

LA CIMADE AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL AID FOR MIGRANTS IN SOUTHERN
FRANCE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS
OF FRENCH ANTI-IMMIGRATION SENTIMENTS
AND THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF AN
APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I show that pervasive prejudice and anti-immigration sentiments in Béziers, France create social and political impediments for migrant and refugees, as well as struggles for the aid organizations that seek to assist refugees in their plights to attain asylum in France. Additionally, grassroots movements aimed towards lessening anti-immigration sentiments in France appear to be a possible source of improvement for the heavy burdens on refugee-aiding organizations, the lacking integration efforts, and the sense of intolerance in France. By highlighting the operations and struggles of one particular branch in Béziers, I begin this analysis with a discussion of La Cimade, a non-profit and non-governmental organization that aims to protect the rights of French migrants and refugees. To provide some context, I then discuss the larger French setting in which the Béziers branch of La Cimade exists so that I may then demonstrate how the organization and its difficulties likely exist because Béziers is a microcosm of a larger French macro-context of intolerance. Next, I highlight some struggles that refugees and migrants face as foreigners due to macro-level discrimination and then address the Roma people in France, how their struggles differ from those of other migrants in France, and La Cimade's interaction with them in Béziers. Through an applied anthropological approach, I then identify a specific plan that may help La Cimade operate more efficiently and provide more effective assistance to the migrant and refugee populations of Béziers. My analysis concludes with a discussion of the importance of grassroots movements in France's fight to change negative mentalities towards multiculturalism and diversity, to end discrimination, and to provide *Liberté, Egalité, and Fraternité* to all.

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CHAPTER ONE

Overburdened and Under-Supported: An Aid Center Struggling to Offer Assistance

Béziers, France: Political Tension Cloaked by a Guise of Idealism

Sitting and drinking an espresso at an outdoor café in the city center of Béziers while vendors set up at a flower market across the street, I felt like I was experiencing the ideal day that most people associate with Southern France. I had spent the morning at an impressionist art exhibit, had admired the stained glass and gargoyles of the 12th century Cathédrale Saint-Nazaire, learned about the city's Roman roots, and even ate a fresh baked baguette with cheese for lunch while enjoying the mid-summer 75-degree weather. As I sat and sipped my coffee and gazed out at the people strolling by, I felt content with a break from the American hustle and bustle of life and like I could forever stay in Béziers. Not only would I be happy attending the almost bi-monthly festivals such as The Festival of the Bull and The Festival of Wine, I adored the small-town feel, the close proximity to the Mediterranean Sea, and the ability to cheaply eat fantastic cheese and produce. While these were my feelings upon arriving to Béziers, I quickly learned that the city possesses strong racial tensions that lie simmering beneath its appealing surface.

Béziers receives a large numbers of migrants each year. The warmer climate and lower costs of living than in metropolitan areas like Paris, Lyon, and nearby Montpellier bring many migrant families to Southern France. During the last ten years, the foreign-born population has rested at about 9% or 234,000 people (Lacan 2012). While the number of migrants living in France has not changed much in the last decade, political

beliefs of many ethnic French have¹. The stance of Raymond Couderc, Mayor of Béziers and representative of the people from 1997 to March of 2014, has become progressively more far-right² or conservative during his time in office. This can be seen in his denial of education for Roma children in 2006 and again in 2008 (Rencontrer Tsiganes 2007) and his three appeals during the summer of 2013 to Minister of Interior, Manuel Valls, to force Roma camp closures outside of Béziers, which were implemented in August of 2013 (Midi Libre 2013). Couderc provided justification for his actions but all excuses are rendered invalid when we consider how children in France between six and seventeen-years-old have a right to an education no matter where they live and how the Roma living situations did not pose immediate danger. It is therefore possible that Couderc's actions originated in his own anti-immigration sentiments rather than his concern for the law or people's safety.

Although Couderc held his position as Mayor of Béziers for sixteen years, in the spring of 2014, he prepared to step down from his position (Trabuchet 2013). Theoretically, there was potential for a less rightist and more liberal candidate to take his place. However, this was not the case due to how 25% of Béziers' voters align with the extreme-right and very conservative ideals of the Front National (FN) party (Perrault 2013). There may be even more people who are in favor of these ideals despite not being

¹ I use the term ethnic French to refer to the people who call themselves the *Français de Souche* and see themselves as having French roots or as being “blood French.” In contrast to the ethnic French are the French denizens and residents who live and work in France, sometimes for several generations, but ultimately have roots outside of France. While they may see themselves as French due to their adopted language and culture, the ethnic French do not and call these people *d'origine immigrée* (of immigrant origin) and therefore make the assumption that to be “French,” one must have French roots.

² In France, people explain the political scale as rightist versus leftist, which would translate to conservative versus liberal in the United States. When I say that something is rightist, I also mean that the idea, policy, or person is conservative. The most conservative ideas are of the extreme-right.

official party members. While Robert Ménard is not the official FN candidate for mayor, he claimed the summer before elections, “I am not ashamed to be with the FN. I am very proud,” (Mollaret 2013). This statement was therefore enough to assume that upon his election, Ménard would support and potentially increase in Béziers the anti-immigration sentiments, actions, and legislation often associated with FN policy.

The discrimination that lies beneath the surface of Béziers is reflective of the dangers of intolerance that exist on a national level. In this thesis, I show that pervasive prejudice and anti-immigration sentiments in Béziers, France create social and political impediments for migrant and refugees, as well as struggles for the aid organizations that seek to assist refugees in their plights to attain asylum in France. Additionally, grassroots movements aimed towards lessening anti-immigration sentiments in France appear to be a possible source of improvement for the heavy burdens on refugee-aiding organizations, the lacking integration efforts, and the sense of intolerance in France. By highlighting the operations and struggles of one particular branch in Béziers, I begin this analysis with a discussion of La Cimade, a non-profit and non-governmental organization that aims to protect the rights of French migrants and refugees. To provide some context, I will then discuss the larger French setting in which the Béziers branch of La Cimade exists so that I may then demonstrate how the organization and its difficulties likely exist because Béziers is a microcosm of a larger French macro-context of intolerance. Next, I will highlight some struggles that refugees and migrants face as foreigners due to macro-level discrimination and then address the Roma people in France, how their struggles differ from those of other migrants in France, and La Cimade’s interaction with them in Béziers. Through an applied anthropological approach, I then identify a specific plan that

may help La Cimade operate more efficiently and provide more assistance to the migrant and refugee populations of Béziers. My analysis concludes with a discussion of the importance of grassroots movements in France's fight to change negative mentalities towards multiculturalism and diversity, to end discrimination, and to provide *Liberté*, *Egalité*, and *Fraternité* to all.

Prejudice on the Rise

Racism is punishable by the law in France, but there is still a significant stigma of Otherness (Jugé and Perez 2006:195). During my summer visit to Béziers, France, I learned of many parents who had pulled their children out of public school and enrolled them in private ones just so they would not grow up around migrants. I also saw many people who were taking public transit give tips to white musicians while few gave to artists who had markers of Otherness such as darker skin color and thick accents. When at the dinner table, my host family from Martinique would mock the French by using their expression, "I am not racist, but..." and thus indicated that they were well aware of not being welcome by all. Bunzel discusses a degree of "Islamophobia"³ that exists in France and a general aversion towards diversity (2005:502). And we must not forget the riots of 2005, during which children of migrants burnt 10,000 cars, damaged 233 public buildings, and injured 217 police in response to feeling unwelcome and treated differentially due to their ethnic roots (Fassin 2006:2). Even Ben Jelloun, an author and French migrant from Morocco, says that the French are ambivalent towards how their xenophobia and prejudice contradict their supposed equal access to *Liberté*, *Egalité*, and

³ According to Bunzel, Islamophobia is the idea of prejudice and intolerance towards practicing Muslims or people of Arabic descent who are stereotyped as Islamic (2005:502). Similar to anti-Semitism during the early 20th century, Islamophobia is used to explain the blaming of social problems on outcasts and Others in French society.

Fraternité (1999:17). For people of migratory backgrounds, the message is clear. They are not fully welcome in France and they will never truly be “French.” All provided examples are proof of modern-day discrimination in France. However, so is one encounter I had with Christophe, the brother of my host mother.

Christophe: The Black Man in a French Disguise

During my time in France, I was fortunate enough to stay with a wonderful Martinican family. While the children and I got along well from the start, I was initially unsure of how to interact with Christophe, brother of my host mom and a big and muscular black man who lacked hair but always wore a smile. Quickly though, I began to cherish his garrulity, his desire to welcome me to France, and those moments we spent together making breakfast and joking about my impressive addiction to coffee despite not being French. After a few shared laughs each morning, I would leave the apartment to do my research while Christophe helped send the children off to school and then spent the remainder of his day filling out job applications. Despite his military service and master’s degree, he had been struggling to find employment since his last work contract expired five months before. While everyone in the house seemed to appreciate having Christophe around the house, we were all quite excited the night we learned that Christophe had received an interview for a job in Paris. The following Monday morning, Christophe left the apartment dressed in his best suit with his 60€ train ticket to Paris in hand and a huge smile on his face.

After his return late Tuesday night, I looked forward to breakfast with Christophe on Wednesday morning so I could hear new about his interview. That morning, we made our usual *café* and *pain grillé* and joked about how much the family had missed him.

After recounting my past two days, I asked him about his interview. I thought nothing of it at first when Christophe suddenly became intently focused on a loose cabinet door and decided to fix it right then. Four minutes passed without a response and I eventually got the impression that he was avoiding the question. He finally replied, "[The interviewers] kept me for two-and-a-half hours. I really hope that all is well. I have the skills they want. I really hope all is well."⁴ Christophe then exclaimed with a whisper as if he was discussing something forbidden he added, "You know, it is really difficult. The first thing the woman said to me was, 'Wow. You are black. But your name is white.' I had to tell her how my father was French but my mother is black." It took me several moments to fully process the complexity of what Christophe had told me. I could hardly believe that the interviewer expected him to be white because of his name and had no longer seemed as open to employing him upon realizing his ethnic origins.

As I stared with utter disbelief at what I had just heard, Christophe explained how much his interview felt like an interrogation. He continued, "They asked me question after question about my knowledge and background. Like they wanted proof that I hadn't taken some white man's interview and that the qualifications on the CV were my own. If I do not get the job, it is because I do not have white skin and blue eyes. If I do not get the job, it is because they are ... you know ..." I sensed that he was implying the word racist. This is not something one simply accuses another of being in a democratic and modern society such as France. Christophe then turned his back to me, stood shaking his head side to side, and then busied himself with the cabinet again. Possibly detecting my disbelief, Christophe then concluded, "You can't believe it but I can. I live it. In France,

⁴ This interaction, like many within this thesis, is taken from my field notes, which I wrote minutes after its occurrence. The direct quotes that I have here may be slightly different in wording from those stated by Christophe, but their meaning, integrity, and essence have been maintained.

there is no work if you are not white. I have all the qualifications. I even have two degrees. But I bet you I will not get that job."

In Christopher's recount of his interview, it is important to recognize the potential of his own bias. Nevertheless, how he tells his story reveals much about his worldview as a French migrant. Christophe felt the need to provide some justification for his name, as if he had some something wrong by having one often associated with the ethnic French. He also seemed to ascribe to the ethnic French mentality that to be truly French, one cannot have markers of Otherness such as black skin. From the outside, France seems ideal with its beautiful French bread, wine, architecture, and people. And it is possible that Christophe's situation was an anomaly. However, it is still in accordance with recent data that 21% of foreign⁵ men and 27% of foreign women are unemployed as compared with 8% and 9% of French born men and women (Étrangers – Immigrés 2012) and that. By looking past the aesthetically pleasing and sensory rich surface, it becomes easy to see the mistreatment of many persons. Fortunately, there are organizations such as La Cimade in Béziers, which are fighting for rights of migrants and combatting the prejudice that people like Christophe face on a daily basis.

La Cimade at Béziers

La Cimade was founded in 1939 to aid people in close proximity to the German border who were displaced during World War II (La Cimade). In the 1970s during the height of migration from Algeria and other former territories, La Cimade began dedicating its efforts to protecting the rights of immigrants and displaced persons as

² The French seem to use the word foreign to describe anyone who does not have French roots, no matter how long they have lived in France. However, in this case, it is used to mean anyone born outside of France. For purposes of clarity, I will instead refer to people born abroad as migrants, people with ethnic roots living in France as denizens, and people with French roots as ethnic French.

defined by the 1949 Geneva Convention and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man. While La Cimade provides “administrative, legal, and social support for asylum-seekers through sixty local groups, language classes, and training courses as well as lobbying for humane treatment” (Lloyd 2003:325) all over France, the Béziers branch is an interesting environment to investigate for two reasons.

Béziers provides an interesting location for a branch of La Cimade and for ethnographic fieldwork first because the town’s growing intolerance is representative of a larger struggle in France. As an organization dedicated to protecting the rights of migrants in an environment where more and more people are identifying with extreme-right ideology, La Cimade’s employees fear cuts in funding and less support of migrant-aiding programs after the upcoming mayoral election. La Cimade in Béziers is also a unique environment because it houses one of La Cimade’s two *Centres d’Accueil pour les Demandeurs d’Asile* (Welcome Centers for Asylum Seekers or CADA)⁶ in all of France. With its space for fifty refugees, offices, meeting space, classroom, and activity room, La Cimade offers a place where refugees can live as they progress through the asylum application process. It is also a location where migrants of the Béziers community⁷ can receive help obtaining work and residence permits or with other bureaucratic processes. The one-on-one interactions at the refugee welcome center therefore provide a unique glimpse into the experiences of migrants in France with various application experiences.

⁶ The French call these centers CADAs for short but I will instead call them refugee welcome centers so readers may have an easier time remembering their function, which is difficult if their name is just an acronym.

⁷ These people have come to France often for economic reasons or to join family but are not considered refugees.

Because the refugee welcome center is part of the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless People (*L'Office Français de Protection de Réfugiés et Apatrides* or OFPRA), the welcome center is funded by the state but is operated by a staff affiliated with La Cimade. Last year, the *sous-prefecture* of Béziers granted La Cimade 46,000€ to operate its refugee welcome center. Funds went to paying the employees - which include a director, an accountant hired by the state, and three other office workers - providing *allocations* or subsidies to families⁸, purchasing items such as beds and school supplies for the children, and general care expenses like for translators and mental health professionals. Existing in a space between the law and social aid⁹, the Béziers branch of La Cimade defends the legal rights of the people it serves but also helps them with their adjustment to life in France. How much aid the organization can give depends, however, on whether a person is considered an asylum candidate or an immigrant, two extremely different classifications in the eyes of France, as I will now explain.

According the 1951 Refugee Convention of the United Nations, a refugee is a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country because of a well-founded fear of persecution that must be based in race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group or political party (Pipher 2002:18; Holtzman 2000:14; Shandy 2003:347). According to data collected by the European Commission, in 2011, the seven places with the highest numbers of refuge requests were Afghanistan, Russia, Pakistan, Iraq, Serbia, Somalia, and Iran (European Commission 2014). The UN

⁸ La Cimade's director, Jean-Philippe, indicated to me that allocations received depends on the number of members in a family applying for refuge. At the time of my visit, funds for one person were 202 €/month, two people were 311 €/month, three were 415 €/month, four were 520 €/month, and five were 608€/month.

⁹ La Cimade defends the law by helping as many people as it can with their right to request asylum but also acts as a social service organization by giving refugees a place to live while their asylum applications process.

definition of refugee gives a straight set of requirements that a person must meet to be considered in need of asylum. However, this definition does nothing to indicate how terrible the typical refugee experience is. Ben Jelloun does a better job of explaining this when he states, "Displaced persons, torn from their own land and country and turned into non-citizens, citizens of nowhere, with no identity and thus unrecognized, forced to rely on unwilling hosts, end up preferring a dangerous unknown chaos to the chaos they left behind," (1999:8). While I will explain in the subsequent chapter why the asylum process in France is so difficult for the refugee population I will first discuss the services provided by employees and volunteers¹⁰ of the Béziers refugee welcome center, the challenging bureaucratic system that La Cimade employees must navigate through, and the struggles they face on a daily basis.

La Cimade's Operations

Due to the diverse group served at La Cimade's *Centre d'Accueil pour les Demandeurs d'Asile*, a multitude of activities such as language classes and paperwork assistance take place each day and one can always find the welcome center bustling with activity. With so much to be done and such a large need of both refugee and migrant populations, the center's employees and volunteers have an overwhelming workload.

¹⁰During my involvement with La Cimade, I saw very few volunteers at the center. This may have been because it was summer break and people were not in their normal routines or because there were few volunteers to begin. Those whom I did interact with were two women who each helped migrants from the Béziers community with various forms of paperwork. Director Jean-Philippe also expressed to me how, when students are falling behind, he asks people in the community to tutor the child. However, possibly because I was at the center at the end of the school year and the start of summer, I saw no such volunteers.

Asylum Processes

According to La Cimade at Béziers's director, Jean-Philippe, "When asylum-seekers come to France, there is no one to greet them as they step off the boat, train, or airplane." They must find their way to the French Office of Immigration and Integration (OFII) where their refugee status is assessed. People who meet the United Nation's definition of refugee are then provided a one-month stay during which they can complete and submit to OFPRA their application for refuge. The asylum seekers are then placed in *Centres d'Accueil* or refugee welcome centers all over France while they wait for their application to be processed. Again, as Jean-Philippe explained to me, the number of welcome center living spaces in France do not equal the number of asylum applicants each year. This means that thousands of people must complete the asylum process while living in hotels, apartments, and other emergency housing and with less assistance from personnel like those found at La Cimade.

For those fortunate enough to receive living space in a refugee welcome center, two major forms of assistance are provided. These include help with the OFPRA asylum application and support with preparing for individual interviews. As Jean-Philippe noted, both processes are challenging considering how few refugees can speak fluent French let alone read or write it. It is equally as difficult to encourage people to accurately recount their histories when such requires them to recall painful memories, speak in French, or rely on a translator. While finding accurate life histories and completing asylum applications are time consuming, so is preparing people for their OFPRA interviews. Again, as Jean-Philippe clarified, refugees have a right to a translator in these interviews but recounting troublesome histories goes much smoother if people are more prepared.

However, because many refugees come from very troublesome backgrounds and find it difficult to talk with strangers about their past, those people preparing the refugees must therefore be quite patient.

Denial Requires Retrial

In the event that OFPRA denies a person asylum, he or she can contest this ruling in a *recours* (recourse) or court-setting reassessment of the applicant's case. Because this process requires people to write an explanation of why they should be granted asylum and attend a short court proceeding in Paris, La Cimade staff again invests a significant amount of effort in either writing the short essay for the refugee or coaching him or her on how to write one successfully. Unfortunately, all preparations must be done quickly because people denied by OFPRA only have one month upon their denial to apply for *recours*. Because the person's situation has already been deemed unsuitable, it is important to gather more evidence that helps establish beyond a doubt why a person cannot return to his or her place of origin. Some pieces of useful evidence may include psychological analyses and medical records, both of which require appointments and therefore a significant amount of effort to obtain. Additionally, because the person applying for refuge must present their case in a 20-minute interview with only the help of a potentially untrustworthy translator before a judge, their lawyer, and a panel, La Cimade personnel also invest a lot of effort into preparing the person for yet another stressful experience.

Aiding the General Migrant Community

While La Cimade is dedicated to many forms of refugee assistance, its primary obligation and biggest time-investment is the asylum application process. However, it also helps immigrants in the community ineligible for asylum maneuver through bureaucratic processes. Two times a week, volunteers come to La Cimade at Béziers to host open office hours during which people from the community can receive help with filing paperwork such as work and residency permits or requests to seek medical attention. Many people pursue this aid due to language deficiencies while others for the assurance that they are correctly completing complex legal documents. While some people who utilize this resource understand basic bureaucratic processes and speak decent French, a majority of them do not. Therefore, assisting the greater Béziers community, giving individual attention, and communicating effectively requires a significant amount of patience.

