to the narrator's political identity because earlier he had claimed to be an activist in the SCNC struggle. Furthermore, because of his Anglophone identity, he continues to be a victim of Francophone domination and the political struggle between Francophones and Anglophones.

The development of a political consciousness and recreating himself as someone with an educated political opinion about the political trends in Cameroon was also portrayed in *Informant 10's* interpretation of electoral processes in Cameroon prior to the 2004 presidential elections. An important fact about the following political account is the way the narrator displays a strong grasp of the political dynamics in Cameroon while in exile, again forging a powerful and glamorous image of the self:

> …We were just talking about elections this evening and I really didn't want to talk about elections that we already know the outcome. I said to my friend that there was absolutely no need talking about elections whose results were already lying in a drawer in the Ministry of Territorial Administration. I feel very disappointed because regardless of what you say or do, nothing is going to change the results. People are so reluctant because they see elections as a waste of time…As I know, the opposition parties are trying to come up with a single candidate to stand against Paul Biya and also clamouring for an independent electoral commission, I mean independent not the type of commission made up of

> Biya's henchmen. I would also like to tell you that recently one of the opposition leaders was put under house arrest simply because he suggested the whole electoral process to be computerized… (Interview 3, 26 October 2003).

The dominant mood of this political account is satirical, as he tries to demonise the ruling party. He represents government bureaucracy in Cameroon as ludicrous and farcical and interprets the electoral process as a meaningless exercise, suggesting that Cameroonians seem resigned to the situation. Thus, in the process of constructing his political autobiography, his testimony becomes a literature of resignation as well as "a means to greater awareness and politicized consciousness" (Smith 1993: 184). The notion of a personal and political autobiography is articulated through the narrator's nationalistic feeling, which emerges from his impassioned interest in home and the way he interlaces metaphors of selfhood and Cameroon's political history. *Informant 10* uses his testimony not only for the expression of the self but the expression of the self in a violent political context, located in different political agendas and ideologies. The personal become political as "the individual story becomes the occasion for…standpoint epistemologies, analyses of specific confluences of social, psychological, economic and political forces of oppression" (ibid: 159).

Finally, the Department of Home Affairs looms so large in the consciousness of forced migrants and exerts such socio-political power, which tends to dehumanise forced migrants. In the testimonies, this form of socio-political power, symbolised by Home Affairs, was captured in the way forced migrants were treated by officials of the department and the quality of services they received. Below, *Informant 10* also gives a

highly subjective account and interpretation of the Department of Home Affairs. This accounts mirrors similar accounts by other Cameroonians:

> …The first thing I was told was to prepare to get up very early if it was my day to go to Home Affairs. So on that day, I got up as early as 4am and took a taxi to Home Affairs. Upon arrival, there were already people in queues and I joined one of the queues. It was really cold and I felt like I was not a human being anymore. At 7.30am, doors opened and we walked in like prisoners and inside, we had to sit and wait for hours. Afterward, I was called for an interview and thereafter granted a six months temporary permit. This is as far as I can remember but honestly it was not a good experience…I really felt terrible and dehumanised like a prisoner without a crime. I thought I was living the same situation I left back home…
>
> (Interview 2, 16 July 2003).

Through the expression of his personal experiences in Johannesburg, *Informant 10* recreates the "marginal space of exile" (Swindells, 1995: 77). Although his experience does not seem awful, it however summarises the struggles of Cameroonian forced migrants to access this space and acquire a refugee identity. His narrative also elucidates "various experiences of oppression and exclusion" (Smith, 1993:161) in this marginal space. Here, the meaning of migrant lives in Johannesburg is defined by the Department of Home Affairs, and he uses his personal experience to model the complex bureaucratic nature of the department.

The narrative patterns in the testimonies of Cameroonian forced migrants emerge as autobiographical writings because of two reasons: On the one hand, since the testimonies are entirely about personal histories, the expression of the self and the subjective interpretation of exilic conditions, they become not simply episodes of homelessness but creative patterns of personal autobiographies. The testimonies are constructions of different personal identities and the positioning of the self as the protagonist in their stories. On the other hand, the personal becomes a public discourse as the forced migrants interlace their personal lives and political identities. The testimonies become political autobiographies, as the chronicling of political situations both at home and in exile is brought to bear on the narrators' personal lives.

2.4 Informants' Narratives Strategies.

The foregoing section has examined how Cameroonians modelled their experiences as tragedies and autobiographies. In the next section, I focus on the key narrative techniques utilised in the construction of individual testimonies and their usefulness for the construction of the genres and broader exilic trajectories. In testimonial narratives, the processes of representation are often channelled using varied narratives approaches and techniques. Apart from the use of metaphors, images and symbols or the construction of social experiences through memory work, testimonies are also formulated using different narrative techniques such as narrative frequency, pronominal alteration, temporal references and so on. These techniques recur frequently as they are employed for the shaping of the structural patterns or the plots of Cameroonian stories.

2.4.1 The Narrative Frequency Strategy.

Narratologists argue that in representing experiences, there is always a tendency for certain events to recur repeatedly in the process of narrating. This usually happens when the events are considered to be significant to the narratives (Prince, 1982; Bal, 1985; Onega, 1996). They postulate that an "event is not only capable of happening, it can also happen again, or be repeated" (Genette, 1980: 113). Such events and experiences are usually episodes with a strong impetus on the lives of exiles and in the process of constructing their experiences these episodes tend to resurface as a way of fostering their poignancy. A good example in the case of Cameroonian testimonies is the episodic repetition of negatives images about Cameroon and Johannesburg as well as South Africa at large. These images appear frequently in the narrative construction of Cameroonians' early days in exile. Most respondents incessantly draw our attention to painful aspects of their lives as a way of symbolising the suffering of forced migrants in Johannesburg. In the following testimony one of the informants recaptures his experiences as an asylum seeker:

> … I have told you this countless time and would like to repeat again that the experience of displacement has never been pleasant in the history of forced migration. I was actually an asylum seeker for one and half years; the experience was different to what I experience today as a refugee. Generally whether you are a refugee or asylum seeker, it is not a good experience because you are constantly treated as a homeless person and a second-class citizen and it hurts…
>
> (Informant 15: Interview 3, 14 November 2003).

The primary focus of this testimony is the reconstruction of the stigmatised refugee identity, also captured frequently in many of the other testimonies. In this case, the frequency of the discourse about the denigrating treatment of African forced migrants in Johannesburg, as in most Cameroonian testimonies, is aimed at reinforcing Cameroonians' interpretations of the crippling effects of forced migration and the broader characteristics of this particular category of migration. The testimonies constantly recollect several gripping episodes which illuminate the tragic nature of the experiences of the respondents in Johannesburg. Episodes of *Informant 15's* stories reiterate the disturbing treatments of African forced migrants in Johannesburg foregrounding the peculiar state of limbo that Cameroonians seem to be living in. However, though South Africa seems not to have met their expectations, returning home is not an option because compared with Cameroon, South Africa remains a safe place.

2.4.2 Constructing the Cameroonian Experience as a Well-Known Narrative.

The informants' use of the narrative frequency technique is supported by the notion of the narrative of the *well-known*. This technique renders the testimonies as *well-known* narratives not only to the researcher, but also to the Department of Home Affairs. The strategy is employed through the repetitive use of words or linguistic codes such as *you know* and/or *you know these stories*, often establishing the assumption that migrant discourses are familiar in both academic and political spheres. In the following quotation one respondent uses this strategy to recast Cameroon's political history:

> … *Like you know*, Cameroon has never been stable politically ever since independence. *You know* what happened during the reign of Alhidjo, when Biya took over. *We knew* what happened and it is still happening. We members of the opposition, SDF, *which you well know*, are always on the run because somehow Biya thinks we are disturbing the peace and stability of the country. Those of us in South Africa are fortunate because we are alive. Some who did not manage to escape are dead today, some are in prisons. I think *you know better*…
>
> (Informant 3: Interview 1, 4 March 2003).

The informant constructs his testimony against the backdrop of the presumption that Cameroon's political history is a 'well-known story', therefore eschewing details. The notion of the well-known narrative surfaced partly because of the assumption that the researcher is a Cameroonian and is thus conversant with the political concerns and claims of Cameroonian asylum seekers, and partly because the upsurge in involuntary migration in South Africa has increased the popularity of radical narratives about this category of migration. In addition, this respondent attempts to reinforce the overarching contention that the political situations in postcolonial Africa and forced migration in the age of globalisation are issues of considerable magnitude in international politics. For *Informant 3*, the ever-increasing number of forced migrants around the globe, especially from less developed African countries, is the tragic effect of the existing political and socio-economic crises in Africa, a key aspect in global debates. This narrative approach reinforces the claim that in the age of globalisation and terrorism, the entire world is aware of the growing number of people forcefully displaced either by the burdens of

global politics or by the chaotic and devastating consequences of armed conflicts, civil war and terror attacks.

Also, the testimony is premised on the contention that recently post-apartheid South Africa has been challenged by issues of immigration, resulting in the proliferation of critical writings interrogating "the multiple waves of political refugees seeking asylum…" (Braziel & Mannur, 2003: 3), again popularising the social conditions of exiles. In the South African context, the experiences of Cameroonian refugee community constitute part of this new trend while the political developments in Cameroon, part of the broader contemporary politics in Sub-Saharan Africa. From this angle, the narrators believe that the experiences of Cameroonian asylum seekers are not unfamiliar because they clearly represent an integral part of the global experiences of displaced Africans.

2.4.3 The Use of Maxims.

Alongside narrative frequency and the narrative of the well-known, the informants also use maxims[27] as a narrative strategy. This pattern became prominent in the testimonies because in the process of constructing personal experiences, "every detail may be expected to have potential significance for the interpretation" (Stubbs, 1983: 209), often conveyed through "different kinds of semantic relationships" (ibid: 210). In the case of Cameroonian testimonies, the interpretation of narratives is concerned with multiplicity and ambiguities of meanings and often brought to light through the narrator's use of maxims. Respondents frequently used maxims as a strategy to strengthen and enrich the

[27] According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, a maxim is "a well-known saying that expresses a general truth or rule of conduct"

meanings of their stories, for disguising and/or painting a sharp portrait of the political atmosphere in Cameroon as well as the predicament of Cameroonian forced migrants in South Africa. One example captured by most informants was the description of the relationship between the Cameroon High Commission in South Africa and the ruling CPDM in Cameroon:

> …Let me ask you, how many times have you seen Cameroon on South African TV or in newspapers? I think you can count the number of times. Furthermore, these so-called Home Affairs officials rush to the Cameroonian High Commissioner in Pretoria for information. They forget that he is an arm of the ruling party and the president's stalwart. As such, he cannot say anything to discredit his boss. You know very well that you do not need to bite the finger that feeds you… (Informant 5: Interview 1, 10 March 2003).

This informant's testimony responds to a question which focused on the reasons why most Cameroonian applications for asylum are rejected by the Department of Home Affairs. While the department seems to argue that there is a relatively serene political atmosphere and no immediate danger in Cameroon, *Informant 5* and many other forced migrants seem to think that Home Affairs' reasons for the rejection of Cameroonian applications are baseless as they argue that the Department's main source of information is the office of Cameroon's High Commissioner in Pretoria. The maxim employed in this testimony, "you don't bite the finger that feeds you", plays a very important role in the unlocking of meaning in *informant 5's* testimony. Here, the narrator attempts through the maxim to explain the co-dependency relationship between the Cameroonian government

and the High Commissioner in South Africa. It illuminates the unquestionable loyalty of the Cameroonian High Commissioner to the ruling government, or how the High Commissioner has to trade his loyalty for his job. He also tactfully draws our attention to the fact that as an administrative arm of a dictatorial regime, the High Commissioner's prerogative is to protect the image and interests of the ruling party beyond Cameroon's border. In return he keeps his job. However, apart from the symbiotic relationship between the High Commissioner and the Cameroon government, the testimony also highlights some of the investigative mechanisms used by Home Affairs to ascertain the credibility of the claims of Cameroonian asylum seekers. And according to this informant, the Cameroon High Commission is indeed Home Affairs' primary source of information.

2.4.4 The Use of Temporal References.

The narrativisation of social experiences usually invites a reflection on time past and time to come. The representation of social events is often characterised by the interconnection between the past, present and the future (Prince, 1981; Bal, 1985). Firstly, we need to remind ourselves again that the testimonies uncover years of trauma, anguish and tribulations in Cameroon and conditions of exile in South Africa. Secondly, to be able to unpack the respondents' history of tribulation and anguish, it is important to make references to their past. This section pays particular attention to the key narratological strategy used to make historical references to time.

This narrative strategy is important especially since diaspora discourses address the experiences of migration within particular localities and specific temporal frames. The

meaning of testimonies of Cameroonians exiles are therefore conveyed and reinforced through the incessant references to time, establishing a link between the past and the present: how the past impacts on the present and how their future is envisioned in South Africa. As such, the body of narratives was constructed using different temporal references and an example of this technique is exemplified in the following testimony:

> …I could have stayed at home but with the *advent of the political turmoil*, life in Cameroon was precarious and you were not sure you will see the next day because people were arrested, imprisoned and some killed just like good morning. *Those days* in Cameroon were gloomy with scary stories in the media about mysterious killings, abductions, looting, rapes and maiming…
>
> (Informant 5: Interview 1, 10 March 2003).

This informant refers to time past as he attempts to articulate his reasons for fleeing and by using this anterior temporal references, he re-introduces us to a political discourse, which recreates the material conditions in Cameroon. His deviation from his experience of flight to reminisce about this political trajectory again enhances our understanding of the origins of the experiences and the process of displacement of Cameroonian exiles. Moreover, while there is often a disjunction between the story and narration, the anterior and posterior narrative technique often shapes the entire narration and creates a seemingly coherent structural pattern. The use of this technique in the testimonies foregrounds the difference between the time of narration and time of the actual events, two essential temporal orders of a narrative (Cohan & Shires, 1988; Prince, 1988).

The anteriority technique is used concurrently with the posteriority technique as a model for visualising and preempting the futures of Cameroonian forced migrants in South Africa as well as Cameroon. In this instance, the narrators repeatedly use the flash-forward technique to forge their vision of the future. This technique developed as a result of responses to a series of questions aimed at sparking pre-emptive discussions about the future of forced migrants in Johannesburg. Here, one respondent explores the past and the present in order to give a prediction of the future:

.

> …I think there is *hope for a brighter future* for every African, not only asylum seekers. Things are changing for the better and I think a *few years from today, we will be living a different life.* I just hope the Department of Home Affairs *will speed* up the process of granting refugee status to asylum seekers…
>
> (Informant 2: Interview 3, 3 October 2003).

The importance of this informant's testimony is located not only in the way he uses temporal references to illustrate the social experiences of Cameroonians over different periods, but also how he uses this narrative strategy to exemplify the metaphor of hope, constantly stressed in most of the testimonies. From this testimony, it becomes clear that the lives of Cameroonian forced migrants are often dependent on hope for a better future in the host country. In Johannesburg, the metaphor is solidified by the seeming progressive changes happening in the new South Africa:

> … It depends from which perspective you want to look at it because some people think crime has shifted from places like Hillbrow to more upmarket places like

> Sandton. However, my personal view is that things have changed in a way because we don't experience the same xenophobia we experienced years ago. Also, I think crime has also reduced in certain areas of Johannesburg. In fact, the future looks bright… (Informant 20: Interview 3, 25 November 2003).

This forced migrant reflects on the early and present days, two important periods in the lives of Cameroonian exiles, as a way of reframing the positive changes in the city of Johannesburg. The testimony attempts to paint a picture of the early days in exile and juxtaposes it with the present situation using the technique of temporal references. For this respondent, this strategy is vital because it creates a channel to reflect on the future of the political situation in Cameroon. Drawing on the existing political situation, the informant is able to predict a Cameroon, continually affected by increasing waves of suffering, poverty, destitution and anarchy. In the response below, the future of Cameroon remains bleak since the conditions have continued to worsen:

> …It seems things are worse especially with the influx of Cameroonians in Johannesburg recently. I don't know what is going to happen after the presidential elections in October and I pray the situation should not degenerate and escalate into a civil war…(Informant 12: Interview 3, 2 November 2003).

In this case, *Informant 12's* response is framed around the fact that the increasing number of Cameroonian immigrants in Johannesburg is a clear indication that the situation in Cameroon is indeed worsening. Here, the temporal references are utilised to grasp different historical frameworks of particular significance in the lives of Cameroonian

forced migrants. Firstly, the repeated references to the past provide solid political grounds to justify the claims of Cameroonian asylum seekers in Johannesburg. Thus, the strategy of narrative anteriority helps to reconstruct experiences, which are deeply rooted in the political past of this refugee community. Secondly, the ability to predict the future through the narrative strategy of posteriority, on the one hand recaptures the metaphor of hope, which has been the vehicle of survival for the Cameroonians in Johannesburg for years and on the other hand creates the space to revisit the future political directions in Cameroon. The testimonies were tailored around two contesting narratives; one of hope for a brighter future in exile and the other, a strong prediction of an obscure and troubled future for Cameroonians still living in Cameroon.

2.4.5 The Use of Pronominal Alterations.

Since Cameroonian testimonies rely strongly on the tragic and autobiographical genres, one strategy used to reinforce the expression of these genres is pronominal alterations.[28] In fact, the construction of experiences of exile is at one level "the representation and negotiation of social roles" (De Fina, 2003: 51). Since the creation of narratives usually entails the formulation of the point of intersection between individual and collective roles, the imaging of these social roles is often achieved through the use of pronominal alterations. Before I address the use of pronominal alterations in the testimonies, it is important to restate that renowned linguist Benveniste (1977) pioneered the study of the function of pronouns in the narrating of social experiences. The study defines the role of

[28] Pronominal alterations in this context refer to the switching of pronouns in the same narrative in order to stress the personal and social meaning of the story or to show the connection between language and context (De Fina, 2003).

pronouns in narratives as one which "provides the instrument of conversion that one could call the conversion of language into discourse" (219/220).

Pronouns in the construction of social events therefore establish a clear link between language and discourse (Wilson, 1990; De Fina, 2003) and drawing on this theoretical foundation, De Fina (2003) argues that this strategy represents a form of social orientation and it is also a model for recapturing the multiple "dimensions of interdependence versus autonomy from others and of personalization versus depersonalization of experience" (51). In relation to Cameroonians' construction of migrant experiences, De Fina's contention can be used to foreground two aspects in the narratives: on the one hand, singular pronouns were used to express the way global social experiences of Cameroonian forced migrants are personalised, addressing the narrator's role in the process. On the other hand, plural pronouns were used to express the sense of community, collective identity and culture of interdependence amongst Cameroonians. In the testimonies, the dominant pronouns were *I, You* and *We* and at every instance the narrators made use of these pronouns, they signaled different meaning. However, whatever the meanings pronouns might signal, it all boils downs to how this strategy is employed to encode "the social identities of participants or the social relationships between them, or between one of them and persons and entities referred to" (Levinson, 1983: 89).

The development of pronominal alterations in the testimonies primarily articulates both individual and collective identities, reinforcing at one point individual contribution to the struggle in Cameroon and at another, pointing to the collective contribution of other

Cameroonian asylum seekers. The shift from the first person singular narrative *I* to the plural pronominal *We* mirrors the interconnection between personal and collective discourse as well as enhances the construction of individual and collective migrant identities. An example of the shift is exemplified in the following testimony:

> …*You know* in Cameroon you can't escape being caught in these things. *You* really have no choice but to be part of the struggle. I did just what any woman subjugated to a dictator like Paul Biya had to do. As one of the members of the pioneer political party in Cameroon, *we* had a lot of baggage to deal with. *We* were targeted as the members of the party that conscientised Cameroonians and made them aware of their basic rights. At the University of Yaounde, *I* was actively involved in political picketing and we had to boycott classes as a strategy to bring the regime to reason. When *I* completed Varsity, *I* was jobless for four years and I thought we all had to fight, if we wanted things to change. It was really a huge step for a woman especially in a Cameroon whereby men still believe politics is for men and that the woman's rightful place is in the kitchen. In fact, *I* took part in the memorable women's stripe march in Bamenda that resulted in the death of several policemen [sic]. You know the curse when you see a woman's nudity. There after, the regime embarked on a witch-hunt and I had to escape… (Informant 18: Interview 1, 19 April 2003).

In this excerpt, the autobiographical genre is foregrounded as the respondent refocuses the narrative on the self using the pronoun *I*. Here, three key narrative models are the main focus of *Informant 18's* explanation. Firstly, the constant use of *you know* suggests

the listener's familiarity with this migrant's experiences and the polities of most African countries. Secondly, this respondent's repeated use of the singular pronoun *I* helps to construct a strong narrative of the self framed around the notion of self-styling. Here, the story at this juncture features primarily as the narrator's own autobiography as she attempts to reformulate her personal identity. Finally, by using the pronominal *we* the informant automatically shifts from the personal to the collective and tries at this point to represent the Cameroonian community and their communal experiences in exile.

2.5 Conclusion.

The analytical framework that underlies the reconstruction of experiences includes the way different narrative genres are subsumed in the testimonies and how each word, sentence or paragraph is a signifier of meaning. This framework shows how the experiences of Cameroonian asylum seekers are "expressed, articulated, manifested and modified in stories" (Josselson & Liechlich, 1993: 9) and varied narrative genres. The representation of these social experiences, using different linguistic idioms, has been the vignette for meaning-making and for the enhancing of our understanding of the experiences of exile, the construction of identities, as well as the formulation of a Cameroonian migrant community in Johannesburg.

In this chapter, I have attempted to capture the different narrative genres used in the testimonies and also to illuminate the way Cameroonian forced migrants use different narrative techniques to retell their stories of exile. Here, I argue that the testimonies attempt to construct Cameroonian stories in terms of systematic structural patterns with different narrative strategies, which help to strengthen the cohesiveness of the entire

narration**.** And though accounts of traumatic experiences can be fragmented, the versions I collected had these structural patterns because of these strategies and the context of the interviews. In this vein**,** the narration of the testimonies "clearly illustrates the relation between a story and its telling" (Cohan & Shires, 1988: 83) and also attempts to link together different episodes about the social and political processes of displacement that have affected the lives of Cameroonian forced migrants in Johannesburg. In chapter three, I revisit some of these key trajectories as I focus on Cameroonians' construction of memories of the past. The chapter is premised on the claim that narrating exilic experiences is inextricably the process of memory work.

CHAPTER THREE

"Memory makes us, we make memory": The Process of Remembering in Testimonies of Cameroon Asylum Seekers.

> *…After I was retrenched and at the time when the wind of change was blowing through Africa, I was determined to fight for change in my country. Our futures were bleak and we could not sit and see things drown. The peak of my political involvement was when the first opposition party was launched on 26 May 1990 and six Cameroonians sacrificed for this cause. We went mad and every young Cameroonian was ready to fight. Since then, there were series of demonstrations with more and more victims. Cameroon then continued in a state of political instability and people were arrested, tortured, houses looted and women were raped and others murdered. Ringleaders were arrested and most of my friends imprisoned and some murdered. That was when I made up my mind to leave Cameroon… (Informant 16: Interview 1, 15 April 2003).*

> *…People's memories of their past lives, what they remember and what they forget, are shaped by their own expectations for the future, and also by whether they have children or young people for whom they care and who may outlive them. Hopes, fears and projections converge into shaping memory and its strategies… (Passerini, 1992: 12)*

3.1 Introduction.

Elizabeth Tonkin in *Narrating the Past: The Social Construction of Oral history (1992)*, discusses two cardinal trajectories of memory work: that the construction of the past is a vignette for the remaking of the self and that memory is not simply a verbatim representation of events from the past but rather a process that is repeatedly subject to reconstruction and reformulation by different tellers (Tonkin, 1992; Fortier, 2000; Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001). In this chapter, I borrow and use Tonkin's expression, "memory makes us, we make memory," as a point of entry since the fundamentals of the chapter are formulated around the proposition that "it is through… the integration of the

past within the consciousness of the present that history enters, in an active way, the system of social reproduction" (155).

This chapter starts from the premise that the social existence of Cameroonian asylum seekers is built on a cluster of traumatic experiences of displacement, which trigger a great deal of memory work. This work is a reservoir of ideas and images that socially construct their realities of the past (Irvin–Zarecka, 1994; Fortier, 2000). The construction of migrant testimonies is itself a process of remembering whereby the narrators reframe and recapture socio-political dynamics of exile. Through memory work migrants reminisce about the past and create 'imagined communities' in order to reinforce a sense of belonging as well as establish migrant identities. Thus, the chapter addresses how the process of remembrance is fashioned and shaped through the use of metaphors, images and symbols. It attempts to uncover how asylum seekers' recollection of the past impact on the notions of communal existence, their construction of individual and collective identities, their sense of belonging and how memory work is used as a nexus for challenging official versions of displaced persons in South Africa. The chapter therefore looks at the schema of memory work under four different categories, namely: the period of political consciousness and activism; the passage to freedom; early days in exile; and the period of initiation and integration. Here, my key arguments will attempt to tease out the multi-faceted debates around the construction of social memory in testimonies of displacement. The chapter will also revisit the psychological implications and personal motivations underpinning the recreation of memory in testimonies of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees.

3.2 Memory Work and Testimonial Narratives.

The compelling and seemingly complex Cameroonian experiences both at home and in South Africa have put the saliency of memory into perspective. The multifarious exploration of memory work and its important role in the construction of identity has refocused attention on the question of reconstructing the past. Moreover, the complicated strategies that inform the process of remembering are interspersed with an extensive array of social, cultural and political trajectories, which rehearse, re-imagine or challenge the politics of remembering or forgetting. When examining the way the past is recalled in testimonies of Cameroonian asylum seekers, the key question that arises is: how is the past recollected and narrativised or how is it buried, suppressed or avoided? In response to this question, many debates around the process of remembrance or forgetting attempt to unearth the way social experiences are framed, shaped and articulated by individual asylum seekers (Fentress & Wickham, 1992; Passerini, 1992; Eckardt, 1993) and also, how different frameworks of the process of memory are linked to the politics of identification and sense of belonging as well as questions of spatiality.

These debates are premised on the assumption that the social existence of forced migrants such as Cameroonian asylum seekers is built on traumatic experiences of displacement and alienation which engender a great deal of memory work. The construction of selfhood in narratives of displacement is therefore predicated on the personal and collective memory of the past and the strength of memory "lies in the multiples ways it is translated into discourse about the present and the future" (ibid: 54). On this point, Thelen (1999) has argued that:

> … The process of remembering and the content of our memories are our ways of defining who we are in the present, of framing choices for the future, of finding solace of immediate troubles, of defining where we have been and where we are going … (119).

Thus, narratives of homelessness and displacement are solidified by the mode in which social memory is recreated and how it can "act to inspire constancy to shared values, courage to struggle against remembered tragedies reoccurring" (Eckardt 1993: 2). The process of remembering becomes a model for understanding the social conditions of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees in exile and their anticipations for the future.

Yet, the study of memory and the ways it is reinvented in testimonies of Cameroonian asylum seekers is rooted in the contention that individual memories access the past in different ways. In the process of remembering, past occurrences are often reshaped, omitted, distorted, combined and reorganised in multiple ways and by different narrators (Thelen, 1989). Memory of the past is a pattern of narrative that is always fluid, ambivalent and highly subjective (Thompson; 1978, Thelen; 1989, Tonkin; 1992; Passerini; 1992). This view that past events are often framed or mediated in the process of memory work, raises the argument that the authenticity of the past is subsumed simultaneously in the telling and the "on-going articulation of the reality of the past that forms and informs a community" (Irvin-Zarecka, 1994: 57). Against this backdrop the politics of remembrance ceases to be an unmediated retrieval process but is fundamentally a network of a myriad of interpretations of the past.

Moreover, Thelen (1989) again argues that, along the spectrum of experiences, people tend to construct memory in different forms, from personal, individual and the private to the collective and the public. An alternative way to conceptualise testimonies of displacement is to depart from the premise that the past has a strong bearing on our present lives and actions. The discursive use of the past by Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees is triggered by diaspora experiences, which are instrumental in the process of self-definition in exile. This discourse is also framed around the premise that the construction of social memory takes shape and place within the contours of time and space. This interface between memory, temporality and space enables people to construct localities and communities (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). It is clearly a commonplace argument that the notion of temporality and spatiality is often brought to bear on the process of remembering.

The testimonies of Cameroonian asylum seekers are repeatedly grounded in a narrative constructed to crystallise and give meaning to their socio-political existence in South Africa. It is the vehicle for the restructuring of the social and political lives of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees in the diaspora and also attempts to establish a nexus between the public discourse of displacement and the Cameroonians' interpretation of exile. Hence, the process of remembering encapsulates the past and the present, or the *here* and *there*, and establishes the relationship between the past and the present as permeated by existing events.

The construction of memory in the narratives commences with the *there*, recapturing socio-political history in Cameroon and unfolds in the *here*, exploring the cluster of

events in their day-to-day lives as asylum seekers in the elusive city of Johannesburg. In the process of recollecting the socio-political history in Cameroon, memory becomes a connector with the polity in Cameroon and their ancestry and it is constantly in touch with their past. While recalling their day-to-day experiences as asylum seekers in South Africa, memory becomes a nexus of varied and shared experiences in South Africa, which restores a sense of belonging and to an extent provides a communal bond between Cameroonians.

Furthermore, in theorising the way the past is remembered in the testimonies, it is necessary to revisit the fact that memory is a discursive terrain for varied approaches to the interpretations of the past. The recovery of the past is often constructed around collective experiences and official narratives of historical discourse, entangled with a collection of personal and private recollections of past events (Ganguly, 1992; Tonkin, 1992; Freeman, 1993). The past, as it is remembered and recollected, is not a verbatim reproduction of past happenings but is reconfigured, twisted by individual narrators to reflect their present. I am foregrounding the claim that, "the authority of the past depends on people's present subjectivity and vice versa; the stories people tell about their past have more to do with the continuing shoring up of self-understanding than with historical truth" (Ganguly, 1992: 3).

The notion of subjectivity, as reflected in the memory of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees should therefore be debated from two premises: firstly, it is important to understand that not all Cameroonians registered and archived as asylum seekers in South Africa were politically involved in Cameroon or fled from political victimisation;

secondly, Cameroonians who have a history of political activism are in the process of deifying the instrumentality of their roles in the political dispensation in Cameroon. However, whether Cameroonian asylum seekers were politically involved or not is rarely a fundamental issue in the formation of refugee identity in the South African context. Since the term refugee itself has been increasingly politicised, the acquisition of a refugee identity is primarily a question of how individual asylum seekers reinvent and fit individual narratives into an extended political discourse.[29] In these testimonies, the representation of pastness is authenticated more often by the manner in which "different individuals remembered differently, using different details as their governing ideas and differing strategies to memorise them" (Fentress & Wickham, 1992: 36).

In this case, the task of involuntary Cameroonian migrants, as they engaged in the process of remembering the past, was principally to decode and reinforce individual roles in a broad political discourse. This celebration of individual roles is highlighted in the following response from one of my respondents as she tried to recall her past:

> …I was actively involved in political picketing at the university and when I graduated, I was jobless for four years and I thought I had to join the fight if wanted things to change. In fact I played a key role in the memorable post-

[29] The Department of Home Affairs in South Africa is more interested in the way individual asylum seekers tell their personal stories and how these stories relate to the fear of persecution. In my analysis of the testimonies, I figured out that most Cameroonian asylum seekers try to locate their stories into the political history of Cameroon. Though some of them are in South Africa because of ethnic conflicts, they focused on recreating a story with a deep political undertone because it strengthens the merits of each application. Home Affairs officials are more interested in the way individual applicants were personally affected by the political turbulence in Cameroon.

> election demonstration marches that resulted in the state of emergency in Bamenda… (Informant 18: Interview 1, 19 April 2003).[30]

Her memory of the past revolves not only around a broad political discourse, but also around the role she played in the collective struggle. The political past, as reconstructed by this respondent, is an affirmation of human dignity and is sanctioned as a narrative of self-recognition, again reinforcing the notion of autobiography discussed in chapter two. Here, memory is incessantly personalised and transformed into a discourse that celebrates and glorifies her personal fame and heroism in a momentous political struggle. As a result, the retelling of the past becomes a signpost for personal identification or the representation of the self in a collective discourse, evident from my discussion of the construction of Cameroonian experiences as autobiographies.

