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Telling Y(our) Story

Precarity of Trust in Contemporary Refugee Life Narratives

Emerging from a growing number of conflicts and catastrophes in the twenty-first century, contemporary refugee life narratives are marked by a multiple erosion of trust, and yet are intimately engaged in rebuilding trust. In the face of material and legal constraints for refugees to speak, their life stories are frequently facilitated by new networks of solidarity to protest hostile immigration regimes, involving activists, lawyers, go-between writers, and translators, among others. These networks offer a safe space for testimony and work towards restoring trust while mutually inscribing biographers and biographical subjects in a relational act of telling y(our) story: The refugee's tale – 'your' story – encapsulates the collaborative and trust-building tale of its making – 'our' story. Outlining a narratology of trust in refugee life-writing, the paper assesses the intricate and innovative dynamics of 'hospitable form' in acts of fictional accommodation, in multiperspectival emic and etic narratives, and in the interplay of auto- and heterobiographical storytelling.

1. Introduction: Precarity of Trust and Narrative Trust-Building in Recent Refugee Stories

The centrality of trust, or lack thereof, to debates over refugee migration has been a staple of research, well before more recent trajectories of trust studies in a twenty-first-century world of proliferating political, economic, and environmental crises. As the editors of the 1996 collection *Mistrusting Refugees* observe: "From its inception the experience of a refugee puts trust on trial. The refugee mistrusts and is mistrusted." (Daniel / Knudsen 1996, 1) It is, above all, refugees who experience a loss of trust, in both their old and new homes. Having to flee shatters their sense of security and institutional trust, and before long their situation is aggravated by high stakes for interpersonal trust in the people they must rely on to survive. According to a recent UNHCR report, "[t]rust is still one of the biggest barriers for communicating with refugees" (Katta 2019), a view shared by many scholars of migration (Putnam 2007; Essex et al. 2021). In host countries, public sentiment tends to be divided. While there is often right-wing distrust in the state's alleged failure to protect borders, a more liberal mistrust exists of a perceived lack of humanitarian effort, resulting in campaigns for refugee relief and in the setting up of charitable refugee trusts.

Attending to these overall circumstances of precarious trust, I argue that recent refugee life narratives have mobilized invariably complex and resilient forms of storytelling in turn. These have been little studied so far, but offer im-

portant insights into the cultural work of narrative praxis and form, as well as into the (re-)making of trust in situations of crisis and conflict.[1] In comparison with the long-standing diagnosis of a "collapse of culturally constituted trust" in contexts of refugee migration (Daniel / Knudsen 1996, 1), much less has been said about the specific cultural and narrative forms developed to contain that collapse. In the face of ever-hardening material and legal constraints for migrants (who are often scandalized as 'illegal') and refugees to speak, their life stories have increasingly been facilitated by new networks of solidarity, involving activists and writers, among others. These networks can be seen to offer a safe space for testimony and work towards restoring trust. Capitalizing on what I will delineate as 'hospitable form,' they inscribe biographers and biographical subjects in a mutual act of telling y(our) story,[2] germane to the nature of trust and trust-building as "fundamentally relational" (Essex et al. 2021, 544). Rather than constituting solipsistic accounts, recent refugee life narratives rely on and fore-ground concrete encounters, imaginative and actual. In the words of the Lebanese writer Nada Awar Jarrar: "If you can relate to one person, you can start understanding the bigger picture […]. The 'other' becomes a human being, not just a stranger." (Qtd. in East 2016, n.p.) Such relational engagement is a crucial precondition for trust, and it is central to Jarrar's 2016 novel *Unsafe Haven*, one of the first fictional reworkings of refugee migration in the wake of the Syrian Civil War.

From this opening snapshot on refugee life-writing and trust, I want to elaborate two further theses for my discussion to follow. First, on the level of form, I suggest that recent works probe new relational constellations of telling: mediated by go-between writers, activists, lawyers, or translators, many stories are effectively co-narrated. The multi-volume *Refugee Tales* (Herd / Pincus 2021), a collection of modern stories modelled on Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, is a case in point. Almost all of these modern tales have been told to a go-between writer as interlocutor and retold by them in turn, as well as published under their name, for fear of reprisal confronting the detained migrants and refugees that the stories are by. In effect, such texts carry the dual voice of biographer and biographical subject while having to navigate the complicated challenge of representing refugees in a way that will not compound their lack of agency and access to self-representation. This basic narrative set-up characterizes a broad range of non-fictional to fictional or fictionalized refugee life-writing, as I will demonstrate in more detail below with respect to new Anglophone works from the Arab world and the Asia Pacific.