Additional Assistance Efforts

At the center, there are many continuous efforts to help refugees become better adjusted to their life in France. On-site refugee assistance programs include bi-weekly French classes at both beginner and intermediate levels, all papers mailed to a resident are kept on file to avoid becoming lost, and employees help parents enroll their children in school. As Jean-Philippe explained, La Cimade personnel consider this last effort one of the most important because getting the children off to a good start seems to be the best way to prepare them for success in France. Farwell and Cole seem to agree and say that “Schools provide a basis for a child’s social world; hence, it is crucial that some semblance of schooling be restored as soon after a crisis as is feasible,” (2001:30). When

the refugee children arrive at the welcome center, employees are involved in the process of assessing the child's academic abilities in his or her native language. As noted by Jean-Philippe, "If children are not assessed in their own language, their scores reflect their level of French and not their intelligence, which is bad for assuring they learn as much as possible." After being placed in schools with respect to academic ability, La Cimade then helps place refugee children in classrooms geared towards teaching French language and culture, much like ESL classrooms in the United States. Jean-Philippe believes that this transition process into the French system works well for 98% of students. However, the remaining two percent, much of whom are older than 13 and therefore have more difficulties learning new languages, are often paired with volunteer tutors from the Béziers community to assure their academic success.

Struggles of the Refugee Welcome Center and its Employees

One may assume that a career involving refugee aid is quite difficult due to the extensive bureaucratic processes and emotionally intense situations of each refugee that passes through the center. However, it was only upon observing daily life at the refugee welcome center that I came to understand fully the extreme challenges of refugee assistance and that protecting the right to request asylum is a constant uphill battle.

Relations to the State and the Significant Limitations that Follow

When interviewing Jean-Philippe, I asked him to describe the greatest challenge in operating a French refugee welcome center. To this he replied, "Well, it is so hard to not be able to help all the people we want. And our relationship with the state. It is quite problematic." Since tightening of French borders makes immigration and family

reunification increasingly difficult and restricted, many people instead attempt to gain admittance to France through the asylum application process (Fassin and d'Halluin 2007:309; Fassin and D'Halluin 2005:600; Fassin 2005:4). As mentioned previously, the number of asylum applicants in 1999 was 31,000 but this number increased to 47,000 in 2001 (Lloyd 2003: 324). While trends decreased slightly after this, numbers remain quite high with 42,000 applications in 2012 (European Commission 2014).

Although most welcome centers like La Cimade would like to help all people who seek assistance with their asylum applications, this is not possible considering the time, funding, and staff that this would require. The director of another refugee welcome center in Béziers explained to me that because of limited resources, only 800 of the 1000 people who come in search of aid receive attention each year while only 200 receive the attention necessary to submit asylum requests. Additionally, in 2012 there were 42,000 applications for asylum (European Commission 2014) but Jean-Philippe informed me that there were only spaces in welcome centers for 23,000 people. Although OFPRA is working to open space for an additional 4,000 people, this is still not enough to accommodate the high demands for asylum. This means that in 2014, approximately 15,000 people will go through the asylum application process without the assistance of a refugee center and the comfort of being part of a refugee community. While La Cimade's *Centre d'Accueil pour les Demandeurs d'Asile* at Béziers receives the funding it needs to operate due to its affiliation with the state, these funds are not enough to have the impact on the Béziers community that volunteers and employees would like.

According to Jean-Philippe, additional problems that stem from state affiliation are the expectations that La Cimade answers to the state's demands and that it stay in

good terms with the people's representatives. As Jean-Philippe illuminated, "When you are affiliated with the state, you have to answer to it. It is difficult because La Cimade is a militant organization¹¹ and we can't fight the governmental systems¹² and protect the rights of refugees when it is the government who gives us funding." While La Cimade in Béziers has considered becoming independent, the general opinion amongst employees was that this would not be practical. While they could then do what they feel as necessary to help refugee and migrant populations if independent, they would have to invest a significant amount of time into fundraising, which would detract from aid efforts. Fassin and d'Halluin affirm this precarious relationship between governments and NGOs in their discussion of how organizations that receive funding from the state to aid refugees are often torn between the need for money and the desire to act independently in protest of strict immigration and asylum policies (2007:317).

Unfortunately, issues of funding and meeting expectations were not the end of Jean-Philippe's grievances with the state. He also exclaimed during this conversation, "You know, it is so hard to be with the state mostly because you know that they are the cause of most of our misery." For this, he provided the examples of copious amounts of required paperwork requested by state officials and processes and the Schengen Agreement, which establishes open travel between countries for EU citizens but also requires refugees to apply for asylum in the first EU country in which they arrive (Druke 1993:110). This agreement is particularly problematic for refugee welcome centers

¹¹ I believe that what Jean-Philippe meant by militant organization was not that La Cimade engages in physical combat but that it is combative in its protection of people's rights such as the right to request asylum or a child's right to an education.

¹² Cases in which La Cimade resisted the state occurred in 2006 and 2008 where La Cimade protected the right to education of several Roma children by taking the mayor to court (Rencontrer Tsiganes 2007; Trabuchet: 2013).

because they must confirm that refugees have not already passed through another country before arriving in France and arrange to have them sent back to file for asylum there if they have. Both of these processes require a significant time investment that La Cimade personnel cannot afford. Additionally, government employees in offices such as OFPRA also induce much strife for both La Cimade employees and refugees by administering policy that requires the heavy burden of paperwork and degree of interrogation. Jean-Philippe even believes many officials are intentionally difficult and unforgiving when reviewing these documents due to their personal aversion towards immigration.

Garner discusses this same concept on a broader European Union level by claiming that strictly regulating asylum policies has become a way to combat a decreased sense of statehood caused by more porous borders and an EU identity (2007:75). Spencer addresses a similar concept when she acknowledges erected bureaucratic barriers, exclusions from welfare, and removal of safeguards in the process of assessing refugee status in response to high numbers of applications during the 1990s (2011:249). By sending back documents with requests for more details, requiring proof of all claims of abuse, and making tighter constraints on who may be awarded asylum, France increases its autonomy as a member of the European Union. Therefore, according to Garner and Spencer, much of the heavy workloads that La Cimade suffers through in regard to migrant and refugee assistance has root in the state's desires to prove its sovereignty and authority in a time where it feels that both are restrained.

The Problem of Efficiency

Although relations with the state are a great source of stress at La Cimade in Béziers, so is managing the workload and the protocol demanded by the state in addition to balancing the needs of the refugees. Every day in the La Cimade office seemed chaotic. While there were bi-weekly sessions during which people at the center and in the Béziers community could ask for assistance with various things, I had difficulties with telling when these set hours were due to how people seemed to come at all hours of the day. From my observations, it appeared as if people could visit any time during the day. As long as employees were not dealing with a crisis, they would most always put down what they were doing and listen to the requests.

While some people sought help making phone calls and others just stopped by to chat, most often came with significant problems that required employees to completely abandon their previous tasks. An example of this is how one afternoon, an Afghani man came in desperate search of aid because he had somehow lost his position at a different refugee welcome center and was now homeless. He came to La Cimade because he had nowhere else to turn. In response, Jean-Philippe spent two hours finding this man a place to sleep and consequentially abandoned the many other items on his to-do list. I, in no way, mean to say that Jean-Philippe should not stop his work to help those in immediate need; I merely aim to demonstrate that it was a miracle that any task at La Cimade became completed. Drowning in paperwork and responding to small emergencies all day, La Cimade employees seemed to struggle with completing tasks. While people who aid the vulnerable refugees and migrants must respond to situations as they arise, the sheer number of papers to be filed and constant interrupting emergencies make it impossible

for La Cimade employees to keep up and adequately help those in need of assistance because they are in a perpetual state of being behind. Additionally, high levels of need also create an environment where people are always putting out the fires rather than working to prevent them.

Overburdened by the Never-Ending Work

At La Cimade, exhaustion was like an infection that everyone either had or was bound to contract. However, Célia was the employee who best demonstrated this fatigue. During my first morning at La Cimade, I sat in the office reading pamphlets on immigrant rights as I waited for Jean-Philippe to return from assisting with some crisis so I could be shown around the center. As I waited and sipped my espresso, I nearly scalded my lap as the door banged open. Startled, I looked to see the cause of my scare and saw a woman in her late-thirties with file folders piled high in her hands. As she trudged past me, gave a quiet “*bonjour*,” and continued down the hallway, I could see dark circles under her eyes and what appeared to be pre-maturely greying hair. She then loudly tossed her things on her desk, moved to stand by the window, and let out one of the longest and heaviest sighs I have ever heard. It was not until an hour later, during which I was still awaiting the director, that she introduced herself as Célia the way to her first of many espresso and cigarette breaks of the morning. For the first few days, my interactions with Célia were minimal but I noticed several trends. She would always arrive around ten in the morning looking as if it had taken all her energy just to get to work and spend the day pounding on her keyboard and sighing while staring out the window.

Coffee seemed to be the only thing getting Célia through her days at La Cimade. No matter the time, day of the week, or how busy things were, she always looked as if

she was carrying a heavy burden. After weeks of observing the chaos of the office, the high demands of the refugees at the center, and the never-ending work, I grew to understand the source of Célia's exhaustion. I must clarify that Célia was far from lazy. Every time I looked over at her desk, I saw her working furiously. She did, however, lack the positive mentality and verosity of one new employee, Violetta, who approached even the simplest task with a smile and a huge amount of energy. While Célia had passion for the cause of refugee aid, she was obviously suffering from burnout.

Unfortunately, Célia was not the only one. Jean-Philippe, who has been there for 10 years, worked feverishly and, like Célia, seemed on the verge of collapse. His degree of personal investment in his work almost seemed unhealthy considering how I never heard him talk about life outside of La Cimade and how frequently he forgot to fill his own needs. While it was a joke around La Cimade that people had to make Jean-Philippe eat lunch, I honestly believe he would forget unless people reminded him. I would also frequently arrive at La Cimade in the morning to find Jean-Philippe in yesterday's clothes and wonder whether he had even gone home the night before. Additionally, Laurent, another employee at the refugee welcome center, explained his own waning energy in regards to conversing with the refugees and Daniel's body language reflected a state of annoyance any time a new person came into the office to ask for assistance with something. Considering the degree of fatigue and how long people had been at La Cimade, it appears that a person's energy towards his or her work seems to be negatively correlated with how long they have been at the refugee welcome center. When discussing the processes refugees go through, Célia called herself cynical¹³ and went on to claim that

¹³ By cynical, I believe Célia was referring to how she had little expectation that families would receive asylum after years of experience and seeing so many cases denied.

“after being here for fifteen years it is hard to stay positive once you have seen so many cases fail regardless of the heart and soul you invested. It is especially hard because these people have been through so much.”

Creating Distance and forming Family Ties: Coping Strategies of La Cimade Personnel

While Célia was always tired and pessimistic about the asylum process, it was clear that she wanted to do more for the center’s residents than she was able. From the way her eyes would light up when she interacted with the kids or how happy she would get when a refugee stopped by just to talk, it was easy to tell that Célia sought to impact individual people on a personal level. However, the French system had limited her ability to help by demanding that she spend all of her time filing paperwork. Additionally, she admitted to me how painful it was for her each time a family’s request for asylum was rejected and that she could no longer handle being close to them. Célia’s establishment of distance reminded me of the mothers of the Alto do Cruzeiro in Northeast Brazil as described by Nancy Scheper-Hughes in *Death Without Weeping*. Much like the mothers who used distance as a way to cope with the pain of losing a child (Scheper-Hughes 1985:394), Célia seemed to distance herself from the refugees to avoid the pain of failure and carry on with her work. Self-distancing was a coping mechanism employed by many at La Cimade. Jean-Philippe was kind but did not chat with the residents while Daniel avoided the children despite how much they loved to hug and climb on him. I do find it significant that the two employees the most willing to bond with the refugees had both been there the least amount of time. To me, it seemed they had not yet learned to employ distance as a way to protect their own hearts.

However, distance was not the only coping strategy I witnessed. Upon learning of the employees' tendency to eat lunch together, I was glad to see that they shared sense of closeness. It was usual for the group to wait to eat until everyone was present, to share bits of their packed lunches, and to participate in a communal dishwashing and coffee brewing after they all finished eating. To me, they strongly resembled a family. As soon as I made this connection, I began seeing evidence of this all around the workplace. Jean-Philippe had intentionally established a democratic workplace strategy where people shared all tasks equally to avoid the "that's not my job mentality" and to boost camaraderie and productivity. Apart from how Jean-Philippe said that he "make[s] all the big decisions like how to spend funds," everyone seemed to divide tasks equally amongst themselves, have their ideas given equal weight during staff-meeting, and get along well in the democratic workplace. At La Cimade's refugee welcome center in Béziers, employees have more than their fair share of work. Long hours make the job physically demanding but it is emotionally draining too. No matter how much a person invests himself or herself in the needs of a family, one cannot guarantee that asylum will be granted. Reliance on one another and a lack of hierarchy seem to be an effective adaptive strategy (and more productive one than creating distance in my opinion) for the demanding conditions at La Cimade. Therefore, in the face of much struggle, hard work, and emotional toil, the La Cimade group has learned to bond together like a family and depend on one another for support.

CHAPTER TWO

A Nostalgic and Fearful France: Literature and Theoretical Framework Pertaining to Migration in Modern France

France and a Fear for the French Identity

According to Johnathan Fenby, “A set of images defines France – the beret and the café, dark pungent cigarettes, the baguette, breadstick, and red wine, the accordion, and the Seine,” (1999:81). However, there is much more to this country than these clichés. France has a long history of traditions (Rogers 1987:56) and its people unite to protect the Republican values – *Liberté, Egalité, and Fraternité*. Since the establishment of the first republic in 1792, France has been a country of inclusion and national pride (Jugé and Perez 2006:188). Wonderful art, scenic markets, historic churches, cafés that line the streets, and equal access to health care, university, and opportunities in the job market help to define why it is good to be French.

However, focusing only on the common assumptions of France paints the country far too idealistically. While one can attribute many of man’s great accomplishments and creations to the French, such as the music of Edith Piaf, the literary works of Victor Hugo, or the militaristic talent of Napoleon Bonaparte, the truth is that not all is well in the Republic. During this most recent bout of economic hardship, the migrant has again been constructed as a problem¹⁴ (Silverstein 2005:364) and the people have lost confidence in their government’s ability to assure their stability. Additionally, they fear

¹⁴ Silverstein claims that constructing the migrant as a source of problems in France is a reoccurring trend that resurfaces in times of geopolitical realignment (2005:364). The most recent case of this is France’s current slow-moving economy.

for the future of France and the French Identity¹⁵, and many have turned against anyone who is not *Français de Souche* (Fenby 1999:424) - “blood-French” - or a person with ethnic French roots. While modern France was founded on the principle of inclusion, its nationalism is now based in exclusion (Jugé and Perez 2006:194) and it “imposes a code of invisibility on specific and constructed groups” – namely migrants and ethnic / racial minorities (Guénif-Souilamas 2006:25). Once welcomed by France with open arms, French immigrants are now undesirable and the republican model based in equality and universal human rights is now ambivalent towards xenophobic and intolerant sentiments (Sargent and Larchanche 2007:80). As France justifies its actions in the name of national pride and the maintenance of identity, it heads farther down the path of discrimination and towards overt racism.

An Introduction to Migration in France

France has been a place of migration for the last 200 years, but its largest four waves all took place during the 20th century. Throughout all of France’s history of immigration, many ethnic French have welcomed migrants from Eastern Europe, former colonies, Italy, Spain, Germany, and more (Brettell 2003:XVI) in times of labor shortages and low birth rates (Hollifield 2004:184). From the early 1800s to 1914, immigration into France consisted mostly of European political exiles from Poland, Italy, Spain, and Germany (Musée de l’Histoire de l’Immigration 2013). When France realized migrant labor was useful in the industrial revolution, it encouraged these people in addition to

¹⁵ By French Identity I mean to refer to ideas of Frenchness according to many ethnic French. These often pertain to the values and rights as established by the French Constitution in addition to appreciation of things such as civic participation in addition to liberty, equality, and brotherhood (*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*). These are all things that ethnic others could feasibly possess, but the French Identity also implies a certain degree of French origins.

those from Belgium and Switzerland to enter France. The second wave occurred between 1914 and 1944 and included companies recruiting migrants for labor and France accepting political exiles from Turkey, Italy, and Russia.

The third wave of migration into France occurred between 1944 and 1975 and consisted of people from communist countries and Algeria after it gained independence in 1962. The fourth wave has been ongoing since 1975 and is characterized by its significant limitation on migration flows. People are permitted to enter on the basis of family reunification and asylum and generally come from areas outside of Europe. During much of the 19th and 20th centuries, migrants could easily regularize their status (Brettell 2003:35). Additionally, once French nationality became based on the birthright principle of soil (*jus soli*) rather than blood (*jus sanguis*), their children could easily be awarded French citizenship (Hollifield 2004:184). Therefore, at one point in France's history, the migrant populations could easily earn a place in France and in French society.

In the past migrants could easily integrate fully into French society but today the label of immigrant¹⁶ is a permanent one (INSEE Références 2012). Even if someone becomes naturalized, he or she will always be regarded as a foreigner¹⁷. According to this definition and data collected by INSEE (France's National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies), 8.4% of the people living in France are immigrants and their descendants made up 11% of the French population (INSEE Références 2012). Also according to INSEE, the 3.7 million people born abroad but who now live in France fall

¹⁶ I define immigrant as a person who was born abroad but now resides in France. At later points in this analysis, I refer to people with foreign roots who live in France as denizens. This notation permits me to group all people who have roots outside of France no matter how long they have lived in France for reasons that become apparent in later discussion.

¹⁷ The permanent label of immigrant is paradoxical considering France's desire to create a uniform population. I will discuss this concept further below

largely between 18 and 50 years old and are approximately 50% women. Ethnicities that contribute to what the French see as a general amalgamate of migratory persons includes people from Eastern and Western Europe, Africans from south of the Sahara, North African Maghrebis (the largest contributor to the immigrant population at 43%), South-East Asians, Turks, and people from overseas departments and territories (Hargreaves 2007:68). These people comprise what Brettel describes as the fourth significant wave of migration in French history, which has been ongoing since the 1990s (2003:XVII). With the French recession spurred by the oil crisis of 1974 and the subsequent closing of borders and repatriation (Hollifield 2004:191; Silverstein 2005:373), policy has shifted from one of manpower recruitment to one of exclusion (Schain 2008:59). The result has been a largely different reception of fourth wave migrants than during prior diasporas in the sense that migrants are now less welcome and seen as more of a threat by the ethnic French than ever before.

Legislation during the latter half of the 20th century and early part of the 21st century is difficult to follow due to changes in power between the Right and Left and a flurry of writing, rewriting, enacting, and overturning laws. However, what is most important to understand are the general trends, which include a halt of immigration in the 1970s, the belief in the 1980s that immigrants could not be assimilated, and efforts to curb immigration in the 1990s by undercutting civil rights and liberties of migrants (Schain 2008:60). Some of the most significant legislature during this time period included the suspension of family reunification in 1978 and the tightening of entry requirements and ease of expulsion processes under the Loi Bonnet of 1980 (Schain 2008:51). Additionally Loi Méhaignerie of 1986 retracted automatic citizenship for

children of immigrants by creating the requirement that they request citizenship at age sixteen. Loi Pasqua of 1994 facilitated expulsions and restricted claims to welfare of undocumented migrants (Schain 2008:56) and Loi Debre of 1997 made it harder to naturalize wives (Schain 2008:51) and children of legal migrants. Lastly, Loi Hortefeux required a person to have a certain degree of language competencies and knowledge of the Republic before receiving admittance to France (Schain 2008:57). The trend is quite apparent. Through the course of nearly 30 years of legislation, the rights of migrants have become progressively more restricted and people of foreign origin have been treated as less than equal to the ethnic French.

While the reception of migrants and their rights in France has changed a lot over the years, so has the asylum seeking process. According to Fassin, “80% of the 20,000 people who sought asylum in 1981 were awarded it. However, of the 30,000 people applying for asylum in 1999, 80% were rejected (2005:369). This shift demonstrates a change in attitude of political authorities from one of tolerance to one of mistrust. However, this statistic also shows a marked increase in numbers of asylum applicants. Between 1999 and 2001 alone, there was a 52% increase in asylum applications (Lloyd 2003:324). This sort of exclusionary legislation designed to maintain France’s “Frenchness” (Guénif-Souilamas 2006:28) and deter people from coming to France but many are unaware of policy changes and come to be with their family as they did before (Guiraudon 2008:279). Since the increase in asylum application correlates with tightening of immigration policy, one interpretation is that stricter policy has led more people to apply for asylum in hopes of gaining admittance to France because simply migrating is no longer feasible. Whether those denied entrance to France are refugees or

people in search of a better life, one must question what continues to fuel strict immigration policy in France.