An analysis of the reconstruction of the past reveals the fundamental role memory work plays in rehashing and reinventing events from the past either in a systemic or seemingly well-coordinated pattern, or in a fragmented and disjointed manner. In instances where the past is vividly portrayed, my underlying assumption is that the respondents were indeed actively involved in politics in Cameroon and also were capable of coping with the psychological challenges of remembering:

> … It is actually a long story but I will try and see if I can put the pieces together. My whole complicated life started to fall apart when I led a demonstration at the

[30] In the 1997 presidential elections, the main opposition political party the Social Democratic Front claimed it had been robbed of its victory by the ruling party, thus called for massive demonstrations

> University of Douala to clamour against a regime that was merciless and was out to ruin the lives of young Cameroonians. During the demonstrations, I was arrested with other students and imprisoned in Douala for days. During this period, we were tortured severely and were asked to denounce our rights to take part in any future student riots. After that, we were released and immediately dismissed from the university and banned from registering at any other university in the country that was sometime in 1993/1994 and after barring us from registering at any other university, the government actually planted spies to monitor our actions and movements around the country. In 1996, I was arrested again for allegedly involved in another strike and was locked up and later released when they discovered I did not take part in the strike. After this incident, I immediately realized there was no point staying in Cameroon any more, so I decided to escape… (Informant 7: Interview 1, 15 March 2003).

One significant aspect of this informant's narration of his experience in Cameroon is the meticulous use of details to capture specific networks of events. Here, particular events, tragic moments and dates are symmetrically chronicled as the story unfolds and the process of retelling is construed as a story with a genesis and with a seemingly logical pattern of narration. On the one hand, these particular narratives exemplify a kind of dialectical relationship between home and forced displacement, "offering a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal" (Hall, 1990: 394). On the other hand, fragmented and disjointed recollections establish the distinct impression

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especially in Bamenda, the party's headquarter. The severity of the demonstrations resulted in the declaration of a state of emergency in Bamenda, which is also the capital of the Northwest province.

that the narrators were either not involved in the political struggle in Cameroon or were politically involved but found certain episodes of their past extremely traumatic or tortuous and preferred to eschew or suppress them:

> …Now you touch on another very sensitive topic. My troubles in South Africa are enough and I don't want to increase them by talking about my beloved country, torn into pieces by a greedy man called Paul Biya. In fact, he has rendered Cameroon barren… (Informant 12: Interview 1, 3 April 2003).

This respondent avoids recollecting the events in Cameroon not because she was not politically involved but simply because of the sensitivity of the topic. For the respondent, the topic has the potential of uncovering disturbing issues, which she prefers to suppress in order to cope with her present predicaments.

However, the need for the personalisation of events is propelled by the fact that the term 'refugee' has become part of contemporary political jargon and the definition of 'refugeeness' in South Africa is determined by a set of rules prescribed by a political institution. Hence, some respondents seemingly had no option but to fabricate distorted stories of the past with an intriguing political undertone.[31] Drawing from the preceding discussions, one might be pushed to the conclusion that perhaps not all Cameroonian

[31] I arrived at the above conclusion because during this research, members of my case study were unusually keen on telling me about their political involvement in Cameroon. Two reasons accounted for this: firstly, they considered the interviews as a way of bringing their experiences to the fore; secondly, they had to stick to the stories they had told the officials of Home Affairs during their maiden interviews because they still had some fears as far as the question of confidentiality was concerned.

asylum seekers are actually asylum seekers in the strictest political sense or as stipulated by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. It could also be deduced from some of the testimonies that assuming a refugee identity is simply a way to legalise their stay in South Africa. However, whether memory work is a blessing, burden or curse depends on the manner in which individual Cameroonian asylum seekers strategically remember their past. I arrived at the above conclusion after one of my respondents said:

> …I don't consider myself as an asylum seeker but I was fortunate that Cameroon had political upheavals and I just had to leave with others fleeing political persecution… (Informant 11: Interview 1, 3 April 2003).

Again, memory work is used as a channel for the insertion of the individual into the hegemonic discourse and interestingly, Thelen (1999) endorses my argument when he states that memory at the political level "boils down to how individuals meet needs when they select and define voices and identities" (122).

A close reading of the narratives of Cameroonian asylum seekers reveal that the experiences of Cameroonian forced migrants in South Africa are predominantly structured around and recalled from four different periods of their lives: 1) the period of political consciousness and activism; 2) the passage to freedom, which captures the process of fleeing and crossing borders; 3) early days in exile; and 4) the period of complete initiation and integration into South Africa. My discussions in the following segments of the chapter will be a systematic engagement with the process of

remembrance within these four significant periods in the lives of Cameroonians while in Cameroon and in Johannesburg.

3.3 The Period of Political Consciousness and Activism.

The Cameroonian asylum seekers' memory of the past usually starts off with respondents recollecting the days of the struggle for political liberalisation in Cameroon and their political commitment to this struggle. This forceful commitment to the struggle for political freedom culminated in an upsurge in political victimisation and precipitated the fleeing of most Cameroonians into other countries, notably South Africa. This period was often remembered as one of political consciousness and initiation into political history as well as the formation of a political identity in Cameroon. In the lives of Cameroonian asylum seekers, this phase was evaluated as an epoch of forceful political engagement dictated by a severe period of economic depression, which followed the new political dispensation in Cameroon after 1990. This depression was also a consequence of new waves of political mobilisation across the Francophone Sub-Saharan region and the devaluation of the region's monetary unit, followed by the devastating economic crisis. Furthermore, it was also recalled as a phase enmeshed in recurrent political upheavals and civil demonstrations that erupted ubiquitously, as a result of massive unemployment and destitution that challenged this quasi-democracy. The subject of this new political rhetoric is captured in the following quote from one of my respondents:

> …You know fully well that living in that place you get trapped into the vicious political circles. When you see your rights snatched, being a jobless graduate, you can't help fighting the battle of freedom. I got involved politically in 1990 with

> the launching of the country's first opposition party, the SDF. This year marked the beginning of a new Cameroon with dreams of a democratic country amidst intense resistance from the ruling party. Being a graduate who has been on the street for a year, I was overwhelmed by the political ideologies of the SDF. I led the march organised by the unemployed and was a victim of several arrests and tortures and thank God I survived them. After the presidential elections in 1997, which was followed by the declaration of a state of emergency in Bamenda, things reached an unbearable point and I decided to leave Cameroon for South Africa… (Informant 12: Interview 1, 3 April 2003).

The excerpt echoes and captures this informant's political history in Cameroon and it contains two important components: firstly, it positions political engagement as an alternative means of survival in many Francophone Sub-Saharan countries plagued by civil wars. In fact, most of these countries have seen youths resorting to armed conflicts as a consequence of their destitution and the promises of a better future from political figures and warmongers. Secondly, another underlying reason for participating in political struggles emanates from the notion of national pride or human dignity. Against this backdrop, the period of political consciousness and involvement marked the debut of a struggle engendered by an urgent desire to make a contribution towards the transformation of the political and socioeconomic conditions in Cameroon at the time. Here, my informants recaptured this phase not only as momentous but also as one during which Cameroonians had to resort to political activism because it seemed like the only means of changing their conditions.

Moreover, memories of this period are a compilation and recreation of episodes of incarceration, fragility and political trauma, and most importantly a period of disillusionment. The process of remembrance is reconstructed against the backlash of a fragile and precarious political atmosphere, represented increasingly with images of deaths, destitution and hopelessness and, as a result, memory work becomes a narrative of victimisation and a salient mode for revisiting political developments in Cameroon while in exile.

Cameroonian asylum seekers also remember this phase as a period of political rebirth, of a new Cameroon and celebration of heroism, characterised by the rapid emergence and proliferation of new political parties. The phase also hinges on the renewed role of civil society in the struggle for democratic changes in Cameroon. I use *rebirth* because this period saw a transformation from a monolithic oppressive political system to a seemingly more pluralistic system of governance, suppressed during the previous regime. Recalling the past as a period of political heroism, the respondents seem to celebrate their contributions to the new political dispensation, imagining themselves as influential role players in the struggle. This renewed image of heroism is vividly described as they recounted individual roles played during the period of political activism, which had begun in Cameroon in 1990. Again, I draw on *Informant 7* and his attempts to narrate his political involvement in Cameroon as student at the University of Douala:

> …The period I mentioned earlier was actually post-multiparty period and the first

> multiparty elections in Cameroon. During this period, many students were involved in the struggle for change since the ruling party had failed to ensure a better future for students. Besides, post-1992 presidential elections was marked by massive demonstrations around the country, so my leadership in the Student Union at the Douala University had a strong political foundation, that is why I was arrested several times. In fact while a student, I was also a strong SDF militant. From this background, I reckoned my life was in real danger especially when my colleagues and I were put under very strict surveillance…
>
> (Interview 1, 15 March 2003).

This informant recasts the notion of tragic heroism, as outlined in my earlier discussion of Cameroonian testimonies as tragedies. In his testimony, the past is recollected and reconstructed ostensibly as a period of socio-political heroism. The respondent seems to represent himself as a hero endowed with mythic qualities essential for the transformation of Cameroon. From the basis of the informant's testimony, it is evident that the reconstruction of the past in some of the testimonies is indeed an attempt to rejuvenate and reinforce their contributions to nation building. In this light:

> …Memories of events from the past provide the means by which people assume, or can be cajoled into assuming responsibilities for the things they have done as individual or that others have done in the name of their family, their group, their nation…(Thelen ,1995: 125).

The remembrance of events from the past reconnects people to their personal histories and the disclosures of *Informant 7* are a recapturing of history and a valuable way of expressing his pride and uplifting his human dignity.

Furthermore, the period of political consciousness and activism is recalled and objectified as the beginning of a traumatic phase that tragically culminated in family dislocation. The political involvement of displaced Cameroonians laid the foundation of an experience that eventually degenerated into a "crippling sorrow of estrangement" (Said, 2000: 173) as they were constantly subjected to incarceration or forced into hiding. At the pinnacle of this disruptive phase, they had to abandon their families and flee into exile. This period was consistently described as a period of family dislocation and a "discontinuous state of being" (ibid: 177) matched with and reinforced by metaphors of home and the notion of homelessness. Memories of family dislocation were often juxtaposed with illusions of an eventual return home. However, most of my respondents preferred not to discuss this particular episode in their lives because it resuscitated the agony of dislocation from family and familiar landscapes and entrenched their entrapment in the "perilous territory of not- belonging" (ibid: 177). As an example of this agony, one respondent describes how he was forced to abandon his bride and flee for his life:

> …It wasn't like postponing. I had to practically abandon my marriage because I didn't have the choice to decide either to postpone or to go ahead with it. All I was thinking about was to leave as soon as possible because as days passed by, my chances of escaping became very slim…When I finally left, everything had to

> come to a standstill. Of course there could not be any wedding because the groom was not there… (Informant 5: Interview 1, 10 March 2003).

This respondent seemed agonised and disillusioned by this episode in his past, but he prefers to talk about it because it played a crucial part in the choices that he makes in exile. He actually emphasised that, every time he thought about his bride in Cameroon, it strengthened his determination to reunite with her. Here the past or events from the past are reconstructed as a narrative of kinship as they remember their families and loved ones in Cameroon. Also, the displaced person's memory work is a form of motivational drive, reinforcing the articulation that remembering the past "provides a perspective for interpreting our experiences in the present and foreseeing those that lie ahead" (Fentress & Wickham, 1992: 51).

The phase of political consciousness and commitment has played a key role in Cameroonians asylum seekers' pursuit of political asylum in South Africa. Primarily, it is the platform for the establishment of a refugee identity in South Africa and the stories of their resistance and subversion of the current political atmosphere in Cameroon have remained as an essential reservoir of inspiration to enable them to cope in exile. Memories of events from this period function as a model for notions of national belonging and they reinforce the communal bonds resulting from their shared experiences. The aspects of memory described by Cameroonian asylum seekers emerge as a trilogy of the past, the present and the future existence of displaced Cameroonians. Although the past is constructed along the spectrum of individual experiences, it has authenticated the discourse of their collective identity in exile. In most cases, it is

possible to arrive at the conclusion that they had a common enemy even though they attacked this enemy using different approaches. The responses illustrate how events from the past can be recreated, twisted and distorted in the process of remembering. Moreover, the past is re-imagined against the backdrop that Cameroonian forced migrants form a community with shared experiences and that as a result of their political involvement they became enemies and pawns of a repressive regime and had to flee for freedom.

3.4 The Passage to Freedom.

Their memories of this apocalyptic phase of political involvement culminate in the next phase, which I call the passage to freedom. In this phase, recollections of the past revolve around the process of escaping and devising strategies of fleeing and crossing borders. In attempting to subvert a repressive system, Cameroonians became victims of a polity of oppression and after years of torture, incarceration and censorship, they were forced to flee for freedom. This epoch in the lives of Cameroonian asylum seekers is remembered as a period of escaping into exile. Here, the respondents describe their strategies for escape and their narratives of flight in various ways. On the one hand, there are asylum seekers who had the unique opportunity of fleeing in the comfort of airplane flight and arriving in exile without any hurdles. This group of asylum seekers entered South Africa with legitimate visitors' visas and while in South Africa, they applied for political asylum. This group remembers the experience of flight as a pleasant trip from Cameroon to South Africa. One respondent described it as a simple, uneventful experience: "through my dad's connection as Member of Parliament, I came straight to South Africa" (Informant 14: Interview 1, 10 April 2003). For this informant and in contrast to her life

in Cameroon, the experience of flight into exile was nothing but a pleasant and smooth experience during a time which has been widely chronicled as a period of suffering and anguish in her homeland. Her memories of escape are devoid of the horrors of crossing frontiers by land and water. This set of Cameroonians only started experiencing the agony of displacement when they entered South Africa.

On the other hand, there are respondents who remember the experience of flight as an extremely frightening experience. This group of Cameroonian asylum seekers seemed to have crossed the surface of the earth, traversing the African continent before arriving in South Africa. They actually tried seeking asylum in some of the countries they traversed through but their applications were either rejected or they were forced to leave because of the political instabilities in those countries. Respondents in this second group recapture the experience of flight as nightmarish. They had to relive the lives they were escaping from and often found the experience quite disturbing, displaying extreme reluctance to recall those memories. It is clear the memories are something to be suppressed or buried or simply a burden or curse as in the following narratives:

> …I wouldn't like to answer that question because I don't want to remember that particular day. It was the darkest day of my whole life; the struggle to live almost cost me my life. The most important thing is that I survived that tragedy and I never want to go back there. I am sorry Ernest, I know how badly you need the information but I just can't… (Informant 12: Interview 1, 3 April 2003).

While this respondent tries to suppress or bury her experience of flight, the fragments of information she provides in her response were enough to confirm that the experience was very traumatic. In her response, the agony of remembering arises from the fact that some Cameroonians had to cross the wilderness searching for a sanctuary and to them, memories of the experience of flight will always be a reminder of the pain and anguish they suffered. It is also important to highlight that in this case, the language of remembering was sanctioned by that particular experience.

The desire of some asylum seekers to suppress the past is constantly juxtaposed with narratives from other respondents who reassemble the past as a state of being which needs to be dealt with through the process of telling. These respondents recollect escaping metaphorically as a ‘long walk to freedom’, or as the ‘Trojan battle’. This comparison of flight with the legendary battle in Greek mythology invites the interpretation that involuntary displacement is an experience fraught with multiple challenges, while survivors seem to portray themselves as epic or tragic heroes. These challenges required not only the physical strength to survive war-plagued or politically unstable African territories but also the psychological strength to travel through these volatile countries with false identities:

> …It was quite a difficult yet memorable journey. After disguising and impersonating as someone else, I succeeded in beating the security at the

> Douala[32] International Airport en route to the then visa-free Zimbabwe. I knew that if I left
>
> Cameroon and landed in Harare, I could smuggle myself into South Africa. The flight from Cameroon to Zimbabwe was quite smooth but the short distance between Zimbabwe and South Africa was a nightmare…
>
> (Informant 18: Interview 1, 19 April 2003).

From this testimony, memories of the experience are reconstructed and sanctioned in a language filled with images of fear, of hope, of new beginning, of rebirth and of an illusion of the haven ahead. And perhaps it was the renewed sense of hope and a new beginning that gave this informant the strength to challenge the horror of the wilderness. However, in the process of fleeing from a place generally considered as hostile, unsafe and dangerous, displaced persons often had to endure even more dangerous situations and places. Obviously, memories of flight frequently include a repetition of the hostility experienced at home, such as incarceration, abuse and orchestrated violence from inhabitants of the countries they pass through in the pursuit of a more secure place. In the process of recreating the past therefore, a pivotal metaphor that recurs in the narratives of Cameroonian asylum seekers and underpins the experiences of fleeing is the metaphor of route. Interestingly, 'route' is used to capture literally, the idea of a channel of escape and metaphorically, an exit to freedom.

The memory of fleeing includes shared experiences as well as common themes in which crossing the border was predominantly recaptured as a terrifying experience. It was

[32] Douala is the economic capital of Cameroon.

"recalled as a process filled with apocalyptic confusion and fear", while borders are construed as a "mythical boundary between death and life" (Malkki, 1995: 109). Cameroonian asylum seekers therefore thought of home as a symbolic representation of death and crossing the borders as an escape from an impending doom. In the process of fleeing, my informants had to endure the hostilities of some African countries because retreating would mean going back to the lion's den to face death. In the following testimony, another informant narrates his experience of flight and despite the challenges, he is determined to smuggle himself into South Africa:

> …With the help of a few friends, I left Cameroon and the only place I could think of was South Africa. I had to come to South Africa because Cameroon was visa free with Zimbabwe at that time and from Zimbabwe I knew I could smuggle myself into South Africa. If I had to escape to a place that required an entry visa I think I would not have made it and would not be alive by now…when I got to Harare, since it was visa free with Cameroon, I was stamped in and out since I said I was going to South Africa. From the airport, I was dropped where I could catch a taxi to South Africa and that was when the real experience began. I deceived the custom officers that I was crossing to see a friend and I saw three ZCC members who scared life out of me. I thought I had fallen in the hands of custom officers again and had to run for my dear life. I stood and saw a driver come and park his bus. I went to him and said "my friend, I want to go to Johannesburg but I don't have a visa so can you help me?" The man looked at me and said "sit in my car" and later he came to me and said "look you can't go to Johannesburg by road, it is very difficult because there are several road blocks".

> So I asked him "what can I do?" and he said "the only help I can give you is to take you to Musina" When we got to Musina I paid him, immediately he told me that there was no transport in Musina and he had to take me back. I said to him "look I am an illegal immigrant but I must enter South Africa." He then took me to the Musina train station and said to me "if you go by train, you may be lucky to get to Johannesburg". He did all the necessary things like buying the ticket and told me to sit and wait for the train. He then warned "you must be very careful because if they identity you as a foreigner, you are in big shit". Finally, the train came and I jumped inside. I sat in a coach where there were many people. It was winter and I knew nothing about winter and was wearing only a t-shirt though it was freezing. A woman looked at me and felt pity for me and lent me her blanket. We finally arrived in Johannesburg in the morning and I was in South Africa after my most traumatising journey caused especially by my fears of been caught…
>
> (Informant 19: Interview 1, 20 April 2003).

Clearly this respondent remembers his experience of escaping, not only as a frightening venture but also as physically challenging because he had to go through unfamiliar topographies and countless security checks. During his journey, he begins to get a sense of some of the challenges of exile as he is advised to disguise his foreign identity while on the train to Johannesburg. Although it was possible for him to abandon the journey and return home, home was no longer a place of safety, but rather a place of insecurity and subjugation. His memory of events from the past is indeed articulated as a narrative of resilience and hope. Traversing strange landscapes, survival was more a question of hope recurrently redeemed by dreams of an imaginary new home ahead. Moreover, in

his testimony, his description of his physical discomfort supports the contention that in the act of fleeing, "social life was overtaken by organismic life" (Malkki, 1995: 110). In the process of escaping, "the apocalyptic physicalization of the body and its functions was accompanied by another expression of chaotic formlessness, the unintelligibility of the physico-political landscape in which bodies traveled" (ibid: 110).

The process of fleeing is anchored in memory work that describes the experience as a herculean task, often requiring not only physical strength but also some degree of shrewdness. On the one hand, Cameroonians fleeing had to be mentally astute because it was a daunting task to outsmart the highly manned and unscrupulous security checkpoints both at the airports and the frontiers, without employing underground methods. On the other hand, the experience also required a great deal of bravery and endurance because it involved journeying across unfamiliar landscapes, meeting unfriendly people. *Informant 19's* testimony explains the dialectical relationship between home and exile and by fleeing Cameroon, the respondent sought to escape from the tragic experience but found himself, during the act of fleeing, having to endure the very experiences he was attempting to avoid. Remembering creates the space to represent the self and the *Other* and to compare different experiences that underpin displaced persons' search for a sanctuary.

In the cluster of narratives by Cameroonian asylum seekers, memories of flight take the form of one of two different narrative trajectories. The first trajectory portrays the process of fleeing as a quiet and comforting experience, especially in those situations where exiles escaped by airplane. In the other narrative trajectory, the past is recreated in a

language that completely contradicts the pleasant experiences in the first trajectory. Here, the experience is constructed essentially as a physically discomforting and mentally disturbing process. The narratives in the second trajectory are confined to descriptions of fleeing primarily as the act of crossing land borders and travelling through countries that were equally marred by political instability and fragility.

3.5 Early Days in Exile.

From the representation of their memories of political consciousness and activism, to their memories of fleeing and crossing borders, Cameroonians' recollection and reconstruction of events from the past evolve into an array of memories of life in exile. As Cameroonian asylum seekers concentrate on reconstructing their experiences in South Africa, this phase of their narratives centres on metaphors of exile. Initially these memories consist of their early experiences in a new socio-political space and later expand to include integration and their construction of 'refugeeness'. However, before analysing their descriptions of their lives in South Africa, I would like to consider their memories of the impressions they formed about South Africa prior to deciding that South Africa would be their ultimate destination. Briefly, most of the respondents recalled a period during which they viewed South Africa not simply as a new democracy but also as a place which offered a vast array of economic opportunities. They had seen footage on Cameroonian television, which portrayed the flamboyant and European-like city of Johannesburg. Historically, this African glamour has been symbolised as the 'city of gold' and while recalling their impressions, their memories were expressed in an almost utopian language, which revealed their fantasies of South Africa as the ideal home for both their political and economic freedom. These utopian visions push potential asylum

seekers into making a final decision and forged their making and remaking of perceptions about South Africa:

> … After the Nations Cup in 1996, I said it was a wonderful country. I could not believe it was Africa and I said to myself, I must go there and see the wonderful world of Mandela. I was convinced they had a very good economy and no matter what, I would have money to pay my flight back home…Johannesburg is the city of gold and I thought no matter what, I would pick some gold from the streets, sell and pay for my ticket… (Informant 11: Interview 1, 3 April 2003).

For this respondent, seeking asylum is not only a politically motivated issue but also an economic one. For example, in South Africa asylum seekers and refugees have to be self-sustaining and therefore have to rely on some form of economic activity in order to survive. Of course, today there is a thin line between refugees and economic migrants because with the precipitous decline in aid from humanitarian countries, most asylum seekers and refugees have to sustain themselves through various economic activities. In the case of Cameroon asylum seekers and refugees, the men are mostly street vendors, hawkers, petty businessmen and teachers, while women are petty traders and teachers as well. Also, most Cameroonian forced migrants came to South Africa after years of joblessness and in the quest for political freedom they are also keen to reap some economic benefits. To this end, memories of their refugee experiences oscillated between impressions formed before arriving and those formed during the early days in South Africa. We are exposed to narratives of the past constructed on a set of oppositional images such as illusion and disillusionment, hope and disappointment, integration and

rejection, utopia and dystopia and finally home and exile. At this point, the construction of the past, most importantly, attempts to rehabilitate the "symmetries between genesis stories of two imagined eras, between aboriginality and refugeeness" (Malkki, 1995: 116).

Upon arrival in South Africa, the initial experiences of Cameroonian asylum seekers revolved around attempting to accommodate and deal with the trauma or anguish of dislocation from home or their roots, and adjusting to a new diaspora space. Becoming part of the exile community in Johannesburg was absolutely necessary since "exile is a solitude experienced outside the group: the deprivation felt at not being with others in the communal habitation" (Said, 2000: 177). Although displaced Cameroonians live in community-like cluster in Johannesburg, this cluster is fundamentally different to an ancestral space because their birthplace provided them with a sense of belonging. Nevertheless, this period set the stage for new experiences and discoveries, galvanised by metaphors of exile and expressed in a language of national pride. Cameroonians remembered their early days in exile as days consumed by a growing sense of nostalgia and accounts of their arrival in South Africa were immediately juxtaposed with memories of their desire to return home because they felt rejected and alienated.

The feeling of hope and utopianism that characterised the period of fleeing was quickly shattered by the cold reception they received from their new host nation and their initial images and dreams of coming to South Africa were reduced to nothing but illusions. This state of hopelessness and disillusionment is conveyed in the following response:

> …Economic wise it is fine but my first experience was not the best. Crime is the prime activity of the day. Immediately I entered South Africa from Zimbabwe, the first person who approached me was a thief who wanted to rob me. Fortunately, I have had some experience of such things when I was a student in Nigeria especially in Lagos and Onitsha. People who have been to these places would agree with me that these were places whereby all your six senses must always be alert. After Joubert Park to Claim Street, ten metres away, someone was shot and I had never seen anyone killed in cool blood like that. It is the most unsafe place on the universe… (Informant 11: Interview 1, 3 April 2003).

This forced migrant's representation of South Africa during his early days in the country was a blueprint indication that South Africa was not the safe and welcoming place they had imagined when fleeing from home. His narrative expressed the state of disappointment and disillusionment that embraced Cameroonians upon arrival in their new home. The image of paradise built by displaced persons prior to their departure to South Africa was destroyed immediately on their arrival in the country. Therefore, the positive images of hope, safety or paradise that preceded memories of Cameroonians before their escape were immediately superseded by negative realities. Drawing on the above analysis, one is tempted to state that today exile is hardly a viable alternative for forced migrants because in the diasporic space they are victims of hostility, rejection and alienation forged through increasing experiences of xenophobia and racism.

Consequently, as they reinvented the early days in exile, Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees regarded South Africa as a landscape of violence, insecurity and alienation.

This image has remained in the memories of these displaced individuals and has played a pivotal role in the construction of narrative trajectories of involuntary migrants in South Africa. As this discussion continues to unfold, memories of South Africa as an unsafe place will continue to resurface prominently. However, the key issue illuminated in the above discussion is the fact that memory is not only crucial for the construction of identity, but also a way of bringing to the fore the challenges facing displaced persons in exile.

The early days in exile were also recaptured in memories of the construction of 'refugeeness' (Malkki, 1995: 116). Here, the discourse focused on Cameroonian asylum seekers' recollection of the struggle for official recognition in South Africa. It was a re-enactment of their days at the Department of Home Affairs and the battle for recognition and acquisition of a refugee identity. The memories of the difficulties of the early days were combined with the equally stressful and extremely traumatic experience at the Department of Home Affairs.

> …When I got into this country, Home Affairs started with three months, it went up to six months, dropped finally to one month, sometimes two weeks and it has now settled on a month. You can imagine that to get papers extended without going through the back door, you needed to get out of bed maybe at 4 am and by 5am you are at Home Affairs. Then you stay in the queue and those who can use their pocket power would be served before you. All what we need to do is to go there and get the one month extension and wait for the day to come again and in winter, you know how tragic and stressing it could be…

(Informant 19: Interview 2, 25 July 2003).

The central issue addressed by this informant and other Cameroonians as they attempted to remember the early days, was the uncertainty grounded in the struggle for recognition. The inconsistencies clouding this process often put displaced persons in a state of limbo in which their futures seem not only obscure but also uncertain. At this point, the testimonies were enmeshed in images of the uncertainty and the pathos of exile as a result of their fears and nightmares that their applications might be rejected in the days to come.

This immediate experience was conceptualised as a phase that is constructed through idioms of hopelessness, fear, nostalgia and uncertainty. Yet, by remembering this phase of their lives, Cameroonian asylum seekers are attempting to reconstruct a state of being characterised by the new politics of resistance in a different political space. At this new crossroad, Cameroonians refashion stories of a people who, in their homeland, were victims of political torture as well as rejection and who seem to be re-experiencing a similar spell of rejection, alienation and torture in exile. The politics of remembering seems to engender a body of narratives that encapsulates episodes of resistance against political victimisation at home and the challenges of living in exile. The impassioned reconstruction of the past by forced migrants from Cameroon is typically a story, which "demarcates displacement as a historically limited experience running from uprooting to integration" (Olwig & Hastrup, 1994: 146). Along these lines, the construction of social memory is positioned as a national narrative of displacement that interprets notions of xenophobia and racism in South Africa as well as subverts official versions of the challenges of displaced persons. Also, recalling events from the past becomes some kind

of an allegory because of the underlying morality and didactic lessons that could enhance our understanding of exile and the politics of displacement.

3. 6 Period of Complete Initiation and Integration.

The final phase of the construction of the past in narratives of Cameroonian forced migrants examines the period of integration into South Africa. Here, the construction of social memory was couched in terms of remembering the shifting dynamics in the lives of Cameroonian after living in South Africa several years. It was grounded in the changing notion of home and the formulation of new identities. Significantly, they tried to remember the ways in which they dealt with issues of assimilation, xenophobia, racism and the changes that have characterised this refugee community in South Africa after several years. Here, memory work was premised on the dialectical relationship between early days and the present situation in South Africa. It focused on the way "people hold past places of belonging in their minds through memory and hold future places of belonging in their minds through imagination" (Ward 2003:88). The process of remembering captured the social and imaginative transition from the state of apparent rejection that underpinned the early days to the period of integration.

In this phase, reminiscing the past focuses on the way forced migrants have been completely assimilated by the system through assuming new identities. Below, one respondent remembers the key changes that have happened over the years:

> …There have been significant changes. In fact, the negative perceptions about asylum seekers are gradually fading and I think one of the people we all owe this to is President Mbeki. You know he has this vision for Africa that can only make

> Africa a unified continent. His ideologies about the African continent have reached the grassroots. Most South Africans today now see themselves as Africans and embracing Africans from other parts of Africa. Today we are seen more like friends, who can contribute to the growth of South Africa. Crime has also reduced remarkably and today most of us now feel at home in Johannesburg… (Informant 10: Interview 3, 26 October 2003).

The narrator recalls the changing patterns in the lives of Cameroonians and explains that memory of the past brings about a self-conscious realisation of present South Africa. The earlier metaphors of fears, images of insecurity and hopelessness are superseded by a new category of literary idioms that capture the newfound love between South Africans and exiles in a seemingly idealised community, now ready to embrace refugees and asylum seekers. Remembering becomes a premise for discussing the renewed sense of brotherhood between host nationals and displaced persons in the new South Africa. Furthermore, episodes of xenophobia and racism that preoccupied narratives of the early days in exile are rapidly suppressed and the respondents seemed to refocus their attention on the positive changes in their lives:

> … These things are real and we have all been victims in way or the other. I remember I was involved in an accident once and though I was not the driver, I was actually hit with a gun because this guy discovered I was not a South African, but I think it is needless today to tell you how many times I have been a victim of racial discrimination in South Africa. A lot has changed and there is no point dwelling in the past… (Informant 8: Interview 3, 20 October 2003).

While recalling the period of integration, this respondent prefers to let bygones be bygones. For him, forgetting is more healing than remembering and in this case, we are confronted by a situation where forgetting takes control over remembering. In this light, Botman and Petersen (1996) contend that it is possible that occasionally people choose not to commit to the past or lack the courage to face the past and prefer to let bygones be bygones. Avoiding the past becomes preferable, especially when the past is filled with shame, fear, anguish or suffering.

