

The Wounds of Refugeeism in Ananda Devi's *Ceux du large* [Afloat]

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ABSTRACT

Ananda Devi's latest collection of poetry, *Ceux du large* [Afloat], is an attempt to humanize those who are subjected to the inhuman condition of "refugeeism," the fraught positionality of being a stateless and anonymous refugee. I discuss the ways in which Devi's poetry uncovers the *wounds of refugeeism* through searing verse, bitter irony, and a scathing critique of Europe's intolerance to difference. I argue that refugeeism is a biting wound that results from forced migration and displacement. This primordial wound takes many forms in Devi's poetry—traumatic affect as embodied in the act of crossing treacherous seas, wounded seascapes that bear the scars of death, the poet's wounded sensibilities when faced with the plight of the refugees, the violence of coloniality represented by Europe's border ethic, and the title itself. The leitmotif of the wound traverses my analysis to reveal the wound's physical, psychological, and geographical permutations in this poetic text. The wound represents a form of violent affect as highlighted in the essay's discussions on suffering, trauma, grievability, and inhospitality.

"The ocean is death offered and refused"—Ananda Devi, *Ceux du large*

Ananda Devi is an award-winning novelist, poet, essayist, multilingual translator, and cultural activist from Mauritius who embraces the cause of social justice in her powerful writings. She is the author of twelve novels, three collections of poetry, several short stories, essays, and two filmographies.¹ For Devi, literature represents a medium to highlight and contest the social, cultural, and economic fractures that create a sense of anomie in society through gender marginality, patriarchal abuse, imposed displacement, economic dispossession, and the violence of history. In her latest collection of poetry, *Ceux du large* [Afloat],

Devi interrogates the violence of globalization, war, and involuntary migration that has led to a transnational refugee crisis, an unimaginable human tragedy in the 21st century. Stemming from a visceral sense of urgency, Devi's biting verse uncovers the hypocrisy behind Western notions of hospitality and delimiting categorizations of acceptable and unacceptable humanity created by the politics of alterity. Her poems ironically demonstrate how Western ideas of magnanimity camouflage a hidden agenda of xenophobia, inaccessibility, and intolerance toward racialized and economic subalterns concretized in the figure of the refugee, "ces êtres meurtris" 'these wounded beings' (Djailani and Assibatu 9).²

In this paper, I use the trope of wounding to discuss Devi's poetic attempt to humanize those who are subjected to the inhuman condition of "refugeeism," the fraught positionality of being a stateless and anonymous refugee (*Elsewhere within Here* 7). I discuss the ways in which her poetry uncovers the *wounds of refugeeism* through searing verse, bitter irony, and a scathing critique of Europe's intolerance to difference. I argue that refugeeism is a wound that results from the "open arteries" (Chamoiseau 23) of forced migration and displacement. This primordial wound takes many forms in Devi's poetry—traumatic affect as embodied in the act of crossing treacherous seas, wounded seascapes that bear the scars of death, the poet's wounded sensibilities when faced with the plight of the refugees, the violence of coloniality represented by Europe's border ethic, and the title itself. In fact, the leitmotif of the wound traverses my analysis to reveal the wound's physical, psychological, and geographical permutations in this poetic text. The wound represents a form of violent affect as highlighted in the essay's discussions on suffering, trauma, grievability, and inhospitality. Recurring references to violence, "découpez, déchirez, déchiquetez" 'cut, tear, rip apart' (*Ceux du large* 13), permeate the collection.³ Each poem represents a searing wound, "une brûlure quasi sacrée" 'a quasi-sacred burn' (*Illusion poétique* 9) created by the poet's act of decrying human cruelty in verse. These poems are not illustrations of trauma per se as they do not focus on the first-person testimonials of the victims and survivors of refugeeism. Instead, the wound in Devi's poems is a metaphoric trope, a "literary verbalization" (Hartman 259) of individual (the poet) and collective pain (refugeeism). Its function is to draw attention to a catastrophic situation: "Poetry always exceeds its assigned place ... [It] can convey muted experiences and structures of feeling that exist outside of normative contexts," states Françoise Lionnet (*Écritures féminines* 286). Poetry thereby provides Devi with a valuable medium to decry and restore the compromised dignity of those who are forced to remain afloat, the vulnerable *ceux du large* of the 21st century.