Fearful of Change and Multiculturalism

As exclaimed by Ben Jelloun, "France is a place where times of withdrawal and fear, rejection and exclusion, correspond to periods of economic or psychological crisis. It is then that politicians spring up whose conceit is matched only by their ignorance, drafting and passing allows to curry favor with a nation that has lost confidence in itself," (Ben Jelloun and Bray 1999:18). But what does France have to be fearful of today? Change. And one of the biggest causes of this change is migration and therefore the changing face of France. When immigrants arrive, they adapt to the host country but also leave their own mark. They typically spur alterations to gender roles, the housing market, fertility rates, and local systems of stratification and employment (Brettell 2007:54) but also change taste in food, fashion, and the use of language. And it is this change and introduction of diversity that many ethnic French find threatening.

In America, the melting pot view encouraged a blending of cultures and heritages and erasing of ethnic identity (Bagopal 2000:12). However, this model is giving way to the tossed salad concept, which aims to promote the maintenance of diversity and living harmoniously alongside those who have different ways of life (Tripodi 2001:129; Brettell 2003:118). While America moves closer towards an appreciation of multiculturalism, France, who believes its autochthonous population is endangered, moves farther away (Friederike Delouis 2012:16). As Fenby states, "Society is changing around the world. The transformation is never easy, but a rough-and-ready distinction can be drawn between those who look forward with hope and those who look fearfully over their

shoulders at what they may be about to lose,” (1999:50). We can see France as an example of the latter with the way it essentially ignores ethnic differences (Sargent 2005:80) and how it tries to create a uniform identity and population through citizenship education in the French classroom (Keaton 2006:91; Starkey 2000:41).

While any dominant group may find high birth rates of migratory populations threatening, (Danahay and Brettell 2008:44), what scares the French most is that people no longer need French roots to consider themselves French (Fenby 1999:199). As many ethnic French see it, assimilation¹⁸ of migrants to protect the French Identity from becoming tainted is increasingly important but also difficult as populations arriving now originate from cultures with norms, values, and belief systems farther from those of the French (Fenby 1999:199). Controlling French phenotypes is impossible, but France can maintain its Frenchness by discouraging loyalty to foreign values or ways of life through what Appadurai calls “ideocide” (2006:117). As previously mentioned, the prime means of attaining this desired uniformity today is citizenship education, which “help[s] integrate a diverse population into a single national culture defined as Republican,” (Starkey 2000:42). In this setting cultural diversity within France is celebrated while non-French traditions are threatening and dangerous to “Frenchness” (Jugé and Perez 2006:200). Anything not synonymous with French norms and beliefs is noxious and must therefore be controlled or removed. Additionally, the hyphenated Frenchman does not exist (Rogers 1987:50). One is either French or not, but he or she cannot simply be a blend of identities.

¹⁸ The French desire to assimilate migrants is contrasted by the potential to integrate them. While integration implies that they are well-functioning within society but maintain their diversity, assimilation implies that a person has dropped his or her old ways and has completely taken on those of his or her host country.

French Sentiments towards Migration and the Front National

Societal norms and expectations do not exist in a vacuum and we must therefore look at the larger implications that stem from the French fear of change and its assimilationist attitudes. One such consequence is the growing support from the extreme-right Front National (FN) party. The FN gains its supports by claiming that outsiders are a threat to law, order, and the national identity (Lloyd 2003:330) and thereby speaks to the French uneasiness with the migrant, the changes he brings, and the frustrations with high unemployment and crime rates. The FN has seen a rise in support over the last twenty years as more people find its vision of re-creating the old nation-state comforting (Fenby 1999:212). Front National's Jean-Marie Le Pen was the runner up in the 2002 presidential election but his daughter, Marine Le Pen, garnered the largest ever support for the FN party in 2012 with 6.4 million votes or 18 percent of the electorate (Friederike Delouis 2012:12). Anxious of the large FN support and afraid of losing party members, the Right has adopted stricter immigration policies (Rosello 1998) and the Left has done little to combat new racist and xenophobic language (Ben Jelloun and Bray 1999:27). While changes within political parties stem from the desires of the people, they now contribute to the internalization of anti-immigration discourse and threaten France's allegiance to liberty, egalitarianism, and brotherhood.

Understanding French Responses to Modernity and Difference

While it is difficult to understanding the causes and larger implications of new sentiments towards migrants, theoretical framework makes this an easier feat. We begin with an analysis of globalization and its effects.

Globalization and Construction of the Other

As Caroline Brettell claims, “There is virtually no place in the world that is untouched by movement, whether internal or international, whether as a sending nation or a receiving nation, or both,” (2007:47). As the transmission of materials and ideas increase in speed and quantity, definitive lines of who we are become less certain and our idea of home begins to morph. Global forces alter localities by “deforming their normative climate, recasting their politics, and representing their contingent characters and plots as instances of larger narratives of betrayal and loyalty,” (Appadurai 1998:244). France, like most places in the world, is caught in the fire, fervor, and uncertainty of globalization. Therefore, migrants are not only a result of globalization but part the uncertainty that stems from it.

One way of establishing our own identities is to pinpoint that which we are not. As Appadurai explains, “The creation of collective others, or them's, is a requirement, through the dynamics of stereotyping and identity contrast, for helping to set boundaries and mark the dynamics of the we,” (2006:50). This means that France’s anti-immigrant sentiments attempt to construct the Other and therefore to better understand itself (Jugé and Perez 2006:192). Defining the Other also enables France to create separateness, inferiority, and thus hierarchical structures within society (Weber et al. 1946:194; Jugé and Perez 2006:193; Swartz 1997:87) and identify what and who it must eliminate in order to reach a state of purity (Appadurai 2006:9). Globalization weakens borders and definitive identities. However, as Appadurai claims, “globalization, being a force without a face, cannot be the object of ethnocide. But minorities can,” (Appadurai 2006:44). We can therefore understand France’s efforts to eliminate ethnic difference through programs

like citizenship education as a way to quell the uneasiness rooted in its globalization-induced ambiguous identity.

Internal Colonialism

Many people know of France's controversial colonial past but few recognize the colonialism that still exists within its borders today. As discussed by Jugé and Perez, "Internal colonialism as defined by Blauner (1969) refers to the social and economic subordinate positions of minorities in society as a consequence of ongoing colonial conditions... The white nation-state and power structure economically exploit and politically control minority groups within the national boundary," (Jugé and Perez 2006:195). This concept pertains to France due to its social distinction of the dominant *Français de Souche* or ethnic French and the economic and political control they have over migrants. Many ethnic French live in town, are the bosses in the workplace, and are full participants in civic society. However, most migrants live on the edge of society, are the laborers, and their children are not automatically citizens even though they were born in France. According to Franz Fanon, the colonized world is divided in two – that of the colonized and the colonizer (Fanon and Philcox 2004:4-8). What world one belongs to depends on your ethnicity. The distinction between the French and migrant groups is obvious and one unquestionably holds power over the other. However, if economic and political controls are not enough evidence of modern colonialism, consider assimilationist attitudes that assume the inferiority of foreigners and their need for civilization (Jugé and Perez 2006:196). While these colonial ideals are superannuated and immoral, France needs the control and separation they bring in order to justify its social hierarchy and to define itself through establishing that which it is not.

Structural and Symbolic Violence

Colonizers use violence to control the colonized. Because France has internal colonialism, we must therefore look at the violence it uses to maintain control. Paul Farmer defines structural violence as “‘structured’ but historically driven processes and forces conspire - whether through routine, ritual, or, as is more commonly the case, the hard surfaces of life - to constrain agency. For many ... choices both large and small are limited by racism, sexism, political violence, and grinding poverty," (Farmer 2005:40). In other words, structural violence is enacted by those in power to control those who are not through structures – or lack thereof – that constrain agency. The French school system serves as one example. While the school system is egalitarian in theory, migrant children who cannot keep up with the fast pace and do not have people to help them on their homework fall behind and then have few opportunities for personal betterment. Therefore, the education system as a structure enacts violence against immigrant children by limiting their success in society and keeping them at the bottom of the social ladder (Keaton and Diawara 2006:98).

The French also maintain their colonizer position through symbolic violence. This violence is anything that makes people “‘misrecognize’ inequality as the natural order of things and blame themselves for their location in their society's hierarchies (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009:2007; Bourdieu and Thompson 1991:24 & 153). Again, the example of schooling is useful for understanding this concept, especially when considering how Pierre Bourdieu, the anthropologist who coined the notion of symbolic violence, saw education in France as the principle institution for controlling status through its creation of hierarchies and establishment of a dominant system in power (Swartz 1997:189).

Many migrant children fail out of school because they have trouble keeping up with the work. However, they misrecognize themselves as to blame for their place at the bottom of the social hierarchy rather than correctly blaming their situations on the biased school system that denies them opportunities to succeed (Keaton and Diawara 2006:98).

Appadurai claims that violence is a way to re-create certainty (1998:229). Therefore, one can possibly relate French structural and symbolic violence against immigrant populations to the changing sociocultural order in France, tensions surrounding immigration, and French desires to abate insecurities based in globalization. These two forms of control are part of France's frantic efforts to maintain ideas of Frenchness and the French Identity in a globalized and changing society.

Struggles of the French Immigrant Population

In an environment where immigrants are blamed for unemployment and crime, told to go home, and feel excessive pressure to desert their culture and blend in, it is easy to understand why the French migrant experience may be a difficult one. I will not attempt to explain all migrant struggles here because they are too diverse and individual-based. However, I would like to discuss some of the more prevalent themes. One such trend is that migrants are frequently the object of overt discrimination and prejudice. President Chirac himself said in 1991, "Our problem is not the foreigners, it is more the overdose of foreigners. Maybe it is true that they are more numerous than before the war, but they are different, and it makes a difference. It is certain that having Spaniards, Polish, and Portuguese working on our soil rerates fewer problems than having Muslims and blacks... and it is not racist to say that," (Jugé and Perez 2006:198). Not only are migrants frequently spoken of in this way, many see little hope in shifting ethnic French

mentalities. Ben Jelloun conveys this common sense of hopelessness when he questions, “What point is there trying to court a public opinion that's no longer ashamed to espouse extremist attitudes and simplistic ideas based on fear and confusion?” (Ben Jelloun and Bray 1999:18).

Additionally, migrants are heavily stigmatized for being different¹⁹. Proof of this comes in the form of employment statistics. While France currently has an unemployment rate of 10.4% (Petroff 2013), 25% of migrants are currently out of work (Ministère du Travail, de l’Emploi, de la Formation Professionnelle et du Dialogue Social 2012). Further proof of stigmatization is in the French classroom. Children are taught to lose sight of their own culture in the (Keaton 2006:90) and face the risk of being considered unpatriotic and bad citizens if they refuse to blend in. To avoid the stigma of difference, migrants must balance two identities – their true selves with their French counterpart that is in accordance with French beliefs, norms, and behaviors. Which identity they adopt depends on the context and social expectations. As a Moroccan migrant himself, Ben Jelloun explains that his dream has always been “to be Moroccan without renouncing any of the things France had given to [him]. To be French without in any way abandoning [his] origins,” (Ben Jelloun and Bray 1999:15). While this Ben Jelloun’s dream is likely that of many more migrants, its actualization is difficult due to current French aversions towards multiculturalism and diversity.

Whether a migrant is seeking asylum or not and regardless of how long he or she has been in France, a common struggle is the realization that one will never truly be French. Despite becoming naturalized, learning the language, studying the history, and

¹⁹ By different I mean in comparison to French expectations in terms of appearance, values, behavior, and possessing the typical French Identity.

adopting the culture, they still have foreign birthplaces, ethnic roots, the label of having immigrant origins (*d'origine immigrée*²⁰) (Garner 2007:80), and are therefore seen by many ethnic French as foreign. However, amidst the French intolerance, unreasonable demands, violence, and oppression, France's immigrant population does have hope for a brighter future thanks to migrant and refugee aiding organizations like La Cimade with its refugee welcome center in Béziers, France. In order to demonstrate the effect of political policy and anti-immigration sentiments on aid organizations, refugees, and migrants, I will now dedicate the remainder of this analysis to a discussion of common refugee experiences, La Cimade's work with the Roma population in Béziers, and suggested areas in which La Cimade can improve its assistance efforts and more effectively change French mentalities towards multiculturalism and diversity.

²⁰ *D'origine imigrée* is the label that many ethnic French put on any person who has any roots besides French ones despite how long they and their family has lived in France. The phrase *d'origine imigrée* has a negative connotation, conveys Otherness, and reveals the stigma of having non-French origins in a current France that is very proud of the French Identity.

CHAPTER THREE

Everyday Strife: An Analysis of the Common Struggles Faced By Refugees in France

Afternoon Walks in Béziers

During my third or fourth morning at La Cimade, Célia, an employee at the refugee welcome center, walked into the office looking just as burdened and exhausted as she had the days before. Surprisingly, instead of throwing her things on her desk as she had done the past few mornings, she hastily scribbled something on a paper and then handed it to me: Nino, room 28. Unsure of what I was supposed to do with this information, I gave Célia a confused look to which she replied, “What? Yesterday you said you wanted to start talking with some of the refugees and Nino is a good place to start. Her French is good and she is lonely. Go upstairs and ask her to show you around Béziers.” As I climbed the stairs, I was nervous about having my first conversation with a refugee without one of the La Cimade employees present. However, all of my anxiety dissipated when I knocked on the door and was greeted by a small, redheaded, twenty-something year old who had one of the biggest and most inviting smiles I had ever seen. Nino warmly invited me into her room despite never having met me before and asked me who I was. I barely finished explaining that I was doing some observations of La Cimade and wanted someone to show me around Béziers before she jumped up excitedly and exclaimed that she would love to be my tour guide. We then set up our first meeting date and I anxiously awaited my chance to learn more about this woman’s story.

On our first walk, during which Nino showed me the Cathédrale Saint-Nazaire, I was surprised by her loquacity. While the other refugees at La Cimade initially came across as friendly yet shy, Nino led the conversation and loved to smile. I quickly learned

that her French was quite good because she was taking French language classes five days a week, which was three days more than many refugees at La Cimade. As Nino explained herself, “I am the only one here from my family and I need to know how to survive on my own.” This was only the first of many indicators that Nino had a strong personal drive and that she strove to make the most of her situation in France. As we walked to the cathedral, we initially chatted about the weather and French food but eventually began finding many similarities between us. For example, we were both captivated by the beautiful French church architecture, stained glass, and gardens and felt completely disoriented when we first arrived in France. I believe it was these commonalities and our easy way of talking that permitted me to learn much about Nino in a short amount of time. During that first walk to the Cathédrale Saint-Nazaire and our conversation on a bench outside that overlooked the beautiful Canal du Midi, I was surprised by how quickly Nino began relaying personal information. It seemed that within a matter of minutes I was able to roughly piece together the last few years of her life and the difficulty of her ongoing migrant experience.

Arriving in Lyon, France after leaving Georgia in 2012 due to conflict at the Georgia-Armenia border, Nino was completely alone, lacked access to the French language, could not effectively ask people for help. However, she was fortunate enough to find a small Georgian community who took her to the correct governmental offices. She was then placed in a refugee welcome center (*Centre d’Accueil pour les Demandeurs d’asile*) in Carcassonne and during her three-month stay found herself isolated and quite depressed. Far-off from anyone she knew and unable to call home due to the high cost, Nino’s drive to build a better life for herself had begun to wane. While making new

friends seemed like the logical approach towards boosting both her happiness and French speaking abilities, she knew too little of the language to feel comfortable interacting with French strangers. For a long time, Nino expressed that she felt alone, wished she had not fled to France, and had a hard time even getting out of bed each morning. However, things seemed to take a turn for the better when the French government decided to move her to the La Cimade center in Béziers for reasons still unknown to Nino.

Per the suggestion of a counselor, Nino began processing her emotions by taking long walks. She said that this was how she had first found the Cathédrale Saint-Nazaire. On a bench out front she exclaimed, “I like this church so much. Its old architecture reminds me of the one in my hometown. I can also take walks along the canal close to here. The nature there looks like it does in my city only it is better because back home I cannot just walk around outside. It is too dangerous. Walking around, it is therapeutic for me. You know?” In addition to exploring the city for fun and her many French classes each week, La Cimade also paid for weekly yoga classes as a way to help Nino relax. Célia had also given her a sewing machine so she could earn a little money by repairing clothes. With the little money she earned from this, she loved to buy supplies to make jewelry or participate in various activities with her Georgian friends in Béziers. From the outside, it seemed as if Nino was doing quite well as a refugee adjusting to her new life in France.

Struggles of Being a Refugee

On our many walks together, Nino told me more of her story piece by piece. From the very beginning of our interactions, I got the sense that she had faced much strife since arriving in France but that the period during which she lived in Carcassonne with no

connections was her lowest. Although Nino was the first refugee about whom I learned a decent amount, many more conversations with people from diverse backgrounds and experiences made me quite aware of how difficult it is to be a refugee in France.

Acquiring Access to the French Language

During our first walk together, one of the first personal things that Nino divulged was how hard learning French has been for her. During those first few days, she was unable to speak with anyone or express her needs such as her when she was unable to order from a vendor at a sandwich shop when she was overcome with hunger. To Nino, this experience was humiliating and left her feeling horribly alone. Since then, possibly to avoid prior feelings of helplessness, she has been taking all the free French classes she can find. It was quite easy to empathize with Nino from the start of our interactions because I remembered my own awkward and stressful interactions with people upon my arrival to France. I could not figure out how to operate the kiosk check out machine at the grocery store nor explain what my problem was to the employee trying to help me. Despite my three years of college-level French, I was astonished by my inability to fully express myself in the way I wanted. Suddenly, I recognized how brave it was for Nino and so many other refugees to enter France with no French speaking abilities.

While many refugees have the opportunity to take French classes through programs offered by organizations like La Cimade and the Red Cross, the process of language acquisition is long and difficult. When I met Nino, she had been taking classes consistently for two of her three years in France and still she did not voice confidence in her own French speaking abilities. She also revealed that she her still frequent inability to express herself fully and the sense of being misunderstood leaves her feeling dejected.

Through discussions with other refugees, this seemed to be a trend. People who did not come to France with knowledge of French often spoke of the stressful bureaucratic processes at OFPRA due to their lack of French but also the feelings of inadequacy day in and day out. Holtzman in writing of Sudanese refugee experiences in Minnesota encourages his readers to

“Try to imagine yourself in a foreign country, being interviewed by people whose language you have never heard, and communicating through a translator whose abilities may be less than perfect. You are asked a long series of complex and difficult questions, which the interviewer requires you to answer in specific ways. If there are any inconsistencies, you will be presumed to be lying and you will not pass.” [2000:24].

Not only is there the stress of answering questions correctly. Most refugees do not want to have to talk about their pasts at all and especially not with complete strangers (Pipher 2002:280). Additionally, French refugees must either speak in a language that is not their first or are relying on translators, who may or may not be recounting their stories accurately. To say the least, the interview process is one of much discomfort, especially in situations where a refugee has French language deficiencies.

As Pipher expresses regarding refugees in the United States, language acquisition is a common source of strife. For example, Pipher gives the example of asking a man to do a simple math problem to assess his mathematical abilities. The man responded by taking the paper, writing out an extensive calculus problem, and giving it back to her (2002:56). This instance shows how, while refugees may not have sufficient access to the host country's language, they do have many useful skills, which Pipher calls human capital (Pipher 2002:69). However, even though many people have advanced education and occupational skills such as those in medicine or mathematics, their language restrictions limit their abilities to fully use these skills and professional experiences.

Additionally, many refugees not only experience a drop in status when they leave their homes (Pipher 2002:99 and Fadiman 1997:105), they must also rely on the help of others such as their children, who often acquire language skills far faster than they do (Pipher 2002:229). The potential change in familial power dynamics that can stem from children speaking and understanding French better than their parents is yet another example of the difficulties of cultural acclimation. Unfortunately, language struggles are just the beginning of those faced by refugees during their adjustment to life in a new place.

A Strange Life in France

In discussing the Nuer refugee experience in Minnesota, Jon Holtzman expounds upon the difficulty of the adjustment period. He claims,

"Adjusting to changes in the physical environment was, however, in many ways the easy part. Housing, transportation, work - in fact, virtually all aspects of life - bore little resemblance to the Nuer's familiar way of life. In the earliest days, even the simplest tasks - how to shop or how to cook - seemed like insurmountable challenges," [2000:29].