Second, I suggest that this narrative constellation engenders a complex negotiation of trust at the level of content or semanticization of form. It is a complex negotiation indeed, probing new forms of life-writing and narrative in an attempt to rebuild trust. This is a special potential of what I call hospitable form, the sense in which life-writing itself offers a place of refuge. At a time of hostile immigration regimes, narrative encounters between biographers and biographical subjects, such as in *Refugee Tales*, perform important cultural work for trust, offering protection for undocumented or stateless migrants while making their

stories heard. Simultaneously, this process involves an acute sense of ambivalence, which is equally captured by the idea of hospitable form, as a matter of the inbuilt semantic slippage between hospitality and hostility (Derrida 2000). Whereas refugee life-writing goes a long way towards rebuilding trust, it continues to reference the hostile conditions of precarious trust which shape its narrative form to begin with.

2. Hospitable Form: Towards a Narratology of Trust in Refugee Life-Writing

There is no shortage of studies on life narrative in migrant, refugee, or postcolonial writing more broadly. In fact, as part of a general boom of literary practice as well as academic inquiry over the past couple of decades (cf. Schwalm 2014), life-writing has been shown to provide an important platform for postcolonial critique and empowerment. Not only has it served to revise white, Western, and male-dominated concepts of self and self-narration, dating from the Enlightenment origins of autobiography (Moore-Gilbert 2009). As Gillian Whitlock demonstrates in her *Postcolonial Life Narratives: Testimonial Transactions* (2015), tracing a long history from the 18th-century slave narrative to 21st-century refugee stories, these texts have also put forward significant causes of social justice and human rights. Not least, projects of oral history and biographical self-expression, as frequently practiced in transit camps, fulfil an important recuperative function: "'Individualities' constructed in oral autobiographies" provide "the foundation on which a meaningful world may be rebuilt" for refugees (Daniel / Knudsen 1996, 5).

While studies of the social and political dimensions of life-writing are legion, specifically narratological perspectives on the forms of storytelling involved and their implications for trust have yet to be elaborated. In exploring the interplay between narrative form and trust, I want to assemble three major building blocks of a narratology of trust in refugee life-writing. I propose to use the concept of hospitable form to cover a range of narrative procedures relating to categories of story, discourse, and autobiographical mediation specifically.[3] Throughout, I will foreground trust as a social relation between biographer and biographical subject that comes to be inscribed in intricate constellations of telling. Aspects of what might be called narrative trust, such as highlighted by theories of narrative (un)reliability, will take second place. That said, narrative trust as a matter of the relation between text and reader is certainly key to actualizing and extending further new relations of trust as staged through hospitable form.

As for the first category of hospitable form – story –, Agnes Woolley has made a strong case for the fictional imagination. As argued in her *Contemporary Asylum Narratives: Representing Refugees in the Twenty-First Century* (2014), fiction opens up "a space that is more hospitable than the restrictive frameworks into which they [refugees] are coerced in dominant discourses" (7). While the "asy-

lum adjudication process" demands "a credible account of the claimant's reasons for flight before it confers legitimacy" based on narrow legal definitions (9), the cultural representations Woolley deals with offer a broader range of refugee experience. Where in a real-life setting claimants must adhere to strict narrative protocols of "the asylum seeker's narrative self-representation" (9), fiction does indeed allow for exploring more encompassing stories and a greater diversity of asylum narratives.