Devi joins a chorus of concerned literary voices from the Global South that protest the limits of European hospitality characterized by discriminating codes of inaccessibility for unwelcome foreigners on European shores. Her poems enter the conversation on issues of clandestine migration raised by writers from other geographies than West Africa, the Maghreb, and the Caribbean. The poet's meaningful literary interventions in *indianoceanic* approaches to clandestine migration create important synergies with other authors from Mauritius (Carl de Souza's *Ceux qu'on jette à la mer*; Natacha Appanah's *Tropique de la violence*) and the wider Indian Ocean region (Soeuf Elbadawi's *Un dhikri pour nos morts*), while establishing trans-aquatic connections with the French-speaking Caribbean at the same time (Patrick Chamoiseau's *Frères migrants* and his 2018 coedited anthology titled

Osons la fraternité, which includes a compelling contribution by Devi). "Writing is a way of shifting the building-blocks of the real world to create as convincing an alternate world as possible," states Devi in an interview with Emmanuel Bruno Jean-François (Devi, "An Interview with" 143).

Written in three languages, the original French followed by the poet's own translations in English and Creole, *Ceux du large* has a fragmented tripartite structure. While the first two sections in French and English evoke the buoyancy of remaining afloat amid extenuating circumstances, the pessimism of the title in Creole, *Bann nwaye* or *The Drowned Ones*, suggests a descent into the labyrinthine abyss of the sea as a brutal wrenching of life and a deferral of dreams. The three titles highlight the act of gradually plunging into the depths of horror through Devi's use of "ocean words" that enable the poet herself to symbolically enter the sea's dark abyss by "plonger dans l'océan de mots" 'plunging into an ocean of words' (27). The passage from life to death reveals the "dangerous" aspects of refugeeism and the tenuous state of the refugees who walk a tightrope between hope and despair, protection and vulnerability, acceptance and rejection. The term refugeeism itself underscores a primordial fracture in the politics of naming by highlighting the "wounding" power of racialized epithets against Global South refugees. Devi establishes the historicity of these wounds by linking them to the maiming of (post)colonial history by the forces of colonization, globalization, and forced migration (Djailani and Assibatu 14), a process of permanent disfigurement referred to by Chamoiseau as a "spasm" and a "historical retching" (24). In other words, this wounded historicity is inscribed in the ultimate spasms of death and the existential nausea of being drowned by History (Djailani and Assibatu 14) as highlighted in the creole title, *Bann nwaye*.

Devi's poetry of the wound represents a sensorial unraveling of the political disembodiment experienced by refugees who confront confounding walls, carceral surveillance systems, and xenophobia on European shores. The poems highlight the successful or unsuccessful migrations undertaken by the refugees as they cross trauma-inducing "geographies of pain" represented by the open seas ("Geographies of Pain" 132). This poetry demonstrates its social relevance to contemporary debates on immigration and refugeeism through each poem's story of the bleeding wound of migration described as "le lyrisme de la chair nue" 'the lyricism of naked flesh' by Devi's editor Bruno Doucey (19). This corporeal language expresses itself dramatically through the physical violation of the flesh (death by drowning, the mutilation of bloated bodies, gendered border violence) and the lyrical pathos of poetry. This poetic language of the body manifests in the form of "a sorrowful voice that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound" (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 2016, 2).

This plaintive voice resembles the soulful notes of Sufi mystic Jalaluddin Rumi's reed flute that laments the pain, sorrow, and loneliness of the soul as it experiences a sense of spiritual unhooking. These muted tones could possibly represent the pain of refugeeism, wherein refugees lament their physical and emotional unhooking in the form of statelessness and rejection. The refugee's anguished lament nevertheless joins forces with the poet's anger against the injustices of European exceptionalism. The poet's rage expresses itself in the form of a stereophonic piercing scream to be heard across the seas. Devi's poems thereby chart a painful geography of dislocation in an audible act of narrative "dé-tissage"

or unweaving that exposes the vicissitudes of the migrating process. This unraveling is etched across treacherous *seascapes of pain* rooted in the Mediterranean and other inhospitable waters like the Indian Ocean, the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and the Caribbean Sea.

