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'Welcome to my waiting room! Please, take a seat!': On future imaginaries being shattered and postponed

Christine Moderbacher

Introduction: "Where could I be, I have nowhere to go!"

"Are we done now, Christine?" 55-year-old Hamuda asked me during our last recording session at the end of my field research in Brussels. Back at my University desk in Aberdeen, Scotland, I was struggling to find an answer to his question. But the more I listened to his stories, the more I felt our work really could come to closure, at least for a while, not only because Hamuda and I had more or less gone through most of the stories he wanted to share, but also because Hamuda's life seemed to be "moving on" rather well. He had "better things to do now", as he told me once laughingly on the phone. A couple of months after we had finished our training, he had found a job in the countryside outside Brussels as a handyman at a large sports hotel, where he was able to continue using his carpentry skills, furnishing and maintaining the entire plot. He was busy not only with his new job but also with increasing orders from hotel guests who wanted small fitted furniture or repairs to their houses. He was proud that with his new salary he could fly twice a year back and forth to Tunisia, his birth country which he had left 20 years before. But while Hamuda's life seemed to follow the path he had imagined during the time we were crafting furniture together, it was Cise, one of the other carpentry apprentices, who left me wondering whether my fieldwork was really done.

I had met Hamuda and Cise – also in his mid-50s, and born in Guinea – in a carpentry training centre where I did a one-year apprenticeship in a life-long-

learning programme for my PhD thesis entitled "Crafting Lives in Brussels. Making and Mobility on the Margins" during the previous year.[1] While my original intention in starting the woodworking apprenticeship was to examine skills acquisition, my research moved further and further away from the physical act of craftwork towards the individual life stories of artisans, whose voices tend to be left out of academic writing. Drawing on the argument that the history of western education in modernity has narrowly focused on conceptual thinking that led to a marginalisation of the body (Marchand, 2008), research on craft often focuses on the merely sensorial act of craftwork. The "craft world" in these accounts seems, in Adamson's terms, like a "ghetto of technique" (Adamson, 2007, p. 2). With this focus, an implicit reversal of the Cartesian dualism takes place: the body, not the mind, is elevated to a status worthy of investigation (Odland Portisch, 2010, p. 63). As a consequence, however, the "maker" himself remains silent.[2] It is this description of the silent maker that enforced my decision to extend my research focus through the use of life storytelling. Through this, Cise and Hamuda's own words stood at the centre of an "ongoing collaboration between interviewer and interviewee, instead of working from the conventional formula in which an outside investigation initiates and controls the research" (Cruikshank, 1990, p. 1).[3] Working with this method sheds light on the dialogical nature of bringing out stories and provides an understanding of the contexts that have shaped and influenced their lives. It demanded personal involvement and a willingness to share one's life with others. Cise, Hamuda and I spent many hours together, talking, walking round town, sitting on benches, where we shared our lunch in silence, when we needed a break from the constant drone of the machines. But regardless of the deep relationship Hamuda, Cise and I had established through our many hours of storytelling, I did not hear much from Cise after the carpentry training ended and I returned to Aberdeen. My numerous efforts to reach him via Facebook or phone were unsuccessful. I learned from Hamuda that Cise had not yet found work. Only once, when back in Brussels a couple of months later, did I finally manage to get Cise on the phone. It was around lunchtime and I noticed immediately that I had awakened him. Happy to have at least reached him, I kept asking him questions: "[h]ow are you? It has been so long! How are you spending your time? Are you at home?" He was a bit stunned by my sudden reappearance in his life, as he told me later on, and answered a bit reluctantly:

Of course I'm at home. Where *would* I be, I have nowhere to go!

The following day I was on my way to see Cise. As I opened the grey door to his house in suburban Overijse, I had to make an effort not to show my concern for how he looked. He had lost a lot of weight, seemed small and frail, and moved around his kitchen even more slowly than usual. Almost two years after I had first entered his home, Cise did not greet me with "Welcome to Cise-City!" but sat down in his room, looked at me and said, "Welcome to my Waiting Room! Please take a seat!".[4]