In the course of reinventing the past, Cameroonian exiles tended to redefine their notion of home, reconstructing Johannesburg as their new home. The interpretation of home as an ancestral place is brought under scrutiny by "recent formulations of place and home" (Ward, 2003: 81) and these recent formulations represent home as consistently volatile and flexible:

> …I told you Johannesburg is now my home, so I am not thinking of returning to Cameroon any time soon. Today I feel more secure here than in Cameroon, so why bother going back… The way I see things here, we should look forward to a brighter future not only for Cameroonians but all other Africans in South Africa…
>
> (Informant 14: Interview 3, 11 November 2003).

Informant 14's revelation captures an interesting narrative shift in the testimonies. Her testimony subverts the preceding scathing description of Johannesburg as a place of violence and rejection and reconstructs the prevailing social conditions of Cameroonians

in Johannesburg as more economically stable and politically secure. The space hitherto rejected is now reconstructed as a place of warmth, security and a new place of belonging. Memories of these forced migrants recall the period of integration as that of bonding and the purity of exile is refashioned in images of "greatest intimacy, security and familiarity" (Said, 2003: 89). In this period, memory seems to be rewriting a new discourse about displacement framed around the claim that "displacement is not experienced in precisely the same way across time and space, and does not unfold in a uniform fashion" (Lavie & Swedenburg, 1996: 4).

In the event of reinventing this phase in their lives, Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees compare Cameroon and South Africa. While the language of remembering is filled with images and metaphors of hope and security, there is an embedded discourse that brings contemporary Cameroon back into perspective. This underlying discourse continues to describe Cameroon as a place with no prospects of change, inadvertently establishing a relationship between the past and present:

> …I am actually enjoying a lot of freedom here in South Africa, which I couldn't and still cannot enjoy back in Cameroon even today. Here, I can go anywhere, say what I want in a democratic set up like South Africa. Sometimes I really wonder if I can actually live in Cameroon again…
>
> (Informant 10: Interview 3, 26 October 2003).

In this excerpt, the respondent remembers not only the new social order in South Africa but also the state of affairs in Cameroon. Through memory work, he puts into perspective

the continuous infringement on human rights in Cameroon and how the present South Africa has given him the space to exercise these rights. Despite the narrative patterns that described the experience of exile as extremely pathological, Cameroonians have resigned themselves to the situation in South Africa because it provides them with a better home and better opportunities than Cameroon. Reminiscing the past, they often mention future plans of returning to their homeland, but these plans can only be executed if there are promising changes in Cameroon. Besides, with the improvement of the material conditions of displaced persons in South Africa, Cameroonians are rapidly assuming new identities through intermarriages with South Africans.

These new formulations of exile bring into the spotlight the suggestion that to understand the concept of home within this context, we should tackle it along the nexus of the relationship between "displacement, identity and belonging" (Ward, 2003: 81). These formulations also engender the view that displacement is a transcendental movement from one cultural setting to another and "those who move between cultural worlds hold contextual identities and multiples sites of belonging" (ibid: 81).

3.7 'Letting sleeping dogs lie': The Need to Forget the Past.

Memory work is conjointly the process of remembering and forgetting and what actually animates memory is the attempt by individuals to either omit or suppress fragments of events in their lives. For memory work to come to fruition, the above-mentioned binary opposites must be addressed. What I am restating here is that any worthwhile analysis of memory work usually addresses the processes of remembering and forgetting. Nevertheless, the main thrust of this chapter has been an extensive examination of the

way Cameroonian asylum seekers remember events from the past and how these events impact on the construction of identity, national narrative and the politics of belonging. It has attempted to foreground the premise that "the similarities and differences in the ways individuals and groups construct memories open new possibilities for exploring how individuals connect with large scale historical process" (Thelen, 1989: 1118). It is however relevant to briefly examine how forgetting creeps into and reinforces memory work. In the opening sections of this chapter, I raised the question: "how is the past recollected and narrativised or how is it buried, suppressed or avoided?" In attempting to respond to the question, the chapter has focused on the recollection and narrativisation of the past with glimpses of how events from the past were avoided.

While some members of my case study group embraced the belief that it was crucial to discuss the past and deal with it accordingly, a minority believed that it was necessary for the past to reside in the past. For this group, the past was painful and too traumatic to be recalled. It was of the opinion that because the past was filled with sad memories, it was important that it remained unspoken. As a result, during the course of the interviews, some respondents skilfully avoided disturbing episodes of their past by either declining to respond or explaining their reasons for not wanting to answer the question. "You know the details and I always don't like talking about the conditions in Cameroon because it only helps to irritate me…" (Informant 14: Interview 3, 11 November 2003). Rather than thinking of remembering as some kind of blessing or an exercise that has a powerful bearing on the present and the future, this forced migrant and others saw the construction of the past as a kind of burden or curse.

3.8 Conclusion.

In this chapter, I have explored the way the past is remembered in narratives of Cameroonian asylum seekers. I have shown how different metaphors, images and symbols are used to deconstruct events from the past. The chapter has attempted to position the process of remembering as a signpost for our understanding of experiences of displacement, individual and collective identities and sense of belonging. From a broad base of narrative data, I have argued that remembering episodes of the past is a "symbolic step towards regaining some sense of control over these episodes" (Payne, 2000: 50). The chapter has therefore addressed the contention that the representation of the past is a vital strategy for creating awareness and bringing to centre stage the predicaments and pathos of displacement in South Africa. Finally, it has also attempted to contend that the process of remembrance provides "security, authority, legitimacy and finally identity in the present" (Thelen, 1989: 1126).

Memory work is therefore empowering and gives displaced person the voice to address their experiences. It is also an outlet for the reformulation of identities and the establishment of a sense of belonging in exile. In this light, one noticeable particularity of this chapter is the dialectical relationship between memory and identity formation. Here, by remembering events from their past as well as their social and political orientations, testimonies of Cameroonian exiles begin to provide a foretaste of different categories of identity and eliciting how the process of remembering in the narratives of displacement provides sense of belonging and identity. Some of the categories of migrant identities

illuminated in this chapter include, inter alia, political, cultural, refugee and national identities. My primary concern in chapter four will be to examine metaphors and symbols of identification and the construction of different forms of identities in the testimonies.

CHAPTER FOUR

"The flux of sameness and difference": The Construction of Identities in Testimonies of Cameroonian Asylum Seekers.

> *…As Cameroonians, we come from different cultural backgrounds so we have decided to reinforce our cultures through creating cultural meetings. We also have an association for Anglophone Cameroonians, which sits every three months. These associations give us a sense of belonging and link us to our roots. In fact during my own association, we speak our native language, our ladies prepare our traditional foods and we dance to our traditional music…*
>
> *(Informant 5: Interview 3, 12 October 2003).*

> *…It is clearly not just the stories I tell about myself that affect the shape and direction of my self-creation but the stories others tell about me as well…[t] hese stories help to create the social climate in which my life is lived and to determine the range of options and opportunities by which it is bound… (Randall, 1995: 44).*

4. 1 Introduction.

The construction of migrant identities has always been at the epicentre of migrant narratives and political discourses on exilic experiences. These narratives and discourses position the question of identity as "the representation of the subject in the differentiating order of the otherness" (Bhabha, 1994: 45) and also as a form of social representation, as well as the display of national consciousness. In chapter three of this thesis, I began thinking about the concept of identity, where I argued that the construction of memory is a model for the recreation of the self and a sense of belonging. The chapter addressed amongst other issues the symbiotic relationship between memory work and the construction of identity, an affirmation that the politics of identification is irrevocably one

of the key trajectories of migrant narratives. In the testimonies told by Cameroonian forced migrants, the construction of identities is premised on the axiom that identity is "a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristic with another person or group" (Hall & Du Gay, 1996: 2) and also the recognition of difference among the Cameroonian refugee community. It is in this light that Cameroonian testimonies tended to authorise the formation of Cameroonian identities in the post-apartheid city of Johannesburg.

Given the primacy of the question of identity in the lives of both voluntary and involuntary migrants, the politics of identity has become more and more salient in migrant narratives and has repeatedly generated a wide array of debates (Hall & Du Gay, 1996; Craib, 1998; Fortier, 2000; Capozza &Brown, 2000). These debates have focused on the way individual human beings recreate the self and how people and institutions construct individuals and groups of people. As pointed out in the introduction, the shifts in the construction of identity are partly a consequence of global trends (Michael, 1996; Cohen, 2000; Whitebrook, 2001). These trends have redefined identity as largely a social product and always in a state of flux, which Craib describes as "the flux of sameness and difference" (1998:7). Here, Craib's theorisation foregrounds two key issues: firstly, identities are never fixed or static, they are constantly reconstructed because of the interplay of different global forces; and secondly, in the process of constructing identities, we are indeed signaling similarities and differences between different people, states and cultures. Thus, identity is a concept of absolute sameness interlocking with the concept of distinctiveness and at this juncture it does presume and establish a relationship between similarity and difference (Jenkins, 1996; Wenjing, 2004).

This chapter is framed around the theoretical underpinning that “the self is a kind of aesthetic construct, recollected in and with life experiences in narrative fashion” (Crites, 1986: 162). This contention claims that our lives basically constitute fragments of tales, told in varied forms of narratives and the way we model ourselves in these fragments, forms part of the tales. To this end, the pragmatics of identity in the testimonies is “shaped by many different nexuses of relations with diverse categories of people and in a multitude” (Malkki, 1995: 156) of cultural signifiers. The testimonies attempt to articulate a strong feeling of a collective Cameroonian community in exile and at the same time the underlying cultural differences within the same community. The main thrust of the chapter is tailored and constructed in three main sections, namely the construction of national identity, cultural identity and the juggling of identities by Cameroonian forced migrants. I examine on the one hand, the formation of *national* associations, *national* languages and Cameroonian music as the main vignettes for the construction of national identity, while on the other hand I scrutinise the formation of *cultural* associations, *cultural* clothing and *traditional cuisine* as mediums for the construction of cultural identity. The last main section of the chapter analyses the way Cameroonians attempt to juggle both national and cultural identities as well as constructing new identities through intermarriages. The politics of identity in this case is locked in and conditioned by the political, cultural and economic consciousness of individual migrants. But before handling the construction of identities in the testimonies, I start by reconceptualising the relationship between exile, identity and narratives.

4.2 Exile, Identity and Narratives.

Since the construction of identities has recurred powerfully in migrant narratives and broader migrant discourses, there is unarguably a relationship between exile, identity and narratives. Therefore, of primary importance to the pragmatic of identity in Cameroonian testimonies is this relationship between exile, narrative and identity. The brokering of this relationship positions narratives as the sphere for migrants to articulate metaphors of the self in exile. Here, I draw on the scholarly works of Whitebrook (2001); Brockmeier & Carbaugh (2001) and De Fina (2003) and their systemic engagement with trajectories of identity and the important role played by narratives in the formation of identity. According to Whitebrook (2001):

> … Identity requires the telling of stories both by and about the self: stories the person tells others about themselves, or stories others tell about the person or stories in which the person is included. Narrative identity construed as story telling entails identity as the public presentation of the self. The fundamental question entailed by this characterization of identity is how to represent one's own or another's public self-life or behaviour. Mere description is not sufficient- there is also a need to explain, to account for, to justify. To talk of narrative identity entails attention to how the story is told, the mode of construction, structure and techniques, and why the story-'this story'-is being told, and whether it is convincing… (22)

The views illuminated by Whitebrook in this quotation are of relevance because they provide a theoretical framework for my analysis in this chapter. Firstly, by attempting to

deconstruct the relationship between identity and narrative, the quotation points to the way different narrative strategies and literary artifacts are used to reinforce the construction of migrant experiences and identities. Secondly, it indicates that they set the platform for writing about the self and at the same time illuminating the way other people or institutions represent forced migrants and by so doing positioning narratives as "central to the process of representation" (Cobley, 2001: 40).

Testimony as a narrative genre becomes an outlet for the construction of identity because it is not only "used to articulate absolute distinctions between peoples but how it might represent cultural difference and hybridity" (ibid: 39) and a transit for the exchange of different ideologies that help individuals to construct the self. It provides forced migrants with the space for the "endless process of self-creation" (Craib, 1998: 7). In this chapter, I borrow from Craib and address the question of identity in narratives of Cameroonian forced migrants principally as "the flux of sameness and difference" (7). Here, I contend that in the context of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees, the crisis of identification is reinforced by the elusive feeling of collective consciousness as well as the political tension and cultural heterogeneity between Anglophone and Francophone forced migrants at one level and the fears of assimilation at another level. The representation of the self in the testimonies has therefore provided a platform for the "fostering of shared representations about self and other" (De Fina, 2003: 184) among Cameroonian forced migrants in Johannesburg.

In the testimonies, diasporic consciousness and the construction of identities involve both collective and individual initiatives for remaking the self. On the one hand, these

initiatives are transmitted through symbolic and metaphoric signposts that seek primarily to uncover the "profound transformations of individual lives" (Buijs, 1993: 39) of Cameroonian forced migrants. We need to read the body of narratives told by Cameroonians forced migrants not only as texts of personal social experiences, but also as texts that echo the way displaced persons express and construct multiples forms of identification in the diasporic space of Johannesburg. The narratives recreate the stories of Cameroonians and their search for selfhood in Johannesburg and above all, how the narratives foreground a powerful sense of belonging displayed through continuous attempts to create a Cameroonian nation away from home. In this context, identity formation takes place through the constant tensions between binary oppositions such as similarity and difference, as well as integration and disintegration (Hall, 1990; Buijs, 1993; Michael, 1996), illustrated through different images and metaphors. These metaphors and images include, inter alia, national and cultural associations, music, clothing and cuisine. However, a key site for the formation of identity by Cameroonian forced migrants has been the formation of national and cultural associations.

4.3 Migrant Associations and the Landscape of Cameroonian Associations in Johannesburg.

To understand the way Cameroonian associations are represented in the testimonies as signifiers of identification, it is relevant to chart the landscape of these associations. The theorisation of the history and the description of the landscape of Cameroonian associations are important to this chapter because apart from the other metaphors and

images used for the construction of identity, associations appear to be the dominant metaphor.

From this premise, I argue that migrants' collective consciousness and the construction of a 'home away from home' have often been performed at one level through the formation of associations. The culture of associations "suggest[s] that the quality of societal life depends on the fruitful interaction between people, and between the individual and society" (Odmalm, 2004: 471). Clearly, these associations function as the vehicles for the mobilisation of members of migrant communities and represent the state of reciprocal relationship between migrants (Fallers, 1967; Cordero-Guzman, 2001; Odmalm, 2004). In spite of the proliferation and the significance attached to migrant associations, literature on this area is still relatively sparse if compared with literature on migration. Nevertheless, existing studies on migrant associations argue that the formation of migrant associations in exile invoke "the image of society as a system of social relations informed by a common culture" (Fallers, 1967: 8) and also to model cultural, political and social hybridity amongst migrant communities (Fallers, 1967; Odmalm, 2004). Against this backdrop, the important role of associations in the construction of migrant identities has been addressed by Odmalm (2004). In an empirical study of civil society, migrant organisations and political parties in the Swedish context, Odmalm addresses the relationship between civil society, migrant associations and political parties. He argues that:

> …Migrant organizations can be said to serve four characteristic purposes that separate them from other types of voluntary organization. Firstly, migrant

> organizations act as a link between the sending country and the receiving one in that they provide advisory services for future migrants. This means that the organization could potentially function as an intermediary or alternative for the complex bureaucracy in that it can offer first-hand experience of migration processes of the host country. Secondly, the organization can function as a supplement to the state in terms of integration and adaptation to the new society…thirdly, migrant associations, if part of an established network are viewed as crucial to their organizing on the basis of ethnic attributes. Finally, migrant associations play an important role for the maintenance of linkage between the ethnic group and the country or region of origin, especially in a diaspora type of situation… (473)

The four cardinal functions described in this quotation are indeed synonymous to the rationale behind the formation of associations amongst the Cameroonian refugee community in Johannesburg. These associations are formed to reinforce a sense of community as well as invoke the cultural differences between Cameroonians in Johannesburg. Furthermore, they hope to serve as the pillar of moral and financial support for new immigrants and avenues for the sharing of valuable information, which could help the lives of both old and new immigrants.

During the interviews, my respondents could not say with certainty when the first Cameroonian association in Johannesburg was formed. However, they speculated it was the period between 1995 and 1996 because this is considered as the period characterised by a visible presence of Cameroonians in Johannesburg. Also, they mentioned that the

pioneer Cameroonian association to be formed in Johannesburg was the Association of Cameroonians in South Africa (ACAS). As an association of Cameroonians, its membership was made up of both Anglophones and Francophones as well as voluntary and involuntary migrants and started with an estimated pioneer membership of twenty. However, despite the heterogeneous nature of the association, the demographics showed that Anglophones formed the majority of the total membership because they constitute the majority of Cameroonians in Johannesburg. According to my respondents, this national association was formed as a way of mobilising Cameroonians in Johannesburg to exist as a single community in exile, especially with the strong waves of xenophobia and alienation in Johannesburg. It was also intended to create a forum for Cameroonian migrants to mingle and also to serve as a pillar of support.

Unfortunately, after the formation of ACAS, it was immediately riddled with a leadership struggle between the Anglophones and the Francophones. The power struggle was the outcome of the Francophones' attempt to assert a more hegemonic rule in the association, seemingly rekindling the polity in Cameroon. This tension culminated in a split and the Anglophone faction decided to form its own association as a way of unifying the Anglophone community in Johannesburg. This new association was called the Association of English Speaking Cameroonians in Johannesburg (AESCA). When I arrived in Johannesburg in 1998, ACAS was on the brink of complete demise because the Anglophone majority had migrated to AESCA. In the following quotation, one respondent attempts to summarise the history of Cameroonian associations:

> …Since collapse of ACAS, AESCA has become the most important Cameroonian association in Johannesburg today. Although we call it the Association of English speaking Cameroonians in South Africa, we have a lot Francophone members. They join our association because they like the way Anglophones do things and because some of them experienced the same problems in Cameroon like us. Today, it looks more like a big Cameroonian association…
>
> (Informant 5: Interview 3, 12 October 2003).

This respondent's disclosure positions AESCA not as a regional but as national association in terms of its membership, justifying why it has been represented in this study as a national association. After the formation of AESCA, all attempts to resuscitate ACAS were unsuccessful and since its final collapse in 1999 until today, AESCA has existed as the main broad-based Cameroonian association in Johannesburg and clearly represents the Anglophone consciousness, despite its membership.

The activities of both associations were similar in a way. They involved meeting monthly, socialising, sharing information, assisting newcomers, and financial contributions, and so on, aspects which will be explored in greater depth in the following sections of this chapter. Interestingly, although both associations claimed to be apolitical, most discussions during meetings revolved around the socio-political atmosphere at home, thus they were represented in the testimonies as a forum for political discussions and updates on the political situation in Cameroon.

Apart from the national associations discussed above, another key feature of the Cameroonian migrant community has been the proliferation of cultural and social associations. The Cameroonian community in particular is represented by different ethnic groups such as *Balis, Meta, Bassa, Ewondo, Pinyin, Mankon, Akum, Bafut, Bamileke*[33] and so on. These different ethnic groups forge and strengthen the construction of cultural and ethnic identity through cultural associations. The narratives chronicled the way the community uses cultural associations as a model for the celebration of different ethnic, linguistic and cultural roots. In fact, the tradition of cultural associations is a long-standing tradition among Cameroonian migrants all over the globe. Cameroonians in Europe, America, and Asia, and of course South Africa have continued to nurture this tradition and it has continued to blossom over the years. In most cases, there is always a national Cameroonian association, which seeks to unite all Cameroonians in that country as well as smaller ethnic-based cultural groupings representing different ethnic groups in that diasporic space. The Cameroonian community in Johannesburg also epitomises shared historical experiences and at the same time represents difference cultural legacies and shifting identities.

As stated in the introduction, Cameroon is not only politically fragmented but also a region with different cultural and ethnic heritages, represented in more than two hundred ethnic groups and indigenous languages. And irrespective of the fact that the activities of both the cultural and national association tend to overlap, cultural associations are also involved in cultural performances such as marriage rites, cultural dances, traditional food

[33] These are some of the ethnic groups that constitute the Cameroonian refugee community in South Africa. They represent distinct linguistic and geographic differences as well as cultural practices, showing how ethnicity works in Cameroon.

and display of cultural dresses. An interesting phenomenon about these associations, which emerged forcefully in the testimonies, is the way they tend to appeal on different levels to individual members, regardless of the sense of collectiveness that they are meant to reinforce. These different appeals and representations have been addressed in the ensuing sections of this chapter.

4.4 The Construction of a National Identity in Cameroonian Testimonies.

The concept of national identity is always constructed against the backdrop of the claims and expressions that people have produced about themselves. It "embodies historic territory or homeland, common myths and historical memories…hence people who share some of these characteristics are entitled to form a national identity" (Georgescu & Botescu, 2004: 6). It is also a process that fashions the way we deconstruct the self and also shows how migrants attempts to express a strong feeling of community. National identity should therefore be understood as functioning as a multi-dimensional entity with multiple empirical referents and expressed through processes of interaction using different metaphors and symbolic codes (Malkki, 1995; Castles, 2000; Whitebrook, 2001).

The construction of national identity in the testimonies of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees is represented as feelings of a collective consciousness, memories of a homeland, common myths and a nationalistic 'feeling'. It is formulated in narrative expressions that attempt to represent Cameroonian forced migrants as a "nationally

homogenous" (Thiesse, 1999: 4) clearly because of their shared experiences of displacement, somewhat identical political histories as well as similar traits of cultural sameness. Here, the metaphor of community is the central frame of reference in the process of constructing a national identity and becomes a main construct in thinking about the way members of this refugee community organise their lives (Wenjing, 2004). In the narratives, the feeling of sameness and collective consciousness are expressed through the two national associations mentioned earlier, common national languages among the Cameroonian community, such as French and pidgin, as well as Cameroonian music.

4.4.1 National Associations as a Metaphor for a National Identity.

ACAS and AESCA are the two main national associations that have existed within the Cameroonian community and have been used to forge a national identity for Cameroonian forced migrants in Johannesburg. These associations have therefore been the central force for the mobilisation of Cameroonian migrants and the recreation of a national consciousness in Johannesburg over the past decade.

So, regardless of the history of antagonism between Francophones and Anglophones, the quality of life of Cameroonian forced migrants in Johannesburg has depended to a large extent on a culture of interdependency, which has been symbolically represented through the formation of the above-mentioned two broad-based associations. By the time of this research most of my interviewees were affiliated as members of at least one of them. And, during the existence of ACAS members congregated once every month and according to the respondents, the main activities of this association included financial

contributions, assistance to needy members, news from home, social interests, survival strategies in Johannesburg, sports and so on. Since it was a composite Cameroonian association, membership was opened to all Cameroonians in Johannesburg and they had financial obligation to the association which included a one-off registration fee and annual dues. However, a prominent feature of the association, which recurred forcefully in the testimonies, was the reasons for the formation of ACAS and why Cameroonian migrants took up membership in the association. Here, the grounds for acquiring membership differed from member to member, though the overarching reason was the notion of collectiveness and living as a community in exile. To one of the respondents, becoming a member of ACAS was motivated by the belief that:

> …When you are in a foreign land, it is always important to identify with other members of your community in that land. Firstly, it gives you a sense of belonging, secondly it helps too with the nostalgia and it serves as a form of security in that you are not alone and you could ask for help from members when you are in trouble. For example, if you are sick, the members contribute money to assist you with your treatment or if a Cameroonian dies, they contribute money to send the corpse home… (Informant 9: Interview 3, 23 October 2003).

This respondent claims to have been an active member of ACAS and also a member of the executive board of the association, thus portraying himself as a reservoir of invaluable information about the association. In attempting to outline his reasons for joining, *Informant 9's* testimony echoes several issues of primary importance to Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees in Johannesburg. Firstly, the testimony revisits the state of

insecurity created by anti-foreigner sentiments and post-apartheid violence which constantly threaten the social existence of migrants in Johannesburg. Thus, he positions these factors as motivators for the formation of the association. Clearly, his testimony represents ACAS symbolically as a place of solace, a support platform and some kind of an insurance policy especially, in places rife with insecurity, such as those where most Cameroonians in Johannesburg live. Secondly, it reinforces the notion of interdependency, whereby the survival of migrants in the city of Johannesburg is contingent on a strong community base and active support structures with migrants assisting each other. For this informant, the formation of ACAS played a pivotal role in Cameroonians' attempts to fashion a national identity in exile, because it was formed against the backdrop of "an impassioned construction and reconstruction of their history as a people" (Malkki, 1992: 35).

The overarching notions of belonging and creation of a 'home away from home' place ACAS at the epicentre of the lives of Cameroonian forced migrants for the short period of time that it existed. For its members, the association had a strong bearing on the lives of Cameroonian migrants and they derived some kind of pleasure from it, apart from simply recreating a sense of belonging. Significantly, the respondents who were members of the association found it pleasurable in different ways. *Informant 9* again states that this association provided space for:

> …Occasionally meeting other Cameroonians that I would not have met without ACAS and the fact that we talk about life back in Cameroon and other issues that could help the Cameroonian community in Johannesburg …
>
> (Interview 3, 23 October 2003).

This interviewee images and transforms this association into a marginal space of profound symbolic importance because it created a unique opportunity to mingle with other Cameroonians. He also represents the association as a nexus for the recasting of memories of home and shared experiences. For him, the pleasure of joining the association is derived from the ways the members used the association as a forum to connect with the political developments and the social conditions at home through the sharing of valuable information about Cameroon. It provided a platform for migrants to address issues "which concern their particular ethnic group or nationality or attempt to bring about change in the political environment" (Odmalm, 2004: 486).

Despite the acclaimed strong feeling of unity represented by the formation of ACAS, it was doomed to collapse because the Cameroonian community in Johannesburg represents different political ideologies, social orientations, cultures and ethnic origins. These discrepant cultural and political patterns had a negative influence on the flourishing of the notion of national consciousness, expressed through ACAS. Although the testimonies exemplified a seemingly powerful culture of interdependency amongst Cameroonians, it was intermittently impeded by existing regional and ethnic conflicts in Cameroon that have continually tensioned even the relationship between Cameroonian forced migrants in South Africa. One example of these conflicts is the struggle for an Anglophone identity in a Francophone dominated Cameroon, illuminated in my introduction. Consequently, at one level, the narratives repeatedly invoke the longstanding antagonisms and lack of unity amongst Cameroonian involuntary migrants, showing how attempts to construct a national identity have always been culturally shaped and politically challenged by the

tension between Anglophones and Francophones in Cameroon and South Africa. The demise of the pioneer Cameroonian association (ACAS) after just a few years of existence was therefore used as justification of the tension between the two factions. And whilst the narratives mentioned that the reasons for the collapse were manifold, particularly noticeable was the distinctiveness of cultures between Anglophones and Francophones. As an affirmation of this claim, the following informant recasts the relationship between Francophones and Anglophones and how it affected the collapse of ACAS:

> …I really don't think I am an advocate of unity or separation. At one point I thought it was good for Cameroonians to be united here in Johannesburg, but when I look back at the history, I think living separately is the best option. If we look at Cameroon today and the way Anglophones are treated by their Francophone brothers, I kind of believe that we are better without them…
>
> (Informant 1: Interview 1, 2 March 2003).

Like *Informant 9,* this respondent introduced himself as an active member of ACAS and presently the Secretary-General of AESCA, which in a way justifies his claim that he is not "an advocate of separation". Nevertheless he blames the demise of the Association of Cameroonians in South Africa partly on politically motivated conflict between Francophones and Anglophones. Here, the historical framework of the antagonism is brought to bear on the lives of Cameroonian forced migrants in Johannesburg, signaling the way it has affected their social existence. In this testimony, political and cultural differences between Cameroonians become an impediment to the construction of national

identity and though the association claimed to be apolitical its very existence had a powerful political undertone. The formation of an autonomous Anglophone association after the failure of ACAS to unite Cameroonian exemplifies these differences.

The outcome of this fragmented relationship between Francophones and Anglophones is evident from the collapse of ACAS and the immediate formation of AESCA. Notable with this association is the fact that it had different meanings and significances to different groups of forced migrants. In the following testimony, the interviewee attempts to explain its meaning and significance for her:

> …Let me start by telling you why I joined AESCA, which to me is the mother association. When I arrived in Johannesburg, I did not know anyone and I was fortunate to have met some Cameroonians who lodged me and told me about AESCA and it immediately gave a sense that I was not alone in Johannesburg. So I had to join because I wanted to meet other Cameroonians and also to see if I could get some guidance from Cameroonians who came in before me…
>
> (Informant 14: Interview 3, 11 November 2003).

For an Anglophone forced migrant who arrived a year after the formation of the AESCA, the association provided a refuge place to help deal with her feeling of nostalgia and loss of homeland especially during her early days in exile. Again, it is axiomatic that this testimony is constructed against the backlash of national consciousness and the symbolic notion of an imagined community. She also represents AESCA as a place for information "for the betterment of the social and economic conditions of individual lives" in

Johannesburg (Malkki, 1995: 161). The new network of information was perhaps a "trajectory of improvement" (ibid: 161) for Cameroonian forced migrants.

Regardless of the multitude of reasons for joining AESCA, the main ground for the formation of the association was related to a growing Anglophone consciousness in Johannesburg. As reflected in the testimonies, forced migrants of Anglophone origins seem to believe that although they constitute part of the Cameroonian refugee community, they have different political ideologies, cultural and historical backgrounds. The formation of AESCA was inextricably seen as a way of celebrating and reinforcing a specific Anglophone consciousness, and expressing a sense of independence in Johannesburg. Here, the testimonies recreated the Anglophone's struggle for self-determination in Cameroon and how it has affected the lives of Cameroonian forced migrants in exile:

> …The formation of AESCA provided a sense of security and a feeling of oneness was generated, as English Speaking Cameroonians. We have a similar attachment to our cultural values and beliefs…
>
> (Informant 10: Interview 3, 26 October 2003).

Like other testimonies from Anglophone informants, *Informant 10's* testimony vividly stresses the bases of Anglophone consciousness as embedded in the Anglophone community's uniqueness and cultural uniformity and also focuses on the discursive creation of an Anglophone community within the broader Cameroonian community, based on their ethos as Anglophones Cameroonians in exile.

The construction of national identity through the culture of national associations privileged the notion of a nation and nationalism in migrant communities. The main framework of these national associations is premised on "the idea of collective organization" (Odmalm, 2004: 480) and co-existence. The mainstream associations mentioned above therefore function as the forces to enhance a harmonious relationship between Cameroonian forced migrants and also as a platform to address issues of regionalism in Cameroonian politics as well as a space to empower and provide solace to Cameroonian forced migrants in Johannesburg.

4.4.2 Music as a Medium for the Formation of a National Identity.

Another model for the construction of national identity, which emerged from the testimonies, was the forced migrants' claims of a strong attachment to Cameroonian music. Though a few Cameroonian forced migrants possess innate artistic talents and have produced and performed Cameroonian music in Johannesburg, Cameroonians have had to rely on music imported from home. However, the significance of music as narrated in the testimonies resided in the way Cameroonians expressed their love for different genres of their home music, mirroring them as categories of popular culture as well as mediums for the expression of national pride (Shuker, 1994; Shepherd & Wicke, 1997). The music was employed in the narratives to express the notion of "home building… or the feeling of being at home in the host country" (Hage, 1997: 100/118). In fact music expresses the self, group particularities and it is a form of cultural expression that unseats language and textuality as "preeminent expressions of human consciousness" (Gilroy, 1993: 74). From this perspective, diaspora discourses have stressed the key role

of music in the formation of the identity and how it informs and cements forced migrants' sense of place (Lemelle & Kelly 1994; Eicher, 1995; Stokes, 1997; Fortier, 2001).