The disembodying fractures of refugeeism are given form and texture in Devi's raw, visceral, and poignant verse, whereby she opposes her poetics of empathy with Europe's politics of antipathy toward refugees. Her poetry manifests its *aqueous sensibility* as a visceral engagement with the nefarious politics of the sea in an effort to give voice and visibility to refugee pain "across the sea." At the same time, these poems also highlight the important role played by poetry in a time of crisis; poetry uncovers the human side of migration through a gripping poetics of the flesh as an anti-media narrative against "demi-vérités, contre-vérités ou post-vérités dont nous sommes abreuvés" 'the half-truths, counter-truths or post-truths with which we are showered' (*L'illusion poétique* 10). This wounding poetics of the flesh uncovers Devi's desire to "want to rip off the skin of superficiality and reveal the depths of suffering, emptiness, inequity, cruelty, and tragedy that lie beneath" (Devi, "An Interview with" 144).

IN PRAISE OF POETRY

Ceux du large invites special attention due to its unique poetic contribution to the topic of clandestine migration amid a sea of novels in Francophone literature. Together with Elbadawi's *Un dhikri pour nos morts*, Devi uses poetry as a multifaceted revelation—a form of prayer, a lament for the human condition, an indictment of Europe's anti-human politics, and a dirge to honor the victims of sea crossings.⁴ Poetry enables Devi to archive the unspeakable tragedy of refugeeism by chronicling this painful experience through the brutality of words that bruise the reader's consciousness while revealing the poet's anguish in an unpoetic world. The existential anguish engendered by the tenuousness of the human condition pushes the poet to move forward in transnational bonds of solidarity with other writers instead of retreating behind an ivory tower isolationism as an unproductive disengagement with the pain of Others.

In other words, Devi's "poetry of the gut" draws the reader's attention to a gut-wrenching situation. Inspired by a dysphagia-induced "lump in the throat" (Frost), these poems are an attempt to "write/right" a serious wrong while underscoring the ambiguity of translating human abjection into words: "Is it still possible to ignore the tragedy that is unfurling before our very eyes at each moment today? Is it possible to still say we are not concerned? These fixed borders, these erected walls, these minds that are closed to others, this refusal to admit that the history which has led to so many migratory flows is our collective history?" Devi wonders ("On oublie trop"; my translation).⁵ By combining aesthetics with a self-motivated ethic of accountability to narrate refugee pain in text, Devi's poetic outrage is an effort to resonate with the subaltern's cry for understanding in an increasingly hostile world.

Without seeming to appropriate an experience that remains outside her own lived reality, Devi's biting verse is more of an accusation against the Western world referred to as "vous là-bas avec votre panneau ridicule" 'you out there with your ridiculous signs' (20), than an attempt to imagine and identify with the condition

of refugeeism in the name of poetic license: "A writer cannot turn away from the reality of violence, especially in an increasingly tumultuous world," Devi states in her attempts to "write the limits" while expressing "the limits of writing" ("Writing the Limits"). The poems express this tumultuous situation in the form of a long primal scream that emerges from the shadows of the unconscious without interruption or pause, "l'ombre et le cri" 'shadows and cries' (15). Each untitled poem is composed like a vignette of pain, wherein a deeply sensory and visceral language pummels the reader's awareness with stark imagery, sulfurous words, and a swift-paced rhythm likened to the modulations of a never-ending cry. The collection demonstrates how poetry is a deinstitutionalized language that responds to a human crisis with the poet's creative empathy and her own sense of anguish, thereby highlighting the necessary synergies between "social protest and art" (Lorde 34). Devi writes with her "scream words" as she engages in the triple process of witnessing, documenting, and indicting injustice as a necessary step to imagine hope for future generations: "Parle-leur d'espoir / Juste un petit peu" 'Talk to them about hope / Just a little bit of hope' (31).