In what follows I will argue that, rather than equipping Cise with tools to help him move on with his life, the carpentry training was generating exactly the opposite: after all the years of imagining something better, he found himself once again stuck in a "waiting room" that was, as Jovanovic (2015) has likewise observed in a similar context, crafted alongside the crafting of furniture. By exploring how patient waiting was taught and encouraged within a training course, I will shed light on how the course I participated in mirrored a larger structure of governmental strategies that manipulate people's time in order to make them "patients of the state" (Auyero, 2012). This, in turn, saps people's capacity to continue imagining a better life and makes them almost incapable of moving on at all. But the focus of this article is less to relate the particulars of Cise's situation to larger structures of migrant imaginaries and their destruction and more, to say it with Jackson (2008, p. 58), to carve out "the empirical details of a particular person at a particular moment in time". Though this emphasis, to refer to Jackson again, might at first seem to compromise the idea of knowledge contribution within anthropology, I believe that only by highlighting in detail what was and is at stake for Cise during and after his training can we gain a profound understand of the damaging consequences of future-imaginaries time and again being shattered through recurrent waiting periods.[5]

Moving forward and stepping back

But to come back to where we are, together with Cise in his "Waiting Room", let me briefly explain what I understand by the notion of "imaginaries" and how Cise's feeling of being stuck is closely linked to the constant destruction and delaying of precisely these imaginaries of a better future. As Salazar (2010; 2011; 2012) and Strauss (2006) have summarised, studying collective imaginaries as well as individual, personal imagination is not an easy endeavour, because these notions have become widely used as well as approached from a wide range of disciplines,

albeit rarely defined. For the purpose of this article, then, I must emphasise my interest in personal imaginaries that relate "to the ways in which people picture a world different from that which they actually experience" (Beidelman, 1986, p. 1). While imaginaries in the context of migration are often thought of and established "through the recognition of possibilities, of alternative constructions of future lives in other places" (Salazar, 2011, p. 676) this chapter is concerned with the consequences of shattered imaginaries of alternative constructions of future lives in the very same place one tries to build a life in. Of course, Cise was never immune to collective imaginaries of the "good life" linked to particular migration, movement and mobility in some African countries (Sanders, 2001).[6] But, as he told me himself, he neither wanted to leave his birthplace, Guinea, nor did he expect paradise when he came to Europe.[7] Cise was fleeing overnight due to political persecution. In addition, he was well aware of the difficulties that flight entails. He expected poverty, hardship and difficult working conditions. But what he did not expect were the many years of waiting, hoping, while all he felt was being stuck:

> Doing nothing, moving nowhere, is the most difficult thing, more difficult than leaving your family, more difficult than being alone. It's like observing your life oozing away from you while you are left behind.

In many other circumstances, Cise described the waiting periods – and along with them, the unrealised imaginaries of an alternative life – as among the most difficult things to endure. Cise's unfulfilled reveries of a better future had started long before I arrived at the carpentry centre with my anthropological questions and needs of analysis. It started when Cise came from Guinea to Belgium more than 20 years ago, remaining undocumented for 11 years, as he told me during one of our first storytelling sessions:

> Cise Ibrahima came to Europe like all the other immigrants. He goes somewhere to seek out a living. Somewhere, anywhere, really. He presents himself with a smile, because that is what people told him to do. He follows all the procedures and ends up living as an illegal alien, hidden, without rights, waiting for 11 years.

During the course of his life in Brussels, Cise waited many years for his right to remain legally in Belgium, waiting more than a decade for his sons to join him,

waiting for a chance to start working.[8] Of course, it was not all about waiting and hardship. There were better times, such as when he finally received Belgian citizenship, which provided him with a minimum state security income and thus the chance to rent his own place and once again to travel legally across borders. Times were better when three out of his six children joined him in Belgium and gave him busy years of bringing up the boys on his own, or when he got intermittent work, or training stints similar to, but shorter than, the one we conducted together. But time and again there were setbacks. Yearnings, as Jansen says (2014: 78), have histories and frustrations. And there were many that accumulated for Cise: when he realised that finding work was harder than he thought, since all the years of living as an undocumented migrant had left a "long gap" in his CV: when he had to give up his small business of selling African masks at markets because he did not sell enough to make it worthwhile, when his sons grew up, started their own lives and were busy with their own struggles, and when he noticed that all the little training stints he had done were not showing any results. In spite of this, Cise continued to strive, keeping up a certain mobility of spirit. Cise's ability to start again many times brought home to me Arendt's observation that human capacity for new beginnings is "the one miracle-working faculty of man" (Arendt, 1998, p. 246). One of these new beginnings in Cise's life was the carpentry training course where we met and got to know each other.