While not all refugees experience changes in lifestyle as drastic as those of the Nuer upon their arrival to the United States, this does not negate the fact that anyone stepping into a new culture has much to learn – especially those who have never experienced life in a Western, industrialized and egocentric culture like France. For some people, even simple things like how to interact with strangers on the street are unfamiliar. It is no wonder that one refugee explained to Pipher that “Every day in a foreign country is like final exam week,” (Pipher 2002:60). Simple tasks become a struggle and people must learn so much quite quickly. While a migrant’s adjustment to life in the United States differs from his or her acclimation to France, there are certainly many commonalities. Many refugees in both places must not only learn a new language but also face the pressures of absorbing

hundreds of cultural norms that will permit them to become effectively adjusted and prosperous in their new lives.

In addition to the pressures to adjust to what may seem like strange cultural norms, a different pace of life, and new social dynamics, a refugee in France must also cope with his or her new identity as an ethnic Other. One Muslim and refugee woman, on our walk to the office of the prefecture, explained her constant awareness of people looking judgmentally at her hijab. This was hurtful to her because of how France is supposedly a society open to all religions but also because of how, from markers such as clothing or heavy accents, people assume a degree of Otherness that is often correlated with popular anti-immigration sentiments in France. This woman and many other French refugees, with their markers of Otherness, enter an anti-immigration political context in which they are frequently associated with “desperation, criminality, wanton sexuality, and voracious appetites for both employment and welfare,” (Garner 2007:76). Indeed, even the children and grandchildren of migrants and refugees who grow up in France will forever be seen as Others because of their label *d’origine immigrée* (of immigrant origin) (Garner 2007:80). Even those few who gain permission to stay and build a life in France will not be perceived as French because the people of their family originated from outside the Hexagon²¹.

A Sense of Helplessness

In addition to the new language, ways of life, and permanent status as outsider that refugees face, many also struggle with always being dependent on others. Due to insufficient language skills and a lack of knowledge of social norms and French

²¹ The Hexagon is another way that many ethnic French and denizens refer to France due to its hexagon shape.

government policy, many refugees that I encountered relied heavily on the assistance of others²². Tamilla, for example, a woman at the La Cimade *Centre d'Accueil pour les Demandeurs d'Asile* needed help changing some incorrect information on her paperwork. To accomplish this herself, she would have needed to know which of the many governmental offices in Béziers to go to, how to get there, and that she must take a number, wait to be called, and know what to say to the impatient government employee sitting behind the desk once it was finally her turn. A person new to France many not understand the bureaucratic systems nor how decisions made about them often depend on how officials feel that day and how much help they are willing to provide (Ticktin 2006:36). To progress effectively through these systems, refugees and migrants often need some guidance. However, high numbers of asylum requests in France make access to cultural brokers (like welcome center employees) difficult to access. The result is that they must figure many things out for themselves.

After several weeks of observing asylum processes and the aid of refugees, I had yet to witness some sort of refugee orientation. When I brought this up with Nino, she seemed astonished when I explained to her how, in the United States, I had witnessed programs offered by Refugee Services of Texas to help refugees adjust to life in America. Unlike the American refugees, no one had taught her about the monetary system, how to best use her allocations for food and personal items, or the laws and social expectations in the host country. After expressing that this kind of help would have been nice, Nino explained how all she had received upon her arrival to France was an impatient social

²² I in no way mean to downplay the amount of independence and capabilities of refugees because, to arrive in France, they had to be very self-reliant and work their way through many bureaucratic processes. I merely aim to demonstrate how upon arrival, many refugees I encountered had learned to utilize fully the aid systems while some even seemed to have forgotten their own capabilities.

worker who had too many cases and would become easily frustrated with her lack of understanding. While Nino was fortunate to have the assistance of La Cimade personnel, nowhere was she taught how to flourish in French culture nor what it means to be French despite the high expectations that she assimilate very quickly. Therefore, while France expects refugees to help themselves and integrate, they provide them with little means to learn the “French Ways,” becoming self-reliant, or find their place in the French community. This leaves many to rely on the help of people from their home country who have been in France longer than they have and create ethnic enclaves that do not promote integration.

The Memory of Home

Over the course of several walks around Béziers with Nino, I learned much about the struggles that commence upon a refugee’s arrival to France. While Nino would discuss troubles with learning French, making friends, the uncertainty of her future, and interacting with French people, what she talked about most frequently was the memory of home. The churches in France reminded her of the one she grew up attending, the giant parks and beautiful French countryside of the nature that violence back home rarely permitted her to enjoy, and the people in pairs of loved ones she left behind in Georgia. She also exclaimed, “I try to call my sister from time to time but it is too expensive and we can only talk for a moment. And sending and receiving letters take so long. I always feel isolated.” There were many people at the refugee welcome center who had arrived with their families and Nino was one of the few of whom I knew that had come alone. However, even for those who brought loved ones along, there are still many people who could not leave or did not survive. France constantly reminds its refugees that they are

neither citizens nor ethnic French and only once they receive permission to stay in France can they start to build any sense of belonging. Until then, however, they are left with memories of home and doomed to a state of liminality.

Struggles of the Refugee Children

During the course of my stay in Southern France, I had several opportunities to work with children of migratory backgrounds: refugee children living at the Béziers welcome center, those at Catholic Charities in Montpellier, France who I tutored in math and English, and other still to whom I read books and played with in the park through a local organization called *Bibliothèque dans la Rue* (Libraries on the Street). Despite running from violence in their home countries, migrating with their parents, and becoming exposed to a new culture and language, they all seemed strikingly normal²³ to me. Despite having this sense of familiarity, their pasts had exposed them to unique experiences and struggles that had ultimately shaped them all uniquely. In addition to demands that they learn a new language, adjust their cultural norms, and accept their status as Others, they faced additional challenges distinct from those of their parents.

Refugee Children and Culture Switching

Reyana was a 15-year-old girl from Chechnya. She, her mother, and grandmother were forced to leave their hometown due to interreligious and governmental conflict. Together they arrived in France, were placed in the Béziers refugee welcome center, and began piecing together their lives while they waited to hear the status of their asylum requests. While all three women learned the French language and behavior norms

²³ By normal I mean I witnessed exchanges much like those considered standard in America like teenagers who pushed away their coddling mothers, younger boys who chase around girls, and toddlers who loved to ask “why?”

together, their experiences in France were quite different. Rayana's mother and grandmother stayed at the center during the day among other Chechen people, spoke Russian, and maintained various cultural practices, while Rayana left the commune every day to go to school. It was there that she was exposed to more interactions with French children, was forced to pick up a new language so she could do well in school, and struggled with bigger questions of identity than average teenagers due to being an Other in an environment where everyone strove to fit in. One afternoon in the office, Rayana's mother came in to check the mail and received Rayana's report card, which contained bad grades in math and history. As the mother-daughter pair argued softly, Rayana spoke in French, her mother in Russian, and I was well aware of the struggle for power that I was witnessing. While Rayana's mother wanted her to do well in school, she only approved of a certain degree of integration.

At home, Rayana's mother and grandmother wanted her to maintain her culture and value system while the French school system and society was concomitantly teaching Rayana to devalue her Chechen culture. For example, both women overtly opposed of Rayana's choice to wear a hijab and dress modestly but in the most fashion-forward way as possible. Rayana's struggle to fit in while pleasing her mother and grandmother was quite apparent. Many children like Rayana live a divided life as they are forced to switch between two cultures depending on their environment (Pipher 2002:162). I imagine she feels quite similar to one of Pipher's informants who exclaimed, "I am an American teenager at school, but at home I am Vietnamese," (2002:162). At school, refugee children are expected to learn English, typical American behavior, and do well in school while they also desperately want to make friends and not be seen as the outsider (Pipher

2002:180; Holtzman 2000:96). Through the example of Rayana, we can see how the same expectations of what Pipher calls culture switching (2002:162) exists for refugee children in France. This bouncing between worlds, value systems, and trying to please people in both realms can be exhausting. Ultimately, it becomes harder and harder for students to keep their two worlds separate and please people in each.

The Challenges of School

As demonstrated by the interaction with her mother regarding grades, Rayana struggled with her academics. Math was one particular weak spot. She would study hard but her invested efforts always returned poor results. Not only is math already a difficult subject for many, she had to learn it in a language that she did not fully understand. Unfortunately, Rayana was not the only refugee child at the Béziers welcome center struggling in school. For example, at one staff meeting La Cimade employees discussed options for helping Akmath, a nine-year-old boy who had a reading level of a six-year-old. The ultimate decision was to find a volunteer who would tutor him. While La Cimade's employees and volunteers work hard to help students perform better in school, this response arises only after a problem becomes apparent and does nothing to treat the cause: the French school system.

Many refugees and migrant children in France often struggle in the French school system not because they do not try but because they receive insufficient support (Keaton and Diawara 2006:98). While many students are placed in special classrooms for students learning French as a second language, this benefit is only for children at the middle

school level or above and the programs only lasts for a year or less²⁴. Béziers is a special case where students may receive additional help from teachers after school, but most still spend the majority of their time in packed, mainstream classrooms where teachers are not able to tailor lessons to their needs. One possible solution on the part of La Cimade has been to enact a sort of advocacy program. As refugee welcome center director Jean-Philippe explained to me,

"I meet with the school on the child's behalf. Like an advocate. I help them understand the history of the child and how it is hard to complete homework assignments when your whole family is crammed into a small living space. I also help teachers and principals know what it means to be a refugee, request asylum, and apply for a *carte de séjour*²⁵ so they can better understand what these children are going through and be more empathetic. There is an organization who does what I do for the refugee children called *Education San Frontiers*. But because I know these kids, I prefer to be their advocate in the school system."

The goal is therefore to increase the understanding of school officials in regards to the children's situations as refugees. Even with this program, I still witnessed many refugee children like Rayana and Akmash who were still falling behind in their studies. I could not help but see their failure as a form of symbolic violence. While they were behind because a lack of support in the school system, many took blame for their poor performance by saying that they were just not meant for school²⁶.

As if this were not enough, they also get the message in the French classroom that their unique ethnic identities are undesirable and not something of which they should be proud. Through programs of citizenship education, French children learn about how to

²⁴ Upon speaking with the head of the foreign student program in Béziers, I learned the common protocol is to just place kids in primary school straight into the French classroom because they appear to integrate best this way. Conversely, students in middle school and high school were permitted the assistance of a special classroom setting for at least their first three months in France

²⁵ The French *carte de séjour* is a permit to reside and work in France and is the equivalent of a Green Card in the United States. From this point forward, I will refer to the *carte de séjour* as a French residency and work permit.

²⁶ This is an example of both symbolic and structural violence as discussed in the literature review portion of this thesis.

“fulfil[1] the principles of the French Revolution of 1789 as embodied by the constitution of the French Republic,” (Starkey 2000:39) and how to integrate into a common national culture (Starkey 2000:41). According to Starkey, these citizenship education efforts have “always been intended to help integrate a diverse population into a single national culture defined as Republican (2000:42). While there may seem to be no fault in teaching children what it means to be French, the problem lies in how these approaches devalue diversity. Complete integration is problematic because children can either assimilate or remain unique and therefore acquire further markers of Otherness (Jugé and Perez 2006:208).

Changes in Power Dynamics

Coming from one world and adjusting to life in another, Rayana and many other French refugee children struggle with balancing two different identities and their academics. However, another source of trouble for young refugees is the change in power dynamics upon resettlement. As Ahearnd and Athey claim regarding the American context

"Following resettlement, refugee children are again forced to take on adult responsibilities. Due to more rapid acculturation and command of the English language, many children and youth become the critical link between their parents and the new society. They are the ones who must communicate with landlords, doctors, school officials, and other authorities" [1991:165].

Fadiman goes further to say that adults come to rely on children for help understanding their new life in the host country (1997:182) while Pipher addresses how better language acquisition causes children to move from being dependent on their parents to being depended on (2002:78). This may cause children to take on the stress of mature situations and interactions such as with doctors and lawyers in addition to parental insecurity as

they lose their decision-making roles in the family. While speaking with many refugee parents myself, I witnessed countless times children who stepped in to translate for their parents. These parents always seemed conflicted in situations like this. While they seemed happy to communicate, I sensed their embarrassment from their red faces and lack of eye contact. While the system of relying on children is helpful for the parents in the short-term, this shift in power may not only put much responsibility on the shoulders of children and force them to grow up quickly. It also has potential to strain the relationship between the parent and child as the child becomes the new authority (Pipher 2002:78).

Fitting the Mold

Through my many conversations with refugees about the process of applying for asylum, I quickly noticed a pattern. While employees expressed that it was a constant struggle to extract accurate stories from refugees, the refugees themselves often expressed a fear of not telling the right story and thus not being granted asylum. While the following account is of a Roma²⁷ woman who is not eligible for asylum, her way of recounting the past is representative of the common refugee experience.

A Fabricated History

At set times throughout the week, La Cimade hosts open office hours for people both inside and outside of the refugee welcome center to come seek assistance. According to Jean-Philippe, “The people not staying at the CADA (refugee welcome center), they find the assistance of La Cimade by word of mouth. They hear from people in the city that we help them with paperwork and application processes. We do not need

²⁷ I will explain why some Roma people are not considered refugees in the subsequent chapter.

advertising. They all seem to find us quite easily just by the spread of word.” Many need advice on where to receive various services while others require assistance with contacting governmental officials. During many of these sessions, I would observe the needs of various people from the Béziers community based on the problems they presented to La Cimade personnel. These short meetings moved quickly and thick accents made understanding the problems and demands difficult. However, no situation left me quite as confused as one involving Jean-Philippe and two Roma women.

In black t-shirts and knee-length jean skirts, two women entered the La Cimade office with their young daughters. While one woman stood quietly against the wall, the other situated the children with pens and paper and started to banter with Jean-Philippe. After chatting for a few minutes, she then brought up her official business. On the day of the most recent Roma camp police bust in Béziers, she had been walking down the street with her children when a police officer stopped them. Her pitch then grew higher, she started talking faster, and even stood up to act out the scene. I could no longer understand much beyond random words and phrases but her yelling seemed to indicate anger. As the woman’s story progressed, Jean-Philippe grew red in the face, started fidgeting with things on his desk, and even began to pace. It was obvious that the woman was telling him a troubling story. Jean-Philippe expressed that filing a report was pointless and both people began yelling unintelligibly. Then suddenly, all parties got quiet, the mothers recuperated their daughters, and the group shuffled out. I must have looked shocked by the intensity of the encounter because Jean-Philippe laughed and said to me, “And now you have met Vlechka.”

Always very vocal about her rights and being treated poorly, Vlechka had been upset that a police officer humiliated her in front of her children by demanding to see her papers, shoving her, and questioning why she was in France. Knowing that she would not calm down until he did something, Jean-Philippe agreed to file a report of the incident later in the week when he was less busy. Jean-Philippe's knowledge of how to respond to Vlechka suddenly made sense when he revealed that he has been working with her since 2005. Living on a private plot of land outside of Béziers and acting as a single mother because her husband was in prison, La Cimade helped Vlechka apply for asylum and familial allocations so she could support her family. However, the French government found inconsistencies in her personal records and the names on her son's birth certificate, and her request for asylum quickly unraveled.

Having lived with her parents in Bulgaria until the age of thirteen, she was married to Lyubisa Konstantinov and soon after moved to Paris. At fifteen-years-old¹⁵, Vlechka and her husband both lied about their names and ages on his birth certificate because they were fearful that the French social welfare would take him away. For several years, Vlechka Borisova Mladenova, born on April 30th of 1989, began using the name Pamela Constantinovic and saying she was born in 1985. Investigations in 2008 revealed that she had lied on much of her application for asylum, including her place of origin. According to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Vlechka was not considered a refugee. Due to her Bulgarian birthplace, Vlechka knew she would be considered a migrant for economic reasons and therefore claimed she was from Ex-Yugoslavia make herself eligible for asylum²⁸.

²⁸ I will address Vlechka's reason for claiming that she was from former Yugoslavia in the subsequent chapter, during which I discuss many plights of the Roma people.

Since OFPRA personnel revealed her true identity after having carefully searched her application for any discrepancies, Vlechka and La Cimade have been working hard to obtain a French work and residency permit equivalent to a Green Card. Throughout many court appearances and hours writing and correcting paperwork, Jean-Philippe has been supportive of Vlechka and has come to admire her. However, he does not deny how much more difficult she made things for herself by creating a false history. Although Vlechka altered her name, age, and place of origin to avoid trouble with the law and make her request for asylum more appealing, the exposed lies now have the government even more picky about her new application. Having already sent her request back several times with demands for more information, Jean-Philippe is not sure if French officials will award her the work and residency permission card that she desperately needs to support her children and stay in France.

Lying as a Common Approach towards Gaining Admittance to a Host Country

Vlechka's story is significant because it is representative of a common struggle. After hearing horror stories of people who are denied asylum but are afraid to return home, many people learn to change their histories to they fit what they think makes a successful application. However, personal accounts that do not perfectly align are commonly returned with requests for more details and proof, which ultimately puts more of a burden on organizations like La Cimade. As Shandy explains regarding Nuer refugees in America, those applying for asylum tell stories that they felt would gain them admittance to the US because "They had learned that the refugee officials were looking for certain kinds of experiences to determine who fit the criteria for refugee resettlement (2003:350). Fadiman and Holtzman also address the struggle of lies told to create ideal

applications for refuge (1999 and 2000). Through the case of Vlechka, we can see that this fabrication of histories also exists in France.

In France, high numbers of asylum applications each year must be sifted through to find those who need asylum and those who use refuge as a way to enter the country now that immigration policy is more restricted. According to Jean-Philippe, La Cimade personnel must therefore help refugees present their stories flawlessly so inconsistencies do not make governmental officials question their validity. La Cimade employees and volunteers therefore spend countless hours collecting and correcting stories and convincing refugees that they can be trusted with often the most painful details of a person's past. Considering the meticulous work that goes into one application, it is easy to understand the exhaustion of the La Cimade personnel. While Vlechka's true story did not warrant refuge, it shows that people are willing to fabricate histories to gain entrance into France, the increased workload that these actions create for people providing refugee assistance, and why many refugees find the asylum seeking process terrifying. Not only must a refugee in desperate need of asylum recount his or her horrifying history multiple times to people that he or she does not know, these accounts are frequently questioned and refugees, who have already been through so much, acquire the burden of proving the validity of their painful pasts.

The Burden of Proof

In the La Cimade refugee welcome center office, discussion often revolves around the concept of proof. It was the job of the employees to extract truthful stories about experiences to validate a refugee's need of asylum while refugees themselves had to gather medical certificates verifying the atrocities they claimed had been done to them.

With the strictness of the French asylum system, there is pressure on both the employees and the refugees themselves to prove experiences as worthy of asylum so that their story may not be confused for a lie. As Célia, a La Cimade employee told me one morning while she was angrily gathering copies of medical documents and birth certificates for one person's asylum application packet,

“What does it matter if you have been tortured? The government will say ‘Where is your proof?’ But while you are being chased are you supposed to say ‘Will you wait a minute please? I need to take a picture of this moment so I can have proof for the French government?’ No. The system is ridiculous. These people have already suffered enough.”

According to Fassin and d'Halluin, “A quarter of a century ago, asylum was a matter of trust, in which the applicant was assumed to be telling the truth. Today, asylum is set in a climate of suspicion, in which the asylum seeker is seen as someone trying to take advantage of the country's hospitality,” (2005:600). OFPRA officials are constantly looking for “false refugees” or persons whose claims to political asylum are simply based in economic incentives (Fassin 2005:369). The asylum seeker is not credible enough and must therefore base his or her case in the expertise of mental health professionals (Fassin and d'Halluin 2007:304) and certificates drawn up by doctors that can attest to their experiences (Fassin and D'Halluin 2005:598). For a judge, the best sort of proof is that which is physically visible and therefore more palpable (Fassin and d'Halluin 2007:318). To expound upon further the dangers of this approach, I will now provide the example of one refugee whose burden of proof was especially large.

Aret's Retrial

Although La Cimade primarily focuses its efforts on the needs of people living at the welcome center, it also hosts bi-weekly outreach sessions where people from the greater migrant community of Béziers (whether they be refugees or immigrants) can receive help with various forms of paperwork. One afternoon, I sat in on one such session and watched people with very diverse needs receive assistance. The last man the volunteers saw that day appeared about thirty years old, carried with him a single envelope, sat down and immediately began to talk with a volunteer named Nadia. Although I had never met him before, this man's behaviors gave me the impression that he had much experience with the La Cimade personnel and his story indicated this was exactly the case.