Music has become a key medium for the animation of memories of homeland in exile. In the context of Cameroonians in Johannesburg, Cameroonian music is significant in three ways. Firstly it has become a channel for ideological expressions especially in the way Cameroonian music icons in Johannesburg and Cameroon use different genres and musical forms to critique the political situation in Cameroon, as well as "expressing the absolute essence of the group that produced" them (Lemelle & Kelly, 1994: 1994). Secondly, it has had a symbolic impact on the lives of displaced persons because of "the power and influence it appears to have over them" (Shepherd & Wicke 1997: 7), preventing them from severing their relationship with home. Thirdly, it has recreated a sense of social and national pride through the way it brings members of this migrant community together and also because of the "direct experiences it offers the body, time and sociability" (Firth 1996: 124/25). Music in Cameroonian narratives represents the Cameroonian identity and experience in South Africa for the simply reason that it offers "a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective" (Hall &Du Gay, 1996: 110).

The popular Cameroonian musical genres in Johannesburg are *Makossa* and *Bikutsi*, perhaps because during Cameroonian parties and other social gatherings they are the most dominant genres. Both genres originated from the Francophone region and later on spread to other parts of Cameroon. However, *Bikutsi* is originally from the Central Province, one of the dominant Francophone provinces of Cameroon. The lyrics of these

genres are either in pidgin, French and English or in indigenous languages. Because of the embedded meaning in the lyrics and the way rhythms and repertoires often exude memories of homeland, my interviewees consider Cameroonian music as the symbolic expression of nationhood. It also has a general meaning as well as specific significance to different Cameroonian forced migrants. Thinking of music as a vignette for the creation of national consciousness, one of my respondents attempts to construct the importance of Cameroonian music:

> …It revives the soul, brings fond memories of when I was still at home and a teenager growing up in a village and also my life as a university student. Again it reminds me of home and what I am missing…
>
> (Informant 9: Interview 3, 23 October 2003).

This interviewee images music as a process of remaking history because to him it functions "not only as a form of social action directed at realising a future, but also as a medium for the retrospective definition of tradition" (Barber, 1997: 49). For *Informant 9*, the aesthetics of Cameroonian music trigger episodes of memory about his impoverished childhood and his strong communal background. His testimony relates his experiences during Cameroonian cultural and social occasions, where different genres of Cameroonian music are given preference over other contemporary genres from South Africa and the West such as Kwaito,[34] House and Hip-Hop. However, amongst thepreferred Cameroonian genres, *Makossa*, the traditional Cameroonian genre and a

[34] Kwaito is one of South Africa's most popular musical genres.

household name in Cameroon music is usually the dominant genre because of its originality and the way it resonates and exudes their 'Cameroonness' as well as expresses different aspects of the Cameroonian culture.

The importance of music as a model for the construction of national identity and a point of resonance of memory is also described in the following quote:

> …When I listen to Cameroonian music, it is different from when I am listening to something like Kwaito. They mean different things and transmit different messages to me. The impacts are different because when I listen to Cameroonian music I sometimes develop homesickness and it does remind me of where I come from… (Informant 14: Interview 3, 11 November 2003).

From the same axis as the previous respondent, this interviewee feels the "musical metaphor plays a role in the imaginative modelling" (Barber, 1995: 51) of events from the past especially in the way it recasts motherland in the mind of the respondent. The testimony reiterates the fact that for those dislocated from ancestral roots and thrown into unfamiliar landscapes, the sound and repertoires of music bring "home to [them], the sheer profusion of identities and selves that [they] possess" (Stokes 1997: 4), reinforcing the claim that music in the diaspora denotes cultural presence, "boundary markers" and "symbols of the existence of the group" (Eicher, 1995: 5).

As a form of popular expression, contemporary Cameroonian music models a strong sense of comradeship and it has become a form of political discourse and a refuge place in times of tribulations:

> …I just want to tell you that our music reminds us a lot about Cameroon In my car, I always have Cameroonian cassettes and CDs and when ever a Cameroonian jumps into my car, for some reasons, I immediately play Cameroonian music…
>
> …Africans have a tendency to sink their strain and stress in music. Messages of happiness and sadness are also passed through music. Historically, lots of struggles have been won through music…
>
> (Informant 10: Interview 3, 26 October 2003).

In the course of the interviews, this respondent represented himself as an avid listener and collector of a vast array of Cameroonian music compact discs. In the above testimony he attempts to model Cameroonian music as "a discourse of national belongingness" (Hall, 1997: 5), which ties up with the notion of national identity. He reconstructs his 'Cameroonness' through his close affinity with Cameroonian music because it often "images…national identity or national cultures" (Ibid: 5). Also, the fact that he instinctively plays Cameroonian music when another Cameroonian "jumps into his car" again expresses the notion of shared histories and "collective realities" (De Fina, 2003: 1). Furthermore, by linking music to historical struggles, the respondent seems to represent music as an alternative form of expression for the oppressed and exiled like Cameroonians. For him, music gives a voice to the subaltern and helps with the

"symbolic creation and maintenance of societies" (Shepherd & Wicke, 1997: 205). Thus the symbolic importance of music to Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees is showcased in the music's potentials to bring home to exiles and how it attempts to ignite a feeling of oneness amongst members of the Cameroonian refugee community.

In Johannesburg today, Cameroonian music has created a web of economic relation amongst forced migrants. Because of the symbolic importance of music to Cameroonian forced migrants, the importation of the latest musical albums is rapidly becoming a very lucrative business and another means of survival. These items are imported and sold at exorbitant prices not because of the quality but primarily because of the symbolism attached to them.

4.4.3 Language as a Metaphor for the Construction of National Identity.

The extent to which Cameroonian forced migrants attempted to construct a national identity is also shown in the usage of popular languages within the Cameroonian community such as French and Pidgin. Despite the fact most Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees speak English fluently, the dominant languages used in Cameroonian gatherings are French and Pidgin. They seem to privilege these mediums of communication not because they are vehicles of interaction but because they are most importantly "vehicle[s] of symbolic value" (Even-Zohar, 1997: 1). These languages constitute "the bases of [their] national consciousness" (Anderson, 1991: 44) and act as signifiers of difference between Cameroonians and other forced migrants as well as South Africans. They are their languages of socialisation, power, private conversations, and

debates in Cameroonian associations and are strategically used as a model for the enforcement of a national identity among the Cameroonian migrant populations (Edwards, 1976; Anderson, 1991; Even-Zohar, 1997; Hall, 1997). In this context, language is clearly action-oriented and a form of social practice.

In the testimonies, respondents spoke passionately about their languages and the pleasure they derived from communicating in them. For most informants, "language provides individuals with the means of locating themselves and others" (Edwards 1976: 31). This category of forced migrants considered Cameroonian cultural associations as a space to chat with friends in languages that are empowering and to express the feeling of difference and uniqueness:

> …You know, your language is your identity and if you do not know your language, you are like a lost soul. You see, whenever we are together, we speak either French or pidgin because it immediately distinguishes us from the others and people, immediately identify us as different. For example, when we speak our languages, both ethnic and national languages amongst South Africans, they stare at us and sometimes they ask us where we come from…
>
> (Informant 9: Interview 3, 23 October 2003).

Though this respondent is an Anglophone forced migrant and very fluent in English, he stated that most often he prefers communicating with other Cameroonians in pidgin or French because of the way these languages represent a separate identity. His testimony reiterates the symbolism of language, as he interprets it within the nexus of identity

formation. Here, identity and language are closely related whereby language is imaged as the signifier of identity. The testimony again reinforces the conceptual notion of sameness and difference upon which this chapter is framed. For him, communicating in either French or Pidgin immediately displays the way Cameroonian refugees represent themselves as people with shared customs. He portrays these languages as a model for the "expression [of] the idea of belonging to a national culture, or identification with one's local community" (Hall, 1997: 5). Also, the importance of language in this testimony is reflected in the way the respondent frames it as a metaphor of difference. Here, he ideologically positions language as the signifier of difference between Cameroonians and the heterogeneous migrant populations of Johannesburg with its linguistics and cultural variants.

4.5 The Construction of Cultural Identity in Cameroonian Testimonies.

Recent theories of cultural identity have stressed the relationship between migration, globalisation and cultural identity. These theories have argued that the global era has not only forged a "world-embracing network of business relations" (Marfleet 2006: 25) but also it has created a space for cultural exchanges between different social groups, transactions hitherto restricted by facts of geography and ecology (Appadurai, 2003). Thus, globalisation sceptics have tended to interpret the deterritorialisation power of globalisation as a new form of western cultural imperialism reshaping the world (Tomlinson 1999; 2003 & Marfleet, 2006). Because of its ability to displace people, or destabilise communities, it is also read as corrosive and destructive to different local cultural practices. Furthermore, these sceptics suppose that since this integrated

marketplace brings together the super powers of the West and weaker developing nations, it has been dominated by the political and cultural ideologies of the powerful economies, seemingly threatening the cultures of developing countries.

However, cultural anthropologists such as Stuart Hall perceive the relationship between globalisation and cultural identity differently. For Hall and like-minded colleagues, the flow of global capitalism and cultural exchange in an integrated marketplace are the nexuses for the creation and nurturing of cultural identities (Hall, 1996; Tomlinson, 2003). They argue that a global space is a sphere where different people converge for the expression of different cultural practices. Whilst it is clear that globalisation often transmits signals of cultural erasure, it also electrifies the role players' "sense of cultural attachment" (Tomlinson, 2003: 271), showing their commitment to protect and preserve their local cultures. Against this backlash, Hall (1996) defines cultural identity from two angles. Firstly, as the performance of common historical experiences, shared cultural practices and common norms, which provides a sense of one people and secondly as an experience of discontinuity and difference. These different schools of thought place globalisation and its implications for cultural identity at the epicenter of cultural discourses (Canclini, 1995; Clifford, 1997; Geertz, 2000; Tomlinson, 2003). They also provide the framework from which the construction of cultural identity is sanctioned in the testimonies.

In the testimonies, the construction of cultural identity is performed through cultural associations, traditional cuisine and cultural dress. These mediums are used for the flaunting of cultural similarities and differences between members of the Cameroonian

refugee community at one level and other migrants at another level. In the context of the Cameroonian refugee community, the performance of cultural identity is therefore framed around the theoretical premise that "it is constructed in relation to one another and that people enact [cultural] identity to distinguish themselves, the 'insiders' from others and 'outsiders" (Collier, 2001: 159).

4.5.1 Cultural Associations as Symbols of Cultural Identity.

The body of testimonies reveals that since 1999 until the present, Johannesburg has experienced the formation of more than six cultural associations, which inextricably expose the cultural heterogeneity of Cameroon. Within the Anglophone population in Johannesburg alone, five cultural associations have emerged representing the different ethnic groups and their cultural dynamics. My informants cited PIFAMSA, Momo Cultural Association (MOMO ELITES), Ngemba Cultural Association, BACUDA, SWESA and Manyi Cultural Association[35] as the most prominent. Most of these cultural associations have an estimated membership of twenty or more and like the national associations, the members usually meet every month end to celebrate and perform their rich cultural heritage.

The activities often include cultural dances and exhibition of Cameroon traditional dishes and of course a unique opportunity to mingle with migrants from the same ethnic group. Here, different indigenous languages become dominant modes of communication of the

[35] The cultural associations mentioned above are some of the most popular ethnic-based groups in Johannesburg. They represent different ethnic groups in Cameroon and as stated earlier, they also represent Cameroon's distinct linguistic differences and identities. For example the Momo Cultural Association represents a group of Cameroonians from Momo Division in the Northwest province of Cameroon.

day and a significant trajectory of these associations is the way they model cultural continuity and change, "a sense of sameness over time and space" (Gready, 2003: 4). In this light, the construction of cultural identity in Cameroonian testimonies is represented as a marketplace not only for the performance of cultural sameness but also for the exploration of cultural hybridity.

To an extent, cultural associations have similar objectives to the national associations, although they tend to focus on different ethnic groups and local cultural practices. These objectives include assisting the needy, bringing together exiles from the same ethnic origins and so on. They also appeal to different forced migrants in different ways and because of the contrastive appeals, they tend to ignite different reasons for joining the associations. Although most of my respondents said they joined the associations because they wanted to belong, some joined their cultural association because they saw the association in the same light as the national associations, a place for protection and a form of life insurance policy:

> …To me, they [cultural associations] give me a clear sense of identity and belonging. They are also a pillar of support to me and other Cameroonians. For example, if I died in South Africa, my family back home might not even spend a cent for my corpse to get home. All the members of my cultural association will contribute money to repatriate my corpse. Or if I am seriously sick, they will assist me financially and morally…
>
> (Informant 14: Interview 3, 11 November 2003).

This informant belongs to a cultural association called PIFAMSA. It represents an ethnic group from the Northwest province of Cameroon and the informant claims to be the founding member of this association. According to her testimony, her reasons for joining a cultural association are the same as for joining the national associations. From testimony, she represents cultural associations as protective frameworks and life insurance institutions. So for a minimal monthly financial contribution, some of her life threatening problems are covered by the association's financial policies. Her cultural association provides her with a sense of social security at one level and at another level, with a renewed sense of family in the diaspora, because of the way it recreates an imaginary family setup for its members.

However, a primary feature of the narratives is the way they reconstruct the flux of sameness and difference and how this trajectory is also reflected in the formation of cultural associations. The fact that different associations exist as auxiliaries of the national associations is indicative of the cultural plurality of the Cameroonian refugee community. Along the same contours as the national associations, the formation of cultural associations is framed around the notions of cultural resemblance and difference. Some distinctive features amongst these associations are the linguistic, geographic and dress variants, making it difficult for a member of a different cultural association to easily integrate into another:

> …I think to an extent they do represent the regional and cultural diversity in Cameroon. For example, the existence of an Anglophone Association immediately tells someone that there is a difference between Anglophone and

> Francophone Cameroonians in Johannesburg. It also applies to cultural association, which I think represent the linguistic and cultural differences between Cameroonians in South Africa… (Informant 14: Interview 3, 11 November 2003).

Again *Informant 14* frames cultural associations as a metaphor for cultural diversity, set as normative instruments for the protection of cultural plurality and indigenous languages. For her, they serve as a tool for cultural resistance against the homogenisation of cultures by the forces of globalisation and assimilation in the diasporic space of Johannesburg. They attempt to "restore their former purity and recover the unities and certainties which are felt as being lost…exposed to the play of history, politics, representation and difference" (Wenjing, 2004: 14). From this standpoint, Cameroonians use cultural associations to retain strong links to their origins and traditions, and to express their "heritage and cultural descent" (ibid: 15) in their diaspora setting.

4.5.2 Clothing as a Metaphor for Cultural Identity.

Alongside cultural associations, the performance of cultural identity in the testimonies and in the lives of Cameroonian forced migrants is also displayed in cultural clothing. Cameroonians flaunt their cultural dress to communicate cultural richness and to touch special spheres of their lives, including the social orientations, sexuality, and norms (Barber, 1997). The testimonies represent cultural clothing as used only during special occasions such as meetings and Cameroonian parties, positioning it as a nonverbal communication form for the expression of groups with shared cultural values (Hall & Du Gay 1996; Barber, 1997). The importance of clothing as a signifier of cultural identity is illuminated in the following testimony:

> … Of course, as a West African woman, dressing in 'kabas' or 'wrappers' do symbolise a lot of things. They give a sense of a real African woman and although some Cameroonians women here in Johannesburg sometimes think they make you look old, I still think they give a sense of an African woman who is still in touch with her roots and traditions. I am not saying I wear them all the times but some times you need to remind yourself of where you come from…
>
> (Informant 14: Interview 3, 11 November 2003).

The 'kaba' and 'wrapper' are styles of clothing made from fabrics commonly associated female West African migrants in Johannesburg and worn by both married and single women. In the case of Cameroonians, these designs are designated dress codes for Cameroonian occasions and are, in the words of Karin Barber "a means of communication and aim at integration and individuation in the cultural context" (Barber, 1997: 138) of Cameroonians in Johannesburg. At one level they express the social status of Cameroonian female migrants while at another level they communicate a strong attachment to cultural roots and identification within a distinctive cultural entity in the Cameroonian community. Despite the changing fashion in the cosmopolitan city of Johannesburg, the meaningful role of these designs to *Informant 14* is still important because they express her strong female sexuality and her West African identity powerfully. Further, clothing was fashioned in the testimonies as an iconographic imagery reflecting some Cameroonians' loyalty to their natal cultures:

> …My wardrobe is filled with different Cameroonian traditional outfits. I am very

> fashionable when it comes to cultural dresses. I have all the latest styles you can think of. I really enjoy wearing them especially when I am invited to South African parties or during our cultural association meetings. I feel really good when I wear them because I am reminded of my roots and the fact that I have not forgotten the richness of my culture…
>
> (Informant 9: Interview 3, 23 October 2003)

This testimony exudes a deep sense of rootedness and the cultural descent of this particular forced migrant. It also reveals a powerful attachment to clothing and how it demarcates cultural variants in relation of the "Other". This informant's display of his cultural outfits especially during South African parties seems to position the semiotics of Cameroonian fashion in Johannesburg not only as the expression of the aesthetics of Cameroon's culture but also models them as mechanisms to resist cultural fusion. Equally significant in his testimony is the mode of differentiation amongst Cameroonians through the status of the latest fashion. This respondent does only attempt to reinvent his culture but he also attempt to express the way he is moored to the latest traditional fashion trends.

However, the downside of dissimilar dress styles in Johannesburg is their power to expose migrants to xenophobic attacks. In the testimonies, another narrative trajectory is also the representation of clothing as an artifact that triggers unpleasant confrontations between migrants and host nationals. The social existence of Cameroonians in Johannesburg has also been characterised by the hybridisation of fashion in order to survive the city's increasing xenophobia and racism. And Cameroonians fashioned clothing in the testimonies as both a semiotic of ethnic belongingness and as a cultural

item fraught with isolated memories of discomforting incidents with the South African police and other nationals.

4.5.3 Traditional Cuisine as a Cultural Metaphor.

Though cultural associations and clothing metaphors appear to be the most visible mediums for the construction of cultural identity, another metaphor, mentioned sporadically in the testimonies, is traditional cuisine. The importance of Cameroonian cuisine in Johannesburg is located in the variety of cultural dishes and how each dish exudes and epitomises a strong cultural origin. Some of these dishes include *achu*, *waterfufu* and *eru*, *fufu* and *ndole* as well as *plantains* and *stew*. Because of this variety, the importation of different Cameroon food items from different geographical locations of Cameroon has become another major source of income for Cameroonians. One of my informants operates a Cameroonian foodstuff shop, while other female and male migrants operate Cameroonian restaurants around *Berea*, *Hillbrow*, *Yeoville* and *Braamfontein*. A key characteristic of these restaurants is the variety on the menus, providing Cameroonians with the opportunity to enjoy different dishes. The proliferation of restaurants and food shops reveals the meaningful role of food in the lives of Cameroonians. In this context, culinary activities are not just a bid to "satisfy one's biological needs" (Monga 2006: 238) but also an expression of an impassioned attachment to ancestral space:

> …Just like clothing, food symbolises different cultures and traditions amongst Cameroonians. For example, Cameroonians from South West province, North West province and from the Francophone parts of Cameroon will prefer

> different dishes and our restaurants do serve these different dishes. So food reminds me of my culture, family meals and other things that are unique within the Cameroonian community in South Africa…
>
> (Informant 14: Interview 3, 11 November 2003).

In the same light as the clothing metaphor, *Informant 14* draws our attention to the cultural significance of food to Cameroonians in Johannesburg. She locates food as a metaphor which illuminates the cultural permutations amongst Cameroonians, bringing the notion of cultural heterogeneity to bear on the cultural identity. Also, food for her harbours and resuscitates memories of family reunions, articulating "a ritual of belonging to a network of relations" (Monga 2006: 230). This respondent reinforces the symbolic importance of Cameroonian cuisine as a pleasurable referent of cultural identity, as she represents it as "a means of connection to particular places and people" (Michael 2006: 261).

The foregoing sections of this chapter have given an analytical presentation of the models for the construction of national and cultural identify, two key areas of identification in the testimonies. The sections have focused primarily on the way Cameroonian forced migrants used different symbols and metaphors for the construction of different modes of identification. In contrast, one visible trend in the testimonies is the way Cameroonian forced migrants attempt to 'juggle' old identities and construct new ones. One of the new trajectories of identification is intermarriages with South Africans. In the last sections of this chapter, I focus on the reasons for juggling identities and the advantages for constructing new identities.

4.6 The ‘Juggling’ of Old Identities and the Construction of New Ones.

One important aspect of the process of identification is the possibility for individuals to be represented and represent themselves in different ways. This possibility for self-fashioning and re-fashioning involves being able to manage different identities at the same time (Malkki, 1995). In the case of Cameroonians, the process of foregrounding different identities was explicitly clear in the way they represented national associations as sites for the fostering of a national identity. The testimonies showcased most Cameroonian forced migrants as claimants of a national identity based on the assumptions that a strong national consciousness was a viable weapon against xenophobia, racism and rejection. At the same time, the narratives also encapsulated the importance of their ethnicities with migrants claiming that the sense of oneness in exile is also buttressed by their feelings of cultural diversity, which they imaged through cultural associations, cuisine and clothing.

Therefore, juggling national and cultural identities is perhaps a mechanism for fighting assimilation. Moreover, since acquiring a refugee identity in South Africa is an endless and an uncertain process, juggling and constructing new identities is more of a protective strategy. Cameroonian’s attachment to roots and performing their loss of homeland through different metaphors and symbols is because some of the forced migrants see exile as a temporary place of refuge and dream of a future reunion with home. However, the main motive for juggling identities is the stigmatisation of the refugee label. Beyond their immediate communities in Johannesburg, most respondents prefer identifying themselves as Cameroonian migrants, rather than bonafide asylum seekers and refugees, while others, prefer a conjugal union with host citizens for permanent residency.

As discussed in chapter one, it is not uncommon to associate asylum seekers and refugees in South Africa with multitudes of negatives, which include, inter alia, *job snatchers, the wretched of the earth, drug kingpins* and so on. For most Cameroonian asylum seekers "the whole figure of the refugee appeared to be constructed from these stigmata, and to be devalued, even pathologized" (Malkki 1995: 161). A refugee identity is therefore seen by most forced migrants as a polluted identity, which often invites shame and dehumanisation. To display the nature of the refugee identity, the following respondent uses his experiences as a microcosm of the lives of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees. The situation of this particular informant is disturbing and not uncommon because although he now lives in Johannesburg, he still has to travel to Cape Town where he initially lodged his application, for the regular extensions of his temporary permit:

> …We all know that seeking asylum in a foreign land is not an enjoyable thing because you are alienated, rejected, abused and even ostracised but sometimes you do not have a choice. I think it is an experience with a lot of challenges especially the insults and long waits at Home Affairs and you should be ready to face those challenges. When you are out of your country never expect life to be the same or a 'bed of roses'… (Informant 16: Interview 3, 16 November 2003).

In the above testimony, the respondent reminisces about his experiences at the Department of Home Affairs and from his revelation 'refugeeness' is a metaphor of inferiority and shame. Also, the image of homeland is brought to bear on the way he narrates his exilic experiences. Here, home remains a place of warmth. Although, the

term *refugee* in South Africa is constantly darkened by these stigmata, for some Cameroonian asylum seekers, it is still a useful document because of its "protective legal status and a politico-moral condition" (Malkki, 1995: 158). Firstly, as refugees, they are by law entitled to free medical care at all South African public hospitals and secondly, they are privileged to acquire quality education at South Africans' rates.

Nevertheless, it is undisputable that the term refugee carries a plethora of negatives and "the leitmotiv among them [is] the curtailment of liberty and freedom" (Malkki, 1995, 160). In spite of the fact that forced migrants in South Africa are not encamped as is the case in some countries, their freedom of movement is restricted through police surveillance and checks, especially in supposedly high crime zones like Hillbrow, Berea and Yeoville, the habitations of most African migrants in the inner city of Johannesburg. Moreover, the condescending attitudes of South Africans towards African immigrants in general have had far-reaching social and economic ramifications and have also helped to smear the reputation of forced migrants. Albeit the testimonies revealed that the attitudes of South Africans towards Africans have changed for the better over the years, these condescending attitudes have not been completely effaced and the 'makwere kwere' syndrome is still present. Having spent years in Johannesburg and still struggling with an asylum seeker permit, the following respondent focuses on the negatives attached to the permit:

> …First of all, as an asylum seeker with three months extensions you can't get a proper job and the employers tend to use this against us. We are hardly well paid

> because we are asylum seekers. So I don't know… I have been disturbed terribly in South Africa and I don't really know where to start…
>
> (Informant 2: Interview 1, 3 March 2003).

While narrating her experiences as an asylum seeker, this respondent tended to model 'refugeeness' as an embodiment of social and economic tribulations. She constantly deconstructed this identity as demeaning, stating that its legal protective status should be the only ground for Cameroonians to acquire it.

Given the stigmas surrounding the refugee identity in South Africa, most Cameroonian forced migrants are forging new identities as a way of liberating themselves from this stigmatised label. Also, after some years in Johannesburg, the strong feelings of nostalgia have gradually diminished and most Cameroonians have either become resigned to the South African system or are beginning to find new modes of identification, which are more empowering and inclusive. One of these modes of integration is the increasing intermarriages between South Africans and exiles, including Cameroonians forced migrants. The testimonies therefore represented intermarriage as a new trajectory of identification. According to the South African Immigration laws, immigrants with legitimate South African spouses are eligible for permanent residency. This has resulted in the proliferation of conjugal relationships between South Africans and migrants as a new form of protective legal status. Whether these marriages are those of convenience or expressions of love is not my primary concern in this section. What is significant is the rapid transition from forced migrants who have repeatedly claimed to have a powerful

and exclusive attachment to their natal cultures to prospective bonafide South African citizens. One informant admitted:

> … I think it is just a means to an end, which means therefore that I haven't abandoned the struggle. You know you never forget your roots. The initial cause why we left has never disappeared from our minds. I will like to state for the records that getting a residence permit simply is a means to an end as I told you earlier because it helps me to get enough stability and finances…
>
> (Informant 10: Interview 2, 16 July 2003).

This testimony suggests that constructing a new identity through intermarriage is a guarantor of better social and economic conditions for forced migrants. Unlike the refugee identity, permanent residency is not tainted by the stigmas attached to 'refugeeness', rather it provides migrants with the opportunity to work and earn substantial remunerations as well as to invest in South Africa. Although the South African Immigration Laws permit refugees to apply for permanent residency, these legislations however exclude applicants whose applications for political asylum are still pending. Unfortunately most Cameroonian forced migrants still fall in this category and therefore cannot benefit from this policy. Since they can not apply for permanent residency using their asylum permits, most of them have opted for marriages with South African nationals, immediately signaling some degree of cultural adaptation. Whilst the respondents continually postulated that Cameroon is still their place of belonging, they however confessed that South Africa has changed their material conditions, justifying why they have decided to construct a new identity. Interestingly, the same Immigration

Bills that allow permanent residency through intermarriages also give migrants the legal right to apply for citizenship. The danger here is that, since the Cameroon government outlaws dual citizenship, their roots and political struggle could become part of their memories of experiences in Cameroon and Johannesburg or in the future they will be face with the dilemma of choosing one nationality over the other.

4.7 Conclusion

The construction of identities in the testimonies of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees is contingent on the way Cameroonians mirror themselves in relation to the 'Other' and how 'Other' helps to define the Cameroonian refugee community in Johannesburg. The chapter started from the theoretical conception that identity is a processual, thus in a constant state of flux, rationalising the shifting dimensions in the process of identity formation in the testimonies. In Johannesburg, the need to construct the self in different modes is motivated partly by the ever-present, pervasive impact of exclusion and alienation. The chapter has therefore argued that the construction of identity in the narratives is a nexus between who Cameroonians are, how they have become and where they are going (Taylor, 1989; Whitebrook, 2001). It has also contended that the construction of identities in the testimonies is shaped at some point by individual political, cultural and economic aspirations and ideologies about home and exile.

I have therefore attempted to show how the narratives told by Cameroonian asylum seekers capture the way Cameroonians construct their identities. The chapter has analysed the varied modes of identification that emerge in the narratives, showing clearly

how different narrators have used different descriptors to formulate images of the self. In chapter five, I shift my attention to the representation of spaces in the testimonies, another key feature of migrant discourses. I frame the chapter around the theoretical conception that there is a symbiotic relationship between memory, identity and space since experiences of displacement are always temporally and spatially bounded.

CHAPTER FIVE

"Geographies of exclusion and inclusion": The Representation of 'Home' and 'Exile' in Testimonies of Cameroonian Asylum Seekers.

> *…I have told you quite a lot about this country, which used to be my home but today it's a place I wouldn't live in. Cameroon is real hell with the most cruel president on the universe…it's so disturbing to talk about this beautiful country, which has become a dead land. In the 21st century, Cameroonians are still in bondage with no freedom of expression, movement, where they are denied basic human rights… (Informant 11: Interview 1, 3 April 2003).*

> *…Ways of seeing and reading contemporary African cities are still dominated by the metanarrative of urbanization, modernization, and crisis. As is well known the roots of this metanarrative are to be located in the tenets of nineteenth-century urban reformism, where the problems facing cities were conceived of as diseases of the social body. For these diseases to be cured, society had to be constructed as a knowable and governable object. Its population had to be policed. As far as Africa is concerned, such ways of seeing the city have determined the nature of urban policies, most particularly in South Africa…*
>
> *(Mbembe & Nuttall, 2004: 353)*

5.1 Introduction.

One of the noticeable particularities of narratives of displacement is their interlacing with spatial discourses and how these discourses are brought to bear on the construction of identity, social memory or sense of belonging. The narrative representations of the experiences of Cameroonian involuntary migrants are often illustrated by a constellation of spatial metaphors, which locate migrant experiences within different spaces and illuminate their existence within these spaces. These testimonies demonstrate that the global experience of displacement is indeed a "generalized condition of homelessness" (Said, 2001: 18), occurring in visibly defined socio-economic and political spaces.

In this state of spatial discontinuity, displaced persons are often in the process of conceptualising and inventing new spaces and homes in the absence of territorial and national bases (Malkki, 1992; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Duarte, 2005). The narratives are therefore shaped by themes of kinship, community, family and home as Cameroonians engage in "an impassioned construction and reconstruction of their history as people and their homeland" (Malkki, 1992: 35). Here, I argue that narratives of this community are repeatedly constructed on a set of binaries and new formulations of exile and home. These new formulations are motivated by "the dynamics between the experiences of the earlier life in the familiar spaces of the homeland and the new experiences encountered in the unfamiliar spaces of the host country" (Duarte, 2005: 323).

Because of these dynamics, Cameroonian testimonies tend to deconstruct exile as fluid and flexible, and "home as an elastic space" (Ward, 2003: 88). The invention of 'home' in the body of narratives is inextricably brought to bear on the relationship of oppositional co-dependency between the underlying notions of 'home' and 'exile' (Henderson, 1995; Buijs, 1993; Hetherington, 1998; Duarte, 2005). This chapter analyses the imaginative and colourful use of spatial idioms in Cameroonian forced migrants' representations of 'home' and 'exile'. It will examine the tension between 'home' constructed as an ancestral space and at the same time as a socio-political space, on the one hand and on the other hand 'exile' as an economic space and as a political space. The chapter will examine Cameroonians' renditions of 'home' (Cameroon) and 'exile' (Johannesburg). Here, I use Johannesburg as a microcosm of South Africa.

5.2 The Representation of ‘Home’.

The representation of ‘home’ in testimonies of Cameroonian forced migrants is shaped by two distinctive narratives. Firstly, Cameroonian asylum seekers try to construct ‘home’ as an ancestral space and secondly as a political space. At each level, spatial discourses are conceptualised and assembled in contrastive metaphors and images.

5.2.1 ‘Home’ as an Ancestral Space.