From excitement to disillusionment: The participation in carpentry training

Since its creation in the 1960s, the life-long learning centre where I did my fieldwork has organised activities to facilitate the reintegration of the city's marginalised population. It is one of the life-long-learning organisations, of the many operating in the Brussels region, that aim to support people with migrant backgrounds, because of the very high unemployment rate of people of non-European origin (Garnier & Piva, 2019).[9] This of course has to be placed in the context of Belgium's being one of the most multicultural countries of the European Union, as stated by the sociologist and political scientist Martiniello (2003: 225), who addresses some of the key issues in Belgian immigration and integration policies today. More than 30 per cent of the inhabitants of Brussels are of foreign nationality, which has led to a widespread form of integration policy which, as in the case of the training course I participated in, is involved

in granting or denying, amongst other things, economic rights. Regular participation was therefore required to continue receiving unemployment benefits. The activities offered are supported by the National Ministry of Culture as well as the European Union. To be able to participate in the training course a person must be registered at an employment agency, which often also refers participants for training. In Belgium's complex institutional landscape the regions are responsible for employment integration; in Brussels this takes place through "Actiris", in Wallonia through "Le Formen" and in Flanders through the "VDAB" (Garnier & Piva, 2019, p. 2). Because of the difficulties of recognising skills and qualifications obtained abroad, people who already have obtained degrees in their birth countries frequently find themselves doing another one in Brussels, as was the case for some of the 11 participants who started the carpentry course with me. Most of them did not want to appear with their real names in my work and remained "curiously distant" from "the anthropologist" interested in carpentry. As I mentioned before, I am interested in Cise's individual imaginaries rather than the collective ones of an entire group. But it should be mentioned that for most of the participants, the carpentry workshop initially triggered imaginaries for a better future in Europe's capital. This translates to the fact that the most important reason for taking the training course was not a passion for wood but to find decent work afterwards, allowing for the opportunity to move forward in life by moving socially upwards. "For imagination to become 'effective'", writes Salazar, "it has to relate closely to reality" (2011, p. 675). And indeed, in the case of Cise and many others, imaginaries of a better future did seem quite tangible at the beginning. Many daily discussions were linked to the economic advantages that the course might provide, such as being able to move out of Molenbeek and into better areas of this seemingly vast, bustling city, as I will describe in detail later on. Stories about former apprentices opening their own businesses circulated during the lunch breaks. Dreams and imaginaries of a good life ahead were not limited just to the near future in Brussels but also included retirement plans to rebuild places in the participants' home countries, such as Turkey or Morocco or, as in the case of Hamuda, Tunisia.

Initiating this new start was therefore linked to a general anticipation of finally "going somewhere", "doing things again". But then the days quickly became monotonous and increasingly and undifferentiatedly tiresome for everyone. Weekdays were structured by a rigid work schedule from 8.30 a.m. to 5 p.m. In retrospect, the many hours in the studio are blurred into memories of trying to cut along the thin pencilled lines the teacher had marked for us on wooden poles,

accompanied by the grating sound of handsaw teeth. Alongside the weariness that woodworking entails, doubts slowly surfaced about whether what we were learning was actually useful for our respectively desired futures. Uncertainty was mostly addressed around the fact that what we were making was old-fashioned, largely "out of style" and hand-made, not incorporating enough industrial means in our handcraft. Cise once whispered to me while looking at a piece of furniture he had been working on for about two weeks, "This doesn't fit in today's world, or in today's homes!" Tarek, another apprentice, simply blurted out in his own manner, "What a waste of time!"

More frequently, the teachers at the centre (which also offers training in other trades) would refer to their courses as occupational therapy rather than actual pathways to, or preparation for, working life. While at first the carpentry training led to "new stimuli for the imagination" (Salazar, 2011, p. 683), what increasingly surfaced in the lunchtime talks was the reluctance of participants to invest time and energy in activities that possibly did not serve their desired futures. Despite their occasional attempts to suggest new ideas for the outdated curriculum, our teacher – of migrant background himself – preferred producing mostly hand-made furniture as he had learnt to do it from his father in Morocco many decades ago. Caught in his own childhood nostalgia about doing carpentry in his birthplace, Tangier, his attitude mirrored a larger problem of prioritising hand-craft over industrial means in vocational training.