Ceux du large is an exercise against forgetfulness, indifference, and apathy in "un monde en désagrègement" 'a world in disarray' (La Rédaction). This fractured world has created binary distinctions between what Judith Butler terms "grievable" and "ungrievable" lives, wherein an "ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all" (15). While Butler does not refer to refugees, her theory remains applicable to the situation of refugees who are also considered to be ungrievable in mainstream partisan politics. Devi's poetry gives form and texture to these disavowed lives by imaging their "grievability" in text through simple words and a suspenseful poetic narrative (Le Rédaction). The poems are a strong condemnation of European antipathy toward unwanted refugees when Europe itself has been one of the prime contributors to refugeeism through its ambivalent foreign policies and neocolonial engagements with the South as mentioned earlier (Le Rédaction). At the same time, the poet also makes a universal statement about the impact of borders and perilous crossings in general, "l'océan n'a plus de nom" 'the ocean remains nameless' (9), to show how globalization has ironically impeded human flows from the South in a transnational anti-refugee politic.⁶

The poems highlight Devi's migrating sensibilities in text. Characterizing her writing as a form of *errance* or wandering across linguistic, cultural, and geographical spaces, Devi follows the trajectories of the refugees as they wander/swim across the unfamiliar routes of exile. She chronicles their painful life trajectories in quasi-cinematographic imagery, "le film catastrophe qui se déroule / sur nos écrans intimes" 'the horror film that unfolds / on our private screens' (*Ceux du large* 30). These glaring images of despair, distress, and courage inscribe their larger-than-life presence on the "white" screen to expose human abjection on a monumental scale as well as to indict the viewer's "fearful" immunity to the plight of others: "Qui sait d'où viendra la fin / En attendant on se terre / Dans sa bulle de peur / Et on regarde, médusé" 'Who knows what the end will bring / While waiting, we hide / In our bubble of fear / And we watch, transfixed' (30). The poet implicates herself in the collective "we"; her privileged location in southeastern France aligns her with the very same bourgeois intellectuals and activists she condemns in her collection. At the same time, she occupies an insider-outsider

positionality. As a world-renowned writer in France, Devi has privileged access to French intellectual circles. On the flip side, her otherness as an immigrant writer from Mauritius creates uncertain bonds of affiliation with insider privilege through her non-French identity.

While viewers protect themselves from tragedy in a bubble of disengagement, the poet is forced to bear the burden of clairvoyance, wherein prophetic dreams and visions create nightmares and disturbed sleep: “La voyance n’est pas une plaisanterie / Cela fait des semaines que je ne dors plus” ‘Clairvoyance is no joke / I haven’t slept in weeks,’ she confesses (22). The weightiness of these visions foreshadows an impending catastrophe, “Ce sera l’année de tous les malheurs / Des catastrophes et des terreurs” ‘This will be the year of all misfortune / Catastrophe and terror’ (22). The poet’s powerlessness to change the course of history can only be mitigated by her shared sense of humanity communicated in her poetry. The poems represent her medium of protest against the world’s indifference to tragedy. This verse demonstrates how violence against refugees has become a spectacle and a reality show to be watched in the safe space of living rooms while hiding behind the protecting border of the TV or computer screen. The screen provides a buffer zone of comfort between the televised “performance” of the tragedy and its real-life unfolding, thereby giving the viewers the power to watch or extricate themselves from “the scene” through channel switching and what I term cocktail sympathy: “Tout cela, tout cela, oui, je l’ai vu.... Un verre de vin à la main” ‘Yes, I saw it all.... With a glass of wine in my hand’ (19).