Forced to flee from Algeria after his wife exposed his homosexuality (something an Algerian can be imprisoned for), the French government had denied Aret's request for asylum because he lacked proof of his sexual orientation. In addition, the French officials did not seem empathetic to this form of persecution. Unable to return to Algeria, Aret requested a retrial, had consequentially received a letter that stated the date of his court appearance in Paris, and brought this letter to La Cimade to receive help with the next step of the retrial process. Upon reading the letter, a big smile formed on Célia's face and she grabbed his hands. She knew that this meant he still had a chance to earn asylum. However, Aret pulled his hands away and said, "It is impossible. I cannot go. I have no money. It is impossible." Nadia quickly dropped her smile and replied, "But you must find a way. If you want to stay in France, you have to go." To this, Aret repeated what he

had said before and then Nadia gave a similar rebuttal. Neither person seemed to be listening to the other as their conversation moved in a repetitive circle.

At this time, a single train ticket to Paris cost €60 or more and Aret had no money to spare because refugees in France are not allowed work permits. However, Nadia knew that if he did not go to the trial, the French government would send him back to Algeria in a matter of weeks. The two continued to talk without listening to the other about both Aret's need and inability to go to Paris. Seeming on the verge of yelling, Nadia tried calling Aret's lawyer as a last effort to help. The line was busy and Nadia said she would try again later and update Aret next Friday. He responded with a scoff and, with slouched shoulders and dragging feet, picked up his letter and exited the room looking as if his burden of proof had left him utterly exhausted.

I did not see Aret until nearly a week later when Nadia offered to give me a ride home one evening. As we got to an intersection just a couple blocks from La Cimade, I noticed Aret on the street-corner and pointed him out to Nadia, who excitedly pulled off the street and frantically waved her arms to get Aret's attention. After he saw us and approached the window, Nadia yelled out that she had contacted his lawyer. However, she did not get much farther than this because Aret interrupted and replied, "Thank you but I will not get it"²⁹. I have decided to stop. I did not get it before and I will not get it this time. It is too much work and I am tired. I have decided to stop." Nadia's response was to dramatically throw her arms up in the air and demand, "Why?! You have come so far. You have a lawyer. You have written your letter to the judge. You have a court date. You are so close and unless you try, you will go back. You must try, you must try, you must try."

²⁹ By "it," Aret refers to refugee status in France.

The two continued back and forth, as they had during their previous encounter, until Aret seemed to realize that Nadia would not give up. After becoming silent, Aret gave a deep sigh and said, “Okay, okay. I will keep trying.” While his words said he would persist, his body language suggested otherwise. With a small wave, Aret then walked away and Nadia happily pulled back onto the street. After going to such great lengths to talk with Aret, she seemed so satisfied by hearing what she wanted that she forgot to tell Aret that she had found money for a train ticket. This was the last time I saw Aret and I am therefore left to wonder whether he continued with his retrial process or had been sent home.

Aret could not prove his homosexuality and therefore his need for asylum. However, many people use France’s demand for proof to their advantage by presenting certificates attesting to medical ailments. Around La Cimade, this concept is referred to as the “illness clause.” As Article 12bis-11 states, residence permits can go to “the foreigner living in France whose health status necessitates medical care, the default of which would have consequences of exceptional gravity, considering that he/she cannot have access to proper treatment in the country from which he/she comes,” (Fassin 2005:370). Therefore, a person who needs medical assistance not offered in his or her place of origin may gain admittance to France to obtain treatment (Ticktin 2006:37). Residency for Medical reasons is precarious given that permits must be renewed every three to twelve months and usually prohibit people from working (Fassin 2005:4). However, this approach permits entrance and, where “all other possibilities of getting a residence permit [are] progressively restrained by successive legislation, health and

illness have increasingly become the most legitimate ground for awarding legal status,” (Fassin 2005:3).

The new trend of reliance on medical proof follows patterns within the system of asylum and immigration that places higher demands of proof on those seeking admittance to France. However, not all people can demonstrate their needs for entrance with a medical certificate as demonstrated by Aret, whose asylum case failed because he could not definitively prove his sexual orientation after trying so hard to keep it secret. In a system that has grown ever-more dependent on establishing proof, we have to wonder how many people like Aret are denied asylum each year after failing to prove the validity of their claims to abuse. And how many are forced to return to the dangerous conditions that they risked their lives to escape because psychological exam reports and medical certificates did not adequately reflect their claimed pasts? Aret’s story is representative of a common refugee struggle in France. The high number of asylum applications in part stems from a radically scaled-back immigration policy that contributes to high asylum refusal rates but also to the system-induced exhaustion of countless asylum seekers who are still in need of assistance.

Denial of Asylum

During the months to years that many refugees spend in the French asylum application process, person spends a significant amount of time anxiously waiting for results that they desperately hope are positive. However, less than 20% of people who request asylum each year have their demands met (Fassin 2005:369). Unfortunately, this success was something I witnessed with Nino, the refugee woman from Georgia who acted as my Béziers tour guide.

Negative Results for Nino

Over the course of several weeks, I had grown used to constant conversation between Nino and me as we explored various parts of Béziers. This past sense of openness made responding to the new silence that had befallen us incredibly difficult. All morning I could tell that Nino was acting strange but it was not until we sat on bench facing out over a beautiful overlook that she told me what was wrong. Her second rejection letter had arrived in the mail yesterday. Lost for words and entirely unsure of what I could say to make her feel better, I decided to simply take her hand. As Nino sat and looked out over the French countryside, she let out one of the most sorrowful and burden-laden sighs that I have ever heard as a single tear rolled down her cheek. Before this day, I had the impression that Nino was making great progress and adjusting well to life in France. Yet, with the arrival of a single letter, all her hard work seemed for naught and her life was again rendered completely unstable.

Before this meeting, I had mostly heard about Nino's life back home, what she liked about France, and which aspects of French culture she found most bizarre. This day, however, she chose to recount a stressful trip to Paris that she had taken a month before my arrival. OFPRA (French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless People) had denied her asylum and she had to prepare a *recours* (retrial) application and present her case before the retrial court in Paris. She explained to me while dabbing her eyes with a tissue, "I do not understand. The officials were always so nice to me. I thought they liked me. Why did they deny me asylum?" She then continued, "I am happy I have Jean-Philippe. Right now, he lets me stay at La Cimade even though I have no right and I have

no money. I used to receive €200 a month and now I get nothing. I do not know how I will survive because I cannot work here.”

When I asked Nino what her plans entailed now that she had been denied asylum twice, she answered, “They will make me go home. I am almost out of options. I will hear back from one more office next week. I have to keep trying because I have no choice.” Looking at this young woman who risked so much to come to France, it was hard to accept her denial especially because I knew her degree of need. She not only felt unsafe returning home due to persecution and therefore met the UN’s main requirement for providing asylum (Pipher 2002:18; Holtzman 2000:14; Shandy 2003:347), she also seemed to be the model French refugee with how hard she was working to become fluent in the French language and self-sufficient in French culture. The government had denied her asylum on the pretense that she could simply move to another city in Georgia that was farther from the border and thus the fighting. However, Nino explained that moving back was not as simple as it seemed by saying, “I have no money. I have no one to help me. I have nowhere to go. My family is still in Georgia but it is too violent in our city. I must try to stay here because I cannot go home.”

The Nino I had come to know was a smart, young woman who was full of life and who had a tremendously kind heart. However, all I could see at this moment was her vulnerability reflected in her translucent skin and tired eyes. Not only had she escaped the terrors of war and was trying to adjust to a new life in France all alone, her counselor had stopped volunteering at La Cimade, her application for asylum had fallen through, and she had neither support in France nor a way to go home to her still war-torn country. France was supposed to be a place of asylum for her, not a new source of dread. It is still

hard to comprehend just how a woman could have been through so much and finally started to adjust to her new life only to have it all pulled out from underneath her so quickly. According to Jean-Philippe, those granted asylum “have permission to live and work in France for ten years. After this time they are assumed to be well adjusted so all they have to do is go to the prefecture and ask for an asylum renewal, which is usually no problem to obtain.” Unfortunately, Nino was not part of the slim number of cases awarded this privilege in 2013.

The Larger Social Implications of Tight Immigration Policy

Nino’s story is significant because it shows how the life courses and safety of many refugees relates to the larger French political context. Due to France’s fragile economic state and growing anti-immigration sentiments, officials feel more pressure to meet the French public’s demands to tighten borders and thus limit the number of people granted refuge. In the process, the French government criminalizes those seeking asylum by giving them the burden of proving their high degree of need. Additionally, of the 34,550 requests for asylum in 2012, 4,930 of these people were awarded asylum while 28,425 were forced to return to their place of origin. This means that many of the 82% of people refused asylum in 2012 had to return home to the strife, terror, and persecution that they tried so desperately to escape. Due to my close interactions with Nino, I cannot help but see her becoming victim to a maladaptive French system as representative of a greater problem in France. By tightening immigration law, France increases its numbers of asylum applicants but it also greatly increases its probably of denying refuge to people who are, in fact, in great need. Unfortunately, refugees are not the only people affected greatly by France’s conservative policies on immigration. I will now discuss the

implications of more rightist policy on the Roma populations within France, who also receive aid from La Cimade but do not fit into either category of migrant or refugee.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Outcasts of Europe: Treatment and Assistance of Roma in France

Meeting the Roma

One afternoon at La Cimade's refugee welcome center, I found a cabinet filled with old pamphlets from various refugee and migrant-assisting organization in Béziers. As I flipped through the pages trying to piece together the complex system of aid in Béziers, Jean-Philippe, the director of La Cimade at Béziers, peeked his head in the door and, with a sneaky smile, asked what I was doing. Worried that I had been looking through something I should not have, I stopped my searching. Jean-Philippe then entered the room with what seemed like a little skip in his step and asked with a hearty laugh asked, "How do you feel about taking a ride?" His bright eyes and giant smile left me curious about what he had in mind. It was not until we approached the city center in his compact European car that he told me how a nearby convent had collected several hundred yogurts on the verge of expiration from a local grocery store and requested that we deliver them to the people living in a Roma³⁰ camp on the edge of town. Never having interacted with the Roma people apart from seeing the elderly women begging on the

³⁰ Deciding on a name to refer to the nomadic people of France is very problematic. In their history, they have faced much persecution and the name Gitan along with many other are now considered pejorative. There is wide diversity among these people that they demonstrate through their names for themselves. The two that I heard most frequently were Tsigane and Manouche. However, many scholars and the governmental officials call these people Roma and *Les Gens du Voyage*, or the traveling people. The latter name was developed by governmental officials in attempt to lessen negative stereotypes associated with these people and their prior names, but it is used minimally. Most commonly, the French, many scholars, and some nomadic people themselves use the term Roma. I therefore choose to call them Roma when referencing scholarly works, French public opinions, and general living conditions and struggles of this diverse population group not out of disrespect of their diversity or of their own names for themselves but to merely to reduce confusion.

street or the men playing musical instruments around the city and on public transport, I was both excited and nervous about meeting and interacting with them.

After picking up yogurt from the convent, Jean-Philippe drove us away from the city center while he told me more about this particular group of Roma. He first met them in 2002 when they came to La Cimade to request help with their *carte de séjour* or French residency and work permit applications. Since then, he and the other employees at the *Centre d'Accueil pour les Demandeurs d'Asile* have been taking donations of food to their camp, defending the Roma children's legal right to an education, and providing a permanent address for Roma families to receive mail³¹. With both Jean-Philippe's descriptions of La Cimade's involvement and the one interaction I had witnessed between him and the Roma³² woman named Vlechka³³, I quickly came to see that while La Cimade exists to fill the needs of refugees in Béziers, it plays an advocacy role in the Roma community as well.

Caught up in talking with Jean-Philippe, I was thoroughly surprised when we turned into a garden plot on the edge of town instead of driving a ways out to where I thought the Roma camps were. Sensing my surprise, Jean-Philippe explained how the camp we were visiting was not the average Roma camp. Unlike the many Roma who face the uncertainty of whether their camp will be there when they get back from school, the market, or work, this group had managed to save enough money to purchase a community garden plot. Drawn by the possibility of land ownership, access to water, and

³¹ A permanent address is essential for obtaining permission to reside and work in France because the government needs a place send updates about a person's legal status.

³² Vlechka preferred to call herself Tsigane instead of Roma. I do not intend to offend by using the name Roma instead of Tsigane but do so merely for clarity purposes since names for various groups within the Roma population are numerous.

³³ I discussed Vlechka's attempt to gain asylum in France by fabricating a false personal history in the prior chapter.

closer distance to travel into town, many other groups had since then also purchased plots and lived together in their caravans amongst gardens of tomato, lettuce, and other greens.

After entering the garden, I saw how the Roma had created a hidden paradise by purchasing the innermost plots that could not be seen from the street. The first caravan cluster at which we stopped was comprised of three campers, one of which had a wood structure built off it, and two cars put up on blocks because they had no tires. There was a large grassy area surrounding the vehicles that was filled with various statues of lions, gnomes, and flamingos that appeared as if they had been plucked from some suburban American neighborhood. I quickly got the impression that the family living here had invested significant effort into beautifying their plot to make it look like home. When Jean-Philippe and I exited the car and slammed our car doors, boys without their shirts on and a few girls in summer dresses came running and yelling out of the house. They all recognized the arrival of Jean-Philippe and knew that he had brought things for them.

It only took a moment for the children to help themselves to the yogurt. While some made their way back to the wood structure carrying their flats, others sat right on the grass, tore into the packaging, and began to indulge. The teenagers then started to emerge from the caravans to see what all of the commotion was. Overall, I counted seven children, four teens, and three adults who chose to stay up at the caravans and watch from a distance. While the children feasted and brought the yogurt inside, the teens recognized that I was not someone from La Cimade whom they had seen before and seemed curious. After one girl mustered the courage to introduce herself, I was surprised by how suddenly anxious they all were to meet me and make sure I learned their names. During those few minutes that we were at the house, I met the children, held two babies, played a quick

game of chase, smiled a significant amount, and had all my prior notions of the Roma people completely dashed. While I heard from many ethnic French that the Roma are manipulative people who will steal from you, the children before me seemed like many others with whom I have interacted before. They were full of life and happy to receive any form of attention.

Recognizing that there were still other families to whom we still needed to deliver yogurt, Jean-Philippe began saying his goodbyes and we climbed back in the car and went on to repeat this interaction at three additional sites. At the last site we visited, I was playing with one of the Roma kids after the last of the yogurt had been taken out of Jean-Philippe's car when I realized that one woman dressed in a jean skirt and a dark t-shirt was making her way towards Jean-Philippe. It was Vlechka, the woman I had previously met at the refugee welcome center on the day she wanted to file a report against a police office. She shook Jean-Philippe's hand and thanked him for the yogurt. Jean-Philippe responded that it needed to be eaten quickly because there were no fridges in the camp. Possibly sensing that there was no need to be shy because Vlechka had felt comfortable to approach the car, many other women then began to come out as well. While Jean-Philippe spoke with a woman dressed in a vibrantly patterned and colored skirt and who I assumed was an elder figure, I tried to engage some of the women of the community. After saying hello and telling my name, one woman asked me if I was *Romanie*³⁴. Upon hearing my explanation that I was actually American, their curiosity seemed to intensify. Playing with my curly hair and asking how I liked living in America, I sensed that they enjoyed not being considered the foreign ones for once.

³⁴ *Romanie* is one name that the Roma of France call themselves if they come specifically from Romania

Finished with his conversation, Jean-Philippe explained to the group how we had to be getting back to work but that he hoped they enjoyed the yogurt. The children then all gathered around for hugs and the mothers moved to shake hands. As we pulled away, several women waved kindly while saying, “*Merci, Madame,*” while the children chased the car and yelled good-bye to Jean-Philippe. As we exited the community garden, I could not help but smile from how welcome I had felt with the family groups despite spending only a few minutes with each. The kind eyes of the women, the appreciative young adults, and the joyful children made it extremely difficult for me to see these people as their stereotypes: dangerous, ruthless, thieves.

Who are the Roma?

Like Mahoney, many authors addressing the plight of the Roma in France today begin with a brief history of their diaspora and the struggles that many have faced due to their migratory nature. The Roma came to Europe from the Indian subcontinent between the 13th and 14th centuries (Mahoney 2012:653-654) and were first persecuted in the 15th and 16th centuries. They again faced strong anti-Roma (anti-*gitan*³⁵) sentiments during the Hitler regime, and similar to the Jews, people suffered greatly because they were different. The Roma population in Europe is now estimated between 10-20 million people but this number’s accuracy is questionable due to how many people are fearful of claiming their Roma identity due to the negative stigma (Mahoney 2012:654). Although hundreds of years have passed since their first introduction into European society, the Roma still face extreme discrimination. Largely unemployed and seen as a burden, they are stereotyped and receive unequal treatment when compared to other people of Europe.

³⁵ *Gitan* is another expression that refers to the Roma but is typically used by the French and not by the Roma themselves. Today, this term is considered pejorative by many.

A significant injustice is also done by many ethnic French who assume their lives are rooted in suffering, see them as worthy of pity, and focus on a non-existent uniformity of all Roma people.

Despite how many Roma do not have refugee status, I discuss this group of people in depth in this chapter due to the aid they receive from La Cimade at Béziers. While not refugees and not standard migrants due to their new status as European Union citizens, which I will discuss below, Roma people have been discriminated against for centuries. However, La Cimade invests efforts into this population because it sees the importance of protecting the Roma right to be in France, fighting for humane treatment of Roma persons, and helping the Roma become self-sufficient in French society.

Names and Misunderstandings

In France, the name Roma refers not to the people who immigrate from Romania but to all the nomadic people living in Europe today. Contrary to popular belief, there is no universal Roma identity. These people are not one group, but in fact an amalgamation of many small ethnic groups (Timmer 2009:45) who are distinct in respect to their language, religion, nationality, history, and culture (Mahoney 2012:650-651). As Timmer explains, “Despite their diversity, scholars and policy makers construct the category of Roma to assert that “there is enough similarity between these disparate groups to justify similar policies and treatment,” (Timmer 2009:45). She then goes on to claim how homogenizing the migratory people in Europe and giving them one name to simply establish uniform policy is a form of oppression common to many minority groups (Timmer 2009:46). It is possible that this oppression is one form of structural violence enacted by France to control the Roma people. This outlook is useful for understanding

how many ethnic French see the Roma as a problem-causing, unwelcome, and as possessing an inferior way of life.

As a group, the Roma are often defined by their lack of a homeland. Despite the distinctiveness of Roma sub-groups, Europeans unite this ethnic group under the umbrella of Roma based on their migratory natures and way of life. However, the Roma or *Les Gens du Voyage* (The Traveling People), as they are also called by many ethnic French and governmental officials, have been in Europe for hundreds of years and do not identify as homeless (Timmer 2009:56). The Roma live in mobile caravans but, with their housing additions, work, and school, they are relatively sedentary and do not move unless forced. My discussions with many ethnic French revealed that few were aware of Roma life. Instead, people seemed to base their knowledge of the Roma on their stereotypes. Many Europeans perceive the Roma as dishonest (Timmer 2010:268; Timmer 2009:51) and equate them with “behaviors such as begging, thievery, and poor personal hygiene that may be more attributable to a life in poverty than to an ethnic or racial identity,” (Timmer 2009:63) and see them as “‘parasites’ who don’t fit in with the rest of society,” (McGarry 2011:128). The media, with its frequent coverage of Roma engaging in criminal behavior does little to correct these stereotypes (Nacu 2011:135). Many NGOs also inadvertently perpetuate these assumptions by depicting Roma poverty but rarely showing the vibrant, beautiful, and communal living. Due to these stereotypes, it is no wonder that the ethnic French have predominantly negative views of individual Roma.

The Camp Lifestyle

While Roma groups have many distinct traits, their migratory nature and camp lifestyle is a common factor. As nomadic people, the Roma live in mobile caravan clusters positioned on the outer edges of French cities and consisting primarily of extended families groups of between 50 and 500 people (Nacu 2011:139). In these camps, the Roma people face health hazards that extend from spending their time on low-value and polluted sites that are often next to dumps (Gunther 2012:210). They lack electricity and water and all that stands between them and the downpours of spring, strong fall winds, and the chill of winter are thin walls of their caravans and the rickety roofs of their built-on wooden structures. While all children in France between ages of six and seventeen are entitled to an education (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères 2007:7), Roma children often lack transportation to school. On the contrary, many children in Béziers have their own school bus thanks to the collective efforts of several anti-racism organizations in town. Transportation issues, however, are not limited to Roma children. To make a simple trip to the market, a mother must either walk the long distance or pay high fees for a ride into town to whoever in the community owns a car. This makes access to necessities like food extremely challenging.