In her research on the attractions and limitations of NGO gender development approaches in Bosnia Herzegovina, Pupavac (2010, p. 490), for example, has identified a similar "return to an idealized past". The NGO approaches that were examined address "Western consumer society's post-romantic yearnings" (ibid.) rather than ordinary Bosnians' economic needs and aspirations. As a consequence, she points out, the participants are offered non-industrial means of creating a sustainable living. Although it was not "Western sponsorship" that failed to provide the necessary material/industrial means in the training course I participated in, but rather the teacher's own romantic yearning for an idealised past, the focus on hand-craft had similar consequences: with the course failing to answer the participants' expectations of moving forward in life, there increasingly surfaced a demotivation to create things other than what the teacher demanded of them. The increasing complaints during lunch breaks showed how failed expectations illustrate the contingent nature of imaginaries "as socially transmitted representational assemblages that interact with people's personal imaginings" (Salazar, 2012, p. 864). Slowly, expectations were disappointed not

only on an individual level but systematically after the training period, as we will see further on. Although some of the participants, like Cise, at first used their breaks to try out little designs that could render woodworking lucrative, after some months of training no one attempted any longer to do anything additional or outside the curriculum. Their successful completion of the course after all hinged on the teacher's judgment of their behaviour and work, and thus created a power relationship of dependency. The course organisers could not only provide the participants with a diploma for their future, but also decide whether or not to extend their state benefits in the immediate present. To receive such benefits of roughly 800 euros a month, their approval was necessary. Thus the relationship with the teacher became more and more ambivalent: while his knowledge and help were widely appreciated, some participants started to resent the power he held over them, which the trainees felt as an obstacle to their long-desired "mobility" in life. Mobility, as Marzloff (2005) has observed, refers to much more then sheer physical motion. Here I am referring to mobility as "a sense that one is 'going somewhere'", as Hage has pointed out, describing a "form of imaginary mobility" that every "viable life presupposes" (Hage, 2009, p. 97). Coined as "existential mobility", he refers to a kind of "imagined/felt movement" that describes the human need to feel that we are moving well in our lives (ibid, p. 98). These imaginaries of a better future to come that surfaced strongly during the start of the training period have to be read against the backdrop of a constant circulation of all kinds of imaginaries of mobility present in a city that has become a symbol of a modern metropolitan society. The EU quarter, a stepping-stone for international careers with direct public transport access to other European capitals, is one vivid example. A statistic showing Brussels to be currently the world's second most cosmopolitan city, after Dubai, has recently circulated on the Internet (Le Soir, 2016). Brussels, for some, is indeed an example of a place where transport systems "span the globe in a vast network of destination-to-destination connections" (Ingold, 2011, p. 152). In Europe's capital people come and go, make connections and travel in, out and "up" the social ladder. Hence imaginaries of a better future, of other possibilities ahead are closely linked to expectations of entering this stream of people constantly on the move towards a better life, living in better areas, circulating within the atmosphere of this seemingly vast, bustling city. But while the training at the beginning was perceived as "a stepping-stone" (Venkatesan, 2010, p. 171) for precisely this mobility to come, the motivation of the participants was more and more overtaken by an aversion to investing their time in something that seemed to have no profitable outcome. The

continual struggle to make ends meet did not make things any easier. Most of the participants were financially stressed throughout the second half of each month, as I could repeatedly observe. Packed lunches became increasingly smaller and less varied until the next benefit payment arrived.

Cise was one of the few participants who kept his motivation going over many months. His previous experiences of waiting seemed to serve him well. Although he did stop his attempts to engage in "out of curriculum efforts" during working hours, he tinkered at home and on weekends, made chessboards out of wooden plates and recycled bottle caps, dreamt about manufacturing and selling wooden penholders, frequently visited flea markets to "hunt for" cheap tools, and continued imagining possible futures. His imaginaries of a future life that would enable him to finally move forward were apparent in our talks. Opening a little carpentry studio with Hamuda and myself in Molenbeek was one of his preferred scenarios. But I increasingly noticed a certain disillusionment in Cise's attitude and wording. Two months before the end of our training period, the rusty tools that he had carefully collected ended up, soaked in turpentine boxes, at the back of his cupboard.