Fictional or fictionalized narratives often involve writers other than refugees, as in Jarrar's *Unsafe Haven* (2016). Thus, they may fall short of direct self-expression, resonating with a long-standing debate over representation as dating back to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). In it, Spivak rejects even well-meaning representations for the fact that they appropriate and continue to silence marginalized groups who are not in a position to speak or be heard, a problem that clearly resembles conditions of forced migration.[4] Addressing these concerns, Woolley (2014, 19) picks up on Spivak's "distinctions between aesthetic and political representation." According to Woolley, the texts she discusses take a nuanced approach and "consider how it is possible to 'speak for' a politically disenfranchised group by 're-presenting' them within literary and aesthetic forms" (19). Aware of the pitfalls of representation, Woolley sees her case studies "not only experimenting with different aesthetic frames, but also foregrounding the ways in which refugees and asylum seekers are subjected to representational processes" (20). Ultimately, she argues, "narrative fiction contests the oppressive operation of the asylum adjudication system by disrupting the idea of the refugee as a positive object of knowledge" (20). This nuanced and self-conscious approach is a key element of the "hospitable ethical dimensions of the imaginative act" (23), which, it has to be said, remain qualified and underwritten by the overall hostility of contemporary migration systems. However, in a situation where refugees are bound by a limited story formula, fiction may indeed provide a sense of understanding and narrative possibility that is lacking in the asylum process. In terms of trust, I define the potential of fictional narrative as 'mending mistrust.'[5] As a relational encounter, fiction may retrieve the "bigger picture," in Nada Awar Jarrar's words (qtd. in East 2016, n.p.), and help both refugees and hosts to contain a lack of trust.

Given the presence of storytellers other than refugees, the discourse of refugee life-writing – my second category of hospitable form – tends to be marked by a high degree of multiperspectivity. Taking up the distinction between 'emic' (internal) and 'etic' (external) perspectives, long established in cultural anthropology, Gillian Whitlock (2021) distinguishes between "emic" and "etic narratives" to differentiate what she collectively terms "asylum papers." This use metaphorically extends the term – asylum papers – beyond the legal paperwork and the claimant's account of their reasons to flee as an emic narrative, ultimately to also include etic narratives such as the fictional representations explored by Woolley. Together, emic and etic narratives stand to make a far stronger and more humane case for asylum than the asylum papers of 'due process.'[6] Moreover, Whitlock's pluralization of emic and etic narratives is an important re-

minder that self-expression is in fact not limited to the asylum process and the legalistic account that refugees are bound by. It does include well-known practices of testimony, performance, and other creative projects of refugee support, such as the long-running stage production *Asylum Monologues* (Linden 2006). Taken together, emic and etic narratives go far beyond the restricted scope of asylum papers submitted through the legal process. As for trust, I build on the (visual) metaphor of perspectivity to locate a potential for 'envisioning new relations of trust' in the multifaceted account of emic and etic narratives.

As for my third category of hospitable form, refugee life-writing is characterized by an invariably complex structure of autobiographical mediation and its use, among others, to construct a common narrative for refugees and hosts through transcultural intertextuality (Rupp 2020). Among other texts, a broad range of classics has been taken up to express and interpret contemporary refugee experience, as well as to reconstruct relational mnemohistories that connect, or indeed have long connected refugees, hosts, and places of refuge. Such histories go a long way towards explaining and promoting understanding for the presence and legitimate claims of refugees – whether it be via Mediterranean and Middle-Eastern relations, as in rewritings of Chaucer in *Refugee Tales* and in reimaginations of the *Odyssey* (Kingsley 2016), or via (post-)colonial relations as in refractions of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Books*, such as in the oral history collection *Voices from the 'Jungle.' Stories from the Calais Refugee Camp* (Godin et al. 2017) or in the Calais-based play *The Jungle* (Robertson / Murphy 2018).[7] Many of these works are informed by autobiographical accounts and first-hand refugee experience, but they also tend to involve storytellers other than refugees as well as fictionalizing elements, not unlike the fictional asylum narratives studied by Woolley. More often than not, the structure of autobiographical mediation in these works contains a 'heterobiographical' component.

Heterobiography is a term first used by Philippe Lejeune (1989, 185) to denote what he describes as "autobiograph[ies] of those who do not write." In life-writing scholarship, the concept of heterobiography has been adopted to scrutinize fictional autobiographies of historical subjects, as in Lucia Boldrini's *Autobiographies of Others: Historical Subjects and Literary Fiction* (2012). As Boldrini notes, related "use of the concept has been given currency especially in ethnographic writing" (2012, 9–10). Either way, heterobiographical narratives emerge as "collaborative autobiographies in which the writer ('*redacteur*') speaks of another in the first person, as if that other were speaking" (9), effectively constituting a "collaboration between the two 'I's involved" (10). This form of narrative collaboration is structurally similar, I contend, to a whole range of recent projects where go-between writers have given voice to or have imaginatively extended stories otherwise unheard, often to protect migrants and refugees who are not able to appear as authors for legal reasons. Alternatively, this might be compared to forms of "as-told-to life-writing" (Lindemann 2018). As the term suggests, as-told-to life-writing is a practice based on interviews or conversations, with significant implications for narrative care around the vulnerable subjects and lives involved (Couser 2004).