In the testimonies, ‘home’ emerges as “a central point of existence and individual identity” (Ralph, 1976: 40). Here, spatial constellations are addressed from the vantage point that displaced persons are seemingly rooted to particular ancestral spaces and these spaces are often inscribed “in a plethora of metaphorical terms connecting people to soil such as ‘motherland’ ‘fatherland’ etc” (Ward, 2003: 86). Firstly, most respondents were born, grew up and acquire secondary and tertiary education in Cameroon and as such, the greater proportions of their lives were spent in Cameroon and they still have a strong emotional attachment to this space, despite the feeling of resentment apparent in some of the narratives. Secondly, the respondents still have families, friends, siblings and spouses in Cameroon. From this junction, Cameroon remains a place of greatest intimacy and emotional attachment, even after several years in exile. For instance, one of my informants has lived in South Africa for more than seven years and despite being victimised and forced to flee from Cameroon because of his political ideologies and inclinations, he still expresses his intimacy and bond with Cameroon. He has not severed all his ties with Cameroon even though he is now married to a South African. Despite

previous proclamations that because of his political history, he is not sure he could live in Cameroon. His testimony, however, shows a strong emotional connection to this space:

> ...To begin with, I love Cameroon and there are not many words to describe my fatherland. It is one place you will always want to be there but because of circumstances, you have to abandon your home. To describe Cameroon vividly, it is a land of milk and honey… (Informant 10: Interview 1, 27 March 2003).

In this excerpt, the informant's construction of ancestral space is anchored in the metaphors of kinship, roots and motherland. It expresses the respondent's impassioned love for his country despite the tragic political history and the existing crippling socio-political conditions in Cameroon. Because of the intimacy shared with home, he attempts vigorously to reinvent 'home' ideally as a place of belonging, which invokes his "networks of family, kin, friends, colleagues and various other significant others" (Brah, 1996: 4). The experience of displacement is considered as a situation of spatial discontinuity or dislocation from an ancestral space to a new and unfamiliar space. The testimony also shows how Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees are still haunted by memories of homeland, since they have been emotionally and physically severed from their roots.

'Home' as an ancestral space is revisited in the narratives primarily as a place of sincere intimacy to most Cameroonians even in moments of intense alienation (Brah, 1994; Duarte, 2005). This deep affection for 'home' constantly resurfaced and was explicated in images of 'bonding' and family connection. As illustrated in previous chapters of this

thesis, the notion of bonding and family connection was achieved through phone calls, emails and letters, creating a kind of imaginary homeland and psychological reunion with families and friends in Cameroon.

The nostalgia experienced by this community of forced migrants creates a "sense of experiencing the reality of change and passage of time" in their lives (Westwood & Williams, 1997: 138). *Informant 10* illustrates again:

> …Of course, Cameroon is home after all and as I told you earlier, it is our resting place… But you know I would not dream of going back if the situation stayed the same because you don't know what was going to happen to you. I would only go back if there was a change of regime… (Interview 1, 27 March 2003).

His representation of 'home' as a natal space continues to hinge on the dialectical relationship between exile and his aspiration to returning to his homeland. However, despite his deeply professed intimacy with home, any future reunion with this space is still dependent on the implementation of political and socio-economic reforms, especially considering his history of victimisation because of his affiliation with the main opposition party. Interestingly, the respondent's referral to Cameroon as the 'final resting place' is somewhat complex and could be addressed from two perspectives. At one level it could mean the place he would eventually return to in the future and at another level, it could also imply his final burial ground, creating the impression that he does not have any plans for returning. Although it is characteristic of forced migrants to see themselves as sojourners, *Informant 10's* testimony however explicates the fact that not all exiles are

always willing to return to their homeland. The testimony seems to suggest that in the case of Cameroon exiles, a return to the homeland can never be predicted, especially since it is dependent on the positive changes. Nevertheless, in some instances, the narratives tended to represent members of this community as sojourners in a temporary state of dislocation from home, with return to their roots or place of ancestral belonging as a long-term ambition. The representation of 'home' at this point provided the underlying structural coherence to the testimonies and brought to the fore the nature of the Cameroonian community's attachment to places, which are imagined or real (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Fortie, 2000).

To express this imaginary union with homeland, one strategy used by Cameroonian forced migrants is the performance of traditional and cultural rituals common during important social events in Johannesburg such as marriages, births, funerals and so forth. One example of these rituals is the pouring of libation, enacted especially during Cameroonian marriages or funerals in Johannesburg. The performance of this ritual is seen as a way of invoking the protection of their ancestors, rekindling a customary belief in the omnipresence of ancestors. Also, according to Cameroonians, it is way of establishing a communication network between the living and the dead. In a bid to attach and reinforce their ancestry, this ritual often recasts memories of ancestral roots. Here, the representation of 'home' is displayed in a language of national pride and ethnic identity.

Through the rituals, the representation of 'home' as an ancestral space means exhibiting and fortifying the union between the living and the ancestors, attempting to show how

displaced persons have remained connected to their tradition and customs while in exile. The respondents repeatedly portrayed themselves as the custodians of their customs, even in exile. In the following testimony, *Informant 10* again explains the relationship between Cameroonians in exile and their ancestors:

> …As community in exile, we are guarded by our ancestors back at home [sic] and we owe them that respect to send the dead ones to join them in our ancestral place. I think every African will understand where I am coming from, that is if you bury a brother or sister in exile, it means you have let the whole community down or that person was an outcast. For example, when we lost a fellow brother back in 1999, we had to do everything to send the corpse home. It is indeed paying respect to the dead and our ancestors back home. It is our culture and we usually receive blessing from our ancestors when we send the dead to them…
>
> (Interview 3, 26 October 2003).

The testimony clearly throws into perspective one of the myths of most African societies which attempts to explain some kind of a mystical relationship between ancestors and the living. The brokering of this relationship on the one hand represents the ancestors as the omnipotent protector of the living and on the other hand, the living as the custodians of the myth. So during Cameroonian social and cultural occasions there is always an elegant display of traditional wear and a set of rituals are performed as a way of signaling their close affinity with their ancestors. In the case of the libation ritual, usually the eldest Cameroonian at the occasion enacts the ritual and he/she is expected to enrich it with some traditional recitals. With a bottle of wine, he moves to the main entrance, and pours

some of the wine outside[36] and inside the hall, while reciting some traditional verses. Again to enhance our understanding of this ritual, *Informant 10* explains that the ritual signifies a strong attachment to their ancestry, customs and traditions:

> … You know as an African, you should be familiar with rituals of this nature or have you forgotten your culture. Anyway, we always perform this ritual because it reminds us that we have not forgotten our culture, that we have not assimilated the South African culture. Also with terrible things happening here in Johannesburg, we need to ask for protection from our forefathers…
>
> (Interview 3, 26 October 2003).

The significance of his disclosure is evident from the way he images the performance of traditional Cameroonian rituals as a protective shield against assimilation. For him, the continuous display of migrant culture and customs shows a continuous link to roots and the protection of these local attributes from the cultural erasure that is likely to come with displacement. He reincarnates Cameroonian's ancestors and positions them as symbols of power and a source of guidance for Cameroonian forced migrants.

Also, the link between Cameroonian forced migrants, their ancestors and ancestral space is displayed in the respect given to Cameroonians who pass away in South Africa. This process again involves performing rituals and singing traditional dirges in a typical Cameroonian fashion before the corpse is sent home. Notably Cameroonians usually

[36] Pouring some wine outside is to cast away the evil ones and inside usually to invite the ancestors to be part of the ceremony.

ensure that no Cameroonian is buried in exile because it exhibits communal pride and a fulfillment of a symbolic Cameroonian custom. For them, the deceased must be buried in their birthplace with their ancestors. Here, most respondents reiterated the significance of repatriating corpses and saw the burying of a Cameroonian in exile as an abomination. This exercise could be construed simply as a way of protecting national pride, but for Cameroonians, it creates a sense of how displaced persons fight assimilation by attaching passionately to their traditional descents and customs, important defining trajectories of an ancestral space.

5.2.2 'Home' as a Political Space.

The narratives of displacement told by the Cameroonian refugee community are governed by the logic of ambivalence between 'home' first as an ancestral space and then as a political space. The gradual accumulation of images and metaphors in the first section discloses 'home' ideally as a sanctuary. In this case, home is embellished using metaphors of kinship, which inscribed motherland and fatherland as "something, which one is naturally tied to" (Anderson, 1983: 131). And forced migrants "are often thought of, and think of themselves as being rooted in a place and deriving their identity from the rootedness" (Malkki, 1992: 27).

By Contrast, the construction of 'home' as a political space presents a blatantly different portrait, more or less a flip side of the latter. The narratives recaptured the decrepit political and economic atmosphere of what is ostensibly a place of belonging and emotional attachment, undermining and challenging the initial discourse. At this level, the process of reconstruction is also couched in a set of spatial metaphors and images

exposing the negative side of a space represented hitherto as a place of sanctuary. The testimonies revealed that the increasing political and ethnic tensions in Cameroon today have transformed 'home' into a contested space. The unexpected outcome of these political and regional conflicts have triggered diasporic discourses that display Cameroon as a platform for the manifestation of political power, with the dominant ideology persistently suppressing and forcing the subaltern to the periphery. Here, the dialectical relationship between the dominant ideology and the subaltern brings to the fore the notion of 'centre' and the 'periphery' which have defined the political settings of post-colonial Africa. The narrative representation of 'home' as a contested space surfaced poignantly in Cameroonian testimonies:

> …The political atmosphere in Cameroon is in a state of decay. In the 21st century whereby modern states are reinforcing democratic structures, Cameroon is busy retreating into the days of autocracy and dictatorship. For example, instead of reducing its five-year term of office, the president through his cohorts increases the term to seven years renewable once. It simply gives him an undisputed fourteen years in office, more than three terms in the US and other democracies. In Cameroon, we are still in an era whereby the wind of change has only opened doors for renewed forms of oppression, murders and dictatorship. We're still in a country whereby the authority bars human rights such as freedom of expression, movement, media and the rights to opinions. It is a country where a single man and his henchmen have decided to reduce sixteen million Cameroonians to slaves and beggars, traveling the world begging for a place of safety… (Informant 12: Interview 1, 3 April 2003).

This interviewee revisits the politico-moral perspective of Cameroon, reinforcing the role of the dominant ideology in a politically unstable country. The testimony brings democracy and autocracy under scrutiny, displaying both systems of governance as models for mediating political space in Cameroon. According to her, Cameroon is a sphere for the manifestation of political power by the ruling party, reducing powerless Cameroonians to pawns in its political game. She also positions the same space as a locality of powerlessness and non-belonging for the Cameroonian disfranchised masses, some of whom are pushed to the peripheries and forced into exile. The above excerpt is constructed against the background of metaphors and images of power, authority and oppression as well as destitution, anguish, suffering and powerlessness, offering another outlet for imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of displacement (Malkk, 1995; Ward, 2003). Once more, the hegemonic discourse of power seems to position the subaltern as the *Other* in this new set of narratives. Spatial practices are given new meanings in the language of 'home' and displacement, which "help us comprehend reality and how we situate ourselves within reality" (Noyes, 1992: 19).

At the melting point between 'home' as an ancestral space and also a political space, the narratives are reconstructed on a relationship of "oppositional co-dependency" between the two representational discourses. The preceding metaphor of purity that characterised the description of 'home' is rapidly superseded again by an array of metaphors and images of hell and inferno, conversely portraying, 'home' as a place of danger and insecurity. The testimonies captured a plethora of events which have dominated the democratisation process in Cameroon and which could be blamed for the state of danger and security. In the testimony below, *Informant 4* explains his experiences during the

struggle for democratic reforms after the re-inception of multiparty politics in Cameroon. This informant points out that the state of danger and insecurity escalated after the 1992 and 1997 presidential elections and the declaration of a state of emergency in the Northwest province which forced some Cameroonians in this province to flee the country:

> … At that point, Cameroon had reached a point we had to pray to God to salvage our beloved country. You could see suffering, desperation on the faces of jobless Cameroonians. With that anguish, Cameroonians had to fight and the government was ready for the challenge. After all, it is an omnipotent government. We were virtually living in a state of anarchy, with the highest degree of censorship of press, speech and even our rights of movement were policed. Demonstrators were dispersed with water canons, teargas and hand grenades. People were arrested, tortured, houses were looted, people murdered mysteriously and women were raped and bottles inserted into their vaginas… (Interview 1, 6 March 2003).

This quotation attempts to justify the representation of Cameroon as a locale of insecurity and pain. Here, the informant uses a range of sexual images such as *rape* and *vagina* to describe the state of insecurity, drawing the attention of the reader to the gruesome and indiscriminate violence in Cameroon. She also reinforces the arbitrary manifestation of political power by the ruling party and by positioning the decrepit social conditions at the epicentre of the political struggle in Cameroon, she is attempting to strengthen her application for asylum and those of other Cameroonian forced migrants. Her testimony does not only expose the conditions in Cameroon but also invokes sympathy, especially

when she represents God as final recourse for the conditions of the disfranchised Cameroonians.

The new creation of 'home' in this narrative is recaptured in a set of contrasting metaphors that repeatedly represent 'home' not as a place to return to but to escape from, because of the unprecedented state of insecurity, fear and uncertainty. Also, the narrative representation of 'home' as a political space is constructed through symbols and images that objectify the political atmosphere as well as the anguish, bitterness and estrangement that constantly grip Cameroonians when they remembered that particular atmosphere. At one point during the interviews, a number of respondents preferred to 'let sleeping dogs lie' when it came to revisiting the political atmosphere in Cameroon. Their political history is seen as harbouring very painful and sensitive episodes of their lives, which should not be remembered:

> … It is painful to remember how our beloved country has been torn into pieces by one individual. It hurts to talk about a country which today is rated as one of the poorest countries but has a lot of resource…
>
> (Informant 17: Interview 1, 18 April 2003).

Irrespective of Cameroonian forced migrants' expressions of love for their homeland in the testimonies, the political and socio-economic angle of these representations appeared as a store of deepening pain and disillusionment, clearly justifying why during the construction of memory in chapter three, some informants preferred not to discuss the political situation in Cameroon.

Starting with the dual encapsulation of 'home', 'exile' gradually and symbolically begins to take the place 'home' in the lives and imaginations of most Cameroonian refugees. Even though I pointed out in my introduction that displaced persons often invent exile as a place of anguish, exclusion and alienation, most Cameroonians, after living in Johannesburg for several years, they tend to argue that South Africa is relatively peaceful and obviously a place to find security. In the narratives, this dual encapsulation becomes an important trajectory because it provides a clear frame of reference for their representations of 'home' and 'exile'. The following testimony captures this pattern as the respondent compares Cameroon and South Africa. Having been jobless for many years and leaving Cameroon with only a primary school certificate, the respondent has been able to survive in Johannesburg for the past six years as a petty businesswoman. She uses her personal experiences to justify her claim that South Africa provides migrants with better opportunities than Cameroon:

> …I can say South Africa is a nice place for me. Even though Cameroon is my home, I can say South Africa is nice. For example, the rents in Cameroon are low and you hire a flat for R250[37] but people still can't afford that money because they are not working, the economy is bad. Here, in South Africa, this room is R800 but at the end of the month, I am able to pay the rents with ease as well as feed myself. Economically, South Africa is better than Cameroon…
>
> (Informant 6: Interview 3, 14 October 2003).

[37] R250 is equivalent to approximately 20000FCFA in Cameroon's monetary units, depending on the exchange rate.

In fact, for six years *Informant 6* has sustained her life as a hairdresser in Johannesburg where the cost of living is reasonably high. Despite the challenges faced by displaced persons in South Africa, this respondent still believes that comparatively South Africa is a better place than Cameroon. According to her, South Africa is fast becoming 'home' especially because of its political serenity and economic viability. This analogy is premised on the fact that the new networks of spaces in narratives of displacement often "seek ways of assimilating and manipulating multiple identities" (Malkki, 1992: 36), which could enable displaced persons to fit within the new spatial demarcations. Also, in the process of constructing spatial discourses, the testimonies seem to foreground the postulation that "it is through movement away from home that one is able to sense a more complete characterization of it" (Ward, 2003: 88).

Moreover, in the event of reconstructing Cameroon as a political space, several important cities in Cameroon such as Yaounde, Buea[38] and Bamenda are repeatedly recalled in the testimonies. However, the core of the narratives pivoted around the city of Bamenda. During the interviews, my respondents spoke about the city with an aura of pride. They also used its political history to formulate their own political identities. While chatting with one of the informants, she constantly reiterated the fact that she is from Northwest province and grew up in the capital city, Bamenda, and claiming to be familiar with the political dynamics of the city. This particular informant also stated she was a victim of gruesome events that happened in this city when she was still at home. One of such

[38] Yaounde is the administrative capital of Cameroon and Buea, the provincial capital of Southwest province, one of the two marginalised Anglophone provinces of Cameroon as well as the capital of the former Southern Cameroon.

events includes the historic state of emergency declared after the 1997 presidential elections:[39]

> …Bamenda has hit international media as the nerve centre of opposition in Cameroon. It is the town that resists and challenges the repressive regime more than any other part of Cameroon. It is indeed the backbone of the opposition in the country. Mr. Biya's regime will rate Bamenda as the most turbulent and stubborn part of the country and if there was a way of erasing this town from the face of Cameroon map, the president would gladly do that. You remember the state of emergency, where we all suffered from unlawful arrests and imprisonments. On the contrary, people from Bamenda are extremely proud to come from a place that is self-reliant and which has given us the voice to speak without fear about our problems… (Informant 2: Interview 1, 3 March 2003).

The testimony describes this political space against the background of the political history of Cameroon. It attempts to highlight the contributions of Bamenda to the political dispensation in Cameroon and the unexpected consequences of these contributions to the inhabitants of this region. For this informant, Bamenda's advocacy for political changes has not only aggrieved members of the ruling party but also has created a new dawn in the lives of its inhabitants. As the capital of one of the supposedly marginalised Anglophone regions of Cameroon, Bamenda or the Northwest province as a

[39] After the presidential elections of 1997, there were violent protests, notably in Bamenda, the strong-hold of the main opposition party- SDF, where it was widely believed that NI John Fru Ndi, the Chairman of party, had won but the results were manipulated in favour of ruling party. Unable to control the situation in Bamenda, the ruling party and winner of the elections declared a state of emergency in the city.

whole has always been a strategic role player in political developments in Cameroon since independence. Its political significance has grown immensely and its impact on the construction of a refugee identity in South Africa remains extremely vital. For a Cameroonian's political story to be considered credible at the Department of Home Affairs, it is supposed to have a connection either with the SDF, the pioneer opposition party launched in Bamenda or it has to be linked to Bamenda, a major stakeholder in the struggle for an Anglophone identity in Cameroon.

Because of the political importance of this city, a Cameroonian applying for political asylum has to formulate his/her story within the ambit of the aforementioned discourses. Either, the informant has to represent himself or herself as a militant of the SDF or as a member of the Anglophone struggle for self-determination. As argued earlier, most informants' structuring of events in their testimonies focuses primarily on their political identities, an aspect of political autobiography discussed in chapter two. My analysis of the autobiographical genre in that chapter examined the testimony of *Informant 10* and the way he constructs his political identity, using his activism in the SDF and other key political movements in Cameroon such as the SCNC as symbols for the formation of this identity.

The representation of 'home' simultaneously as an ancestral and political space emphasises the cultural and ethnic backgrounds as well as the political identity of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees. The narratives shape "physical spaces into mirrors of who [Cameroonians] are, on the one hand and the creation of subjects, on the other" (Fortier, 2000: 111). Here, space does not only resonate a sense of belonging but

also triggers collective and personal memories, creating a sense of continuity in the lives of displaced person as they reconstruct home (Boyarin, 1992; Savage, 1994; Malkki, 1995; Rowlands, 1997; Fortier, 2000; De Fina,2003).

5.3 The Representation of 'Exile".

'Exile' as a locality often redefines identities of displaced persons and at the same time reincarnates the disturbing sense of homelessness. At a primary level, most literature on the experiences of displacement has tended to represent 'exile' in a language of resentment, anguish and agony (Morris & Bouillon, 1999; Said, 2000; Timngum, 2001). However, testimonies of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees have also been grounded in a polarised discourse. This body of testimonies is cogently built on a double narrative that reconceptualises 'exile' first as a place of exclusion, disillusionment and alienation and at the same time as a space of freedom, peace and prosperity. Interestingly, the way Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees reinvent South Africa as a whole has been affected profoundly by elements of temporality and subjectivity, and their stories seem to be in a state of flux as they gradually adjust and fit into the South African community.

The recurrent metaphor of community in these narratives illuminates a dialectical discourse that recaptured 'exile' initially as a "perilous territory of not belonging" (Said, 2000:177). But eventually a new notion of 'exile' emerges as migrants lay claim to Johannesburg as the new found home and to a majority of Cameroonian forced migrants it has indeed unfolded into a fascinating locale for new beginnings. We are exposed to narratives that are not static but rather eclectic and change over time.

Although I use 'exile' to refer to South Africa, this discussion will focus exclusively on Johannesburg, the research site for this study. I will be using Johannesburg as a microcosmic representation of South Africa. Before engaging with my analysis of Cameroonians' representation of the politics of this space, I commence with a compressed representation of the cosmopolitan city of Johannesburg. I hope that such a representation will enhance our understanding of the way this city is portrayed in the collection of narratives. This discussion will be interlaced with excerpts from the testimonies, as a way of correlating and strengthening claims from the literature on Johannesburg.

5.3.1 Johannesburg, the Elusive Metropolis.[40]

In 2004, the journal *Public Culture* dedicated an entire volume to the city of Johannesburg. This invited groundbreaking contributions about Johannesburg from distinguished scholars around the world, which addressed a multitude of issues about Johannesburg. Symbolically called the 'city of gold' because of the gold reserves of the Witwatersrand and the glamour of the city itself, "contemporary Johannesburg is the premier metropolis in Africa in terms of technology, wealth and racial complexity" (Mbembe, 2004: 365). But not long ago, before the collapse of the apartheid regime, the urban space of Johannesburg epitomised the regime's policy of urban resettlements, where the city was reserved for apartheid moguls and today it is represented as an exemplar of a postmodern European city (Mbembe, 2004). As a relic of the apartheid regime, the city still has images and memorabilia of the apartheid regime especially in

[40] This phrase is borrowed from an essay in the journal, *Public Culture 16, 3* entitled "Johannesburg, The Elusive Metropolis" with Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall as guest editors.

terms of its architectural outlook, which still exhibits "partitions within well-defined spaces with clear protective boundaries so as to avoid the disruptive effects-real or potentials-of race mixing" (Mbembe & Nuttall, 2004: 386). It is still segmented by the multiplication of boundaries and barriers with visible markers that were designed by the apartheid administration to separate people from people (ibid, 2004). Today, as a postmodern European-like city, Johannesburg emerges prominently as a highly class-structured city "shaped by the intertwined realities of bare life (mass poverty), the global logic of commodities, and the formation of a consumer public" (ibid: 374)[41].

Thus Mbembe (2004) describes this city as an elusive metropolis because

> …It is denigrated as being a set of ugly urban agglomeration, a crime city, or a security-obsessed dystopia, or it is elevated as a place of rapacious survival "making do" and chance encounter of the multiplicity of registers in which it is African or perhaps not at all, or not enough); European (or perhaps not, or no longer) or even America by virtue of its embeddedness in commodity exchange and its culture of consumption… (367).

He concludes by stating, "its very elusiveness makes it especially compelling as an object of study" (367). These connotations give a clearer picture of post-apartheid Johannesburg but what makes Johannesburg an eccentric urban space is its exposure to a multiplicity of representations. As an 'elusive metropolis' it is enriched by the multiple ways it presents itself to different people at different times and the way it is "opening up as a space for the

[41] An obvious example is the juxtaposition of the opulent Sandton suburb and the derelict Alexandra

experiences of displacement, substitution and condensation" (ibid: 374). Today, the city of Johannesburg could be coined the "African Mecca" (Matshikiza, 2004: 483), especially with the upsurge of immigrants from other African countries, or the New York of Africa because of its physical appearance. This multiplicity of representations is also captured in the testimonies, which dwell on how Johannesburg's eccentricity has affected the lives of Cameroonians in this city. The excerpt below demonstrates one respondent's impressions and knowledge of the glamour of the city of Johannesburg and how he was beguiled by the glamour of the city:

> … Well from what I heard, it was a nice place and besides I knew South Africa was in a transition and because of the struggle and support from other countries, I thought the people of South Africa would welcome us. I had also seen the beautiful city of Johannesburg on television and I was also a great admirer of Mandela and I followed his political career keenly. I had great interest in the country and that they would be accommodating to others…
>
> (Informant 1: Interview 1, 2 March 2003).

This testimony focuses on a number of factors that influenced and continues to influence the influx of African migrants in Johannesburg. This respondent and thousands of other migrants have been seduced by the metaphor of the city of gold into believing that Johannesburg is Africa's premier paradise. Drawing on the excerpt from *Informant 1's* testimony and the conceptual claims in *Public Culture,* the elusiveness of Johannesburg manifests itself even in the way its history and architecture challenge the imaginations of

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Township.

immigrants (Morris & Bouillon, 1999; Adams, 2001; Mbembe, 2004). The representation of Johannesburg echoes the spatial politics of the centre and the periphery, galvanised through the "ongoing struggles over position and power within the urban landscape" (Chidester, 2004: 4). Since the collapse of apartheid, the struggle over space, especially in the intersections of the inner city has shifted from one between white and black South Africans, to one between African migrants and South Africans, with migrants gradually taking control of sections of the inner city of Johannesburg such as High Point, Ponte City and Pretoria Street, a trend discussed in my introduction.

The ghettoisation of the inner city by Cameroonian and other African migrants is also a consequence of "the commercial culture of the inner city" (Simone 2004: 420). The vibrancy of the inner city has always been a major force of attraction for African migrants with business orientations. Here, most migrants are businessmen and women in their own rights, operating a multitude of businesses through a "sense of mutual cooperation and interdependency" (ibid: 422). In the following excerpt, a respondent tries to represent this spatial trajectory as well as the sense of cooperation and interdependency amongst Cameroonians:

> …When I arrived Johannesburg, there were a lot of Cameroonians in Yeoville but mostly Francophones. I later on found out that there were also many Cameroonians in Hilbrow, Braamfontein and Berea…There are several reasons why we cluster in these places. Firstly, we try to create a sense of a community and to share experiences, and also for information seek. We feel more comfortable with our brothers than with South African. Also because these places

> are business areas and the rents are cheaper. From a negative angle, the police and criminals easily identify us. For example, there are incessant police raids in these places partly because they are inhabited mostly by foreigners. You know the stereotypes that foreigners are criminals and drug kingpins…
>
> (Informant 10: Interview 3, 26 October 2003).

The excerpt above reinforces the view that in the inner city of Johannesburg "particular spaces are [today] linked to specific identities, functions, lifestyles, and properties so that the spaces of the city become legible for specific people at given places and times" (Simone, 2004: 408). Although there is a visible hatred between South African nationals and African migrants, one consequence of the struggle over the inner city, there seems to be a business network between these communities. Johannesburg was therefore represented as a space for business transactions between Cameroonians, South Africans and other migrants at one level, and between Cameroonians in Johannesburg and those at home at another level.

5.3.2 Johannesburg as a Socio-political Space.

Portraying Johannesburg as a socio-political space, Cameroonian testimonies are again characterised by spatial idioms that repeatedly attempted to rewrite 'exile' in two polarised discourses. Firstly, Cameroonian forced migrants excavate this city as a space, in which spatial practices are seen fundamentally as signposts for the kind of estrangement and anguish that has always dominated the experiences of displacement. At this crossroad, the testimonies are entangled in a language that exposes 'exile', in this instance as a space of disillusionment and estrangement. This discourse is repeatedly

grounded in the metaphor of 'uprootedness' as these forced migrants constantly remember the "loss of bodily connection to their national homelands" (Malkki, 1992: 32). For instance, even though most of my informants have lived in Johannesburg for more than five years, *Informant 2* remains an estranged dweller in Johannesburg. Like many other Cameroonian forced migrants, she arrived in the city with very ambitious dreams of an utopian society, formed from the glamorous image of the city viewed at home. However, her dreams and expectations seem to have been shattered by the strange realities of this city:

> …When you look at South Africa from the outside, you will have endless dreams about the place but the moment you get inside, those high hopes easily transform into a state of disillusionment. It has got its own ups and downs and you just have to learn to cope with them and I have been trying very hard to cope. If you find yourself in the middle of a rough sea, you have to struggle to survive. It is all about survival and as days pass by, I am getting used to the situation…
>
> (Informant 2: Interview 1, 3 March 2003).

This respondent's representation is constructed against the backdrop of the paradox of reality versus illusion in which "the quasi-automatic coincidence between expectations and chances, *illusio and lusiones*, expectations and the world which is there to fulfill them" (Bourdieu, 2000: 208). Notably, her impressions and expectations as well as those of other forced migrants before arrival in Johannesburg are juxtaposed with the unexpected realities when they finally arrived in the city. For her, these unexpected realities include overcoming multiple daily challenges around the city of Johannesburg

such as violence, insecurity, joblessness and so on. From this testimony, our attention is immediately drawn again to the eccentricity of the city illuminated earlier in this chapter and how the city should constantly be read within the nexus of "an ever-changing movie that no one has quite managed to produce… a screenplay in progress" (Matshikiza, 2004: 481). As a socio-political space therefore, Johannesburg is symbolically represented as a sphere where life is largely about survival of the fittest and coping with its slew of challenges. This 'elusive' space attempts to connect different minority cultures in their subjugation and opposition to the dominant culture of Johannesburg (Janmohammed & LIoyd, 1990). In this case, Johannesburg becomes a locality created by the dominant ideology for the exercising of political power and also a representational space where migrants are often excluded because of cultural and socio-political differences.

Moreover, the representation of Johannesburg as a socio-political space is enforced by Cameroonian's reconstruction of the Department of Home Affairs. As a political institution that defines the 'refugeeness' of asylum seekers in South Africa, its representation correlated with the way Johannesburg is politically defined by Cameroonians. From the body of testimonies, daily activities of forced migrants at this department involve queuing in the early hours of the morning at the Braamfontein Home Affairs and waiting desperately for 7:30 am, the start of day. At 7:30 am, the doors are thrown open and asylum seekers march into the building under the watchful eyes of security guards, to have their temporary permits either extended or to lodge new applications. Sometimes, the process takes the whole day because it has been persistently marred by irregularities, inconsistencies and alleged cases of bribery and corruption. Below, *Informant 2* captures her tribulations in Johannesburg but this time focusing on

her first appearance at the Department of Home Affairs. Her disillusionment and resentment of the city of Johannesburg is aggravated by her Home Affairs experiences:

> … It was one of the most traumatic experiences of my life and I can never forget that particular day. I remember I had to be at the Department of Home Affairs as early as 4 am to queue up. It was winter and I was shivering and that was my first real experience of winter. Before I arrived the queue was already long and some of the people I met there were sleeping on the ground. I joined the queue to wait for 7.30 am the official opening time. At 7.30 am, the doors opened and pushing and fighting started. People were pushing to get into the building and at the same security guards were insulting us. I managed to force myself inside and we sat waiting for the next step. After hour of waiting, we were asked to write our stories and we were issued temporary permits after another very long wait. In fact, I actually spent the whole day inside Home Affairs… (Interview 1, 3 March 2003).

Her experiences of exile are framed around strong images of suffering, alienation and rejection, because she does not only have to face the social realities of Johannesburg but also has to go through a tedious and painful process of lodging an application for asylum. The testimony is an epitome of her life as an asylum seeker and a microcosmic portrayal of the gruesome experiences of forced migrants at the department of Home Affairs. Here, the respondent's memory of the experiences becomes a narrative that chronicles some of the agonising episodes of displacement. The testimony connects space to refugee identity, placing Home Affairs as the symbol of political power and forced migrants' struggle for recognition in South Africa. Home Affairs is therefore a key political space not only

because it defines the ‘refugeeness’ of asylum seekers but also because it is a place fraught with episodes of pain, disillusionments and uncertainties, emerging partly from the department’s poor administrative performance.

The poor performance is often blamed on capacity problems or the reluctance of the employee to render services to forced migrants. In the following testimonies, two interviewees attempt to summarise the way the Department of Home Affairs functions:

> …Well, I have knocked all the doors to find out about my case, but Home Affairs hardly tell me any thing useful and it seems to me the officers are as clueless as I am. They keep telling “your file is still in the process” for how long, I don’t know. I am sick and tired of the three months extension the department gives me. In fact with three months your future is very uncertain….
>
> (Informant 9: Interview 1, March 2003).