This transformation expressed itself most demonstratively one morning when Cise handed me my coffee upon arrival, as he usually did. When I asked him the daily "*Ça va?*" he answered, "*Ça doit aller!*" And repeated, when seeing my surprised face, "*Ça doit aller, non?*" Cise's answering my rather commonplace question of "How is it going?" with "It has to go" was precisely what he meant. As Hage has suggested, to equate wellbeing with a sense of mobility is not simply a metaphor but is present in everyday life and language (Hage, 2009, p. 98). Similar to Cise's expression, Hage points out that in Lebanese dialect one asks "*Keef el haal?*" which literally means "How is the state of your being?". And the common reply is "*Mehsheh'l haal*" which literally means "The state of my being is walking". In German, we ask "*Wie geht's?*" which literally means "How is it going?" "*Es geht gut!*" – "It is going well" is the usual answer. But Cise, I argue, slowly came to realise that, once again, he was not going anywhere. Constructing tenon and mortise joints – one of the main types needed for wood constructions – at first had raised his hopes for the long desired future movement, but Cise slowly became aware that "stuckedness" was circumvented only temporarily and had once again caught up with him. His turn of speech not only reflected an increasing feeling of going nowhere but also mirrored an attitude that developed through the training, of encouraging "a mode of restraint, self-control and self-government", as Hage has argued (2009, p. 102). Come what may, "it has

to go" anyway, as Cise pointed out. Marked by an uncertain present and an uncertain future, his words point to a larger phenomenon, namely that what we had learned alongside furniture making was patiently waiting to receive what is desperately needed to survive. What mattered was stoically accepting the apparent inevitability of hardship and its patient endurance. In the following section I will turn to exactly these processes that rob people of the capacity to continue imagining a better life through and while creating a "waiting room" that makes it impossible to move forward at all.

Crafting furniture and waiting rooms

Through informal discussions with people who work for similar organisations in the life-long-learning sector, I have come to know that what happened to the participants throughout the year is not at all unique to the course I attended. Participating in a wool-felting course for women in eastern Serbia, Jovanovic similarly argues that, rather than equipping the women with tools that help them to get back on the market more easily, it made older women even more dependent on the state (Jovanovic, 2015). Describing with her course organiser situations like the one I encountered, she points out that an unequal power relationship was maintained during the course. While the women were crafting felted objects, a "waiting room" was simultaneously crafted, and with it women's dependency (Ibid, 2015). Building on Auyero and Jovanovic, I argue that the production of the kind of waiting room that Cise found himself in is part of a larger "governmental technique" that makes people wait as "patients of the state" (Auyero, 2011; 2012). This does not mean that clients are passive, nor do I argue against state support of people in need. What I point out is what Auyero, following Bourdieu (1998), called the "doxa" of welfare: a "basic compliance with the fundamental presuppositions of welfare distribution: show patience, wait, and you might obtain benefits from the state" (Auyero, 2011, p. 23). Following this perspective, the example of the carpentry training course figures as only an extension of a larger system of power that does not end with training.

In the first months after the apprenticeship, Cise's life was largely structured by predetermined appointments in places that Jansen had so pointedly described as "zones of humiliating entrapment through documentary requirements" (Jansen, 2009, p. 815). The employment office that had sent him to the training centeer in the first place argued later that, given his age, a one-year course in carpentry

without any previous experience in woodwork was maybe not the best idea. "Come back next week, come back in a couple of weeks, we will call you when we find something for you" were the promises he heard. "And what am I supposed to do?", Cise said to me much later in his own waiting room. "After all, I need the money. All I can do is wait!"

By analysing the sociocultural dynamics of waiting, Auyero's research on poor people's waiting in a welfare office in Buenos Aires shows how his research participants experience their waiting as what he calls "the patient model":

> To be an actual or potential welfare recipient is to be subordinated to the will of others. This subordination is created and re-created through innumerable acts of waiting. [...] In those recurring encounters at the welfare office, poor people learn that, despite endless delays and random changes, they must comply with the requirements of agents and their machines. (Auyero, 2011, p. 24)

Nuijten, who offers an interesting addition to the topic by exploring the life world of the state agencies that deal with the demands, shows that Mexican bureaucracy functions as a "hope-generating machine" that continually projects the message that things are still possible. While constantly creating expectations, many promises are never fulfilled, and rather than following a certain coherence, the bureaucratic machine insists on generating hope, fear and expectations (Nuijten, 2003, p. 16). Following these perspectives, the carpentry training course and its follow-up taught Cise the opposite of engagement for a better future. Cise learned to comply with the requirements, obeying the teachers' demands during lessons, and following the interview schedule he received after training. One of the few things he actually was rewarded for, albeit with only a small amount of money to keep going, was patiently waiting. And like the good citizen he was, Cise kept waiting, regardless of the outcome. But the condition of ongoing crisis and precarity, marked by many moments of stuckedness, led to an extreme sense of immobility, of "pattering in place", as Jansen's research participants in the outskirts of Sarajevo would describe it (Jansen, 2014, p. 79).[10] If, to refer back to Arendt again, human capacity for new beginnings is indeed "the one miracle-working faculty of man" (Arendt, 1998, p. 246), the question needs to be raised about what happens when the new beginnings never lead to any long-term outcome? What happens when all the imaginary lives are constantly postponed in real life; and what is the breaking point for an individual beyond which