Both heterobiography and as-told-to life-writing clearly overlap with the multiperspectival nature of asylum papers, and add to envisioning new relations of trust through hospitable form. However, rather than a cumulative multiperspectivity of emic and etic narratives, as in Whitlock's encompassing metaphoricization of asylum papers, these collaborative forms denote a mutual inscription of two 'I's or two perspectives in one and the same text. Heterobiography thus merits a separate category of hospitable form. As for trust, it not only envisions new relations of trust, cumulatively and metaphorically, but symbolically enacts these relations of communal through interpersonal trust in concrete encounters between biographers and biographical subjects.

Segueing to my case studies, I will now test these narratological building blocks in relation to examples from two bodies of new Anglophone refugee life-writing. Both case studies, I argue, show the complex workings of hospitable form, which registers hostile conditions of migration and mistrust while seeking to rebuild trust in turn. In this regard, the three categories of hospitable form and trust may serve not only to differentiate, but also to periodize recent trends of refugee life-writing.

3. New Arab Anglophone Writing: Hostile Environments, Fictional Accommodation and Heterobiography

Fictional accommodation has probably been the earliest tendency of hospitable form. Woolley (2014) traces the development of asylum narratives to the Balkan Wars in Europe and the late twentieth century more generally, which did see new forms of precarious migration, including from the Arab world and elsewhere. Simultaneously, 9/11 and the so-called 'war on terror' severely impacted migrants and refugees, leading to practices of indefinite detention and to an overall state of "precarious life," in Judith Butler's terms (2004, 50–100). This situation witnessed the emergence of a wide range of fictional asylum narratives, such as Nada Awar Jarrar's debut novel *Somewhere, Home* (2004), or *Minaret* (2005) by the Sudanese writer Leila Aboulela, which I want to focus on here.

Minaret centres around the female protagonist Nawja, who has had to flee her home country Sudan after a political coup that saw part of her family killed. The novel's opening, introducing Nawja's first-person account, powerfully invokes the coercive nature of refugee migration and asylum: "I've come down in the world. I've slid to a place where the ceiling is low and there isn't much room to move." (Aboulela 2005, 1) In exile, Nawja is afraid and mistrustful to reveal her full name, for fear of being found out as a political enemy by other Sudanese migrants: "My heart starts to pound as it always does when there is the threat that someone will know who I am, who I was, what I've become. How many times have I lied and said I am Eritrean or Somali?" (71) Simultaneously, she is subjected to post-9/11 Islamophobia and acutely aware of who she can trust or not, as is illustrated by this next passage: "At the next bus stop, three young men

stagger in. I know just by glancing at them that they are not reliable, they are not harmless." (80) In this situation, she finds refuge in her Muslim faith as a mobile identity and sense of belonging:

> I start to recite *Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of Daybreak*. I recite it again and again. As they walk past to the back of the bus, one of them looks at me and says something to the others. I look away out of the window. I tell myself that Allah will protect me so that even if they hurt me, I won't feel it too badly; it will be a blunted blow, a numbed blow. (80)

However, it is not only her faith that provides refuge and trust. Aboulela's novel, too, offers a sense of accommodation by relating a fuller, more human, and rounded life-story than the one Nawja feels safe enough to reveal herself. Aboulela's imaginative encounter thus works towards mending what mistrust of refugees might exist on the part of readers, while the fact of novels like hers being published might also go some way towards mending mistrust on the part of refugees who share in the experience of her fictive protagonist. Either way, the trust-building potential of hospitable form is not down to presenting a true or authentic story, in this case, but owes to the broad imaginative range of experiences, emotions, and thoughts available to fictive characters and stories. Fictional representations like Aboulela's novel or Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore* (2003), which features an African military general turned civil war refugee, adrift in the north of England, often portray traumatized and morally conflicted characters. They tend to complicate narrative trust and withhold easy empathy (Craps 2008). Paradoxically, it is precisely in offering such multi-faceted imaginative encounters that the trust-building potential of narrative fictions might be located.