During my stay in Béziers, I was fortunate enough to meet a young Roma³⁶ woman named Laradoma who described to me her typical day living in a Roma camp. Every morning at about 4:00 am, she wakes to the sound of her two-year-old daughter coughing and wheezing. Trying to keep her quiet so the rest of the family can keep sleeping, Laradoma holds and comforts her daughter because they cannot afford

³⁶ Similar to Vlechka, Laradoma chooses to go by a name other than Roma. Due to her place of origin and family group, Laradoma identifies as Manouche.

medicine. Once her husband and parents begin to stir, she gets up, dresses her daughter, and prepares breakfast on their propane camping stove. While Laradoma tries her hardest to feed the children before sending them to school, there is never enough to go around and the adults often settle with just coffee. While the men leave each morning to earn what money they can, often by collecting scrap metal or being street performers, the women stay in the community and complete tasks such as fetching water from nearby fire hydrants and washing clothes. In the winter, when the icy rain turns the camp into a giant mud pit, these chores become even more painful, difficult, and time consuming.

While Laradoma expressed how living with few resources and little to protect her and her family from the elements is difficult, she loves being with her family. Because extended family members often live in close proximity, the children often grow up playing with each other while their mothers are nearby washing clothes and cooking. Raising a child is not an individual effort but a group one. Also, in a culture where women often get pregnant in their teens, it is common for them to drop out of school and begin working along their husband. This means that grandparents do a significant portion of the childrearing and community members help keep an eye on everyone's progeny. The Roma face many struggles but they remember to stay thankful for what little they do have; their most precious possessions are their bonds with each other. To be Roma is to live communally. They cook together, live together, sing and dance together, grow up together, and face the same struggles together. As Jean-Philippe expressed to me, for the Roma to meet the state's demands of integration and assimilation³⁷ would be to destroy their communal lifestyle and therefore their Roma identities.

³⁷ As explained previously, I differentiate between integration and assimilation because the latter implies that a person functions within society while maintaining aspects of cultural diversity while the former

Making a Living

As Jean-Philippe said to me, “The Roma, they are a whole different story than the refugees.” While the Roma have the same needs as refugees, many are not eligible for refugee status and receive very little assistance from the government. According to Jean-Philippe, “Only those Roma from ex-Yugoslavia are considered refugees because of the distress caused by the war and the fact that their country no longer exists. Their problems are huge because many do not have passports and documents because they have been ruined or lost and there is no country to make them new ones. However, the Roma from Romania and Bulgaria are a whole different story.” Roma from Bulgaria and Romania came to France in large numbers in the early 1990s and 2000s (Nacu 2011:136) in desperate search of work and better livelihood and acceptance³⁸. Because they come from an existing state, unlike those from former-Yugoslavia Roma, many governmental officials sees them as economic migrants and ineligible for refuge. Therefore, their only hope of staying legally in France is to obtain a French residency and work permit.

While people from former-Yugoslavia can reside in France because of their statelessness, people from Romania and Bulgaria can enter freely due to the Schengen Agreement and their status as European Union citizens. In 1990, the Schengen Agreement eliminated European borders through the concept of free movement of European Union citizens and goods between participating countries (Mahoney 2012:660). The agreement also permits a three-month visit and the ability to stay longer, provided that the visitor can prove that he or she has a steady source of income. New European

indicates that the person has become part of the uniform society by casting off that which makes him or her unique.

³⁸ The Roma are largely unaccepted in their home countries of Romania and Bulgaria where they are also stigmatized and criminalized for their alternative and nomadic way of life (Rencontrer Tsiganes 2007).

Union citizens as of 2007, Romanian and Bulgarian Roma have access to these rights (Mahoney 2012:663). However, with little need for unskilled labor in France today and high unemployment rates (Fassin 2005:5), the Roma have little chance to securing work in this short three-month timeframe. Consequentially, some apply for French residency and work permits that allow them to stay and work in France.

This process, similar to that for the asylum application, is incredibly difficult considering how migrants must provide records of their permanent addresses for the last five years, have a permanent address in France, and pay the costly fees of applying for and renewing work and residency permits. One can also expect to experience many difficulties with the French Office of Immigration and Integration (OFII), which limits the number of immigrants permitted in France by policing French residency and work permit applications. After failing to obtain these permits, many Roma stay illegally in France illegally and make ends meet by begging, stealing, playing music on street corners for tips, and working in the metal industry (Nacu 2011:139). The latter is a typical career path for the men but some women participate in the heavy labor required for breaking down old appliances and making money off the scrap metal. In this industry, a person earns only one centime for every kilogram of scrap metal collected and three centimes for every kilogram of copper. Therefore, Roma metalwork is an extremely laborious means of making a living and leaves the family with a very meager income.

Expulsions of Roma People

Before my first visit to a Roma camp, I was guilty of the common assumption that, because of their nomadic ways, the Roma can easily pick up, move, and establish their lives elsewhere. However, they are not nearly as their name *Les Gens du Voyage* -

The Traveling People -implies. My conversations with several Roma revealed that they would like to be stationary but the policy that turns Roma populations into illegals after a three-month stay forces them to be migratory. In some cases, people are lucky enough to move on to different cities or sites before the police come to shut down their camps. However, it is more frequent that they either return to their camps to find all of their belongings gone or themselves being deported or repatriated.

When police descend on a Roma camp, they typically demand papers from the Roma, find they have overstayed their welcome as EU visitors, and begin the process of repatriation if a person cannot prove that they have either a work permit or evidence of steady employment (Mahoney 2012:651). The tactic of giving money to the Roma so they “voluntarily” leave the country began in August of 2010 under Sarkozy when 80 Roma boarded planes and were sent home with 300 Euros for voluntarily leaving the country (Gunther 2012:205). However, it is likely that their returns were not voluntary knowing the “widespread intimidation practices that French officials use against the Roma,” (Gunther 2012:206). Roma people can also be forced to leave the country by receiving an *Obligation de Quitter le Territoire Français* (A Demand to Leave the French Territory or OQTF) if seen as an unreasonable burden on the French social assistance system such as if they are caught begging (Nacu 2011:138). After a person receives an OQTF, he or she may also be “voluntarily” returned to his or her place of origin.

This phenomenon of voluntary Roma repatriation and deportation is not exclusive to France and similar programs exist in Finland, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, and Germany where the Roma are also disliked (Gunther 2012:206). While intolerance of the Roma is

not limited to France, its deportation rates are the highest of the EU, as demonstrated by the 10,000 Roma repatriated to Romania and Bulgaria in 2009 alone (Mahoney 2012:654). These repatriations were only the beginning of the heavy scapegoating, destruction of camps, and deportations that have existed since Sarkozy's presidency (Nacu 2011:148). However, deportation on the basis of crime is quite suspicious when one considers how Roma begging and stealing correspond directly with the difficult access of Roma to French residency and work permits. By denying work and residency permits to many Roma, France arguably creates the criminals it seeks to deport. While difficult to prove that these are intentional actions of the state, one cannot deny that sending minorities away reduces diversity and therefore cuts down on possible threats to the French Identity³⁹.

While France believes it is acting upon its right to keep crime rates low by deporting Roma people (Nacu 2011:148), these actions are considered illegal by much of the larger European community. Through the repatriation program and deportations, France not only violates rights of freedom of movement and residence guaranteed to all EU citizens⁴⁰ but also the right to not be discriminated against⁴¹ (Gunther 2012:08; Mahoney 2012:659). Romanians and Bulgarians have been European Union citizens since 2007 (Mahoney 2012:651) but have been singled out from other Europeans who stay in France longer than three months (McGarry 2011:131). This attention based on

³⁹ See footnote number 15.

⁴⁰ This freedom of movement was guaranteed to Romanian and Bulgarian Roma when their countries joined the EU in 2007 and their people gained full access to EU rights as of January 2014. This means that the Roma people can now cross borders of European Union countries as they wish. If they stay for longer than three months in any one place, they must have residency permits or proof of employment (Mahoney 2012:651).

⁴¹ Some believe that the Roma are being discriminated against in France because France does not deport all EU citizens who have overstayed their three-month visitation period permitted by the Schengen Agreement and instead chooses to only target the Roma people (Gunther 2012:08).

ethnicity alone therefore makes the Roma victims of discrimination. Yes, because Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, their people did not officially gain access to Schengen rights of free movement until 2014 (Mahoney 2012:662). However, France seems to have used this loophole to, as some say, dishonestly⁴² deport and repatriate Roma seen as a criminals and societal burdens for as long as it could (Mahoney 2012: 662) by not recognizing the change in EU rights of the Roma from Romanian and Bulgarian until they became official on January 1st of 2014. Instead, many politicians hid how their actions would be considered illegal in the near future by creating images of heroism through painting themselves as defenders of the French Identity⁴³.

Struggles of the Youth

One afternoon, I was fortunate enough to find myself invited into the apartment of Laradoma and her family. In the very ironic situation where Laradoma's father had been released from prison and granted house but had no home, the French government had provided him with an apartment for a month in Béziers' city center⁴⁴. While the apartment was located in a decrepit building, Laradoma was proud of her new living situation and invited me to visit.

Laradoma's Apartment

After arriving at the top floor of the old apartment building at Béziers' city center out of breath from my hike up several flights of rickety stairs, I knocked on the door and

⁴² Many people may see these repatriations and deportations as dishonest because the French government knew that law making these actions illegal would soon go into effect and still chose to keep doing them as long as legally possible.

⁴³ One example is Sarkozy's mass deportation of Roma in 2010 at a time when his popularity as president of France was sinking (Nacu 2011:148).

⁴⁴ He had no home according to the state's standards because the government did not recognize his camp as a house. This was possibly because it lacked a permanent address.

waited eagerly. The door swung open almost immediately to reveal five-foot- tall and bright-eyed Laradoma. Standing behind her was a middle-aged woman with a brightly patterned skirt, a large man of the same age, and two toddlers with some of the most beautiful blue and green eyes that I have ever seen. I assumed these people to be Laradoma's mother, father, daughter, and nephew. Warm smiles welcomed me as I stepped into a cramped, single-bedroom apartment. Simple with its small kitchen, a bathroom, and one large living room area that contained a bed and several couches, the quarters were still a significant step up from the quality of life in the camp. It appeared that the family had crammed as many people into the apartment as possible so all may benefit from the temporary yet luxurious living situation.

After inviting me to take a seat on the couch next to her father and mother, Laradoma began preparing coffee on the stove. Unable to talk to the parents, whom Laradoma expressed did not speak French, I sat, smiled, and played peek-a-boo with the two children. Once prepared, the coffee was served in matching delicate pink china teacups, which gave me the sense that Laradoma took her pride in her ability to serve coffee to her guest. The parents and I sipped the coffee and smiled while Laradoma gazed around at her apartment. She let out a happy sigh as if to say she was quite content and then exclaimed, "Here, this is not a typical day. We have a kitchen. We have a bathroom. We have running water. I can easily make you coffee. Life here is good but it is not normal. And it will all end soon." I assumed she was referring to the end of her father's house arrest and her family's return to the difficult camp lifestyle. Laradoma then continued, "I love living in this apartment. Because I have a kitchen and running water, life is much easier and I have more time to play with my daughter. For the first time I

really feel French.” I was surprised by this assertion, as Laradoma had lived in France most of her life. When I asked her to explain what she meant by this she stated,

“I am in France now and I try to act like a French person and teach the children how to be French too. When we meet people, I make them give *bisous*. Kids in the camp are used to eating whenever they are hungry but I feed my daughter three times a day so she is used to this when she goes to school. If she is more French, she can have the better life.”

Laradoma felt that better abilities to act French would help her daughter become successful⁴⁵ in French society. Or at least more successful than she regarded herself – an 18-year-old mother who never completed high school and who relies heavily on her parents for support. This desire to boost her daughter’s opportunities for success by teaching her to be more French no longer strikes me now that I know more about Laradoma’s history.

Upon arriving in France at age nine, Laradoma was placed in a French classroom. It did not take her long to learn cleaning up her appearance meant that the other children would stop teasing her and that she could focus more on her studies. This was important because good grades meant that she could go to university, find a stable job, and live a prosperous life. However, this never became possible for Laradoma because, at age 16, she became pregnant. Back in the spotlight at school, her family strongly encouraged her to follow what she expressed as the normal Roma route. This included dropping out to give birth, getting married, working alongside her husband in the metal industry, and relying on her parents to help raise her family. Laradoma loved school and had worked hard to avoid the typical female Roma trajectory. So, by quitting school as

⁴⁵ Ideas of success in France typically involve a person who graduated from the French equivalent of high school, attended university, holds a stable job, acts upon their civic duties in the Republic, upholds the French values of *Liberté, Egalité, and Fraternité* or Liberty, Equality, and Brotherhood, and shows allegiance to France.

her family requested, she watched her chances of having a life with no camps, a stable source of income, and a full stomach crumble before her eyes and quickly sunk into a period of depression.

With time, however, Laradoma learned to love her daughter tremendously and find fulfillment in acting as a liaison. Due to completing several years of French education before stepping into the world of parenthood and work, she could navigate the languages and norms of both cultural worlds and consequentially became the translator and cultural broker for her Roma community. It seemed to me that Laradoma had taken the intermediary and powerful role that many migrant children take to the next level by becoming her people's advocate. Laradoma's pregnancy, and thus her need of familial support, forever tied her to the Roma world and she seemed happy to help members of her community. However, she was equally dedicated to giving her daughter the opportunity to meet the French standards of success that she so narrowly missed.

After spending the afternoon with Laradoma and her parents drinking coffee, talking, and playing with the kids, I felt I had a much better understanding of what it was like to be a Roma growing up in France. Not only is there extreme pressure to do well in school, fit in, and become successful French citizens, family members need assistance and want their youth to carry on the Roma ways. As much as the children love their families, many possess the desire to blend in with the ethnic French and French denizens. As Laradoma said herself, "One day I want to go back to school. Then I will then have a better chance of living a normal life in France." This not only indicated to me that Laradoma saw her Roma identity as neither normal nor compatible with French ideas of success. According to Laradoma, as long as she stayed Roma, she could not be normal.

Caught in the Middle

Laradoma's struggle is significant because it sheds light on the dilemma of countless Roma youth. While older generations have problems navigating French society and providing for their children, the younger generations find themselves pulled between their desires to please their families and French society. However, meeting the demands of both is incredibly difficult considering how each world requires different actions based in different value sets. According to Laradoma, many Roma want a better life and the feeling of belonging on a national level. However, they still feel a strong connection to their community and culture and do not want to sacrifice their Roma identity.

Roma children know that camp life is difficult. Many face the reality of food insecurity, are teased at school for being dirty, and fall behind in their lessons because they cannot receive homework help from their parents. Several children and young adults with whom I spoke, including Laradoma, found alluring the full integration into French culture and the supposed better quality of life. At school, Roma children learn the culture, civility, and mindsets of the French (Jugé and Perez 2006:199) in addition to standards of success. The education system socializes children and teaches them what it means to be French but then forces Roma children to choose between "being themselves and becoming outcasts, or assimilating to become somebody else," (Jugé and Perez 2006:208). While success is promised to students who work hard, the Roma have little access to this success because they generally lack the cultural, economic, social, and physical attributes that allow an individual to prosper in society (Timmer 2009:56). Additionally, by receiving the conflicting message that, due to their diverse cultures, languages, religions, and being of immigrant origins, (*d'origines imigrée*), many Roma

children learn that their histories, cultures, and therefore they themselves are not French. This is a concept that Keaton and Diawara discuss in regards to children of migratory origin in France through a concept that they call Franco-Conformity (2006:100).

And it is with this knowledge that the full irony of the Roma situation becomes visible. The Roma come to France for better educations and access to jobs. Even though many are there legally on the temporary basis of the Schengen Agreement⁴⁶, they are criminalized and sent home. If they manage to stay (often illegally due to rare offerings of residency and work permits), the education system pulls their children away from their Roma roots by teaching them to devalue their heritage. Additionally, the Roma are promised rewards of success if they integrate, but the state continues to dangle the threat of deportation. The Roma may have been in Europe for generations but not even their youth, who attempt to integrate and become successful French citizens, are not regarded as insiders.

Aiding the Roma

La Cimade has been active in the lives of the Roma who settled in the garden plot community since its inception in 2004 but also assists people from many other communities in Béziers. The smallest camp I witnessed was one camper and a wooden addition while the largest had over thirty caravans. La Cimade does not directly serve all of these people on a consistent basis, and instead become involved only when problems arise or their rights are ignored.

⁴⁶ Roma from Bulgaria and Romania are permitted a three-month stay anywhere in the EU according to the Schengen Agreement and can stay longer if they provide proof of a stable income.

Standard Approaches towards Roma Aid

Many ethnic French regard the Roma as worthy of pity and a problematic population group. These notions of the Roma are based on reports such as that by the European Commission in 2004, which established the Roma as the most impoverished, discriminated against, and unemployed group in Europe (Timmer 2010:264). While their living situations are often quite difficult, the state and even aid organizations, who often construct the Roma as “needy subjects” (Timmer 2010:265), make public their difficulties but rarely show the Roma sense of joy and love for life or how they are strong, determined, resilient, unique, and full of life. Not only do the Roma hear from the French public and state that their way of life is problematic, they also receive this message from many aid organizations aimed towards assisting them.

Timmer’s work focuses on Roma aid in Hungary, but she relates much of her findings to the treatment of Roma people by aid organizations in various European Union states⁴⁷. As she explains, the aid approach of many NGOs does not promote integration.

“As long as the Roma are conceptualized as a problem by those very people who are attempting to help them, the Roma/non-Roma divide will not be broken down and the organizations will be severely limited in their ability to make substantial inroads in addressing the needs of their beneficiaries,” [2010:276].

Seeing the Roma as a problem and thus perpetuating the Roma / ethnic French divide therefore helps aid organizations to see the Roma people as a project in which they can invest efforts.

A significant difficulty with this “problem approach” is how it implies that the Roma cannot exist alongside the French in a multicultural setting and permits aid

⁴⁷ I include this section on general Roma aid efforts so I may contrast these approaches with La Cimade’s methodology, which I argue is more effective and respectful of the Roma people and their desires.

organizations to fix the Roma outsider status through assimilation efforts⁴⁸. As Jean-Philippe explained, some organizations achieve this by strongly encouraging Roma to live in apartments and leave the metalworking industry. However, this assumed need for assimilation often does not correspond with the desires of the Roma. The voices of the people essentially become lost as aid organizations address their perceived needs instead of communicating and learning about the areas in which the Roma want help (Timmer 2010:266). If these aid organizations were to stop and listen, they would find that the Roma are proud of their heritage, love their communities, and do not want to change. What they see as most important is acquiring financial security and finding ways to integrate while still keeping their Roma identities. What is therefore so progressive about La Cimade's approach towards the Roma in Béziers is that they do not attempt to change the Roma and instead listen to the needs as expressed by the people and try to improve the situations that the Roma themselves see as problematic.

La Cimade's Roma Interactions: The Aim to Create Two Overlapping Worlds

The Roma people are not the primary population that La Cimade at Béziers serves and the organization has its work cut out due to the increased number of asylum applications and more difficult bureaucratic processes as discussed in chapter one. However, amidst this chaos, La Cimade manages to find ways to have a greater impact on the greater Béziers community, particularly through its aid of the Roma. La Cimade seeks the most effective aid by referring the Roma to organizations specializing in their specific needs. However, La Cimade's biggest commitment to the Roma is its help with

⁴⁸ By using the word assimilation rather than integration, I hope to emphasize how the Roma are not encouraged to join French society while still maintaining their cultural identities but are instead pushed to erase that which makes them unique.

protecting Roma rights through a cooperative of anti-racism organizations in Béziers called *Le Collectif* (The Collective).

Le Collectif is comprised of La Cimade, *Association Béziers Contre Racisme* (Béziers' Association Against Racism), and union groups in the Béziers area. In the past, involvement of *Le Collectif* has included weekly discussion groups to inform Roma people of their rights as European Union citizens in addition to lessons on how one may attain social welfare and access to the French medical system. When Roma ask for assistance with the French residency and work permit process, La Cimade assists by providing a permanent address where Roma families can receive mail and establish proof of their current residence. However, most attention has been dedicated to the protection of Roma children's education rights. Some examples include how, in 2006 (*Rencontrer Tsiganes 2007*) and in 2011 (*Trabuchet 2013*), *Le Collectif* took the mayor of Béziers to court for not permitting a group of Roma children to enroll in public school.