imaginaries are entirely abandoned? This is exactly what brings us back to where we left Cise at the beginning of this chapter: sitting in his waiting room, having nowhere to go, caught in a feeling of hopelessness, daunted, dependant on state benefits, without any concrete end in sight.

To be outside the world

The distress Cise experienced almost a year after the carpentry training had ended expressed itself strongly in the way he talked: slowly, often not finding the right words, telling me in random order about many different situations in which he was forced to wait without much outcome. While listening to him, I became convinced that he had not spoken to anybody for quite a while. In contradiction to what I have read in other accounts of waiting rooms in government institutions (Auyero, 2012; Jansen, 2009), waiting with and amongst others made Cise feel more alone in his struggle. "In many parts of the world", as Salazar has pointed out, "mobility is an important way of belonging to today's society" (2018, p. 154). Consequently, with the increasing feeling of "not belonging" to a world around him that he perceived as being in constant movement, Cise experienced a great loss of community feeling and a resulting loneliness that seemed to render this period especially difficult. Feeling disconnected, removed from time and place, it seemed as if Cise had crossed a threshold into a "non-place of existential waiting" (Dwyer, 2009, p. 25). He slept most of the day, lost track of time and more frequently asked his neighbour, one of the few people he was still in contact with, to deliver his food to him. Cise, to borrow Al-Mohammad's phrase, "disentangled himself" (2013, p. 228) more and more from the world around him:

> "Outside these walls", he told me hesitantly, crumpled in his chair, "everything seems to move. Only I don't. At a certain point, it becomes unbearable. And then I start thinking and thinking and it destroys me. I would need a general to buoy up my spirits, because in certain moments I just feel exhausted. It's like I don't feel the ground under me anymore. So, I'd better stay at home. I'd go crazy otherwise."

Cise's experience of stuckedness and waiting over a long period of time triggered a general reluctance to be part of the world surrounding him; and along with this reluctance Cise lost his capacity to imagine any other future: "[a]ll the doors we

constructed didn't open many doors for me yet, no?", he asked me, referring to all the destroyed imaginaries that never materialised into real possibilities. "Now, I'm just waiting for whatever will come", was his answer to my question about his plans for the coming months. The anthropologist Weiss has observed that for young Tanzanian men "imaginaries of the 'good life' serve as an essential creative act that facilitates their ability to move beyond existing structural imbalances of power and economic constraints" (Weiss, 2002 in Salazar, 2011, p. 683). But, in Cise's case, the ability to imagine a better future was lost with the creation of a waiting room he felt more and more stuck in. Hence the training then not only "encourage[d] a mode of restraint, self-control and self-government" (Hage, 2009) but also discouraged Cise's power to hold onto one of the few things that could sustain some feeling of control over his life: imaginaries for something better to come. And exactly here, the interrelation between the production of a waiting room and the simultaneous destruction of imaginaries comes into effect in a person's life. In a city where everything was imaginable for Cise during every new beginning, the future became unimaginable for him. Through the governmental strategies that played out during and after the training, Cise had given up imagining – and so fighting for – a better life. "When the world refuses our efforts to interact with it on social and reciprocal terms", says Jackson, "it becomes, in our imaginations, a locus of minatory power that, from the perspective of a state, are better to be hindered" (Jackson, 2008, p. 70).