> …They don’t have the resources to staff this department and therefore youhave one person taking care of 1000 files. So, it doesn’t seem like a good number of files could be processed within a short period of time…but in my opinion, four years is just materially too long…
>
> (Informant 13: Interview 1, 5 April 2003).

In these excerpts, the process of acquiring a refugee identity and Home Affairs’ mediocre administrative performance are again illuminated, capturing one of the numerous problems facing Cameroonian asylum seekers. In fact, most respondents repeatedly

interjected that as asylum seekers, they are often victimised, rejected and treated as 'non-beings' by employees of the department. Also, the recent relocation of the department from Braamfontein, near the centre of town to the basement of a Standard Bank premises in Rosettenville, much further away, exacerbates the negative and dehumanising treatment of asylum seekers and refugees, justifying the negative representation in the narratives. In this new space, the functioning of the department is affected by new waves of capacity problems, rendering the experience of seeking asylum even more traumatising. Here, an estimated three hundred asylum seekers received on a daily basis are squeezed into a basement with a capacity for one hundred people while they wait for the extension of their temporary permits. The construction of the Department of Home Affairs in the testimonies was couched in a set of conventional literary forms and captured through the metaphors and images of pain, suffering, and exclusion because of xenophobia and racial discrimination as well as Home Affairs' capacity problems.

At the centre of the representation of Home Affairs as a key political space the word 'file' was repeatedly used, translating it into a significant metaphor in the narratives about Home Affairs. By emphasising the importance of the *file*, my respondents hope to enrich our understanding of the bureacratic process of seeking asylum. In the following quote, an informant narrates the story of his file:

> …I have been able to access the system up to the point where I know who is handling my file and what is happening to it but I am not in a position to give details on that… (Informant 13: Interview 1, 5 April 2003).

In this disclosure, the importance and complexity of the *file* are reinforced, positioning it as a key metaphor in the testimonies. Even though this informant and I signed a confidentiality form, he is still concerned about the question of confidentiality as he declines giving me details about the state of his file, again reinforcing its importance. Therefore, while describing Cameroonian experiences at Home Affairs, the narratives constantly referred to asylum seekers' files at the department. As explained in the testimonies, every applicant for asylum is usually allocated a file with a special electronic code and this file usually contains relevant information about that particular applicant, information which could facilitate the processing of the applicant's application. Usually, the documents in the file include inter alia the applicant's written story detailing his/her claims and his/her motivations for applying for asylum in South Africa. During oral interviews, the applicant's responses to the interview questions are expected to correlate with the story in the file. The interviewing officer uses the information in the file and the applicant's oral interview responses to determine the credibility of the applicant's claims. So, all my interviewees claimed they had files at the Department of Home Affairs as evidence that they had actually lodged applications for asylum with the department. As a way of establishing some degree of authenticity and coherence in their description of the activities at Home Affairs as well as reiterating the legality of their applications, the testimonies constantly referred to 'their' files. The following testimony explains a respondent's concern about his *file* and how it has affected his life in South Africa.

> …Well, each time I go to the Department of Home Affairs, I hand in my permit and it is simply extended and given back to me. Sometimes they give me a month sometimes two and I am told that my file is still in Pretoria and that they have not

> gone through my documents and that the committee responsible has not decided on my case. I do not know what is actually going on and I am still to figure out when this whole saga is going to end. It is so pathetic…
>
> (Informant 5: Interview 1, 10 March 2003.

Informant 5's discussion of the situation regarding his file again mirrors the poor performance of the employees of Home affairs evident from the irregularities and inconsistencies mentioned above. The life of this respondent as an asylum seeker is worsened by the slow processing of his file. Thus, the file is not simply a paper folder containing information about forced migrants but also an important symbol especially in the way it affects the lives of forced migrants in South Africa. Firstly, their contents capture the life stories and political orientations of forced migrants and function as some kind of leverage on Cameroon asylum seekers as well as provide the credentials for the approval or rejections of applicants' applications. Until the 'file' has been processed, forced migrants continue to live in a state of limbo not knowing what the future holds for them. Secondly, the file plays a pivotal role in the construction of a refugee identity because it is the outcome of the processing of the file that determines the statuses of asylum seekers in South Africa.

Finally, the negative representation of Johannesburg is also triggered by the experiences of some Cameroonian forced migrants at the refugee deportation camp at Lindela. The few Cameroonians incarcerated at Lindela had supposedly been arrested illegally or because they were not in possession of their temporary asylum permits at the time of the police checks. Among the twenty informants I interviewed, two had been arrested and

imprisoned at the Lindela deportation camp. One was arrested apparently for being rude to police officers. He was locked in Lindela for one month pending deportation and was eventually released after the intervention of lawyers. The other respondent was arrested because he had infiltrated a Home Affairs office with a hidden camera in a bid to expose bribery and corruption in the department. He was also released after the intervention of human rights lawyers. Below, the informant arrested in a Home Affairs office retells his experience:

> …I was actually arrested at the Braamfontein Home Affairs, where I was caught with a hidden camera. I had smuggled the camera into the building to capture footage of corruption at the department for SABC. I was sent straight to Lindela in handcuffs and plans made for my eventual deportation. Their plans failed because of the timely intervention of SABC, the Refugee Fraternity and the Human Rights Commission… (Informant 15: Interview 3, 14 November 2003).

The respondents' experiences at Lindela contribute immensely to the disparaging representation of the city of Johannesburg. From his experience, the metaphors and images of trauma, pain and disillusionment were recurrent in the testimonies because of the tribulations of African forced migrants imprisoned at Lindela pending deportation. In the following testimony, the other former Lindela inmate narrates his experience:

> …I have been imprisoned twice at Lindela…it was a really terrible experience and extremely traumatising because we were treated like criminals. I would rather

> not go into the details because I do not like recalling those particular experiences… (Informant 1: Interview 3, 1 October 2003).

This narrative recalls his experience at Lindela and the effect of this experience on his life as an asylum seeker in Johannesburg. Because of the agonising nature of the experience, it has actually become one of those episodes in his life that would only bring pain if remembered. For him and other ex-inmates, the deportation camp symbolises pain, fear, uncertainty and suffering because it has been reduced to a traditional penitentiary, a feature apparent from its bureaucratic practices and the incarceration, and treatment of inmates. Moreover, one noticeable particularity of this deportation camp is its security network, fortified by electric fences, surveillance cameras and twenty-four hour patrol of guards with trained security dogs. Furthermore, the health facilities are seemingly deplorable, which has resulted in the death of some inmates. Given the deplorable conditions, the presence of games such as football and snooker and other leisure facilities such as television and music do not make inmates' lives any better. In the South African context, Lindela and Home Affairs therefore personify some of the brutal experiences of Cameroonian forced migrants. However, these negative representations were particularly powerful during Cameroonians' early days in exile an testimonies have somehow changed remarkably after several years in exile. The following section of this chapter will show how the negative images and metaphors of Johannesburg have given way to more positive renditions.

5.3.2 Johannesburg as an Economic Space.

Cameroonian forced migrants' changing material conditions have also permeated the narrative representation of Johannesburg as an economic space. Ironically, the recurring discourse that represents Johannesburg as a sociopolitical space is undermined and challenged by a new set of testimonies with a completely different perspective of 'exile'. While the metaphor of 'uprootedness' and images of despair, and disillusionment remain ubiquitous in the narratives, Johannesburg is however recreated as a relatively better place compared to Cameroon. This showcases an interesting reversal situation in which 'home', (Cameroon) is rejected as emblematic of a sanctuary and redefined as a place of danger, while the challenges of exile are seen "as a moral trajectory of trial and tribulations that would ultimately empower them to reclaim the homeland" (Malkki, 1992: 35).

This binary opposition translates the complex networks and paradoxes of exile and shows how these networks impact on the construction of forced migrant identities (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Fortier, 2000). The metaphoric notion of a 'home' in 'exile' is refocused on a set of oppositional metaphors and images that re-inscribe 'exile' as a place of estrangement and disillusionment but if juxtaposed with Cameroon' it is unarguably a haven. Most Cameroonians asylum seekers and refugees are constantly formulating new identities in South Africa because the dream of an eventual return to their homeland is gradually fading. Despite the experiences of xenophobia and exclusion, Johannesburg as an economic space, has still managed to create "new maps of desire and attachment" (Breckenridge & Appadurai, 1989: 1) in the lives of Cameroonians forced migrants. This new formulation of this urban landscape is demonstrated in the following testimony:

> …I think I am a better person today with a world of knowledge gained from my terrible experience in Johannesburg. Generally, life here is better than Cameroon because we live in a free world where we have the right to our opinions. South Africa today is politically peaceful and we have been accepted by most South Africans… (Informant 11: Interview 3, 2 November 2003).

Having spent more than seven years in the city of Johannesburg, this interviewee has actually built a new life for himself, his wife and two children, a life which holds out relative promise and viability. His representation of Johannesburg as an economically lucrative space today is reinforced by his comparison of Cameroon with South Africa and also by his assessment of the economic development in the lives of most Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees. Here, he brings the notion of 'home' under scrutiny, thereby incidentally contesting some studies on the socio-economic experiences of Cameroonian forced migrant in Johannesburg, such as those by Timngum, (2001) and Landau (2004), which depict Johannesburg largely as a topography of exclusion, pain and hopelessness. Nevertheless, the discordant renditions in the narratives illuminate the contention that "communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness but by the style in which they are imagined" (Anderson, 1983: 6). Of course spaces are always constructed differently by different people and are constantly in a state of flux as time changes, a strong underlying feature of most Cameroonian testimonies. The above extract visualises and defines 'exile' as an important site where issues of home, location, displacement and dislocation are placed under the same diasporic discourse.

In the foregoing sections, I argued that in the pursuit of safety and security, Cameroonians asylum seekers and refugees are also taking advantage of South Africa's economic viability to overcome their state of abject poverty. Encapsulating them as separate arms of the same chair, the testimonies address the reasons for seeking asylum as both political and economic. The testimony below demonstrates that the political involvement of most Cameroonians in Cameroon was partly the consequence of a decaying economy characterised by joblessness and deprivation:

> … It is so disturbing to talk about a place that used to be the land of 'milk and honey' and within the blink of an eye became the beggar of Africa because of one greedy individual in the name of the president. Today, Cameroon excels in corruption and well-orchestrated murders. Thousand of graduates roam streets with no jobs while the president and a group of infidels devour the country. My home has become the unsafe place on the planet, a place where the basic human rights are abused, where people are arrested, imprisoned without trial. It has become some kind of inferno and if you are thinking of living the next moment, the best thing is to leave the country…
>
> (Informant 20: Interview 1, 26 April 2003).

Although this excerpt does not make any direct reference to Johannesburg as an economic space, the narrator however uses it as a signpost to address the relationship between politics and economic viability, justifying the overarching narrative shift. For him, politics and economics are inseparable, especially since most Cameroonian exiles were entrapped into political struggles because of the economic marginalisation and the

country's endemic poverty. By throwing the economic standpoint into perspective, this respondent and others are not insinuating that Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees are economic migrants per se. Perhaps they are trying to foreground a view illuminated in the testimonies that most young Cameroonians became politically engaged and were victims of political persecution because of their economic circumstances in a collapsing economy. It is along these lines that the testimonies are also committed to reconstructing Johannesburg as a promising economic space. The narratives claim that though the lives of Cameroonian forced migrants in Johannesburg have been characterised by extraordinary experiences of xenophobia and racism, the city is still better than Cameroon in terms of its economic strength and fast-developing democracy.

> …The country has not really met my expectations. It has not been the best as such but certainly far better than my home. South Africa is not quite accommodating. You get styled, called names, pushed and shoved around discriminated upon because you don't have the right documentation but still, it is better than Cameroon… (Informant 10: Interview 1, 27 March 2003).

This informant is married to a South African and has been granted South African nationality and by relinquishing his Cameroonian identity, it seems to me his main reason is that South Africa is indisputably a better pathway for future economic viability than Cameroon. Though he claims that his initial impressions have not been met by the realities of Johannesburg, the city still presents Cameroonian forced migrants and other migrants with better opportunities to survive in a global era. The relatively serene political situation in South Africa and its transformative macroeconomic policies have

therefore pushed Cameroonians forced migrants to move away from the jingoistic attitudes that preoccupied their early days in South Africa. They are fast accepting the bitter reality that South Africa is indeed a better place than Cameroon. The negative representations were consequences of both the cold reception during the early days in South Africa as well as the difficulties of adjusting, and coming to terms with the terminal loss of their ancestral space Like in other testimonies, Cameroonian forced migrants have come to accept that Johannesburg is indeed the economic powerhouse of Africa and economically their lives are relatively better off in Johannesburg than in Cameroon. The respondent quoted below has deepened his roots in South Africa with a strong family and economic base. Not only is he married with three children, he runs his own business in Johannesburg and according to him, the city has given him the opportunity to develop entrepreneurial skills which he could not have if he was in Cameroon:

> … I think South Africa is better because we enjoy a lot freedom here than in Cameroon. South Africa is a lawful country and there is freedom of speech and movement although sometimes we are harassed by some violent South Africans but still I think it is more peaceful than Cameroon. On the economic front, I make more money in Johannesburg as businessman than in Cameroon. You can see that I can even afford a car… (Informant 5: Interview 3, 12 October 2003).

This quotation mirrors an apparent economic "experience of time and the capacity to incorporate a sense of future in the present" (Mar, 2005: 369). It captures the visible shifts in the testimonies, the endless strategies for the reconstruction of diaspora spaces

and also demonstrates the discordant views of 'home' and 'exile' in narratives of displacement (Malkki, 1995; Fortier, 2000; Braziel & Mannur, 2003). It becomes glaringly obvious that the representation of Johannesburg during the early days in exile was deeply influenced by the fact that Cameroonians were still struggling to adjust and did not understand the new dynamics of post-apartheid Johannesburg at that time. Secondly, the new government was still struggling to come up with viable strategies to combat crime and anti-foreigner sentiments, as well as formulating a sustainable immigration law to deal with the increasing number of foreigners into South Africa.

To this end, most of my informants repeatedly spoke about their entrepreneurial and academic achievements in Johannesburg. Below, one of them explains how he has grown from an alienated and bitter asylum seeker to a successful Conference Organiser, running his own Events Company in Johannesburg:

> …I think my life has changed a lot and I have learned a lot of things that I didn't know before today. I am more mature and completely independent, unlike back home where I had to rely on my parents. I have also enriched myself educationally. Today, I'm living in a society whereby I can interact freely and do things on my own. Given the limited resources back in Cameroon, there is just too little you can achieve there but here with all the facilities, I definitely can achieve a lot here… (Informant 1: Interview 3, 1 October 2003).

His account is framed around a strong symbolic narrative of economic empowerment embedded in Cameroonians' double vision of Johannesburg. It also undermines the

preceding construction of Johannesburg as a political space, showing a gradual narrative shift to a cluster of literary forms that represent Johannesburg as a transit point for business and a symbol of prosperity as well as a better life. Territory is therefore linked to the livelihoods of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees, espousing the "new formations that emerge from deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation" (Fortier, 2000: 2).

5.4 Conclusion

This discussion of the construction of diaspora spaces has focused principally on the relationship between homeland and exile, characterised by Cameroonians' simultaneous connection with *here* and *there*. In this chapter, I have argued that "thinking about place involves a general formulation of human experience, memory and imagination" (Mar, 2005: 369) especially when multiple spaces are positioned side by side. However, without necessarily undermining that fact that the experiences of forced migrants have always been characterised by feelings of loss of kinship and ancestral space, as well as unusual waves of alienation and rejection in exile, it is clear that "we understand a place and a landscape through the historical and personal narratives that are marked out within it and that give that place a particular unity and establish a particular set of possibilities within it" (Malpas, 1999: 186). Cameroonian accounts were glaringly solidified by the shifting narrative patterns that reinforced the representation of 'home' and 'exile'. As postulated in this chapter, there is a conspicuous reversal of roles, where 'home', often represented as a place of peace, safety and security, has become a landscape of violence, fear and insecurity. Given this reversal of roles, 'home' is rapidly replaced by 'exile',

especially when diaspora creates new opportunities and provides an invigorating climate for forced migrants.

Furthermore, the discourses of displacement have always been the nexus for reflecting on the construction of social memory and identities and how these trajectories are interlinked with the representation of diaspora spaces. Ideas about displacement are always grounded in the formulations and interfaces of "home, identity and exile" (Braziel & Mannur, 2003: 6). The theorisation of displacement has to an extent paid particular attention to the way migrants imagine and represent different space and how the construction of these spaces help in the refocusing of their sense of belonging, trajectories of home and exile, as well as the shaping of varied identities. In the case of Cameroonians, the representation of the diasporic spaces was constructed against the backdrop of the shifting social experiences of this refugee community over different time frames, culminating in polarised and ambivalent renditions. I have therefore analysed the representation of 'home' and 'exile' and how Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees employ different narrative patterns to represent these complex localities and how they have imagined these spaces across different time frames.

CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

Recently, of all the South African major cities, Johannesburg has experienced an extraordinary upsurge in forced migrants, particularly from other African countries and Asia. This influx is the outcome of the noticeable forces of globalisation, poverty, terrorist attacks, armed conflicts, natural disasters and civil unrests around the African continent, as well as the relative political serenity and economic growth in South Africa. These factors have influenced the movement of people, especially from African and Asian countries, in pursuit of a sanctuary and greener pastures. One significant outcome of these migratory trends has been the "burgeoning interest" (Ojwang, 2004: 312) in issues of displacement and the increasing problems of migrants in the new democracy. This situation has resulted in the emergence of studies increasingly linked with "the multiple waves of political refugees seeking asylum" (Braziel & Mannur, 2003: 3) and South African domestic policies towards both voluntary and involuntary migrants.

The ten years[42] of democracy have also been marked by a rising preoccupation with "the theorisations and problematisations" (ibid: 3) of issues of forced migration in different academic departments at different universities in South Africa. This recent interest in academic departments has without doubts located diaspora debates and the problems of forced migration as the nucleus of some academic and political debates in post-apartheid South Africa. However, a noticeable feature of studies in this area has been the dominance of sociological approaches, characterised by quantitative and deductive research methods. One explanation for this dominance could be attributed to the fact that

[42] 'Ten years' at the time of the writing up of this thesis.

studies on immigration into South Africa have been carried out in academic departments such as Sociology, Forced Migration Studies and Geography and Development Studies. So while researchers at other institutions outside South African are rapidly shifting from traditional research methods to innovative paradigms such as the narrative construction of social experiences, evident from Malkki (1995), Fortier (2000) and De Fina (2003), this significant shift is still not very prominent in the study of the experiences of forced migrants in South Africa.

Nevertheless, the shift to the study of narrative patterns of human experiences "suggests the emergence of another strand to the post-positivist paradigm and a further refinement of interpretive methodology in the human sciences" (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001: 40). Given the emergence of the new research paradigm, forced migrant testimonies provide critical spaces for the reconceptualisation of the politics, histories and the often-silenced voices of displaced persons around the globe. It is against the backdrop of this shift that this thesis has engaged in a discourse analysis of the testimonies of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees in Johannesburg. Although the number of interviewees used in this study is nothing compared to the number of Cameroonian forced migrants in this urban landscape today, the data has however provided a sphere for a critical and qualitative exploration of the narrative construction of diasporic trajectories such as memory work, identity, space and so on.

But, before I explore some of the contentious issues that have emerged and grown from this research, it is necessary to revisit the fact that before the demise of the apartheid regime, there was relatively limited scholarly passion for forced migration and the

problems related to this category of migration at some South African universities. Generally, most academies focused on the surge of labour migrants from within the Southern African regions of the African continent. The scholarly interest in the influx of cheap migrant labour from Southern African countries such as Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe reflected the long-standing demand for labour in the lucrative South African mining industry. One noticeable particularity of this extensive literature was of course the absence of the East and West African part of the African continent. This absence is related to the seemingly negligible numbers of East, West and Central African mine labourers in the contingent that streamed into South Africa.

Not long ago, shortly after 1990, South Africa began to witness the entry of political refugees from West and Central Africa. These waves of refugees have for the past decade shifted the focus of part of South Africans' intellectual engagements from Southern African mine labourers to new research spaces in the field of forced migration. As this study has argued, despite the proliferating of media coverage and massive stereotyping of refugees from West Africa, there is still a paucity of literature with West African countries as specific case studies, compared with the vast amount of literature on migration from Southern Africa or on global issues of migration.

Existing literature on African immigration into South Africa still exist mainly in the form of unpublished theses, articles and a few published books, with noticeable examples including Morris & Bouillon (1999), Timngum (2001), Landau (2004) and Chamba (2005). As usual, the studies have concentrated on the chronicling of the livelihoods and the negatives experiences of African migrants as well as the attitudes of South Africans

towards principally African migrants. Very often, they have tended to denigrate the unfriendliness of South Africans towards both voluntary and involuntary migrants, especially from other parts of Africa. Perhaps this analytic curve is motivated partly by the fact that forced migration is unarguably the worst form of migration and because of its often crippling psychological effects on human beings, it has often attracted massive sympathy. This emotional and sympathetic feeling has crept into and clouded the way some researchers and critics have approached and addressed the problems of forced migrants in South Africa.

On the contrary, one significant outcome of this study is the way Cameroonian forced migrants tend to represent South Africa as an exilic space that has somehow managed to provide neat solutions to many of the endemic problems that have often been the cause of involuntary displacement in Africa. Despite the negative representations, the testimonies also portray exile as a political sanctuary and a solution to their state of destitution, if their conditions in South Africa are compared with the existing situation in Cameroon. These double narratives certainly reveal that underneath the gruesome experiences of exile often lie glimmers of hope and possibilities that can transform the lives of forced migrants in South Africa. Although an insight into the social conditions and experiences of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees is crucial and relevant to this study, its main thrust focuses on how the testimonies told by Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees contribute to our understanding of the different dimensions of exile and forced migration in Africa, the construction and reconstruction of problems of displacement and homelessness 'in the telling' as well as the intricacies of memory work, space and identity in migrant narratives.

By teasing out the narrative patterns and the complex networks of memory work in Cameroonian testimonies, this thesis has ventured into an analysis of those testimonies as a more innovative and imaginative strategy for a critical examination of experiences of Cameroonian forced migrants in the cosmopolitan city of Johannesburg. Though the research was not devoid of challenges such as those presented by analytic strategies, methodological approaches and providing an unbiased study of Cameroonian testimonies, it nevertheless has provided a deeper understanding of the problems it had anticipated to address. Therefore by synthesising two research paradigms (literary and sociological), this project has culminated in an interdisciplinary study of the narrative construction of displacement and the experiences of homelessness within the Cameroonian refugee community. One achievement of this research is clearly its distinctive ability to capture and interpret the multi-dimensionality and multi-functionality of migrant narratives contributing to the new frontiers of knowledge on forced migration in South Africa. This achievement can be credited to the interpretive tools provided by the development and expansion of the theory of narratology with its "interdisciplinary semiotic and cultural theory of narrative texts and contexts" (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001: 4). The interdisciplinarity of the theory of narratology was indeed one of the vehicles for the meaningful interpretation of images, spectacles, events and the artifacts that challenged the process of analysing the social experiences of Cameroonian forced migrants (Bal, 1997; Whitebrook, 2001).

It is also important to note that the development of narratology in analyses of social experiences has been the outcome of the deficiencies of the forefathers of narrative

theories such as structuralism and formalism, in addressing the multiple patterns of narratives. For example, the structuralists' concentration on 'langue' rather 'parole' in most analyses of narratives has proved to be intellectually limiting for accessing the underlying meaning and deeper structural patterns of events and broad human experiences. In this study, the holistic nature of narratology has been a viable theoretical framework for the processing of different narrative genres, metaphors, images and symbols used by Cameroonian forced migrants for the construction of identity, memory and space. In this light, the chapters have developed a philosophical and intellectual relationship between narrative, memory, identity, space and time. The thesis has argued that the construction of memory in the testimonies is in fact the narrative consciousness of history and that the construction of the self has always been organised in narrative patterns. Another noticeable particularity that has grown out of my analysis of the testimonies is the fact that the process of memory and the construction of the self within social, political and cultural contexts are indeed the narrativisation of historical processes and events within the contours of space and time. The process of remembering and the construction of identity as well as notions of spatiality and temporality are in fact bastions of narrative (White, 1997; Whitebrook, 2001; Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001).

Moreover, the testimonies produced by the twenty Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees represent a fascinating body of textual evidence from which to draw on and provide a micro-structure for the understanding not only the experiences of Cameroonian refugee community in Johannesburg but also global human experiences in the age of migration. Through the interviews there was an intimate contact with members of my case study "… people engaged in the process of interpreting themselves" (Josselson &

Lieblich, 1995: ix) and their communities. The richness of the testimonies was evident in the way my respondents addressed personal and collective experiences, and how they interweave those experiences while situating their lives in particular historical and socio-cultural periods and landscapes. Their testimonies capture their journeys to exile, their past, present, aspirations, as well as their sense of identity as displaced community. Using an inductive analytic approach, this study has therefore used the testimonies of the twenty Cameroonian forced migrants as a possible microcosm for an enlarged discussion of the experiences of the Cameroon refugee community. However, in keeping with all case study approaches, the findings are not automatically generalisable.

Also, while narrating their personal lives and interlacing their past, present and future, the logic of ambivalence became apparent in the testimonies. Another distinct feature was the way the narratives were constantly subverted and undermined, using sets of oppositional metaphors and images. The subversion of episodes of the same body of narratives is engendered by the notions of subjectivity and temporality. Though there are some visible general trends and patterns in migrant testimonies, key events are often personalised, strategically representing and foregrounding pertinent aspects of individual histories and experiences, often resulting in varied versions of the same events. Along these lines, the testimonies came across as contesting narratives of displacement because of their multiple representations of different events and places. For example, the representation of South Africa through the 'eye' of Johannesburg was forged by the generally cold reception migrants received from South Africans, other personal experiences and the seemingly positive changes that have characterised the lives of Cameroonian refugees and asylum seekers over the years. As I have argued, the early days in exile were

dominated by a strong feeling of loss, nostalgia, xenophobia and unfamiliarity with the new space, which often tended to trigger very negative impressions about South Africa.

This position can also be blamed on the fact that the bulk of Cameroonian asylum seekers entered South Africa during the period immediately after the collapse of the apartheid government and at the onset of broad-based debates on the transformation and institution of democratic structures in the new South Africa. This interregnum was characterised by uncertainties, repeated violence, crime and joblessness and fuzzy immigration legislations. These migrants were perhaps victims of a precarious transition, or pawns in a regime change and were entrapped in these new waves of violence and uncertainty. The portions of Cameroonian testimonies that focused on this period, which I describe in the thesis as the early days in exile, generated narratives that clearly represented South Africa not as the haven they dreamt about before departure from home, but as a locale of violence and insecurity. This generally mordant representation was solidified by metaphors and images that illustrated the violence, crime, and uncertainties ubiquitous during this interregnum.

However, the schematic negative representation of South Africa was gradually subverted in subsequent testimonies that described the lives of Cameroonian forced migrants after the early days in exile. This narrative shift was propelled by the supposed changes in attitudes from South Africans and personal growth in the lives of Cameroonian asylum seekers over the years in Johannesburg. Here, the overarching impressions were that they have adjusted and adapted in their new home and the nostalgic feeling of loss of ancestral home was gradually fading. Secondly, according to my respondents, after more than ten

years of democracy, there has been a more progressive trend in South Africa characterised by significant reduction in anti-foreigner feelings, crime and violence.

Whether the impressions gained from testimonies are credible or not, is not the most important point. What actually sparked my enthusiasm as I analysed the testimonies was the fact that the positive impressions that followed the earlier negative impressions forced an almost spontaneous subversion of the preceding narratives. The testimonies shifted from the negative representation of South Africa and the bleak lives of African forced migrants to a somewhat realistic and invigorating representation reinforced by metaphors and images of hope, prosperity and happiness, with the symbolic imagination of Johannesburg as their new home. This depiction positioned exile as a place of survival and newly emerging sets of metaphors, symbols and images were therefore extremely useful for explaining changing perceptions, especially when seen in the light of the narrative "hybridity, heterogeneity and multiplicity" (Braziel & Mannur, 2003: 9), three significant terms that define the testimonies of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees. I have also posited that the testimonies address the "nostalgic dislocation from homeland" (ibid: 4) and at the same time illustrating the ambivalences and the manifold experiences of displacement and exile.

This study of testimonial narratives inextricably builds on theoretical illustrations of oral history, migration, literary studies, narratology, social history, identity, memory and space, to illuminate the specific context of Cameroonian exile community in Johannesburg. Firstly, drawing on these often interlocking paradigms, I was able to interpret the testimonies in complex and multi-layered ways, focusing on the way my

interviewees articulated their personal histories and tribulations as well as addressing generalised experiences of the Cameroonians. Secondly, the interdisciplinarity of the study created an outlet for a critical insight into the memories, histories and the identities of Cameroonian forced migrants in the context of global migration. This thesis categorises the testimonies as a social and political text, which sought to capture the individual and collective experiences of the Cameroonian refugee community in Johannesburg. And analysing this body of testimonies as social and political texts, I was particularly intrigued by the fascinating interplay of language and different "linguistic repertoires" (Josselson & Lieblich, 1995: 203) as a channel to foster different social and political roles in Cameroon and South Africa. This interplay of language was enhanced by narratives techniques such as repetitive pronominal alterations, temporal references and narrative frequency, animating different levels of language usage and linguistic codes.

Moreover, the interplay of language and linguistic codes was particularly important for the construction of identities and different genres in the testimonies. Here, the construction of identities in the testimonies was handled with clear references to social, cultural processes and political orientations of Cameroonian asylum seekers and refugees. The symbiotic relationship between ethnicity, culture and identity was strongly illuminated sharply in the way Cameroonian forced migrants attempted to manage the tension between trying to maintain their 'Cameroonness' and constructing new identities. To this end, I argued that Cameroonians' strong attachment to home was reflected through distinctive cultural symbols such as clothing, music and cuisine and also through the emergence of cultural associations. The construction of identities in the testimonies

was also shaped by the classification and representation of different cultural practices and habits as well as Cameroonians socio-political experiences at home and in exile. My claim about the formation of identities in this thesis is that it is constantly constructed and reconstructed socially within discourse and functions as a form of exclusion and closure (Hall, 1996; Craib, 1998).

The construction of identities was interlaced with the way the past was remembered and how it affected Cameroonian identities in the present. The chapter on memory addressed the ambiguous and ambivalent relationship between history and the present, at the same time capitalising on the impact of the past on the present and the future. The testimonies were framed around the dialectical relationship of remembrance and forgetting, in which the "feeling of dislocation from the past is the impetus for recollection" (Ojwang, 2004: 302) and the pain and trauma of remembrance, the impetus for forgetting. The memory work in the narratives was seen as a site for self-gratification, the construction of individual identity, the depiction of social and political roles. The testimonies have drawn our attention to the fact that memory work is "a fictional process of mastery over a silent and mute body of knowledge, a body that must be simultaneously invaded and conquered" (Rhodes, 1999: 180). This argument immediately reinforces one of my claims in the thesis that the process of remembering is not a verbatim reproduction of events in the past but a social process, which engenders the reconfiguration of such events. Remembrance was however subverted by forgetfulness, and the need to block the past was forced by the pains and anguish of remembering events from the past. Thus, a sizeable portion of the testimonies was also grounded in the view that the only relationship between the past and present was the trauma the past brought along when it

is recollected. Because of the fear of being traumatised by the past, some respondents chose to remember certain parts of their pasts while omitting others, littering the testimonies with fragments of memories. However, Ojwang (2004) deals shrewdly with this quandary, when he argues that "it is because the past is remembered incompletely that it is remembered at all, for it is in the cracks of memory that new ones are able to take root" (305). From this angle, the logic of ambivalence and oppositional co-dependency between remembrance and forgetting is what brings memory work to completion, one of the features that continuously enhanced the quality of the testimonies.