The poet associates the easy access to state-of-the-art technology with the deadening of the senses as well as attention deficiency spans. Fast-paced living creates constant diversions, repressed emotions, a lack of creative reflection, and an exaggerated individualism. Moreover, the hyper-sensationalizing of tragedy by the media for dramatic intent generates a numbing effect by anesthetizing the viewer’s empathy toward the pain and suffering of others: “Research has shown that after consuming violent media, people are less physiologically aroused by real depictions of violence” (Bushman et al.). Viewers can maintain a guarded distance from the unfolding tragedy in virtual time by convincing themselves of the event’s “unimaginable” scope in real time. In these circumstances, Devi affirms that poetry offers a viable antidote to postmodern indifference by providing a sobering wake-up call. The politics of empathy disputes a privileged “art for art’s sake” ethic in a world that is moving backwards with its “abattoirs, dépotoirs, fours et murs” ‘slaughterhouses, dumping grounds, ovens and walls’ (29). Western ideological discourses on humanity and hospitality are debunked by Devi’s crying/screaming voice, her literary aesthetics, and her use of poetry. The poetic scream establishes the political value of literature and the nuanced position of the transnational poet who wants to imagine a world “beyond” pain. The scream also represents the poet’s sincere efforts to give pain a sensorial presence in text by exposing “the void where true fury and true despair speak” (Devi, “An Interview with” 151).

COMMEMORATING LIVES

The very title of the collection, *Ceux du large* in French and *Afloat* in the English translation, refers to a polemic. Who is destined to remain afloat at sea and what does it mean to float between bordered territorialities? How do those who remain

afloat testify to their survival skills while dodging the specter of death in their bordered lives? How does the condition of being afloat testify to the condition of refugees who are denied safe passage and the rights of arrival? How are borders a site of wounding and pain? Devi's poetic interrogations of these questions in *Ceux du large* were motivated by the image of a drowned three-year-old Syrian child, Aylan Kurdi. The boy's body washed ashore in Turkey after his family's failed attempt to cross from Turkey to Greece in September 2015. Although the image of the dead child sparked international outrage about the precarious situation of refugees, it soon faded into obscurity when successive tragedies desensitized the world to the gravity of the crisis: "Notre empathie pour ceux qui souffrent n'est que passagère" 'our empathy for those who suffer is only fleeting,' states Devi (Le Rédaction). If the Global North immunizes itself against the horrors of the abject, Devi's poetic tribute to the victims and survivors of refugeeism is a form of arts activism. Her poetry contests the status quo of conditional empathy by immortalizing these disavowed lives and experiences in text for posterity. The poems move back and forth between the unsynchronized rhythm of commemorating victims and survivors and condemning their detractors, a cadence that mimics the unpredictable capriciousness of the sea, "chaque marée un espoir, une terreur" 'each tide a hope, a fear' (9).

The refugees' fear of persecution and annihilation as a justifiable humanitarian cause should provide grounds for their protection and immunity against further violence, according to the terms of the Geneva Convention. Instead, refugeeism in the 21st century has been inscribed in the politics of "ungrievability" through Europe's conflation of hospitality and hostility toward foreigners from the Global South as stated earlier: "The foreigner ... (becomes) ... an enemy, a barbarian who must be removed, repelled, made invisible. When you no longer see someone, there is no longer anyone. Inhospitability becomes hostility or hatred" (Le Blanc and Brugère 13; my translation). Invisibility and inhospitability characterize the refugee's condition of statelessness, a tenuous *entre-deux* positionality characterized by flux, precariousness, and errancy. Europe's dehumanization of refugees, conditioned by their ungrievability, converts them into a nagging problem that compromises the security of European shores. They inhabit a forbidden inhabitable space in this "Europe des lointains" 'distant Europe' (Le Blanc and Brugère 15), described as "les rivages hostiles" 'hostile shores' (10) in the poems. The threat of the foreigner feeds into nationalist discourses on citizenship and cultural authenticity, thereby associating the presence of refugees with a "fundamental problem to the future" (Noiriel 146) of European sovereignty. Victims of multiple evictions at home and in European spaces, refugees represent the degree zero of alterity as objects of ethnic profiling in the home country and as targets of racism in Europe. The nation's interest in preserving its homogeneity over plurality condemns refugees to a permanent state of physical and psychological homelessness in the absence of basic civil rights and protections; the poet asks with bitter irony, "Ne sont-ils pas la menace de notre siècle?" 'aren't they the bane of our century?' (20).