Remote horizons. Concluding remarks

As I mentioned at the outset, this article focuses mainly on the effects of future imaginaries being continually unmet and destroyed, in the case of one person. It needs to be stated, however, that Cise is by far not the only one who started the training course as a means of potentially overcoming marginalisation, while ending up with very limited abilities to go on. There were other participants who told me about their feeling of disillusionment, describing, when we occasionally met for a coffee after the training course had finished, how they suffered from becoming "hostages of a very complicated system" (Xhardez, 2016, p. 10).[11] Cise's story shows how structures that are disabling people also destroy their ability to imagine future horizons while at the same time producing a waiting room that turns people into "patients of the state" (Auyero, 2011; 2012). Despite the endurance Cise showed in countering negative circumstances during and after

training, the continual, systematic failure of expectations led to his personal breaking point that made it impossible for him to move forward, whether in his real life or, at the absolute minimum, in his imaginary worlds. Trying to understand Cise's reluctance to be part of this world a year after the promising training course had ended not only suggests a less romantic reading of participation in vocational training courses and apprenticeships, as is so often represented in anthropological writing, but also sheds light on the damaging effects of being stuck in a seemingly endless waiting room where future imaginaries are time and again shattered and postponed. In Cise's case, this not only encompassed his increasing psychological ill-being, but also took its toll on his health.[12] Two months before we saw each other again, Cise's neighbour had found him unconscious in his flat. He was suffering a heart attack due to a blockage of the cardiac artery. After a successful operation, the doctors told him that he had to cut down the stress in his life, since his physical tests did not point to any risk factors. "I was laughing at the doctor", Cise said when retelling me the story. "How to not have stress when you are at war. *À la guerre comme à la guerre*, no ?".[13] While observing Cise showing me his medicine and telling me about his decreasing appetite, I was thinking about the many times he had used this French proverb, "*À la guerre comme à la guerre* !", literally meaning "At war as at war" since I had known him. Almost three decades had elapsed since he had fled war and came to Europe, yet he was still continually thrown back to the starting point: fighting for a decent life.

Notes

1 Due to the "sensibility" of the topic, in consideration of current "political" tendencies that are sweeping across Europe, no names of organisations are given. The question of research ethics in an apprenticeship setting is discussed in detail in Moderbacher 2019.

2 Also see Moderbacher 2018.

3 I reflect on my decision to work with life storytelling as well as its methodological challenges in more detail in Moderbacher 2018 and 2019.

4 Originally in French: "Asseyez-vous, Madame! Bienvenue dans ma salle d'attente!", translation by the author.

5 Strauss (2006) gives a detailed overview of "The Imaginary" within anthropological knowledge and specifically refers to Anderson's and Taylor's application of the imaginary as potentially valuable if person-centred methods are prioritised. Also see Weiss 2002.

6 On many occasions during our shared year in the carpentry class, Cise and other participants told me about their individual "contributions" to the creation of collective imaginaries of the "good life" in Europe. During one conversation, one trainee, for example, said, "It's all fucked up! When we arrive here we live a shitty life during the week and work like dogs without rights. Then, on Sunday, we dress up, drive to the Atomium [one of Brussels' most important sightseeing monuments] and take a picture in front of the most beautiful car we can find; and then we send it home with best greetings from our perfect life!"

7 Cise's story stands in contrast to common popular discourses suggesting that many refugees and migrants would rather migrate to Europe than continue living in their birth country. He often described himself as part of a Guinean generation that shared an eagerness to rebuild the country after its independence in 1958. This results from the countries' particular history (Gerdes 2009): As the only French colony, Guinea refused to be included in the "Communauté Français" and insisted on immediate independence in 1958. Guinea's "No!" to Charles de Gaulle's offer remained not only an important symbol throughout the (ongoing) post-colonial struggle (Lewin 2005) but encouraged a national pride in being able to lead the country to a better future without the "help" of the colonial rulers (Moderbacher 2019).

8 Between 1988 and 1999, the rate of acceptance as a refugee, as defined by the Geneva Convention, rarely exceeded 5 – 10% in Belgium. The examination of these applications was extremely slow, with a waiting period of, at times, up to seven years (Martiniello, 2003, 228).

9 According to a comparative analysis of migration policies in Europe conducted in 2014, Belgium has the highest unemployment rate of foreign-born people in Europe (17.4 % compared to 6.9 % "native-born"), followed by Sweden and France (Patay, 2017, p.147).

10 Jansen's research participants mean "going nowhere" by the expression "pattering in place" (2014: 79).

11 As mentioned previously, most of the participants did not want to appear under their real names in my work and preferred to keep our relationship on the level of superficial encounters, albeit knowing about my research and laughing about my sometimes seemingly spontaneous note-taking.

12 With his felt "immobility" influencing his health, Cise's story stands in harsh contrast to the current popular discourse of mobility and movement as part of a healthy lifestyle.

13 Literally translated as "in war as in war", often meaning "to make do with what one has".

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