Apart from fictional, etic narratives, the new millennium has also seen a growing prominence of emic narratives by refugees themselves. Stage productions like *The Jungle* (Robertson / Murphy 2018) and *Asylum Monologues* (Linden 2006) highlight the central role of theatrical performance and oral testimony (Skeiker 2020). Yet, it is often actors performing and mediating such testimony, which underlines the precarious legal position for migrants and asylum seekers to speak. Emic narratives are always liable to take on a collaborative character, influenced by a mutual investment on the part of emic storytellers and etic go-betweens.

This extent of collaborative narration has become increasingly pronounced amidst the post-2015 so-called 'refugee crisis' in Europe and the evermore hostile immigration regimes both predating and following it. If Europe was "on the verge of turning its territory into a *Festung*" already in the 1990s (Jayawardena 1996, viii), this fortress Europe has become a dire reality in times of twenty-first-century "immigration shock" (Lauter 2009). In Britain, creating a hostile environment for migrants and refugees from the Arab world and elsewhere has been a central policy since the 2010s. Anti-immigrant feeling was also a major motive for the Brexit referendum in 2016, which, as is well known, was fought on a campaign to take back control of national borders. If any more proof was needed of the extent to which politicians are prepared to take hostile environment policies, it is the more recent scheme to deport 'illegal' migrants arriving on British

shores to Rwanda. More and more, this process of shoring up national borders has given prominence to heterobiography and as-told-to life-writing, which can be seen to both register and critique these developments.

The multi-volume project *Refugee Tales* is a case in point, making its nature of as-told-to life-writing explicit in the full title and subtitle: *Refugee Tales IV, as Told to Bidisha, Robert Macfarlane, Diana Nayeri, Philippe Sands, and Many More* (Herd / Pincus 2021). This latest volume is no exception in other respects, either, devoting like the previous ones a lot of room to Arab Anglophone refugee stories from Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East.

The majority of stories in all four volumes of *Refugee Tales* to date are co-produced, entrusted to go-between writers who are named as authors to protect the identity of the refugee protagonists.[8] This constellation is both a consequence of, and a protest against, hostile environments. While the writers might be seen to unduly speak for refugees, I suggest that the mutual inscription and trust-building of two 'I's represents a major intervention of hospitable form in the face of dehumanizing practices and discourses. The opening of Robert Macfarlane's "The Hotelier's Tale" (2021) is illustrative of this inscription and presence of two 'I's, as well as of the way in which many of the tales collected are attuned to "a Spivakian awareness of the problems of representation" (Woolley 2014, 20). This is how "The Hotelier's Tale" begins:

> *How best can I help tell your story?*
> I don't know which part of my story is very interesting for you?
> *All of it.* (Macfarlane 2021, 4; italics in original)

Even Macfarlane's tale (with his voice given in italics) cannot redeem the fact that the hotelier does not appear as the sole author and teller of the story, or that the hotelier's proper name is not given to protect his identity. However, reproducing in dialogue form the conversation on which the tale is based does manage to include the hotelier's perspective and voice. The exchange also shows a concern to retell the story on the hotelier's terms when Macfarlane insists that "[a]ll of it" matters. While all storytelling will ultimately involve selecting and ordering events, and bear the imprint of narratorial points of view, Macfarlane takes pains to delimit his own role and serve as a go-between or co-narrator of the hotelier's story at the most. This constellation, in this story just as in *Refugee Tales* at large, might be interpreted as an attempt to speak together with refugees, rather than speaking for refugees. By relating the dialogical exchange between the hotelier's and his own 'I,' Macfarlane not only carefully navigates the pitfalls of representation, but also demonstrates how trust can be (re-)made in concrete storytelling encounters between biographers and biographical subjects. Together with mobilizing a common narrative through transcultural intertextuality, the heterobiographical accounts resulting do go some way towards not only narrating, but eventually enacting new relations of trust.[9]