The poet critiques the "benevolent" hospitality displayed by certain feel-good bourgeois solidarity groups and charitable organizations who embrace the ethic of the white man's burden and its implicit overtones of colonial benevolence toward othered subalterns: "Vous l'auréolé de vos bontés / Voyons voir si vous leur ouvrirez vos portes / Et si l'ayant fait / Vous croirez en leur humanité" 'You

haloed in your goodness / Let's see if you will open your doors to them / And if, having done so / You will believe in their humanity' (21). She distinguishes between remote control hospitality "haloed in goodness" and a genuine politics of refugee activism to critique the hypocrisy underlying Europe's very ethos of hospitality when it comes to welcoming or disallowing Global South refugees. The limits of hospitality are put to the test through prevailing ideologies of racism, sexism, Islamophobia, and a virulent nationalism that establishes the criteria for the homing or unhoming of refugees: "Certainly, hospitality is a debt to the guest, but it remains conditioned and conditional. If, for example, he or she does not possess a right to hospitality or a right to asylum, each new arrival is not accepted as a guest. Without this right, he or she can enter one's 'home,' the 'house' of the host only as a 'parasite'—as illegal, subject to arrest or deportation" (Kakoliris).⁷ The conjunction between the conditional altruism of European citizens and the state's codification of hospitality laws is reinforced by disavowed categorizations of Southern difference—geography, race, religion, color, sexual orientation, and other delimiting variables inscribe hospitality within the same confines of inaccessibility as the European Eldorado mystique, an ideal with limited rights of admission.

"Refugeeism has become a regular feature of our times," states Trinh T. Minh-ha. "A matter of life or death for many, the act of crossing overland and over-sea to seek asylum in unknown territories is often carried out—especially in mass flight—as an escape alone, with no specific haven of refuge in mind," she adds (46). If the desire to escape represents a concrete goal and a so-called subjective choice, these escape routes are nevertheless haunted by the specter of death. The title of the collection evokes images of frozen floating bodies unsuccessful in their attempts to cross over to the coveted northern Eldorado, capsized Zodiacs unable to compete with strong winds and unpredictable tides, and rickety overcrowded boats whose buoyancy is compromised by the weight of their human cargo. The ocean's capricious whims impose a death sentence on the intrepid crossers in an attraction-repulsion game of seduction in which nature has the upper hand: "L'océan est une vie offerte et refusée / Offerte et refusée" 'The ocean is a life offered and refused / Offered and refused' (9). The progressive-regressive movements of the tides beckon the unsuspecting refugees with a "come-hither" promise that is quickly retracted when they get too close to European shores: "L'océan les condamne" 'They are condemned by the ocean' (9). The ocean offers the mirage of accessibility just like the northern Eldorado that seduces the weary travelers with the lure of possibility, "à l'autre versant des possibles" 'to the other side of possibility' (9). The "idea" of Eldorado is a tantalizing ideal, "a ... [metonymic] ... site of desire" (Ramsey-Kurz xix), and a location of simultaneous longing and unbelonging couched in its "proverbial elusiveness" (vii). The power of the ideal is the driving force behind these irregular crossings that represent a quest for socio-economic viability, survival, and human dignity. The poet nevertheless hints at the tragic deferral of these cherished dreams: "L'espoir gèle les yeux / Qui scrutent le rien" 'Hope freezes the eyes / That scan the nothingness' (14).

Eldorado is the mystical never never-land, the fetishized *out there* whose rights of accessibility are conditioned by a rite of passage across the sea. "De l'autre côté de la berge / Des guirlandes de Noël / Narguent leur silence" 'On the other side of the shore / Christmas lights / Taunt their silence' (14). The blinding