This thesis has drawn our attention to a number of issues. On the one hand, the sociological component of the study has addressed and theorised issues and patterns of forced migration in the South Africa context. Drawing on the experiences and livelihoods of Cameroonian forced migrants in Johannesburg, I have argued that the experiences of displacement in this Southern African state are indeed crippling but also carry with them strong symbols of hope and fulfillment for African forced migrants. On the other hand, the strong literary thrust has examined the narrative genres, patterns and narrative strategies that emerged in the testimonies. A sizeable fragment of the thesis has explored the narrativisation of different aspects of immigrant discourses such as the construction of identity, space and temporal trajectories as well as the process of remembrance and forgetting. The interdisciplinarity of this research therefore emerges in the way the literary thrust is weaved with the underlying sociological perspective. By so doing, it draws the readers' attention to the way testimonies from the same refugee community have generated different interpretations of experiences of displacement, culminating in

the conclusion that “it is the telling that makes the difference” (Josselson & Lieblich, 1995: 153).

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Individual Subject Information Form.

Appendix 2: Individual Consent Form to Participate in this Study.

Appendix 3: Permission to Record Interviews.

Appendix 4: Selected Samples of Interviews.

Due to the volume of data gathered from the interviews, I have decided to include as appendices, only samples of interviews that have been used repeatedly and have been critical as well as instrumental to my analysis of the testimonies. These samples are meant to give a taste of the type of stories told by Cameroonian asylum seekers and how they have been used as texts for my analysis in this thesis.

Appendix 1

Individual Subject Information Sheet

Dear Cameroonian

My name is Ernest Angu Pineteh and I am a PHD candidate at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I am currently undertaking a research project on Cameroonian asylum seekers in Johannesburg. The aim of this research is to understand the experiences of Cameroonian asylum seekers, how they cope in South Africa and to write up a PHD thesis on the testimonies of Cameroonian asylum seekers in Johannesburg South Africa. Your selection to take part in this project was based on the fact that you are a Cameroonian and an asylum seeker, thus capable of providing material for this research. As such, I would like to conduct three separate interviews with you over a maximum period of one year. Each interview will last for one hour maximum and will be held at a time and place convenient to you. Furthermore, although we know each other very well, I would like to emphasise the following:

- your contribution will be strictly confidential.
- you are free to decline answering any questions that you may find disturbing or which make you feel uncomfortable;
- it is your personal decision to take part in the research and you are free to withdraw from it at any stage if you wish to do so;
- be assured that the tapes used in recording your testimonies will be given special codes and that your personal details will not be used in the writing up of research. The tapes will either be destroyed or returned to you after the research has been completed;
- Should you find the content of the interview(s) disturbing, I shall refer you to an organisation that can help you, should you wish me to do so

Thanks for your co-operation
Ernest Pineteh

Appendix 2

Individual Informed Consent Form to Participate in the Study

I…… have read and clearly understood the information in the individual subject information sheet. I have equally understood the aims and the implications of this piece of research. I accept the invitation to take part in Ernest Pineteh's research under the conditions noted in the subject information sheet

_____

Signature

_____

Date

Appendix 3

Permission to Record Interviews

I……, taking part in Ernest Pineteh's research project, give him the permission to tape record interviews he conducts with me during the research process. After the research has been completed, I would like him to:

1) return the transcribed interviews to me.
2) destroy the transcribed interviews.

(Please tick one option).

_____

Signature.

_____

Date

Appendix 4

Selected Samples of Interviews

Informant 10

Interview 1

Ernest: Thanks for accepting to take part in this research project. Today's interview is the first of three interviews I will conduct with you. It will focus on key aspects such as your personal background, political history, the process of fleeing, and your refugee history. You are free to refrain from answering any question(s) you are uncomfortable with..
Informant 10: Interesting!

Ernest: Let us start with you telling me more about yourself.
Informant 10: Ernest what do you want to know about me that you don't know? We meet every day, we play soccer every Sunday, you can't tell you don't know every about me. In fact, I am winding because it is really a difficult question to answer. I always like a situation where someone describes me not me talking about myself. What can I really say? I would like you to focus me a bit.

Ernest: I mean you and your life in general, the things that I do not know about you.
Informant 10: There is no need telling you my name, you definitely do not need that unless you want to tell you don't know my name as well (laughs). Well I am a teacher and deputy principal of a private high school and a student as well.

Ernest: How old are you?
Informant 10: 30yrs old

Ernest: Are you married?
Informant 10: I am still not lucky!

Ernest: What do you mean?
Informant 10: You know, it is about waiting for miss right and you never know when you will meet this miss right. At the moment, I still have my fingers and toes crossed.

Ernest: Which part of Cameroon are you from?
Informant 10: As you know, I come from the notorious town of Bamenda, precisely Awing in the North west province.

Ernest: Why do you call Bamenda "notorious"?
Informant 10: Before I get to that, I would like to say it is a very lovely city, quite cosmopolitan, welcoming and a peace loving people. But, on the other hand, as I said earlier, it is a notorious city when it comes to politics. It is the hardcore of the opposition and the city that has given the ruling government the toughest of times. I think you know the place, it is the birthplace of the SDF and multiparty politics in Cameroon. I would like to tell you my parents are strong supporters of the SDF and so are my other siblings. I grew up believing in what my parents believed in.

Ernest: We will talk more about Cameroon later. Where do you extend your asylum seeker permit?

Informant 10: At the Braamfontein Home Affairs.

Ernest: And how long have you been in South Africa?
Informant 10: Five and a half years, close to six years.

Ernest: Quite a long time! I take it you are now a South African and can speak at least one of the eleven languages?
Informant 10: You bet! I have seen and done it all. That is what I can say.

Ernest: Have you been granted refugee status?
Informant 10: Not yet! I can't wait.

Ernest: Why not?
Informant 10: I think that question is misdirected. I think the right audience for that question is the Department of Home Affairs. I think it should be the usual administrative bottleneck to go through it.

Ernest: I am interested because I think you deserve the right to know what is happening with your application. I think seeking asylum for six years definitely affects your life negatively.
Informant 10: A lot of inquiries have been made, in fact a lot of effort has been invested and hey, a man can only do so much and you just have to wait for fate or destiny to take its course.

Ernest: Why I am a bit concerned is because some Cameroonians have been given the status though they have been in South Africa just for two or three years. I think it is a bit unusual for someone to seek asylum for six years. There should be some kind of an explanation don't you think?
Informant 10: I can't agree with you more. It is quite a nerve wrecking and upsetting situation to find yourself in. You find it difficult to accommodate the fact that people just a year or two old here, have been granted the status and for six years you still get up at dawn and go begging for three months extension at Home Affairs. You work toes and nails and your luck is still far fetched.

Ernest: I just hope light will shine on you one day.
Informant 10: That's my hope. Thanks very much.

Ernest: Let's chat a bit about Cameroon. Why did you decide to leave Cameroon to seek asylum in South Africa?
Informant 10: To begin with, I love Cameroon and there are not many words to describe your fatherland. It is the one place you will always want to be there, but because of circumstances you have to abandon the place. To describe Cameroon vividly, it is a land of milk and honey.

Ernest: If you call it 'land of milk and honey', why then are there many Cameroonians seeking asylum in South Africa?
Informant 10: For political reasons and I would want to say that it is always really disturbing talking about Cameroon. You actually notice a change in my voice (laughs). That is how touchy I feel talking about Cameroon.

Ernest: Why touchy?
Informant 10: Because of the circumstances or framework and why we find ourselves in South Africa begging for a place to stay. Why can't we enjoy the fruits of our efforts in our country?

Ernest: What circumstances precisely are you talking about?
Informant 10: I am talking about the political upheaval, turmoil, repression, and oppression. There are so many words, negative of course to describe Cameroon right now. To describe Cameroon in one sentence I would say it is 'ticking time bomb'.

Ernest: From a more general perspective, what are the conditions in Cameroon that push Cameroonians to leave their country?
Informant 10: I would want to specify that being out of Cameroon doesn't mean I am not in touch in terms of communication. We communicate quite often with people back home and we know the framework hasn't changed. I get really emotional when I talk about Cameroon because of the incessant repression. People are murdered for expressing their views, killed, maimed, bottles put in the vaginas of women, and children's hands cut off with grenades. You have a peaceful march despite asking for permission, the government still uses teargas, water canons to disperse armless people. It is not a conducive environment for someone with a right frame of mind.

Ernest: Why such repression?
Informant 10: I think the dichotomy that exists in the framework. First of all we are ruled by a dictator, a tyrant, some gentleman who just rose to power and doesn't want to relinquish power. He has been there for twenty-three years and still hoping to be there much longer. An absolute power corrupt country!

Ernest: You say you are from the Northwest. What is your relationship with your Francophone brothers here in South Africa?
Informant 10: It is a very strange feeling and I can tell you there is no love lust between us. There are certainly some very nice and dynamic Francophones but I think the union between English and French-speaking Cameroonians is totally uncalled for. It is indeed an unruly and unholy alliance and I must tell you, using my father's words, he describes Francophones "if you have anything to destroy, please give it to a francophone, he will destroy it very well"

Ernest: That's interesting! Were you involved in any political struggle that actually endangered your life?
Informant 10: I had been very active in the political domain back home since the launch of the SDF. I was an active member of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), in fact I was the secretary of our ward, member of the Amnesty International Group and also a strong activist in the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC) struggle.

Ernest: Were you once a victim of the malpractices of the regime in power?
Informant 10: I can't count the number of times I was arrested and tortured for airing my views. Believe me, it was not a nice experience, hours of torment, fear and you're hurt and traumatised by what you see and what happens to you.

Ernest: How did you manage to escape?
Informant 10: I can tell you safely and soundly that I was lucky to have a brother with great connections. Through one top military officer, I was smuggled through the Douala international airport and l flew straight to South Africa without a break.

Ernest: You were really fortunate because I was chatting with another Cameroonian and his experience of flight was really terrible. He actually travelled through Gabon, DRC and Zimbabwe and in Zimbabwe; he had to jump the border fence between South Africa and Zimbabwe to enter South Africa.

Ernest: During this research, I found out that Cameroonian applications are rejected basically on grounds that there is no war in your Country. The officials at Home Affairs compare Cameroon with DRC or Rwanda and conclude that your country is peaceful thus no reason for Cameroonians to seek asylum. Do you agree?
Informant 10: I think without mincing words, I would like to take you back to what I said earlier that Cameroon is a ticking time bomb. When you talk of wars in these countries you have mentioned, it doesn't mean that when a country is in war you must see people with guns, dressed in military attires. A war in my opinion is when we totally disagree or degenerate ourselves to the level of intolerance, undemocratic torture, mental or physical, that is a war to me. As far as I am concerned, Cameroon at this stage is in such a volatile state that if you find yourself there, you may not like to stay there for the next minute. You will want to rush out if knowing how dynamic and democratic your ideas are.

Ernest: You talk of a ticking time bomb but Cameroon has been in the democratization process longer than most of these war-torn countries. Why is the bomb still ticking?
Informant 10: I want to describe Cameroon as a peace loving country and peace loving does not mean that you don't have an urge. You push a man too close to his limits and you will get his reaction. It can take years, it has taken years in other countries why not Cameroon. We simply should not define Cameroon as peaceful because you don't hear or see gunshots everyday. There are certainly gunshots, people killed mysteriously, women raped and maimed, children without educational privileges, but it is not in the public eye because of the repressive ways the regime treats its citizens. In fact, the media is closely censored.

Ernest: What were your impressions of South Africa before you decided to seek asylum here?
Informant 10: The country hasn't really met my expectations. It hasn't been the best as such but certainly far better than my home Although South Africa is not quite accommodating: you get styled, called names, pushed and shoved around, discriminated because you don't have the right documentation but still, it is better than Cameroon.

Ernest: What were your expectations?
Informant 10: I must tell you it was described as the city of gold and we had a different way of looking at it, hoping that we would come and have peace, a conducive state of mind and a better economic situation. Though we have met some dynamic South Africans, we are faced very often with unruly, unorthodox behaviours. We have met our match because of our documentation and secondly the transition is not yet over

Ernest: Let us end stop here for today and thanks again for your time. I will call around again and we will talk more about your life in South Africa and your experiences of seeking asylum for six years.
Informant 10: If this can go a long way, reaching the ears of those who are supposed to hear then it is worth the pains. Good luck and see you on Sunday for our normal soccer training session.

Interview 2

Ernest: Thanks once more for making time to chat with me. We are into phase two of our discussion and, this phase is basically a focus on your early days in Johannesburg. Survival strategies, your refugee history and how you dealt with xenophobia and other challenges during

those early days. Again, you can always decline from answering any question(s) you don't want to.
Informant 10: Nice to see you again! To be honest with you, I thought you had finished your research and I completely forgot you told you had three phases for the research. However, I am always ready and really I do not need to do some research before responding to your questions. So can we get started?

Ernest: Of course! During your first few days in Johannesburg, what was your first impression of the place and how was this impression formed?
Informant 10: I told you during our last discussion that I was fortunate to have flown comfortable from Douala to Johannesburg. I really didn't go through the fleeing trauma like most of my brothers who had to flee on land through different war torn countries like DRC, Rwanda etc. I had a really smooth trip and that was how I got into Johannesburg. Back to your question, I was completely overwhelmed by the infrastructure of the City. It is quite a magnificent place that gave me a different perspective about live. But after living in the city for a couple of days, I discovered that the people were not as beautiful as the city itself. I thought a beautiful city without a welcoming population meant absolutely nothing. We were not welcomed here as you know, we were styled 'makwere kwere', rejected and insulted. In fact the people were not friendly at all.

Ernest: How then would you describe the Johannesburg you met when you just arrived?
Informant 10: It was a strange place then and you had to live life by the day not knowing what was going to happen to you the next moment. It was a tough place and we had to barely survive and during that time, you needed your survival instincts more than anything to be able to live in the rough Johannesburg.

Ernest: What do you mean by rough?
Informant 10: Just to give you an example, when we arrived we started job hunting, we had to send CVs out there for Job. I give you an anecdote to answer you, something that happened when a friend and I were walking down Claim Street after a day of job hunting. We didn't see them coming and suddenly we were pushed to the walls and striped almost naked by thieves. I found this incident not only frightening but also very strange because this happened during the day and people were passing while these guys were busy striping us and no one cared. I had never seen such a situation in my whole.

Ernest: How did you feel after the incident?
Informant 10: I immediately thought this place was hell and we were in for a rough ride.

Ernest: What was the reception you received from your Cameroonians who were already in Johannesburg?
Informant 10: Frankly when I came here, there were not many Cameroonians in Johannesburg at the time. We knew almost everybody, we were very close and a happy family and as days went by, numbers increased and you meet Cameroonians you don't even know and some unfriendly ones. But when we just arrived, it was quite a friendly community. I also met a few South Africans who understood our plight and were a bit friendly.

Ernest: But did you have any plans how you were going to survive in Johannesburg?
Informant 10: Quite frankly no! I was fade up with life at home and honestly, I thought any place will be better than home. But when I got here, I was faced with many challenges.

Ernest: what precisely were these challenges and how did you manage to combat them?

Informant 10: You know them! Things like joblessness, rejection, high crime etc. You were easily identified even if you didn't want to. You know we dress differently, speak differently so to be able to fit in, you had to change and dress like them, walk like them etc. You even had to learn a few Zulu words to pave your way.

Ernest: Can you speak a bit of Zulu or any of the other South African languages today?
Informant 10: Of course! After staying here for many years, I think I can manage.

Ernest: Did you have any feeling about Johannesburg?
Informant 10: I think when you look at Johannesburg, you feel jealous because coming from a country with enormous wealth, and I tended to think our country would have been something like Johannesburg. However, I was still filled with a strong feeling of nostalgia though Cameroon is not as beautiful as Johannesburg.

Ernest: Did you ever feel like returning home?
Informant 10: I certainly thought South Africa was not for me especially with the challenges we were faced with. So I had to come up with a plan to leave this place very fast but definitely not back to Cameroon. Yes, I had the nostalgia but home was the last option because it would have meant going back to the lion's den. My plan was to go to another country and start the process of seeking asylum afresh.

Ernest: How long did it take you to adjust in Johannesburg?
Informant 10: I think you adjust everyday in Johannesburg because everyday you spend here, you learn and in this process I have met some very intelligent and wise South Africans, who have helped me through the process over the years.

Ernest: Going back to your Home Affairs experience, when was your first visit to the Department of Home Affairs?
Informant 10: I really do not think I can remember because it is almost seven years ago. But I think I went there after a month here.

Ernest: Can you describe the experience or the process on that day?
Informant 10: The first thing I was told was to prepare to get up very early if it was my day to Home Affairs. So on that day, I got up as early as 4am and took a taxi to Home Affairs. Upon arrival, there were already people in queues and I joined one of the queues. It was really cold and I felt like I was not a human being anymore. At 7:30am, doors were opened and we walked in like prisoners and inside we had to sit and wait for hours. Afterward, I was called for an interview and thereafter granted a six months temporary permit. This is as far as I can remember but honestly, it was not a good experience- a lot of desperation and anguish on the faces of asylum seekers.

Ernest: During the hours you stood in the queue, what went through your mind?
Informant 10: I really felt terrible and dehumanised, like a prisoner without a crime. I thought I was living the same situation I left back home.

Ernest: How would you evaluate the services at that time?
Informant 10: I really do not want to remember the way we were treated by the officials. Generally, the services were terrible.

Ernest: Would you say there have been any changes today?

Informant 10: It has been long since I visited the department now that I am on a different status. But I still think, it is still a corrupt place though the officials are a bit more welcoming. But I think corruption is yet to be buried at the Department of Home Affairs.

Ernest: Saying you are now on a different status, what status is it?
Informant 10: I had the asylum status annulled, when I got married and I am now on a permanent resident status.

Ernest: So you have abandoned the struggle that forced you out of Cameroon?
Informant 10: I think it is just a means to an end, which means therefore that I haven't abandoned the struggle. You know, you never forget your roots. The initial cause why we left has never disappeared from my mind. I would like to state for the records that getting a resident permit simply is a means to an end. As I told you earlier, it simply helps me to get enough stability, finances etc.

Ernest: Let us stop here for toady. I will call around again for the final phase.
Informant 10: I will be here waiting!

Interview 3

Ernest: We are in the third and final phase of our discussion and again thanks for your time. During this final interview, we will talk about your life after several years in exile, conditions in Cameroon again, your future plans, the overall process of seeking asylum, the importance of Cameroonian associations, music and Cameroonian food to asylum seekers.
Informant 10: No problem!

Ernest: I would like you to tell me about your life after seven years in exile.
Informant 10: I must say I am a totally different person today as compared to seven years ago. Life is more comfortable today because I am able to at least have three meals a day with a bottle of cold drink (laughs). Remember I told you during our second interview that life was hell when I just arrived. My friend and I could not even afford a meal and we were not sure of what was going to happen the following day. I think my life today is really comfortable. You can actually tell by looking at this place!

Ernest: From what you have just said, I would want to think that you have adjusted very well in Johannesburg. Do you still have the nostalgia you had when you just arrived?
Informant 10: It is still there and will always be there. You know, my parents are still in Cameroon and my ancestors as well. But since I have now adjusted, it is not as strong as it used to be. Now, it is more in the subconscious mind. Though I am married to a South African, I still remain a Cameroonian and remember, home will always be home. That is where I am going to settle and be buried when I am dead. It is my final resting place.

Ernest: How then do you deal with this nostalgia when it comes back to your conscious mind?
Informant 10: Most often I will call home, talk to my parents, read about Cameroon from the net and respond to political issues happening back at home. Doing these things actually alleviate the feeling.

Ernest: You described Cameroon earlier as a place where you will be buried when you are dead. Is there really any significance to transport corpses of Cameroonians back home?
Informant 10: As community in exile we are guarded by our ancestors back at home and we owe them that respect to send the dead ones to join them in our ancestral place. I think every African will understand where I am coming from, that if you bury a brother or sister in exile, it means you have let the whole community down, or that person was an outcast. For example, when we lost a fellow brother back in 1999, we had to do everything to send the corpse home. It is indeed paying respect to the dead and our ancestors back home. It is our culture and we usually receive blessing from our ancestors, when we send the dead to them.

Ernest: Does it really make any difference where a person is buried?
Informant 10: Please refer that question to the ancestors. I think I am not the right person to answer your question.

Ernest: What else do you do, as a way of staying attached with your ancestors or ancestral space?
Informant 10: There is this strong culture of ritual performance amongst Cameroonians especially during Cameroonian festivities and the most common is the throwing of libation. You know, as an African, you should be familiar with rituals of this nature or have you forgotten your culture? Anyway, we always perform this ritual because it reminds us that we have not forgotten our culture, that we have not assimilated the South African culture. Also with terrible things happening in Johannesburg, we need to ask for protection from our forefathers.

Ernest: OK! Apart from emails and phone calls, what are some of the things that you do that connect you with home?
Informant 10: There are quite a number of things and to quote Achebe who says "when a woman is dancing and pointing to a particular spot, you should know that something happened there" I just want to tell you that our music remind us a lot about Cameroon. In my car, I always have Cameroonian CDs and when ever a Cameroonian jumps into my car, for some reasons, I immediately play Cameroonian music. We also have cultural associations and national associations and we talk a lot about soccer, our main passion and our national pride.

Ernest: Let us talk more about Cameroonian associations. When you arrived South Africa, were you aware of the existence of any Cameroon association?

Informant10: ACAS

Ernest: Were you already in South Africa when ACAS was formed and did you play any role in the formation of this association?

Informant 10: I arrived just after its formation

Ernest: Were you a member of ACAS?

Informant 10: Of course!

Ernest: Why did you join the association?

Informant 10: To gain a sense of belonging: a feeling of oneness and the thought of having people who share the same history and culture, being together.

Ernest: What pleasure did you derive as a member of ACAS?

Informant 10: Matters of common interest were discussed during meetings and I found them very insightful.

Ernest: What were ACAS main activities during meeting?

Informant 10: We were involved in a variety of activities but some of the key ones are assistance to members in need, social interest issues raised and sport. Unfortunately this association could not exist for long.

Ernest: what caused the demise of ACAS?

Informant 10: I think some of the factors responsible for its collapse were irresponsible leaders, poor management, lack of accountability and a major difference in culture.

Ernest: What happened after the demise of ACAS?

Informant 10: The Anglophone population of the Cameroonian community decided to form the Association of English Speaking Cameroonians (AESCA)

Ernest: Are you are member of AESCA

Informant 10: Of course I am an Anglophone.

Ernest: Do you belong to any cultural association?

Informant 10: No

Ernest: Even though you do not belong to any of the cultural associations in Johannesburg, do you know why these associations are formed?

Informant 10: It is in our culture to associate with people that have the same roots like ours, the same outlook and the same interest.

Ernest: Going back AESCA; *why did you join this particular association?*

Informant 10: The formation of AESCA provided a sense of security and a feeling of oneness was generated as English speaking Cameroonians. We have a similar attachment to our cultural values and beliefs.

Ernest: What pleasures do you derive from AESCA?

Informant 10: It provides a possibility to network, and to share information.

Ernest: What do you do during meetings?

Informant 10: Some of the things we did during the days of ACAS such as guidance, assistance, support, advice to the needy, and sport as well as socialize.

Ernest: What significance and meanings does belonging to associations bear on you?

Informant: I think our associations define us, our wellbeing and build firm interpersonal relationships.

Ernest: In general, what politics do these associations represent in South Africa?

Informant 10: They help us to face the challenge of xenophobia better; they assist us to assert ourselves as black and proud to be from our African heritage, and the acceptance of our past and the present.

Ernest: You talked about Cameroon music earlier, are you exposed to Cameroonian music in Johannesburg?

Informant 10: Yes.

Ernest: What are the popular genres in Johannesburg and why are they popular?

Informant 10: Makossa, Bikutsi, because they remind us of who we are and where we are from.

Ernest: Where do you listen or buy Cameroonian music in Johannesburg?

Informant 10: Interestingly we get some of them from music stores in places like Rosebank and Sandton, and a lot is imported from home.

Ernest: What significance and meaning does music bear on you?

Informant 10: Our music reminds us of our past and builds bonds that are inseparable between us.

Ernest: To you, is there a difference between Cameroonian music and other genres, if yes how does that difference impact on your life in Johannesburg?

Informant 10: Personally, African beats are the same or similar. Africans have a tendency to sink their strain and stress in music. Messages of happiness and sadness are also passed through music. Historically, lots of struggles have been won through music.

Ernest: Do you usually have any special memories when you listen to Cameroonian music?

Informant 10: An African writer "Chinua Achebe" best explains this in "Arrow of God" he says that when there is music and a people are dancing around in a group, and suddenly one of the female dancers, stops and points to a spot she must be remembering what happened to her there. As Africans and Cameroonians in particular, music, our music brings back lots of memories.

Ernest: what meaning do you attach to Cameroonian music?

Informant 10: Celebrating at events, parties, celebrating success in soccer, socio – cultural events etc.

Ernest: What about Cameroonian cultural clothes, do you sometimes dress in something distinctively Cameroonian?

Informant 10: Not often. Once in a while maybe

Ernest: When do you usually wear these clothes?

Informant 10: Principally at Cameroonian organised functions and sometimes on a normal day.

Ernest: Any particular significance or meaning when you dress in your cultural clothes?

Informant 10: It simply serves as a reminder to me and most of us. Reminding us of where we come from, gives us a feeling of attachment towards our cultural heritage. It links us to our roots, culture and our past; In fact, different Cameroonian wears display the different Cameroonian cultures

Ernest: Do you feel different from other migrants?

Informant 10: Not really.

Ernest: What are some of the experiences you go through when you dress differently from South African and other migrants?

Informant 10: One can easily be identified and of course the development of a feeling of pride and respect for my motherland.

Ernest: Any negative reactions from South Africans?

Informant 10: One can easily be identified and exposed to the dangers of crime. Others take advantage of the fact that you are not of South African origin and so you can be taken for a ride. Some people even think it is outrageous to dress in that way.

Ernest: I hear there are so many Cameroonian restaurants in Johannesburg. Are you exposed to local Cameroonian food here?

Informant 10: Sometimes.

Ernest: Where do you usually buy Cameroonian food?

Informant 10: In some particular shops and restaurants in the greater Johannesburg area.

Ernest: Do you sometimes prepare the food, or do you constantly buy from restaurants?

Informant 10: Sometimes the food is bought but most of the time, it is home made.

Ernest: What is your favourite Cameroonian dish?

Informant 10: Personally, I am not particularly crazy about food. I'm highly indifferent when it comes to food.

Ernest: In a month, how many times would you eat Cameroonian food?

Informant 10: Once or twice. However some months not at all

Ernest: What are some of the common dishes?

Informant 10: You have garri, yams, cassava, eru, cocoyams and plantains etc.

Ernest: Are they different from South African food?

Informant 10: Yes there are. The climatic conditions in South Africa do not permit the growth of a lot of the food items both listed and not listed here.

Ernest: What meaning do you attach to Cameroonian food?

Informant 10: One is forced to remember the meals served by our mothers and quite often the family.

Ernest: What significance and meaning do Cameroonian dishes bear on you?

Informant 10: Simply, a reminder of the past and a feeling of loss as there is not as much variety in South Africa as normally would be in Cameroon.

Ernest: Enough about food! I know we spoke about the relationship between Francophone and Anglophone Cameroonians in Johannesburg earlier. I would like us to talk more about this issue. During our last discussion you called this relationship 'an unholy alliance'. Why?

Informant 10: I think it goes back to history and I really would not like to bore you with the gory details, which I presume you know. You know about the plebiscite and how Mr. Paul Biya managed to efface the agreement reached during that plebiscite. But the reason why I called it an 'unholy alliance' is because Francophones think they own Cameroon and want to dominate the whole nation. That is why you hear of the struggle for an Anglophone identity and the emergence of pressure groups such as CAM and SCNC fighting for an Anglophone identity. Secondly, it is also a cultural issue because there is a big gap between Anglophone and Francophone cultures, making it difficult for the two to cohabit.

Ernest: If you think Francophones have the "yam and the knife" in Cameroon, why then do they leave Cameroon to seek asylum in South Africa?
Informant 10: I don't think all Francophones are happy with the political situation in Cameroon. The marginalisation is so bad that even the Francophones are affected especially at the ethnic levels. Francophone regions such the Western Province feel that Cameroon is ruled by the Beti clan, thus feel marginalised as well.

Ernest: Are you in a way saying that Cameroonians in Johannesburg are not a nation in exile?
Informant 10: We certainly can unify ourselves but at the moment, there are a lot of differences between Francophones and Anglophones in Johannesburg.

Ernest: Coming back to you, Is your life today different from what it used to be back in Cameroon?
Informant 10: Certainly! The structures that I have put in place today were not in Cameroon. I am actually enjoying a lot of freedom here in South Africa, which I couldn't enjoy in Cameroon even today. I can go where I want, say what I want to in a democratic set up like South Africa. Sometimes, I really wonder if I can actually live in Cameroon again.

Ernest: I am sure you have regular updates on the political situation in Cameroon. Do you think there have been any changes?
Informant 10: For the worst, certainly yes. Three weeks ago, I met with legendary footballer Dr. Abega, when Canon Yaounde came to play in South Africa and we had a very interesting chat. During this chat, I mentioned to him that if we were not careful Cameroon would plunge into war. Dr. Abega actually said, in the next three years, if things don't change, we might be worse than DRC or Cote D'Ivoire. He told us that things were going down the drains every day.

Ernest: I do understand the next presidential elections are coming up in a couple of months. Any ideas as to how the opposition plans to fight the Incumbent?
Informant 10: We were just talking about elections this evening and I really I didn't want to talk about elections that we already know the outcome. I said to my friends that there was absolutely no need talking about elections whose results were already lying in a drawer in the Ministry of Territorial Administration. I feel very disappointed because regardless of what you say or do, nothing is going to change the result. People are so reluctant because they see elections as a waste of time.

Ernest: From what you have just said, do you think the opposition parties are still going to take part in the elections?

Informant 10: Look, I would want to feel there is always that odd chance.

Ernest: Any strategies from the side of the opposition parties?
Informant 10: As I know, the opposition parties are trying to come up with a single candidate to stand against Paul Biya and also clamouring for an independent electoral commission, I mean independent not the type of commission made up of Biya's henchmen. I would also like to tell you that recently one of the opposition leaders was put under house arrest simply because he suggested the whole electoral process be computerised.

Ernest: Coming back to South Africa, we hear everyday that foreigners are victims of xenophobia and racism. Have you been a victim?
Informant 10: Of course! You meet these things everyday in South Africa and we have actually acclimatized to the society. I wouldn't really want to narrate particular incidents because they are actually countless. Moreover, I really want to forget some of these things because South Africans are more accommodating today and the level of xenophobia and racism has also reduced. So it is better we try to forget the past and concentrate on the future, which I think, looks promising.

Ernest: Have you ever had any confrontations with the South African police?
Informant 10: A few times and we have to understand that these things happen everywhere around the world. But as I said earlier, we have to learn to live with these things and again with the right papers, you hardly have problems with the police.

Ernest: How do you feel when you go through these challenges?
Informant 10: I feel dehumanised but again things are much better than when we just arrived.

Ernest: Have you been locked up at the deportation camp or police cell?
Informant 10: Never! I have been very fortunate in that domain.

Ernest: What are some of the places that you can easily meet Cameroonians in Johannesburg today?
Informant 10: When I arrived Johannesburg, there were a lot of Cameroonians in Yeoville mostly Francophone. I later found out there were also Cameroonians in Hillbrow, Braamfontein and Berea.

Ernest: Why these places?
Informant 10: There are several reasons why we cluster. Firstly, we try to create a sense of community and to share experiences, and also for information seek. We feel more comfortable with our brothers than with South Africans. Also because these places are business area and the rent are also cheap. From a negative angle, the police and criminals easily identify us. For example, there are incessant police raids in these places partly because they are inhabited mostly by foreigners. You know the stereotypes that foreigners are criminals and drug kingpins.