4. New Anglophones in the Asia Pacific: Indefinite Detention, We-Narrative and Collaborative Resistance

If narrative structures implicitly reference hostile conditions of immigration and critique precarious trust, life-writing from the Asia Pacific might at first sight point to a less coercive regime. Contrary to *Refugee Tales*, two recent memoirs from the Asia Pacific feature their biographical subjects' names on the cover: Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains. Writing from Manus Prison* (2018) and Jaivet Ealom's *Escape from Manus. The Untold True Story* (2021). However, the – quite dramatic – stories of how these books came about suggest anything but a straightforward autobiographical account. Ealom, a Rohingya refugee from Myanmar, published his story only after having spectacularly escaped from Manus Island, one of Australia's infamous offshore processing centres in Papua New Guinea, to Canada. When his book was released, Boochani, a Kurdish refugee from Iran, was still incarcerated on Manus Island. Hailed by the international press as "Australia's most important writer" (qtd. in Boochani 2018, jacket) while never having set foot in the country, Boochani won numerous prizes for his book, among them Australia's *National Biography Award* in 2019.[10]

Many editions of *No Friend but the Mountains* feature Boochani's name and picture on the cover, and the bulk of the text contains his first-person account of his time as a detainee on Manus. Yet the text's complicated genesis and Boochani's ongoing detention at the time of publication in 2018 again highlight the workings of hospitable form and narrative trust-building. Like much other refugee life-writing, *No Friend but the Mountains* relied on a network of collaborators and trustees, importantly involving digital lifelines of support, textual mediation, and translation.

It is worth recalling the story of Boochani's writing of the book in more detail, to throw into relief its critical and empowering reworking of autobiographical structures. Boochani famously reported on the conditions of Manus via text messages sent from a secret phone he kept hidden in the island's detention centre. He had fled Iran after questions began to be asked about his work as a journalist, and first took up again his journalism after finding his escape to Australia stopped short in Manus. However, many of the news and opinion articles that he telegraphed from Manus appeared under a pseudonym. It was only after having built a large enough network of support that he felt comfortable to publish his writing under his proper name. Moreover, he felt that it required a more imaginative, literary style of writing to capture and critique what he saw as a system of structural repression and even torture in Manus. His publicity as author and autobiographical subject in *No Friend but the Mountains* thus constitutes a major shift, enabled by a network of trust – a group of collaborators, editors, and translators who all contributed to shaping the text. Boochani's collaborative network also includes the Iranian Dutch filmmaker Arash Kamali Sarvestani, with whom he co-directed *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* (2017), a filmic portrait of the conditions on Manus Island.

In *No Friend but the Mountains*, the extent of heterobiographical affordance becomes especially visible in the book's composition. Boochani's individual messages were first compiled by a friend, who then passed them on to a translator, Omid Tofighian.[11] Tofighian not only translated Boochani's account from Farsi into English, he also played a role in devising the book's chapter structure and in fleshing out literary allusions and style. Not least, Tofighian's voice is present through a set of paratexts that reveal his editorial and intellectual input. Many editions of the book closely juxtapose Boochani's and Tofighian's names on the cover, which may be a coincidence, but is certainly symbolic of their shared probing of hospitable form.

In his translator's note "No Friend but the Mountains: Translator's Reflections" (Boochani 2018, 359–374) and his "Translator's Tale: A Window to the Mountains" (375–398), Tofighian gives a detailed account of the multilateral debates and conversations from which the book emerged. Among other aspects, these companion pieces emphasize the constitutive role of translation in carrying across the book's character as a literary work, dense with Kurdish cultural references and informed by Boochani's reading of other prison literature while recording his own story. Similarly, Tofighian pays homage to and explicitly names a large group of activists and academics for helping Boochani's cause, a process on which Tofighian himself also brings to bear his expertise as an assistant professor of philosophy in Cairo. Ostensibly, more than raising awareness to individual lives and suffering, Boochani and Tofighian target the structural violence of what they theorize as "The Kyriarchical System" (311). This is a scheme of systematic oppression, which they designate as such by drawing on the feminist scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's concept of 'kyriarchy' to characterize a connected set of social systems of domination (Poletti 2020). One major effect of this scheme in Manus is closely related to trust: "This is the objective of the prison's Kyriarchical System, to drive prisoners to extreme distrust so that they become lonelier and more isolated, until the prison's Kyriarchical Logic triumphs with their collapse and demise." (Boochani 2018, 126) It is not least against this collapse of trust that Boochani's and Tofighian's collaborative resistance constitutes itself.