lights of Eldorado beckon with seductive promise like beacons of hope that offer the illusion of safe passage beyond the sea: "... nowadays one of the only ways for migrant-hopefuls to see Europe is to 'sea.' ... Their eyes are directed northward, seeing, or at least trying to see, Europe from across the sea" (Abderrezak 149). How do you see through "eyes frozen with hope" (Devi 14) when the sea becomes an impenetrable barrier between the *here* and *there*? How do the blinding lights of Eldorado impair clear vision through the wounding impact of retinal distortions? The poet asks: "Qu'est-ce qui te retient ici qui ne soit déjà perdu / Pourquoi tes yeux se tournent-ils sans cesse / Vers ces rivages hostiles / Vers les trous des tombeaux / Où à peine les tiens ont trouvé / Sépulture" 'What holds you here that is not already lost / Why do your eyes keep turning back / Toward these hostile shores / Toward tomb holes / In which your loved ones have barely been interned' (10). The poet wonders if death-dedicated wishes are the only form of hope offered to refugees who refuse to avert their eyes from the sea. Are frozen bodies and floating debris encased in "tomb holes" the only traces of the subaltern's presence in the sea-turned-graveyard of stifled dreams? The trope of the sea as sepulture dominates the first part of the collection (Devi 10) to demonstrate how seas and oceans have become the aquatic tombs of the nameless and placeless refugees. Ironically, even death does not provide an anchor and the security of mooring when their bodies continue to be tossed around by the sulfurous waves of destiny. The sea itself becomes an impenetrable barrier, an original site of pain, instead of generating free-flowing movement between its shores. These anti-natural reversions create bordered territorialities within the sea that remain sandwiched between confining "grillages et clôtures" 'fences and enclosures' (Devi 14).

The poems demonstrate how border territorialities represent primary sites of wounding when the sea becomes a border instead of a site of expansiveness and movement. Gloria Anzaldúa describes these borderland spaces as a bleeding wound "where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again ..." (25). Refugees are caught in this liminal space created by the grating confrontation between land and sea. The sea's confinement within artificial borders provokes a sense of disorientation for the refugees who are looking for more porous routes of access, "les points cardinaux longtemps égarés" 'long-lost cardinal points' (18). The sea delineates safe and unsafe passage for affluent Global North tourists and Global South "transients" in binary demarcations between acceptable and unacceptable passengers. The sea loses its identity as a contact zone to function as a wounding border zone by creating differential routes of passage for the North and South in liminal distinctions between "difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond,' an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà*, here and there, on all sides, *fort/da* and thither, back and forth," according to Homi Bhabha (1). For the refugees, the *au-delà* nevertheless remains out of reach; the sea traps them in an aquatic impasse, a hither/thither vortex that impedes escape to the liberating third space beyond the insider/outsider boundary. Instead of offering transcendence, the "beyond" becomes an empty fathomless space devoid of possibility and miraculous escape: "L'espace vide qui t'attend / Ne porte en lui aucun miracle" 'The empty spaces that await you / Hold no miracles' (10).

SEEING THE MEDITERRANEAN

The Mediterranean Sea and the Straits of Gibraltar have functioned as important transnational contact zones between Europe and Africa and within the Mediterranean basin in general since the beginning of Western civilization.⁸ However, these bodies of water have morphed into cemeteries for the “wretched of the sea” in the 21st century.⁹ As a demarcated war zone targeting refugees, “the sea has become a materialization of the neo-colonial European Empire and therefore an additional border to cross, another system to elude, as well as a military barrier to evade for people from the global South,” according to Abderrezak (22). The sea’s hither/thither propulsion is compromised by an imploding rupture when the sea becomes a war zone. Europe’s wars against the refugees impose carceral markings of detection, detention, and deportation on these bodies of water in the form of the sea’s “ventre dépeuplé” ‘depopulated belly’ (Devi 15). The fear of the southern Other has transformed the Mediterranean into an intimidating “sea wall” in a man-made reversal of nature’s intent.