Ernest: In general, Johannesburg seven years ago and Johannesburg today what can you say?
Informant 10: I am sure I have mentioned to you that there have been significant changes. In fact, the negative perceptions about asylum seekers are gradually fading and I think one of the people we all owe this to, is President Mbeki. You know, he has this vision for Africa that can only make Africa a unified continent. His ideologies about the African continent have even reached the grassroots and most South Africans today now see themselves as Africans and embracing Africans from other parts of Africa. Remember, I told you during our last discussion that when we first entered Johannesburg, we were seen as criminals and 'the wretched of the earth' but

today we are seen more like friends who can contribute to the growth of South Africa. Crime has also reduced remarkably and today most of us now feel at home in Johannesburg.

Ernest: I know you are no more an asylum seeker but during your four years as an asylum seeker, how would you describe the entire experiences?
Informant 10: It was really a traumatising experience and every time I had to go Home Affairs, I fell sick. In fact, whenever I went to the place, it was a totally different environment. You need to actually live the experience to know where I am coming from. While at Home Affairs, you really fell degenerated. You actually lose your pride and dignity and often we were treated like people who do not deserve to be human beings. In short, it was not something I would chat about with a smile on my face. Today, I am a different person and would like to forget those trying days.

Ernest: Where to from here, any hopes of one day returning home?
Informant 10: Of course! Cameroon is home after all and as I told you earlier, it is our final resting-place.

Ernest: Even if things do not change?
Informant 10: I will not dream of going back if the situation stays the same because you don't know what could happen to you. I will only go back if there is a change of regime.

Ernest: Finally, what does the future look like for Cameroonian asylum seekers in Johannesburg?
Informant 10: I think the future looks bright. It is going to take a while and if we are patient enough we will definitely reap the fruits. Seven years ago, things were not like today, there have been fruitful changes and I think more goods things are still to come. We just need to be a little patient.

Ernest: My sincere thanks for making time to share your experiences with me.
Cask 10: Good luck with your research and I would like to read the complete document.

Ernest: Of course you will!

Informant 13

Interview 1

Ernest: Good evening and thanks for accepting to take part in this research project. Today's interview is the first of three interviews I will conduct you. It will focus on your personal background, political history, the process of fleeing, and your refugee history. You are free to refrain from answering any question(s) you are uncomfortable with..

Informant 13: It is my pleasure to share some of my South African experiences with you.

Ernest: How is your wife and kids?
Informant 13: I can't complain! They are doing fine.

Ernest: I would like us to start with some basic information about yourself if that is ok with you.
Informant 13: No problem!

Ernest: How old are you?
Informant 13: 32 years old!

Ernest: Which part of Cameroon do you come from?
Informant 13: I am from the North west province.

Ernest: When did you leave Cameroon?
Informant 13: I left Cameroon in 1997 and currently seeking asylum in South Africa.

Ernest: Of course! What can you tell me about this part of Cameroon?
Informant 13: In terms of? I want specifications (laughs)

Ernest: Politically, socially or economically if you want
Informant 13: It is often been said that there is a divide between the English part of Cameroon and the French speaking part. The English part of Cameroon believe that from a purely political, linguistic point of view, they have not been given equal rights like their French speaking brothers. Em, I do hold those views, but I do not fully agree with the process being followed by the structures within this part of Cameroon to restore these rights. To be more precise about the Northwest province, it is a province full of cultural diversity and if my figures are right, there are 30 different tribal groups in this province, though simple but with different settings like Bali, Pinyin, Mankon, you know the rest. As a province, these tribal grouping come across with a set of traditions.

Ernest: I would like to take you back to where you said you do not agree with the strategies used by the structures to tackle the Anglophone problem. Why?
Informant 13: Well, I did say I do not agree fully but not that I don't agree at all. The extent to which I agree relates to, first of all, an acknowledgement that there is a problem. There is a problem in the sense that the Anglophones do not only feel marginalised, they are actually marginalised. You would want to look at the statistics in terms of government appointments. These statistics over-shadow what is actually on the ground. If you want to look at what you consider pure marginalisation, you have to look not only at the demographics of the country, you have to go back down to the community; level of infrastructural development in West Cameroon (Anglophone Cameroon) vis-à-vis the other part of Cameroon. You find out that on the overall, as a typical African developing country, the infrastructure is weak. But you clearly see that there is a clear margin between the Anglophone and the Francophone part of Cameroon. It is far worst in

the Northwest in terms of educational assistance. Personally, I was very actively involved when I was the Student Union President at the University of Buea, where we continued to argue that they were six universities in the country, the University of Buea then with about 6000students at the time of my leadership while a university like Soa, a typical Francophone university had just half the population. The budget allocation for Soa was twice more than that of the University of Buea. Clearly in my view, this was an Anglophone university and should be the funded by Anglophone, while francophone universities were funded by the central government. These things continued to reinforce my belief that clearly in terms of resources the Anglophones have been purely marginalised. To that extent, I acknowledge that there are problems that need to be resolved. That is the extent to which I agree but in terms of the process being followed, I do not agree. Remember I said, I do not fully agree. We have certain structures over time; there has been an evolution of structures such as AAC, CAM, TAC and AYC, to which I was a member- All these strong groupings, some having political undertones or connotations and some not quite. This is some kind of acknowledging that there are problems in Anglophone Cameroon. But from a structural perspective, how these problems are coordinated, you have the umbrella front SCNC. I would say yes, when they started, they had clear cut approaches, questioning the rationale of the 1972 Foumban Accord, therefore re-centralising a system that was once a federal system taking back the rights of the Anglophones. Instead of saying hang on, can we go back to the drawing board, you will find out that having pursued this approach for a while and the central government not listening, they turned to a zero option approach, that fine you don't want the federation; we better go back to secession. We want to just cut off. You would argue it is because of the intransigence of the central government, with regards to not wanting to take into consideration the plights of the Anglophone that has forced them to move to the "zero option" (secession).

Ernest: What then is your point of view?
Informant 13: Purely I am a nationalist and believe that the country is one. I believe the problem can still be resolved through a constitutional setting. So I don't fully agree in terms of let's break the country into two. That is why I say, I acknowledge the problems but do not agree with the approaches in terms of finding lasting solutions to the problems.

Ernest: what then are your recommendations?
Informant 13: Em, You may call it unfortunate but I will call it fortunate in terms of the fact that my recommendations can only go as far as my activism within the Social Democratic Front (SDF). I am part of this front and even led this front, because I have come to accept the solution or what you would want to call recommendation in terms of resolving the issue. I have come to accept and I find it the most plausible one. Basically, as the SDF, we are saying that we are living in a period whereby the world is building bridges rather than cutting them, in times where larger entities are making a major difference. That is why around the world you have heard of the East/West Germany, they thought of coming together. We are living in times where only by integration…. You have the global force called the global village by the same people. Nations and societies are building around their economies, which I think is the strength of any society, how well you organize yourself such that people can fend for themselves. So we cannot afford, when the global village, global economies are coming together, to separate. Now we have looked through carefully, purely from a perspective of saying what can work best for us, what is the point to have political freedom or emancipation where at the end of the day we cannot put bread and butter on our tables. For me, I have taken a more economic standpoint.-How to take the masses out of their current doldrums. Clearly secession is not the way to go. Clearly integration has been chosen over disintegration. I will therefore subscribe to the view that the nation rallies behind a single opposition candidate and try to get the junta out of the system and put in place proper constitutional mechanisms that would decentralise and give back the federal system. It can be two or ten states but a federal government in terms of power to the people where the people would

have the means to make their own decisions, use resources to develop their own society. These are my recommendations.

Ernest: Let's not get too deep into the Anglophone problem. Coming back to South Africa, how long have you been in South Africa?
Informant 13: Four years.

Ernest: Have you been granted refugee status?
Informant 13: I haven't! At the beginning of this interview, I did mention that I have been following this process for more than four years. I did apply for refugee status four years ago and I was put on the asylum seeker list and therefore given the asylum seeker status. It is disturbing and quite frustrating to me, to note that despite the strength of my case, it is well-documented, I am quite surprise that it has taken four years to really make a decision. However, I note that there have been explanations in terms of capacity problems that the Home Affairs is facing. They don't have resources to staff this department and therefore you have one person taking care of 1000files. So, it doesn't seem like a good number of files could be processed within a short period of time. However, I still believe the length of time taken, I don't want to sound subjective because I don't know the standard, but in my opinion four years is just materially too long. I do believe the issue of refugees is on the international agenda and organisations such as Red Cross Societies that are quite interested and formed to handle refugee crises. If it is just a question of resource constraints and capacity to staff those offices, they will make sure Home Affairs expedites this process. I just feel they haven't done enough.

Ernest: But have you really tried to find out? What you have just explained to me sounds more like your opinion.
Informant 13: Yes! I have but I am afraid I am in no position to give certain details. I have been able to access the system up to the point where I know who is handling my file and what is happening to my file. But I am not in a position to give details on that.

Ernest: Going back to Cameroon, can you explain why you left Cameroon to seek asylum in South Africa?
Informant 13: It is a very long account but I will try and make it short and simple. I think the genesis; let me not call it the genesis because I don't believe that was where it actually began. Prior to my being elected the Student Union President, sometime in 1994, I have been actively involved in a lot of issues that had clear-cut political implications in Cameroon. I had been actively involved in the Cameroon Anglophone Movement; I led the final struggle that led to the installation of the GCE board in Cameroon. I led that final demonstrations, everything that took place during that time was purely under my control, I did all the coordination from Yaounde to Buea to Bamenda and it was well known that I was behind everything. So, at the point even before I came to the university, I was already noted for such activities, but because it wasn't really an issue at that time, it did not hamper my entry into the university. But having been admitted and subsequently elected as the Student Union President, due to my beliefs, I had certain beliefs, aspects that I admired very much in terms of how to take the university as an institution ahead. We were basically the second batch of the university and it was already besieged with a lot of problems. Resource constraints, capacity issue and things like that. I took a view that students are the main stakeholders of the university and therefore any critical decisions have to be taken with the approval and with the consensus of the students. Now, shortly after I was elected, I took a view that the students have to actively participate in the process of taking their own academic issues forward. But I quickly noticed that it wasn't the interest of the administration. The university administration was interested in imposing decisions on students and telling them what needed to happen without their regards. So at that point my interest was why things were

happening in this way. So I had to go down to the facts and I was shocked to find out that the institution in a bid to retain their political ambitions, it turned to the students for resources instead of the government. So I thought we all agreed that the university needed resources because we needed labs, libraries but we disagreed fundamentally as to the tactics of getting these facilities. My approach was, let's coordinate a central proposal, well documented, and forward it to the Prime Minister's office and push on the basis that other universities already had far much than what the University of Buea was having with far less number of students. And the university approach was to say either the students or damn it. Now, they were these issues of significant disagreements and I was hoping that the disagreement would be looked upon from a more constructive light because it was a question of ideology. Suddenly, it was taken to mean locking the leadership's agenda as to what they wanted to achieve for the university. And of course, blocking … I believed then and still believe that it was the right thing to do. You know the issues that they wanted to implement could not go through as a result, I fell out with the administration. In fact, the working relation with the union and the university administration basically became sour and my leadership called to question in terms of "you don't know where we want to take this university to, so you better shut up". My whole executive was with me and the entire student body but the university administration on the other side. Because of the rife, the university felt that the only way to go a head with their … I would call it destructionist agenda was a take away the students leadership unconstitutionally.

Ernest: What happened then?
Informant 13: Before I get to that, I would like to point out that the leadership was elected by the students and not appointed by the university administration, so they had no mandate in my view to actually take the student leadership out of the system. But at that point it was the answer to its problem. As if that was not enough sufficient, after I was dismissed with my Secretary General, there were still some efforts made outside the university to bar me from access to education, to what I would consider basic human rights issues, such as access to education, security, they were all these attempts to arrest me. I was been linked up to any simple thing…. I remember sometime in June 1996, there was an attempted secession, a Gendarme post was attacked and the next day I heard over the radio that I was involved in the whole process. Everything that happened around the country, I was linked to or blamed for, as I was the master minder and sooner, I heard I was needed in Yaounde, that I was sponsoring these things, inciting violence etc but I was never part of the process. At some stage, I felt my life was no longer secure in the country. My access to space and rights were no longer secured. It was a question of whether I could be arbitrarily arrested and detained or just killed. I knew it was one of the two options. I just thought this was the time for me to leave the country. On that basis, I feared for my life and actually left the country.

Ernest: In general, what were the conditions in Cameroon at that time and what are the conditions today that force Cameroonians to leave the country?
Informant 13: If you say in general, I have been trying to explain the situation at the political front, where l tried to say thing haven't changed basically. If things have changed, it could only have been for the worst.

Ernest: You seem to present a very scathing picture of the ruling party. How does this government operate?
Informant 13: You are dealing with a regime, which has been there over two decades now. We are talking about a regime, which use any means to consolidate and stay in power. I think the issue of human rights abuse is not something new for the regime. It has been documented in the US department reports, almost on an annual basis, during the last ten years, Cameroon has ranked first and third at different intervals in terms of the worst cases of human rights abuse. You are

dealing with a regime, which has been ranked by Transparency International in terms of corruption, three times first, in a row. You are dealing with a regime which is so nepotic, specific people are given special rights- a regime with no place for the youths; a regime where people in their sixties and seventies are still called back to come and run ministries and state organs of control, as if there was nobody within the youth community capable to handle these posts. It seems to me you are more interested in the way these things are described but I am touched by the facts. I continue to lack the words that I can use to describe the regime. I have it in one word or two; I would say it is a very brutal regime. Go back to Webster dictionary and look up for the meaning of brutal I mean anything that is clearly not acceptable in terms of our modern world of today, which is what encapsulates the regime. It is politically, economically, and academically brutal from any humanitarian perspective, brutal at all level. It is a regime that is more interested in staying in power and consolidates its powers.

Ernest: How did you manage to escape?
Informant 13: Look, for security reasons, I would normally not reveal this information, . However, because of the strict guarantees that you have given me in terms of the way you are going to publish the results of this research, I would briefly explain the process in terms of saying, I made a number of attempts during a period of nine months to the leave the country. At one stage I had a visa to Canada, I had an admission into the University of Toronto and at the airport, I was arrested and my passport seized and the only explanation was that my name was in the 'black book', a book containing names of people who are not supposed to leave the country. Somehow because I had meditated prior to attempting to leave the country, somehow everything was taken from me and I was asked to go back. I just think that everything held constant and typical of how the regime operates, I would have been arrested and detained. Somehow, someone appeared and said "you have taken everything from the young man, can you allow him to go back" and I quickly left the airport. Another instant, I actually got a tourist visa, tried this time through the Yaounde airport but it was a similar situation. So, I continued to be surprise why in these instants they did not try to abduct me to somewhere. In my view, at that time, I had consulted a lot of human right lawyers and the government was fully aware that these guys were working with lawyers. It seems they were trying to find out ways of building a case against us. Whilst they had not managed to do that, the only thing was to try and keep me within the confines of the country while they try and get a case that they were going to use against the lawyers. Remember when I was arrested, the lawyers had to come and bail me out. They were not sure whether the lawyers were there at the airport. Now, that was the second attempt to leave the country; The Canadian trip I could not make, my passport seized with a visa inside, the German attempt was also the same and so were many others. At that point, I knew that I was not ever going to free myself from that bondage. It was certainly not through the airports in Cameroon. It was clear in my mind that I was being monitored at the airports. I thought the only way out was to leave through the frontiers. I basically had to get another passport with a false identity and managed to leave the country through the Central African borders. I left basically using road transport and I managed to smuggle myself out of the country and found myself in Bangui after two weeks, proceeded using a boat to Kinshasa in former Zaire, Lubumbashi and then Lusaka.

Ernest: How was the experience from the time you left Cameroon through Bangui, through Kinshasa to Lusaka?
Informant 13: I think those were the most difficult days of my life, full of uncertainties, assurances that I would not live by the time I finish the process. It was always clear in my mind that I would die in the process. Why? I will give you a first example, when I had cross the frontiers from Cameroon to the Central Africa Republic, there was a point where we all had to go and show our passports and get some exit stamps and stuff like that. I was actually standing in a queue with about six people ahead of me getting their stamps. Now, when I was approaching the

third person, I was interested in seeing the procedure followed, before your passport was stamp. I clearly saw a list that the immigration authorities and the police had. They were checking each passport against the list before stamping the passport and I saw my name on that list. It was clear that my name had been circulated alongside other names, eleven in number. When I saw that it was clearly my name, I thought it would be the same at all the frontiers.

Ernest: What made you to think that it was wise to check the procedure before hand?
Informant 13: (Laughs) you know Ernest as a wanted person your brain must think fast and you must be smart.

Ernest: And then?
Informant 13: When I saw my name on the list, I thought if these guys had my name, they would definitely have my photo and I shouldn't be happy that I am carrying a passport with false names. I thought I shouldn't really go there and I had to arrange with someone who had to go there and present my passport. Fortunately, they looked at the name and the list but didn't look at the guy's face. He came back and for that, I paid him fifty dollars. It was quite a lot of money. Subsequently, I had to go cross the border and there was a huge checkpoint a head. I knew they would get everybody and inspect them. So, the only thing I had to do was to pay the luggage guys to pack me up as luggage amongst other luggage. I knew the customs were interested in the luggage while the police in the people. Again I knew that as usual, these guys would bride the custom officers not to thoroughly check their luggage. That was my worst experience.

Ernest: And how did you cross the checkpoint?
Informant 13: I thought I was going to die because it was so hot and I think I have never been in a hotter environment. It was like in the desert and I was tied up there and for that, I paid the guys 100dollars. Clearly, they knew at that stage that I was a wanted guy and their fee had to increase and because I was desperate I had to pay the money. We passed the check point, the customs actually climbed on the luggage and I was actually under. They did their job and we went for another ten kilometres and the driver stopped and I was removed from the luggage. At that moment, I thought if they had driven for another 15minutes, I think would have died because I could not breathe anymore and floor of van was very hot and I thought I was roasting. I could not shout because I would betray myself to the police. Before the driver stopped, I was ready to give myself in at the next checkpoint if he didn't stop. It took us two day to reach Bangui and fortunately, I met some Cameroonians, who recognised me but I never knew them and they bought cokes and fanta and gave them to me. In Bangui, I went for medical check up and was given some ointments to rub on my stomach.

Ernest: From Bangui, what was your next stop?
Informant 13: It took me two weeks to settle in Bangui and look for means to proceed. From Bangui, we took a boat to Kinshasa and at that time, there was actually a war in Congo-Brazzaville. The rebel group under Sassou Nguesso wanted to take over the government. We were arrested and trained to fight for the rebels for a fee of 2000CFA (R20) per day. We were trained for three weeks and the Zairian government understood that its citizens were in the group of the trainees. The then president of Zaire (DRC), Laurent Kabela issued an ultimatum stating that his government did not want to be involved in the war. So, we all had to impersonate as Zairians and we were released, taken straight to Kinshasa. In Kinshasa, some of the guys were arrested because they did not have proper documentations.

Ernest: So you survived this time around?
Informant 13: I would have been arrested as well but actually I smuggled my self into the country, stayed for two day, proceeded with my trip. It was still a harsh trip because it took us about one month because of the bad roads. We used all forms of transports from land rovers, trucks to wheelbarrow between Ilebo, Kananga and Likasi.

Ernest: So you used virtually all means of transport except the plane?
Informant 13: That's right and that was the nature of transport between these places. It took me one month to get to Lubumbashi. I must say I found Zaire very friendly except for a few hostile soldiers who would want to squeeze money from you but in all, it was an enjoyable trip. In Lubumbashi, I applied for a visa to proceed to Zambia to seek political asylum.

Ernest: Why Zambia?
Informant 13: I knew all the French-speaking countries had very strong diplomatic relations with Cameroon and I would be arrested and deported to Cameroon if I asked for asylum. In Zaire, my application for a visa was rejected on ground that I had to seek asylum first in Zaire but I had a feeling that if I did so, something would go wrong.

Ernest: At that stage what did you do?
Informant 13: I rejected the Zaire option and went to the UN offices and said look "these are my fears and please process them the way you want, otherwise I strongly believe that I deserve political asylum" I was interviewed and granted asylum. Two weeks later, I applied to leave the country and I was issued a "laissez passer" which I used to proceed to Zambia. I arrived Kasumbalesa, the border town between Zaire and Zambia, I was arrested and when I showed the UN laissez passer", they said" we cannot recognize this because the country is under a state of emergency" that was sometime in 1997. They had been an attempted coup against President Chiluba's government and they suspected mercenaries were in the country. I was locked up at the Chiwempela prison and an immigration officer instructed to verify my document with the UN. Somehow, he did not do it and I was simply dumped in jail. I was in jail for four months without any judgement or access to lawyers.

Ernest: What were the conditions in jail?
Informant 13: They were very deplorable. The cell were congested and I had to be put in the same cell with sick prisoners; some with TB. I complained bitterly and I was told, "you are a foreigner and you are the ones organising the coup d'etat in this country, so better stay there" I don't know how to start describing my four months in prison. I spent Xmas 1997 in that place and I knew I was going to die because the cell was infested with worms, prisoners coughing out worms and at least one prisoner died each day. There were fighting between Zairian soldiers who had escape war during the Mobutu regime and were arrested by the Zambian government because they were foreigners.

Ernest: What happened then?
Informant 13: After, someone was stabbed and killed, the situation became that of national urgency. The Zambian President created a Commission to investigate why the guys were imprisoned. It was through that process and during the work of the commission that I was lucky to be released. In fact because the members were unable to communicate with these guys because they were french speaking, the commission requested an interpreter, so I was identified by one of the soldiers, whom I had once interpreted a previous fighting case and I was brought into the commission as an interpreter, and worked with them for two weeks. At the end, the commissioner was interested in me "gentleman, you sound very intelligent, what are you doing in our prison, you are a Cameroonian, you appear upright and constructive, "what are you doing

behind bars?" I explain my situation to him, how I was taken for a mercenary and how my documents were rejected. It became a major issue for the commission "you can't just arrest somebody and put in jail like that. No! No! No! Gentleman where are your papers?" The immigration officer in-charged was asked to verify the document and if it was authentic, I should be released immediately. The following day, I was called and released.

Ernest: From jail where to?
Informant 13: I was hoping they would take me to Lusaka, where I could formally lodge an application for asylum but instead they took me to a refugee camp. There again, life was terrible and I spent three months there almost one year since I left Cameroon. Terrible things happened in the camp. Refugees were raped by the official, resulting in pregnancies. Finally, I mobilised some guys and put pressure on the authority and we were released and brought to Lusaka. That was the end of the ordeal in terms of bad experiences. In Lusaka, it was more a question of settling down and taking my life further. I started struggling to get my feet on the ground, tried to find a job and to get the necessary permit. Then, I met my wife during the process and that was the end of the ordeal and the bad experiences now memories.

Ernest: It is getting late and I would like us to stop here and continue during our next discussion. Thanks again for your time.
Informant 13: Thanks also! It was my pleasure.

Interview 2

Ernest: We are into phase two but before I get into this phase, I would like to know what happened in Zambia and how you finally got to South Africa. Then, we will talk about your early days in Johannesburg, survival strategies, your refugee history and how you dealt with xenophobia during those early days. Again you are free to decline answering any question(s) you are uncomfortable with.
Informant 13: I settled down a bit and Lusaka, I got a job, then I met my wife and we immediately got married, thereafter I had my first child. After working in Lusaka for some months, I decided to move to South Africa to look for greener pasture and my wife had to join after I have settled.

Ernest: Why South Africa?
Informant 13: I had been following the political process in South Africa very keenly and some how, I believed it was the best option for me. For example, the country looked stable after its first democratic elections and also the economics was doing fine.

Ernest: How were your early days in Johannesburg?
Informant 13: When I arrived, I couldn't get a job immediately so, I had to survive on financial assistance from friends. After a couple of months, my wife joined me with our young baby and life was even tougher. Then, I knew I had to struggle hard because I had a wife and kid to look after.

Ernest: What was your impression of Johannesburg?
Informant 13: After struggling to get a job for quite some time, I began to think Johannesburg was not the city of gold after all. Moreover, the place was so risky and crime was all over the place and the people were horrible and were not interested in opening their doors to foreigners.

Ernest: What was the reception you received from Cameroonians already in Johannesburg?

Informant 13: I was actually surprised to see a lot of Cameroonians here in Johannesburg, most of them my former university mates. They were so happy to see me again after my disappearance. In fact they treated me very nicely and we spent time talking about life at the university.

Ernest: Did you have any specific plans before leaving Lusaka for Johannesburg?
Informant 13: No, I just wanted a place more secure and where I could earn a better living. Besides I knew Johannesburg would not be a serious challenge to me because before arriving Lusaka I went through terrible experiences and I knew Johannesburg could never be anything compared with what I had already experienced and came out alive.

Ernest: How would describe the Johannesburg you met when you just arrived?
Informant 13: It was to me terrible, worse than I had expected. It was indeed a very risky place as people were being robbed every second of the day and some even murdered. I remembered I had to fight several times with thieves, when they tried to rob me and of course xenophobia and racism were very much present.

Ernest: Weren't you scared to fight with thieves?
Informant 13: Some times, you really do not have a choice. I remember the last time I fought with them was when these guys tried to rob my wife and I and all we had left was R300, 00. I couldn't allow them to do that because it would have meant no food for my family for a couple of days, so I had to fight.

Ernest: When was your first visit to Home Affairs' department?
Informant 13: Immediately, I entered Johannesburg, I went and declared myself at the Department of Home Affairs as a political refugee

Ernest: Can you describe the experience on that particular day?
Informant 13: It was one of my nightmares and I really do not want to go there.

Ernest: Can you tell me about the services?
Informant 13: Very terrible!

Ernest: Any changes today?
Informant 13: To me, it is still the same old place. Nothing has changed!

Interview 3

Ernest: We are in the third and final phase of our discussion and thanks for your time. During this interview, we will talk about your life after several years in exile, conditions in Cameroon again, your future plans, the overall process of seeking asylum, the importance of Cameroonian associations, music as well as Cameroonian food.
Informant 13: Ok!

Ernest: After living in Johannesburg for a couple of years today, how is your life?
Informant 13: I think my life today is better than it was few years back. I have got a good job and driving a good car. I am also living in own my house with my family. I think I have achieved a lot and I want to believe the days of suffering are over

Ernest: Would you say your life is better than what it was in Lusaka?
Informant 13: I certainly do think it is better

Ernest: You left Cameroon in 1997, don't you miss your family in Cameroon?
Informant 13: Certainly I do, but there is nothing I can do about because I can never try to set foot in Cameroon since I am still a wanted person. So, all I can do is phone or email and send photo of my family to them.

Ernest: What other ways do Cameroonians use to connect with Cameroon from Johannesburg?
Informant 13: We keep in touch with political events in Cameroon, we listen to Cameroon music and we sometime organise Cameroonian parties, where we only dance to music from home. Moreover, we have several associations and cultural groupings, where we come together to celebrate our cultures and keep them alive. During this meeting, we eat traditional Cameroonian food and dance to our traditional music. In fact it really feels good.

Ernest: Do both Anglophones and Francophones take part in these activities?
Informant 13: I am talking specifically about Anglophones, but I know Francophones have their own cultural groupings. The only Cameroonian association could not exist for long because of differences between Anglophones and Francophones.

Ernest: Are you telling me there is no strong relation between Anglophones and Francophones?
Informant 13: They have always had their differences, but as I told you during our first interview, I really do not believe in a divided Cameroon. Remember I told you I am nationalist, who believes in integration rather than separation. I think the Anglophones have a legitimate case, but I do not agree with their secessionist agenda.

Ernest: You talked of xenophobia and racism, have you been a victim?
Informant 13: I think the question would sound more appropriate if it was how many times have you been a victim? I have had several experiences, in fact I have been denied jobs simply because I am foreigner, harassed and insulted because I am not South African. It is actually something you can never run away from as long as you live in Johannesburg. But I think I am used to it.

Ernest: Any police harassment?
Cask 13: Yap!

Ernest: Have ever you been arrested, locked up in any police cell or deportation camp?
Informant 13: I was arrested once with my family but I will prefer we do not talk about it.

Ernest: Looking at Johannesburg today, are there any changes?
Informant 13: I think a lot has changed in Johannesburg and it is fast becoming a place to live in today. I believe crime and violence have reduced as well as xenophobia and racism. South Africans today are more receptive and welcoming and there are more opportunities for foreigners to exploit. In fact, I work for one of South Africa's multinational company.

Ernest: What does the future look like?
Informant 13: Brighter with even more opportunities.

Ernest: Generally how is the experience of seeking asylum in South Africa?
Informant 13: It is a very dehumanising and often traumatic experience. You are often treated like an animal and suffer rejection, alienation and exclusion. I think it is not an experience to be happy to talk about.

Ernest: Looking at Cameroon, any changes?
Informant 13: The conditions in Cameroon are only getting worse and the president seems not to care. Cameroonians are languishing in poverty, corruption is hiking, and political persecutions and human rights abuse everywhere. In fact, the incumbent has actually cut Cameroon away from international politics. Pity the opposition is losing its grip, since it can not come up with a single candidate to challenge the incumbent during the October 2004 presidential elections. I reckon the incumbent is still going to win and I really do not know what is going to happen when he takes up his next seven-year term.

Ernest: I hope Cameroon is not going to plunge into a bloody civil war?
Informant 13: Who knows!

Ernest: Any final comments?
Informant 13: Not really, I think I have told you everything you need to know about me.

Ernest: On that note, I would like to thank you immensely for your time and invaluable contributions.
Informant 13: My pleasure!

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Interviews Dates

All the interviews used in this thesis were conducted in Johannesburg by the researcher.

Informant 1 (2003): *Interview 1, 2 March 2003; Interview 2, 3 July 2003; Interview 3, 1 October, 2003.*

Informant 2 (2003): *Interview 1, 3 March 2003; Interview 2, 5 July 2003; Interview 3, 3 October, 2003.*

Informant 3 (2003): *Interview 1, 4 March 2003; Interview 2, 6 July 2003; Interview 3, 6 October, 2003.*

Informant 4 (2003): *Interview 1, 6 March 2003; Interview 2, 7 July 2003; Interview 3, 10 October, 2003.*

Informant 5 (2003): *Interview 1, 10 March 2003; Interview 2, 9 July 2003; Interview 3, 12 October, 2003.*

Informant 6 (2003): *Interview 1, 12 March 2003; Interview 2, 11 July 2003; Interview 3, 14 October, 2003.*

Informant 7 (2003): *Interview 1, 15 March 2003; Interview 2, 12 July 2003; Interview 3, 15 October, 2003.*

Informant 8 (2003*): Interview 1, 20 March 2003; Interview 2, 15 July 2003; Interview 3, 20 October, 2003.*

Informant 9 (2003): *Interview 1, 24 March 2003; Interview 2, 16 July 2003; Interview 3, 23 October, 2003.*

Informant 10 (2003): *Interview 1, 27 March 2003; Interview 2, 16 July 2003; Interview 3, 26 October, 2003.*

Informant 11 (2003): *Interview 1, 3 April 2003; Interview 2, 20 July 2003; Interview 3, 2 November 2003.*

Informant 12 (2003): *Interview 1, 3 April 2003; Interview 2, 21 July 2003; Interview 3, 2 November 2003.*

Informant 13 (2003): *Interview 1, 5 April 2003; Interview 2, 21 July 2003; Interview 3, 6 November 2003.*

Informant 14 (2003*): Interview 1, 10 April 2003; Interview 2, 22 July 2003; Interview 3, 11 November 2003.*

Informant 15 (2003): *Interview 1, 15 April 2003; Interview 2, 23 July 2003; Interview 3, 14 November 2003.*

Informant 16 (2003*): Interview 1, 15 April 2003; Interview 2, 23 July 2003; Interview 3, 16 November 2003.*

Informant 17: (2003*): Interview 1, 18 April 2003; Interview 2, 25 July 2003; Interview 3, 16 November 2003.*

Informant 18: (2003): *Interview 1, 19 April 2003; Interview 2, 26 July 2003; Interview 3, 17 November 2003.*

Informant 19: (2003): *Interview 1, 20 April 2003; Interview 2, 25 July 2003; Interview 3, 24 November 2003.*

Informant 20: (2003*): Interview 1, 26 April 2003; Interview 2, 27 July 2003; Interview 3, 25 November 2003.*