As for the major trajectories of refugee life-writing, hospitable form, and trust-building introduced earlier, *No Friend but the Mountains* probes all three of the categories involved. First, it clearly offers a sense of fictional accommodation and mending mistrust, extending not only to Boochani, but also to other characters in the book. While insisting that "[t]his book has been written to give a truthful account of the experience of Australia's Manus Island Regional Offshore Processing Centre" (xv), Boochani fictionalizes his fellow detainees in Manus for reasons of narrative care around the lives and stories entrusted to him, as is pointed out in a disclaimer:

> There are some limits as to what can be revealed, particularly about fellow detainees. Changing details such as hair colour, eye colour, age, nationality, name … we have not considered this sufficient to ensure that those who are vulnerable within the system have been adequately obscured. No detainee or refugee in this book is based on a specific individual, however detailed their stories. They are not

individuals who are disguised. Their features are not facts. Their identities are completely manufactured. They are composite characters: a collage drawn from various events, multiple anecdotes, and they are often inspirited by the logic of allegory, not reportage." (xv)

Literary modes and artistic licence – such as collage, allegory, and fictionalization – thus allow Boochani to tell an altogether more encompassing account than his journalism ("reportage", xv) would permit. By defamiliarizing and turning his fellow inmates into "composite characters" (xv) to protect their identity, Boochani also imaginatively extends his own story to construct a relational autobiography.

If the book's main text is multi-faceted enough, it becomes even more so through its range of paratexts. Boochani's emic narrative is framed by several etic narratives, such as the companion pieces referred to. Together, these narratives emphasize multiperspectivity and envision new relations of trust and solidarity as a second major characteristic of current refugee stories. Eventually, gesturing towards the third characteristic of heterobiography, Boochani's and Tofighian's narratives are not simply juxtaposed. In multiple places, such as in a range of explanatory footnotes (or in the disclaimer cited above), their two 'I's literally merge into a we-narrative, highlighting the book's collaborative nature and enacting or putting into practice new relations of trust. The following footnote, which explains the choice of a certain character name, is a case in point:

We selected this name in honour of the Iranian actress Golshifteh Farahani, who now lives in exile. Behrouz respects her a great deal; for him, Golshifteh is a model artist and a profound individual. She is known for her courage in breaking traditional norms, and Behrouz considers her revolutionary. (Boochani 2018, 47n3)

The footnote prominently interweaves Tofighian's voice and characterizes the writing as a collaborative process. It almost seems as if Tofighian's 'I,' as part of the footnote's we-narrative, is made even more prominent through references to Boochani in the third person later in the passage ("Behrouz respects her a great deal," "Behrouz considers her revolutionary"). Other footnotes, which foreground editorial comments on Tofighian's part, contribute to raising his profile and share in the collaborative work.[12]

Altogether, this refiguration of life-writing launches a complex creative effort of hospitable form and trust-building, in inverse measure of the restrictive system and precarity of trust to which it responds. It thus offers an important cultural component to navigate and resist what Boochani and Tofighian identify as systemic oppression and violence in present-day migration regimes.

5. Conclusion: Refugee Life-Writing as a Laboratory and Narrative Practice of Trust

As I hope to have shown, both my case studies map new ground for life-writing to contain mistrust and the dehumanization of migrants and refugees in times of precarious life. Both demonstrate the role of narrative and the agency of vul-

nerable subjects in devising cultural resources for convivial hope and relational trust. At best, the collapse of trust that refugee migration is often characterized by turns into the making or remaking of new trust. This is an important insight regarding the received wisdom of trust studies that crises, catastrophes, and conflicts are marked by an erosion or absence of trust. They certainly are, but, just as well, they offer an opportunity to forge new relations of trust that, paradoxically, are born from crisis and conflict. The cultural work of narrative and new ventures of life-writing as in the refugee stories discussed are key here, serving as a laboratory for the social arena at large.