Ultimately, what is most significant about La Cimade's involvement in the lives of the Roma is how it does not attempt to change who they are and does not see their way of life as problematic. Unlike many other French NGOs that aid the Roma, employees and volunteers of La Cimade at Béziers seem to see the Roma's communal and familial way of life as different yet beautiful and does not attempt to change it. Instead of reaching out to fix what it sees as wrong, La Cimade permits the Roma to seek help with situations and conditions that they themselves see as requiring improvement. By protecting the rights of the Roma in France and offering aid only when the Roma request it, La Cimade does not problematize their way of life, listens to the desires of the Roma,

shows respect for diversity, and consequentially demonstrates a more effective form of Roma aid.

During the return from our first Roma camp visit together, I asked Jean-Philippe what the best way to help the Roma is. To this he replied,

“It is nice to bring them something they can use, but yogurt isn’t really that important. They can get food from *Restos du Coeur*⁴⁹. What is more important is the human interaction and reminding them they are normal people by talking to them in a normal way.”

Jean-Philippe also went on to explain how, in a society where the Roma have been Othered, devalued, looked down upon, and scapegoated, the biggest favor a person can do is simply sit, listen, and learn who they really are. The organization works tirelessly to create overlap between the worlds of the Roma and the ethnic French by preserving Roma children’s right to an education and providing help with employment and ultimately with finding a place in French society. However, La Cimade’s goal is not to change the Roma into ideal French citizens⁵⁰ but to provide the assistance that the Roma people themselves see as beneficial. Additionally, employees and volunteers celebrate Roma diversity, interact with them, and therefore help to restore their humanity and increase the ethnic French’s understanding of the Roma.

⁴⁹ A French NGO that provides food to people unable to purchase it themselves, similar to food banks in America

⁵⁰ By ideal French citizens, I mean those people who meet French standards of success. See footnote 45.

CHAPTER FIVE

La Cimade The Microcosm: One Organization's Relation to the Macro-Political and Social Context in France

Off to a Good Start

On any given day, there are a number of wonderful things that take place at La Cimade. French lessons occur in the on-site classroom, people from the Béziers community can receive help with their applications for French residence and work permits, refugee welcome center employees assist refugees on a case-by-case basis, and more. One thing that La Cimade's employees and volunteers do especially well is treating refugees like people, not victims⁵¹. While discussing how La Cimade prepares refugees for the future, the center's director Jean-Philippe explained,

“If the refugees have enough French, we try to make them do the paperwork and walk them through the processes. This is definitely harder for the employees and volunteers and takes a lot more time but it is important for us to build people up when we can. Yes, they have problems with administration but they are adults like you and me. You got here all the way from your country and now you want me to walk you to the prefecture? No, you are capable. It is important to not let them see themselves as victims.”

Pipher also addresses this concept when she says, “Refugees are sometimes portrayed as helpless victims, but truly helpless victims don't make it here⁵²,” (2002:57). Although it requires more effort for La Cimade personnel to teach the refugees how to complete the forms, this approach recognize the refugees' capabilities and helps them foster their own self-sufficiency, which is ultimately more beneficial. Refugees may arrive penniless and

⁵¹ While many refugees have been targets of atrocious crimes, what I mean by victim and victimization is being seen as incapable of helping themselves, which reinforces a dangerous stereotype of the refugee as a societal burden.

⁵² By “here” Pipher is referring to America but the same philosophy can be applied to asylum seekers in France. Leaving their countries, making it into France, and bringing processes for refugee are not easy tasks and require a person to be both savvy and tactful.

without language skills, but this does not mean they are unintelligent and unskilled people. Although there is a tendency to see refugees as victims, La Cimade works with refugees to give them agency so they can be autonomous later. In this chapter, I will highlight La Cimade's strengths and weaknesses as a refugee welcome center.

English Lessons with Alex: An Example of the La Cimade Personal Approach

At the end of each day at La Cimade, I would sit in the courtyard and eagerly wait for 5:10 pm. This was when the *Centre d'Accueil pour les Demandeurs d'Asile* was transformed from a quiet space to one ringing with the sound of children laughing and talking excitedly as they returned home from school. The children brought with them a sense of exuberance and joy that was lacking at the refugee welcome center throughout the day while all the parents stayed isolated in their rooms. Daniel, one of the La Cimade employees, detested the kids because their yelling and laughing made it difficult for him to concentrate. I, however, loved having them around. After a few days of being in the courtyard when the kids came home, they started to converse with me and ask me to play. However, there was one young man, a long and lanky teenager with short black hair and feet that dragged as he walked, who would always go straight up to his room and ignore the pleas of the other kids to stay and play.

Perplexed by this boy's apathy when it came to interacting with others, I asked Daniel who he was. "Oh Alex?" Daniel quietly asked, "He is a seventeen-year-old from Kazakhstan here with his mother. We think he is severely depressed. He and his mom were the only two of their family to escape the religious persecution back home." His sense of loneliness suddenly made sense to me. I could not imagine what it must have been like to adjust to life in France with only one family member for support while many

people back home continued to live through the terror. Wanting to help but unsure of how, Jean-Philippe, the director of the refugee welcome center, suggested I begin tutoring Alex for an hour and a half each day in English. He explained, “This may help him do better in English class, but it will be good for Alex to have more human interaction. Right now he is always alone, sitting in his room.” And so began my time spent with Alex.

During those first few days, it was frightening just how much Alex resembled a ghost. His movements were soundless, he demanded no attention, and he always avoided eye contact. Day after day, I continued to plan lessons despite his unresponsiveness. However, this all changed the morning I used “Three Little Birds” to teach him new vocabulary thanks to an employee’s tip off that he liked Bob Marley. I had finally succeeded at making Alex smile and began to strategically plan all of my lessons around his interests. With each day together, I could almost feel life being breathed back into him.

On my last morning at La Cimade before my return to the United States, Alex and I took a walk in the park where we discussed religion, violence, and tolerance. Towards the end of our walk, Alex confided in me his new big plan to become a refugee-aiding psychiatrist and I could hardly believe Alex’s transformation into an animated, joking, and lively teenager. I am still unable to discern whether Alex’s improved interactions with the people of La Cimade and his new engaged approach towards life was rooted solely in the time we spent together. However, our companionship clearly helped to facilitate this change.

As our time together progressed, the way Alex opened up, began smiling, and found a new desire to interact with other people gave me the sense that our one-on-one attentions were exactly what he needed. Additionally, I became more aware of both the benefits and evidence of personalized attention around La Cimade. Violetta invited several people from the center to attend a free concert in the park with her. Daniel ordered books for one of the refugee children to read during his summer break because he knew his reading level was below average. Célia gave Nino an old sewing machine of hers because she knew Nino found sewing relaxing. Although I felt I had discovered the benefits of personalized attention through my interactions, it seemed that La Cimade had been fostering these sorts of relationships on a more subtle level all along.

The only problem with the personal approach towards helping people through their individual struggles was the lack of extra time that these interactions required. As it was, employees at the La Cimade center at Béziers were already overwhelmed with paperwork. They spent their days gathering stories, filling out applications, and going back to make corrections when information documented was not deemed sufficient by OFPRA officials. From their interactions with the refugees, I could tell they wanted to help on a more personal level than just aiding with their bureaucratic processes. However, as one employee said, “We need more talking to people. Things like recording people’s stories get easier the more we talk to residents. If they are comfortable with someone, they are more likely to adjust. Unfortunately, we are all buried too deep in paperwork right now for this.”

Unmet Needs

At La Cimade's *Centre d'Accueil pour les Demandeurs d'Asile* in Béziers, there are countless refugees who spend their days sitting around and waiting for their children to return. They are unable to work while their applications for asylum are processed and most spend all of their days cooped up in their tiny rooms or apartments. While Nino attended at least one French lesson a day, repaired clothes, made jewelry, and found friends in the Béziers community, she was the exception. From the way most other adults stayed around the center all day, it appeared that most residents were wasting precious years of their lives as they waited for approval to stay in France. The immediate interest that many people showed in me once they heard I had been spending time with Alex and Nino on a one-on-one basis made me feel they were all desperate for attention and personal interaction. Based on my involvements with these people and observations of their struggles, I will now discuss several ways in which the welcome center could create a better and more fulfilling waiting period for its refugees.

Refugee Orientation: One Means towards Improving Adjustment

One thing that the refugees desperately need is to know that they are welcome in France. Many have recently escaped traumatic situations that most people cannot even begin to imagine. In France, they are often greeted by anti-immigration sentiments, blamed for taking funds from the French welfare system, and lumped together with the other French denizens that many ethnic French scapegoat for France's current economic, employment, and crime rate struggles (Ben Jelloun 1999:12; Jugé and Perez 2006:189; Garner 2007:75). As mentioned in chapter two, refugees who make it to France are welcomed by no one when they first arrive and must rely on the help of people they

stumble across, who speak their language, and who can point them in the right direction. Once they reach the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless People (OFPRA), they begin their asylum applications, are placed in emergency housing or a refugee welcome center, have interviews with governmental officials, and enter the liminal waiting zone.

Nino, the young refugee woman who acted as my Béziers tour guide, was astonished when I told her about the orientation programs in the United States for refugees, such as those provided by Refugee Services of Texas. As I mentioned previously, unlike the American refugees, no one had taught her the monetary system, the laws she must obey, or how her social assistance worked. While Nino received some of this information from her social worker, this woman lacked the time and resources to convey this to all of her clients and grew annoyed with Nino when she tried to ask questions. After arriving at the refugee welcome center, the refugees did not receive much additional orienting information. As two employees and one volunteer explained to me, it is not the job of the center to satisfy refugee needs beyond providing living quarters and helping with the legalities and paperwork. This meant that Nino and many other refugees were essentially on their own when it came to learning about living in France.

Through the example of Nino's welcome, we can see that nowhere are refugees coached on what it means to be French, taught French values, shown social behavior norms, instructed on attaining jobs, and, most importantly, taught self-sufficiency. Fortunately, Nino found a strong Armenian/Georgian community that was willing to guide her. This community helped her adjust, permitted her to maintain her native

language and cultural norms, but seemed rather inhibitive to her integration into France. Through my experience with Nino, I was able to see how the French were frustrated with the lack of migrant integration into French culture. On my many walks around the city, it seemed to me that ethnic enclaves were quite standard in Béziers given by how I could easily identify the *Maghreb*⁵³ and West Africans neighborhoods. However, what the French do not address is that the lack of assistance that many migrants and refugees receive with their integration process forces them to rely heavily on the comfort of their ethnic communities, ghettoizes various ethnic populations, and engenders a further divide between immigrant communities and the ethnic French.

In France, the expectation that migrants erase their pasts (Jugé and Perez 2006:199) presents refugees “with the unsolvable dilemma of being themselves, and becoming outcasts, or assimilating to become somebody else,” (Jugé and Perez 2006:208). However, the pressure is the greatest for children who, at school, receive citizenship education that is designed to integrate all students into a common culture (Starkey 2000:41). I argue however, that because diversity is neither celebrated nor encouraged that the French system aims to assimilate rather than integrate⁵⁴. Teaching refugees to blend in, and thus potentially avoid the stigma of Otherness, encourages assimilation, which can be very harmful for the refugee self-esteem and identity. However, learning basic French norms and how to operate in French society is absolutely essential for refugee acclimatization to French life. As discussed by Pipher, there are several skill sets that refugees in America need learn (2002:90), which also translate to

⁵³ *Maghreb* is how the French refer to people from Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. They are usually marked by skin color and their Arabic dialect.

⁵⁴ As previously explained, assimilation implies that a person drops his or her old beliefs and values for those of his or her host country whereas integration implies that a person is well-functioning but maintains his or her old culture and ways.

the French context: learning to buy food from a grocery store, getting a job, navigating around town, getting help from emergency personnel, and learning cleanliness and personal hygiene practices (Pipher 2002:90). Without such lessons and orientation, France essentially denies its refugees the ability to become well-adjusted, self-sufficient, and integrated French denizens in a multicultural France.

La Cimade is a liberal organization⁵⁵ due to its support of migrant and refugee aid and not closing French borders. However, some of its staff espouses an anti-change and pro-French Identity way of thinking. For example, one afternoon I was speaking with Laurent, the welcome center's accountant, when I was absolutely astonished by his response when I asked him how La Cimade works to meet the diverse needs of the refugees at the center. Laurent exclaimed, "Here, they are respected. But they are in France now. We do not need to fit their needs. They must adjust to life here. This is not a summer camp." Laurent was not the only person whom I heard this anti-summer camp philosophy from and all persons who said it seemed to be emphasizing the necessity of integration and self-sufficiency. This shows that even a strong sense of "Frenchness" can prevail among refugee-centered organizations like La Cimade. While I can understand French allegiance to their culture and history, the demands that the refugees leave their cultures at the border, as demonstrated by the Headscarf Affair in 2004⁵⁶, seems insensitive to the fact that many refugees leave home as a last resort and rarely come to France because they want to. In reality, however, many refugees would have rather stayed in their places of origin, but dangerous situations and persecution forced them to

⁵⁵ By saying La Cimade is liberal, I mean to emphasize how it is on the opposite side of the political spectrum than extremely conservative political party Front National.

⁵⁶ The Headscarf Affair was a conflict that arose in 2004 when claims were made that wearing religious symbols in public schools was a breach of the separation between church and state, or what the French call *laïcité* (Hollifield 2004:198; Beller 2004:582).

leave home, their families, friends, positions in society, and much of their cultures (Pipher 2002:336; Miller and Rasco 2004:xiii).

Better Language Programs

The French are proud of many aspects of their culture, particularly their national language. I experienced this during my stay in France when many people whom I barely knew or had just met corrected my mispronunciations or grammar. It was obvious that they loved their language and wanted to protect its beauty. Given this linguistic pride and the expectations of many ethnic French that all denizens learn to speak French well, it is peculiar that there is not a better language programs in La Cimade's *Centre d'Accueil pour les Demandeurs d'Asile*. This becomes an even more important question when we consider how essential language skills are for a person to operate effectively in society.

As Tubergen states,

“Due to the growing share of immigrants in many Western societies, there has been increasing concern for the degree to which immigrants acquire the language that is spoken in the destination country. The reason for this concern are clear: Language skills are a form of human capital that positively affect immigrant earning and labor market opportunities, and language fluency of immigrants is associated with better interethnic relations in a society.” [2003:139]

Therefore, language skills are essential because they permit a person to earn wages, pay taxes, and participate civically – all of which the French value as citizens of the Republic.

As Tuburgen also says, “immigrants' proficiency in the destination-language is considered a function of the amount of exposure to that language. Immigrants learn a new language by opportunities to hear, study, and use the language,” (2003:140). Therefore, for refugees to quickly learn French and ensure adjustment to life in France, they need as much exposure as possible. However, a common isolation in the family unit at the center

and the infrequent socializing are not conducive to the refugees' acquisition of the French language. While there are French classes taught weekly at a both the beginner and intermediate levels at La Cimade, most of the students were not refugees, but other denizens from the Béziers community. I found that the students were primarily middle-aged persons from other European countries who had followed their instructor when she moved to La Cimade. The deal she struck with Jean-Philippe was that she could use the classroom space free of charge if any refugees and people of the Béziers community could attend her lessons. While this approach seems good in principle, in reality the disproportionate numbers of non-refugees students likely intimidated many refugees and discouraged their participation. Additionally, I did not find the teacher particularly respectful of different social norms. For example, in one lesson, she used a magazine ad of teens in swimsuits to teach adjectives but seemed oblivious to how uncomfortable a young Muslim refugee woman seemed with this activity. Either the teacher was unaware of cultural norms outside of her own or she did not receive training as an aid worker and both pose significant problems for tolerance within the La Cimade community and refugee acculturation.

A better system of teaching French may include efforts to make the refugees feel more welcome in the classroom. Not speaking down to people who do not know the answer to questions (as I saw the teacher do on several accounts) and having more culturally respectful lessons may increase attendance significantly. With just a few more refugees in class, I feel many more people of the community would feel more comfortable taking advantage of the free French lessons. Additionally, lessons should not be restricted to the classroom. La Cimade could promote refugees' language acquisition

by taking them on activities outside the center where people could learn how to interact with the French and put their language skills into practice. I did one such activity with Alex, the boy to whom I taught English, when we went to the supermarket to learn the names for various fruits, vegetables, and snack foods instead of teaching out of his grammar books one day. Although learning English was the pretense of our interaction, I used the opportunity to show Alex that he should not be afraid of speaking with the French and how to do basic things like check out from the grocery store. He seemed to enjoy being out of the center and expressed more willingness to try and speak with French people the next time we left the center together. This shows that while activities in the French community require more effort on La Cimade's part, they would build up refugees' capacity to participate in society, heighten their sense of agency, increase their willingness interact with others in French, and thus improve their acquisition of the French language and culture.

A Lack of Focus on Refugee Well-Being and Healing

Another significant problem with the approaches towards aid at the refugee welcome center is the lack of focus on well-being and healing programs. While the center did have a psychologist named Fanny who had been volunteering at the center for ten years, she left for reasons unknown to me the same week that I arrived. During my stay, I heard no discussion of finding a replacement but I did hear plenty about various ways that the center's refugees were struggling. For example, I learned how Alex had to leave his twin sister behind in Kazakhstan when his family fled religious persecution. Or how Faith was forced to have an abortion. She had gotten pregnant while working in a prostitution ring in Paris while repaying debt she had acquired from being smuggled out

of Nigeria. The struggles of these people were profound. While they received assistance with paperwork, there was little emotional support offered and many had to process their traumatic experiences alone.

For a refugee, trauma is at the root of why many seek refuge in another country.

Reflecting on the severity of the distress refugees face, Pipher states,

“Refugees are here because they had no choice but to be here. They couldn’t stay where they were ... Would you stay where your children saw people being killed if they looked out of the window? Or where you were made to participate in your parents’ torture and execution? Or where you might be beaten until you could never work again...?” [2002:336].

While the trauma many refugees endure in their countries of origin is apparent, the difficulties of leaving home are less recognized. As Miller and Rasco explain,

“Many are forced to flee with little time to prepare for the journey of exile, and carry with them only their most essential and portable possessions. They leave behind houses, plots of land passed down through generations, family members and friends unable or unwilling to go into exile; proximity to the graves of ancestor; and the sense of belonging that comes with living in one’s own culture, as a member of one’s own community, a citizen of one’s own country. They flee after witnessing the death of loved ones, the destruction of their property, and the humiliation of family members, friends, and neighbors at the hands of sadistic armed combatants; and they flee after enduring their own experiences of physical and sexual violence, arbitrary detention, and prolonged fear and vulnerability,” [2004:xiii].

As a result of these traumatic experiences, many refugees suffer from what Western medicine would diagnose as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety (Silove 2007:379; Miller and Rasco 2004:8), chronic sleep problems, and reoccurring nightmares (Daniels and McGuire 1998:206). Additionally, the trauma they experience may cause feelings of disruption in the balance of affective, cognitive, and spiritual functions as they experience a rupture in their relationships, attachments, perceptions of themselves and others, expectations for the future, and the fabric of meaning (Farwell and

Cole 2001:26). Therefore, it is quite easy to see the many long-term adverse effects that traumatic experiences can have on a refugee. Unfortunately, experiences back home are not the only source of their distress.

Upon arrival in their host countries, the policies refugees are greeted with often add to their long list of traumatic experiences. The stress that many refugees face in their new host countries has potential to induce or prolong their symptoms of PTSD, especially when they receive low levels of social support, face increased levels of poverty, experience discrimination, and have fears of repatriation (Silove 2000:606). PTSD symptoms may also be heightened further by stressful interviews with immigration officials (Silove 2000:606; Silove 2002:294), impersonal bureaucratic systems (Silove 2002:294), and limited access to employment, welfare, and education (Silove 2007:361-362). Additionally, due to huge influxes of refugees in the last two decades, many countries have responded to high numbers by moving people into detention systems where they are held in huge groups under prison-like conditions during the application process (Silove 2007:362). While the conditions at La Cimade in Béziers are a huge step up from those described by Silove⁵⁷, the shut doors, lack of community space, and the way refugees spend all of their time in isolated and very small rooms still mimic detention circumstances.

Given the trauma, loss, and discrimination that refugees endure, it is no wonder that they suffer from PTSD, anxiety, depression, and more. Williams and Berry explain that acculturative stress “refers to one kind of stress, that in which the stressors are

⁵⁷ I have sited Silove heavily here due to his extensive work with the adverse effects of asylum policy in Australia on refugees. While he speaks of Australian detention centers, the experiences he relays are very similar to those I discovered while observing La Cimade due to general isolation people experience and their denial of social participation such as through the lack of employment abilities.

identified as having their sources in the process of acculturation, often resulting in a particular set of stress behaviors that include anxiety, depression, beliefs of marginality and alienation, heightening psychosomatic symptoms, and identity confusion," (as cited in Tripodi 2001:258). To say the least, refugees have all been through a lot of difficult experiences and face significant challenges in their adjustment to life in France. While these findings are not terribly surprising, the lack of treatment opportunities and assistance with the emotional struggles with acculturation are. As Miller and Rasco explain, "Psychological problems often reflect a poor fit between the demands of the setting in which people live and work and the adaptive resources to which they have access," (2004:35). However, La Cimade is not to blame for the lack of support programs for trauma and well-being. In the rush of paperwork and following the demands of the bureaucratic system, La Cimade employees and volunteers lack the time and energy necessary to adequately meet the needs of the refugee community.

Suggestions for Improving Refugee Aid Efforts

Anthropology, with its high regard for objectivity and maintenance of diversity, used to discourage anthropologists from taking an active role in their informants' lives for fear of changing their cultures. Today, however, anthropology increases its usefulness through applied approaches that permit observers to not only detect the source of societal problems but also to propose effective solutions. La Cimade, with its tenuous relationship with the state and its difficulties with providing effective aid for the refugees and the migrant community of Béziers, faces significant struggles and is therefore perfect for an applied anthropological approach. I will now provide some possible solutions to various

problems at the refugee welcome by making suggestions that would treat causes rather than just symptoms.

Hiring Additional Staff Members

Obtaining additional staff members is highly unlikely. Reasons for this include that more employees would have to come from the La Cimade budget, which is already very small, and how several employees expressed to me their fear of further funding cuts as FN representatives hold more of Béziers' offices. Regardless of the improbability of hiring additional staff, I feel it is important to discuss the significant impact that this change would have on the operations of La Cimade's refugee welcome center at Béziers. While having an additional two staff members would not resolve the struggles of employees, volunteers, and refugees at the center, it would be a step in the direction towards better meeting the needs of the refugee community. With an additional two people in the office, bureaucratic duties would be more spread out and employees would have more time to interact with the refugees in meaningful ways. Their lighter loads would provide them the extra time necessary for having more personal and one-on-one interactions with people, sponsoring refugee orientations, permitting better language and culture teaching programs, and promoting better well-being. While hiring additional employees is ideal yet improbable, a possible compromise may be to encourage higher levels of volunteer efforts within the center.

Not only would these efforts help the refugees tremendously, they would also promote Jean-Philippe's democratic workplace strategy because all employees would still do equal amounts of bureaucratic work. Additionally, more time to work directly with the needs of the refugees has great potential to benefit the morale of the employees at the

center and keep them dedicated to their work. In the current conditions, employees and volunteers spend most of their time putting together and redoing application packets for difficult to satisfy government officials who ultimately deny a majority of claims to asylum. In this setting, it is understandable why employees and volunteers may feel a lack of purpose in their jobs as I saw reflected in the burden Célia seemed to always be carrying. By having more people on staff and thus more time to interact with the refugees and people of the community, the needs of the community could be better addressed, and the employees could spend their time engaging in fulfilling personal interactions with the refugees.

Applying the Roma Policy to Interactions with All Refugees

I chose to discuss the Roma in chapter three because this is a non-refugee migrant group that La Cimade assists and I felt it was important to address all areas of the center's work. However, I also decided to highlight the Roma because some of the approaches that the center takes towards helping them could be applied to other refugee interactions. As I have mentioned, La Cimade's approach towards assisting the Roma is to help only when the Roma ask for assistance. Instead of demanding that they change to meet French social norms and views of success, La Cimade listens to the desires of the Roma by working to change the things they deem problematic. La Cimade also puts effort into creating bridges between the worlds of the Roma and the ethnic French by defending the children's access to school, obtaining residence and work permits for the adults, and spending time in the community to foster feelings of a common humanity.

The interactions I witnessed between La Cimade personnel and the Roma were distinct from those I saw with the staff and their refugee clients. While I frequently saw

the Roma parents banter with Jean-Philippe and their children run and jump on him, there appeared to be more distance between employees, volunteers, and the refugees. This may be attributed to the different cultures that people come from or the fact that the refugees cycle in and out of the center while the Roma stay in Béziers for a long time and thus have more potential for ongoing relations. An additional cause may be the strain of the French bureaucratic systems. Because the employees are so burdened with paperwork when it comes to assisting with refugees, they have little time and effort left through which they can establish relationships. Additionally, La Cimade spends a lot less time with the Roma when it comes to their bureaucratic policy and consequently is able to spend more time addressing their needs and listening to their desires. This is beneficial for the Roma population because this method permits intervention strategies that reflect the community's priorities (Miller and Rasco 2004:38). The kind of assistance that the Roma receive is demonstrative of the relationships that La Cimade is capable of fostering with its refugee community. Having more people to spread the bureaucratic processes among would permit La Cimade personnel more time to spend around the center listening to the needs of the refugees, enacting changes, and offering assistance that the refugees themselves see as useful.

La Cimade: A Microcosm of the Larger Political Situation in France

In this study, I have discussed France's current system for welcoming refugees and have specifically focused on the struggles of the La Cimade employees and volunteers, refugees, and Roma in addition. In many ways, Béziers, with its fraught dynamics between refugees and the ethnic French, serves as a microcosm of the larger tensions regarding the politics of inclusion that are brewing in France. Prejudice and

intolerant actions are omnipresent in France even though racist actions are prosecuted by the state. The National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH) said in March of 2013 that the rising intolerance in France is a concern and that the police were responsible for a total of 1,539 reported racist and xenophobic acts and threats in 2012 alone (Le Monde 2013). CNCDH also reports a growing distrust of Muslims and rejection of foreigners in France by the ethnic French for a third year in a row. I personally witnessed these sentiments with instances such as how Christophe could not get a job because his skin color marked him an obvious ethnic Other and how the nomadic people of France are all lumped into one umbrella group and called Roma despite their significant diversity. French culture, language, and values are important markers of Frenchness but are seen by many ethnic French as threatened by the high numbers of minority denizens living in France and the cultures they bring with them. However, migrants have been a large presence in France for well over 200 years and the French Identity has managed to stay strong. However, the national economic crisis that began in 2009 is correlated with new conservative political turns, unease with change, and the growth of extreme right beliefs like those of the Front National. Manifestations of these political beliefs in places like Béziers include parents who pull their children out of public school so they do not have to be with migrants and the election of mayors who attempt to deny migrant children their rights to an education.

The strict asylum and immigration policy that has developed in this political context fosters anti-immigration sentiments in France, creates the potential to deny people who are in great need of asylum, and puts significant strain on refugee-aiding organizations like La Cimade. The center is short on funding, which means it is forced to

operate with minimal staff, only able to help a fraction of the people who seek of assistance, and can offer only nominal assistance with adjustment and well-being processes. One option for La Cimade is to invest itself solely in the bureaucratic processes in attempt to better stay on top of the workload. However, I would like to suggest that a better strategy is to support the current grassroots movement in France aimed towards decreasing anti-immigration sentiments by building tolerance and breaking down stereotypes. I expound upon this view below.

Methods Towards Healing and A Better Sense of Well-Being

There is a significant need for healing and well-being opportunities for the refugees at La Cimade's *Centre d'Accueil pour les Demandeurs d'Asile* in Béziers. Back home, many refugees experience traumatic events that drive them to leave. When they part, they are forced to endure the distress of leaving behind family, friends, their belongings, and their way of life (Tripodi 2001:257). Upon their arrival, they struggle through much misery that that the French asylum process induces. They then stay in refugee centers for years, waiting to hear the verdict of their request for asylum. Most of these refugees have few opportunities to process and move past the suffering they have endured. A key part of healing involves resuming daily tasks and contributing towards the good of the community (Farwell and Cole 2001:27). However, neither of these are very possible at the center where the refugees, cannot work, lack funds to participate in entertaining activities, and can only sit and wait.

People from Western societies tend to equate healing with hospitals and therapists. While these forms of treatment are viable, they are not the only means of moving past trauma. In the case of refugees, not everyone traumatic case requires the

assistance of a therapist --often knowing that someone cares is enough (Pipher 2002:299). Similarly, permitting a refugee to resume daily tasks and find ways to feel like he or she is working towards some community good can also help a refugee significantly in this or her recovery process (Farwell and Cole 2001:27). Additionally, “service needs to range from relieving the transitional stresses of moving to a strange environment to resolving emotional and interpersonal issues (Balgopal 2000:231). Classical biomedical treatment for trauma and PTSD is not necessarily the most practical approach as many refugees prefer other forms of trauma resolution and there are too few counselors for assistance. Additionally, many refugees find that speaking with a stranger about personal problems is foreign and uncomfortable (Miller and Rasco 2004:2-3; Pipher 2002:14) because psychological counseling is based in Western ideas of wellness and treatment places emphasis on the individual rather than the community⁵⁸ (Miller and Rasco 2004:30; Farwell and Cole 2001:22; Tripodi 2002:269). Given this, it is essential that La Cimade find culturally appropriate healing methods for its refugees.

An alternative approach to individual therapy would be group therapy. There has been much work on PTSD treatment methods for veterans in the United States. For example, Daniels and McGuire discuss the possibility of dream analysis and sand tables to help PTSD-afflicted persons (1998). While many refugees have endured very traumatic experiences and even show symptoms of PTSD (Silove 2003:1555), one must be wary of treatment methods tested with American veterans because, coming from an egocentric society, they again stress the individual (Farwell and Cole 2001:22) rather than the community. A similar approach may be creating support groups, such as one

⁵⁸ The emphasis on the individual is significant when one considers how this approach towards social interactions is in contrast with the community-centered way of life that many refugees come from.

established for women in a Johannesburg refugee center where refugees could learn about each other's cultures (Ley and Garcia 2003:53-57) and gain access to education, healthcare rights, and employment. However, there are challenges to this method of trauma resolution as well: difficulties conversing because everyone spoke different languages and few people's willingness to talk about their pasts. Because the women seemed to feel so much joy in talking about their cultures and from learning about each other, Ley and Garcia suggest that a better approach towards fostering well-being is to create a sense of community among refugees where they can support each other without dwelling on past suffering.

There are many healing aspects of community-centered behavior. As Miller and Rasco discuss "Emphasis on collaboration and community empowerment holds great promise as an alternative framework within which culturally appropriate mental health interventions for refugees can be developed, implemented, and evaluated" (2004:4). There is also a lot of support and understanding that a group can provide its individuals when members have experienced similar trauma (Johnson et al.1999:20) and can unite in a common healing activities to reach a productive outcome (Farwell and Cole 2001:24). The community approach may also prove useful because, while it works with adult groups, it has also proven successful with children (Farwell and Cole 2001:19) and adolescents (Batkin Kahn and Aronson 2007:281). Additionally, a whole community can begin to heal together when they show a common interest in the needs of the children (Farwell and Cole 2001:29).

A last possible approach could be the use of what psychologist Sara Alexander calls healing packages (Pipher 2002:282). Instead of asking refugees to talk out their

problems, they may choose from a wide range of activities, such as reading to kids, taking walks outside, doing art projects, or other things that make them happy. This method takes the community-based intervention approach for well-being and, by permitting refugees a say in their own healing modalities, is culturally appropriate (Miller and Rasco 2004:43-44). This aid approach would be particularly helpful at La Cimade because these efforts do not require much assistance from facilitators. Additionally, we as humans tend to thrive most when our human needs for autonomy, mastery, and purpose are met (Pink 2009). Therefore, this aid approach would be significantly beneficial for refugees because it would permit them an active role in their own healing process and a meaningful way to spend their time as they wait for their asylum decisions.

Additionally, Pipher discusses twelve attributes of resilience that help make refugees more successful in their adaptation to their new place of living (2002:69; 2002:285). A few examples include verbal expressiveness, intentionality, positive mental health, ambition and initiative, and future orientation. Providing activities that foster these traits may allow refugees to build their own resilience, establish more agency in their adjustment period, and therefore have more autonomy in their own lives. In addition to French classes, refugees could learn skills that would make them more employable upon being awarded asylum and entering French society. A mentorship program with more seasoned refugees assisting the new arrivals may also give people a sense of purpose, support one another, and spread their acquired knowledge. These are all just a few ideas regarding how autonomy, mastery, and purpose could be achieved among refugees at the center, which may be quite instrumental in improving the quality of life and sense of morale at La Cimade.

This approach has potential to not only positively affect many refugees; it could also be implemented quite easily. Currently, the center provides funds to refugees seen as struggling⁵⁹ the most so they can participate in activities they enjoy such as yoga. However, this option is not available to all due to financial impediments. Although funding may be scarce, all people can benefit from this approach of well-being assistance and agency building by focusing on low-cost and free activities such as writing or drawing in journals and talking walks in the park.

A Multidimensional Approach Towards Healing, Combatting Racism, and Building Community

Although I have already described possible ways that La Cimade at Béziers can develop programs to increase the well-being of its refugees, I would like to explain what I think would be a particularly viable attempt towards improving many of the aforementioned problems at La Cimade. During my stay in Béziers, I was struck by the lacking sense of community amongst the refugees at the welcome center. The residents all lived next door to one another and shared community space such as laundry facilities and kitchens. However, these areas were inadequate for prolonged interactions due to the lack of space for sitting and passing time together and I rarely saw people leave their rooms let alone sit and engage one another. While we may attribute some of this disconnect to cultural and linguistic differences, I think a more likely cause was the lack of interaction-facilitating community space that residents could use as they pleased⁶⁰. As I have already discussed, there are many benefits to community engagement among

⁵⁹ During my work with La Cimade, I did not meet a single refugee who was not struggling significantly in one way or another.

⁶⁰ While there was a gym area and a classroom / meeting space, both of these areas were kept locked unless there was some employee led function or activity going on such as monthly meetings with all the refugees.

refugee populations. One possible approach is to encourage community relations by building a garden in the welcome center's courtyard. With a space that everyone could easily access, people could sit with one another, take care of the garden together, and even benefit personally from the flowers and produce they collect. Additionally, gardening is also another task shown to be therapeutic for distressed persons (Horowitz 2012:78).

Another approach would be to encourage residents to create art such as painting, writing, making jewelry, carving, or building with clay as a form of therapy. Making art is not only therapeutic in itself, it also may also prove quite beneficial in the context of the refugee welcome center. Andemicael discusses how art establishes a sense of productivity, preserves traditional culture while far away from home, and builds connections through refugee and host communities (2013:69-70). Through these three benefits, art therapy has significant potential to improve living conditions at La Cimade's *Centre d'Accueil pour les Demandeurs d'Asile*. However, art's potential to build connections with the host country may allow for a multidimensional approach towards aid, which I will now discuss.

Festivals are beloved in Béziers and happen nearly every weekend during the summer. Knowing the power of community groups for refugees, the therapeutic benefits of gardening and art, and the need to increase respect for diversity amongst the ethnic French of the Béziers community, I suggest that La Cimade sets up a booth at these festivals using funding it reserves for refugee wellness. By selling artwork created by residents and flowers and produce from the garden, refugees could make money to spend on their own activities at the center and various aspects of their healing packages.

Interaction with the community would also enable them to discuss and possibly demonstrate unique aspects of their cultures to help create an appreciation for diversity. Lastly, La Cimade could use this space of interaction to encourage people within the Béziers community to volunteer in the center and possibly act as cultural brokers⁶¹. Not only would interactions with the ethnic French help the refugees learn and acclimate to the French language and culture, these connections are likely to help build empathy towards refugees and migrants within the ethnic French population. Additionally, interactions have great potential to normalize and humanize refugees.

I foresee this approach as potentially successful in the betterment of La Cimade's aid efforts for several reasons. It would be a multidimensional healing method (Miller and Rasco 2004:44), as it incorporates agency opportunities, the chance to engage with many ethnic French persons, and healing potential associated with making art and gardening. Facilitation efforts of La Cimade personnel would also be minimal as refugees themselves could lead the community engagement efforts at the festival and therefore invest personal effort into something they see as productive. If desired, La Cimade could also garner much support from other migrant-assisting and racism-combatting organizations around Béziers such as SOS Racisme and Association Béziers Contre Racisme. It is likely that members of these groups would love to contribute to this diversity appreciation and empowerment effort.

Lastly, with direct interactions between the refugees and ethnic French, the operation of a booth at community festivals is likely to decrease stereotyping and increase tolerance. This is hugely significant when considering the current political

⁶¹ Tripodi discusses how cultural competence goes beyond cultural awareness and ethnic sensitivity but also requires a certain degree of effectiveness (2001:123-124). Efforts to welcome refugees and help them adjust must therefore be sensitive and tailored to benefit specific people.

situation in Béziers and the whole of France. Over the course of two decades, the anti-immigration sentiments of the Front National have grown stronger in Béziers. Since the beginning of my work on this thesis, Robert Ménard, supporter of the Front National platform, has become the new mayor of Béziers. The total population of Béziers is approximately 70,955 and 66.8% of them are registered voters (Europe 1 2014). In 2014, 68.51% of registered voters participated in the mayoral election, the Front National political party won 46.98% of votes, and there was a 31.49% abstention. While the election of Ménard indicates a move to the right and therefore towards more conservative policy, it is unfair to say that Béziers as a whole is becoming more prejudice and intolerant. Although Ménard has secured his place in office for six years and has appointed many officials to help carry out extreme-right policy changes, there is still hope that Béziers can pull itself back from the extreme and conservative right as reflected by how 53.02% of registered voters did not support the FN in the recent election. Policies in Béziers are becoming more intolerant - not the people of Béziers as a whole. However, the effect of electing an extreme-right mayor is still the same considering how funding for many organizations that offer assistance to migrants and refugees now face significant financial threats. Prior to this election, director Jean-Philippe said to me, "I cannot imagine what will happen to us if a more extreme mayor comes into office next. I fear we will have our funding cut and thus our ability to help." Now that Ménard has been elected, the big question is whether La Cimade will maintain its funding and therefore its positive impact on the refugee and migrant communities of Béziers.

In order to curb the adverse effects that are likely to stem from actions of an extreme-right mayor of Béziers, La Cimade must commit itself more than ever to

combatting anti-immigration sentiments⁶² and encourage people to elect more tolerant officials. Also, by spreading awareness of how acculturation and well-being efforts have potential to create more self-sufficient and integrated refugees, La Cimade may garner more support and funding for these programs and hence have a more long-lasting impact on the people it serves. In this thesis, I have shown that discrimination and anti-immigration sentiments in Béziers, France create social and political impediments for migrants and refugees as well as struggles for the aid organizations that seek to assist them in their plights to attain refuge in France. I ultimately argue that grassroots movements aimed towards lessening anti-immigration sentiments in France are essential for La Cimade's survival in an environment that is increasingly controlled by extreme-right beliefs. However, these movements are also important for all of France, which, through its fourteen cities with FN mayors who promote anti-immigration sentiments and exclusionary actions, permits a portion of its population to diminish the French values of *Liberté, Egalité, and Fraternité*.

Unless France learns to elect officials who are more accepting of difference, who treat all people with equality, and who recognize that the brotherhood of humanity should exist within its own borders, it risks threatening its reputation as a welcoming and just country. While facing the problem of increasingly rightist or conservative policy is a daunting task, progress begins with small steps forward. La Cimade's work in Béziers does not have a large impact when considering the size of France and the number of migrants and refugees in need, but this does not devalue its efforts. By having an effect on the micro-context of intolerance in Béziers, La Cimade can do its part in the French

⁶² While La Cimade participates by protecting the rights of migrants and refugees, its interaction with the Béziers public is minimal and I saw no efforts to teach the ethnic French about multiculturalism and tolerance, which might prevent the need to defend migrant's rights in court in the first place.

macro-context by encouraging people to see the value of electing officials who protect the rights and insure the fair treatment of all people in France. As Jean-Philippe, La Cimade's director says, "I do my work because it is a chance to make a difference in the lives of others. It is essential that we try to change the world for the better. Even if it's only a little at a time." Small steps towards improvement may seem rather insignificant in themselves, but they are how we create waves of change and ultimately protect the France that so many people love.

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