This trust-building work, as I have argued, is a complex one, unfolding in relational acts of entrusting and telling y(our) story. Refugee migration confronts both refugees and hosts with a situation "wherein the need to create meaning and recover the cultural process become acute for refugee and 'stranger' (whether a caseworker or the native of the new country)" (Daniel / Knudsen 1996, 5). As the editors of *Mistrusting Refugees* stress, this "meaning-making process is not one that can be brought about by the refugee or 'stranger' in isolation; it is the product of collaboration between the two" (5). If they go on to ask, "how is this collaborative venture of making meaning and enhancing the cultural process to be facilitated" (5), my close readings and consideration of a narratology of trust in recent refugee life-writing provide some pertinent answers and ample illustration. As I have tried to demonstrate, the manifold workings of hospitable form engage closely in the reciprocal "formulation and reformulation of culture in this context" (5) – whether it be through imaginative encounters in non-coercive fictional representations, through the encompassing multiperspectivity of emic and etic narratives, or through the degree of narrative care guiding heterobiographical accounts. Like postcolonial life narratives at large, the refugee stories discussed have to navigate complicated problems of representation and appropriation. To a considerable extent, they remain compromised by the severe legal and material constraints of hostile immigration regimes. Rather than reproducing these constraints uncritically and speaking for refugees, however, my readings of hospitable form suggest that recent experiments in life-writing practice new ways of engaging and speaking together with refugees, of mending mistrust, and of envisioning new relations of trust.

Surely no effort of life-writing and hospitable form can ultimately compensate for the lack of rights and representation on the ground. In fact, with the slippage between hospitality and hostility in mind, it bears repeating that while refugee life narratives afford hospitality and trust, they continue to register their opposites at the same time. It is vitally important to acknowledge the cultural work of hospitable form and narrative trust-building in tackling the hostile structures it seeks to overcome. And yet, no matter how complex and innovative their narrative structures, current refugee stories may ultimately gesture towards a possibility and wider scope of unmediated self-representation – as part of the hope and trust inspired by telling y(our) story.

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[1] For recent perspectives on the cultural work of narrative and form, see Alber / Olson (2018) and Kovach et al. (2021). As for trust studies, cf. the research initiative "ConTrust: Trust in Conflict – Political Life under Conditions of Uncertainty" (see https://contrust.uni-frankfurt.de) on recent endeavours which have revised the sequentiality of crises and conflicts as a loss of trust, shifting attention to processes of trust-building in and through conflict.

[2] In a wide range of social, medical, and political contexts, different spellings exist to convey the relationality and mutual empowerment of individual and collective or communal stories, including 'y/our story,' 'y-our story,' 'y(our) story,' and '(y)our story.' I use 'y(our) story' to foreground the refugee's (agency in telling their) story while acknowledging the extent of collaborative narration involved – the story's frequent co-narration on the part of activists, go-between writers, and translators. By visually rendering this collaborative dimension in brackets, I position the refugee's story as referencing but ultimately taking precedence over the tale of its telling, encapsulated in 'y(our) story.'

[3] For a related but broader discussion of fictional and literary hospitality, see Woolley (2014) and Whitlock (2015, 195–197).

[4] On the politics of representation in refugee literature, see also Gallien (2018).

[5] In identifying this potential as 'mending mistrust,' I stick with the terminology of *Mistrusting Refugees* (Daniel / Knudsen 1996). As a modality of unmaking but also remaking trust, I distinguish mistrust from the outright, deeply ingrained, and seemingly irreversible distrust often characterizing right-wing sentiment towards the state and refugees in host populations. On the relationship between trust, mistrust, distrust, or 'antitrust,' see also Baier (1986), Hawley (2012), and Essex et al. (2021).

[6] See Gebauer and Sommer (2023), who introduce a similar distinction of (emic) 'stories of migration' and (etic) 'narratives on migration' to map the empowering narrative dynamics of what they call a 'level telling field.'

[7] Cf. Erll (2018) on the concept of 'relational mnemohistory,' with a particular view to actualizations of Homer and the *Odyssey*.

[8] The four volumes of *Refugee Tales* to date were published by the same editors in 2016, 2018, 2019, and 2021, respectively. The third and fourth volumes contain a number of stories where refugees serve as sole authors. However, only initials are given to identify these accounts, not their full author names.

[9] This performative dimension of narrative practice and communal trust-building is further underlined by the fact that the project regularly includes readings and walks with refugees (see https://www.refugeetales.org).

[10] Boochani arrived in Manus in 2013 and stayed in the Australian-run detention centre until its closure in 2017. He remained on the island until the end of 2019 when he went to New Zealand on a short-term visa. He was granted refugee status there in 2020 and has lived in New Zealand since. Australia's practice of offshore processing is ongoing.

[11] See in more detail the passage entitled "Collaboration and consultation" in Tofighian's "Translator's Tale: A Window to the Mountains" (Boochani 2018, 379–386).

[12] For a broader discussion of the forms and functions of we-narratives in contemporary fiction, see Bekhta (2020).