Land and sea converge in a contiguous line of fortified demarcations, wherein sea patrols collaborate with border control forces to police the liminal buffer zones between water and land: “ni horizon, / ni barrière de récifs” ‘neither a horizon, / nor a barrier reef’ (18). Contact zones become encroachment zones when land and sea trespass on each other’s territoriality to form undifferentiated maritime and land fortifications against the invading foreigners, “cette horde à l’assaut” ‘these invading hordes’ (20). Fortress Europe buttresses its coastline using highly sophisticated warlike technology, such as the formidable Integrated System of External Surveillance or SIVE, to identify and neutralize the perceived threat to its borders. Abderrezak argues: “SIVE not only marks a physical border along Spain’s coasts where there used to be none, but it also stretches its functionality beyond the ‘belted’ land” (59). This insidious system of “body control” makes use of the most invasive surveillance technology to mark “offending” bodies with its biopolitical imprint.

Refugees are kept in a state of nervous tension on the “wrong” side of these fortifications, just as they “find themselves on the wrong side of exclusivist ethnic determinants of national identity” (Chadha 131). Their “wronged” positionality nevertheless reduces their lives to a series of impasses and interdictions in their imposed non-status as trespassers on land and at sea: “mais l’écriture sur les murs / ne répète qu’un seul mot: Interdit, interdit, interdit” ‘but the writing on the walls / repeats one word only: Forbidden, forbidden, forbidden’ (16). The object of interdiction is delimited by the prevailing politics of contamination equating the refugee’s foreign presence with an epidermal infestation. The refugees symbolize an “infectious threat” (Sanyal 16) to the salubriousness of the nation through their unrecognizable metallic smells, heavy footprints incrusting in mud, swollen bellies, strange sounding languages emanating from strangled throats (*Ceux du large* 10), and other forms of unacceptable difference. These gangrenous forms of alterity must be contained by the regimented control of foreign “anti-bodies” before they compromise the nation’s immunity: “The risk of contamination immediately liquidates contact, relationality, and being in common.... What is important is inhibiting, preventing and fighting the spread of contagion wherever it presents itself” (Esposito 59–60). Europe stages its own form of ethnic cleansing through

its rights of inhospitality by immunizing its citizens against Global South otherness. Biopolitical borders and infrared surveillance networks are early detection systems to deter the infected hordes from penetrating the pristine coastlines of Europe. Internment zones and detention camps described in the poems as “un bunker suisse” ‘a Swiss bunker’ (11) represent sites of regulation to contain the further spread of infection, whereby European lives are spared from the egregious infractions of dis-eased Others. Devi expresses her shock when she learns about the Swiss bunkers: “... young men were housed in old anti-atomic bunkers that all Swiss nationals built in the 1960s and that had been unused until now. Hundreds of men were housed in rooms with no windows, thirty or fifty people to a room, leaving all their papers at the entrance and subjected to rigorous checks. It was as if, having traveled thousands of miles under the most rigorous conditions, they arrived and landed straight in a prison” (Devi, “An Interview with” 148–49).

How are these signifiers of interdiction inscribed on the bodies of refugees? How do hyper-militarized and masculinized borders circumscribe the bodies of refugee women in particular in Europe’s hate=rape border politics? How does the body provide a corporeal text of its abjection and resistance in its subjectivity as a moving “body in pain?” (Scarry). The poems reveal how refugees are caught in forbidding impasses between death and detention. Their survival of a death-defying trip does not guarantee a pathway to freedom. Instead, the hazardous trip places them at the equally perilous mercy of border guards and coastal patrols that lie in wait at the water’s edge: “Je suis arrivé / Je suis arrivé / S’écrit-il, la bouche pleine de sable.... Il tombe à genoux et embrasse les bottes / D’un gendarme médusé” ‘I have arrived, I have arrived / He cries, his mouth filled with sand.... He falls to his knees and kisses the boots / Of a stupefied border guard’ (120). The membrane-like contact zone between the sea and the shoreline is a site of trespass and spatial infraction for unwelcome others; this liminal space is monitored by the militarized presence of the aforementioned coast guard who represents the state’s national security task force. His formidable boots have the power to crush lives on the seashore when the sea-weary travelers, these “corps jetés” ‘jettisoned bodies’ (12) bow their heads in supplication before him. He mistakes gratitude for submission in a power-inflected dynamic between the condemner and the condemned in a non-negotiable criminalizing of difference across north-south borders.

The coast guard acts as a human wall of interdiction, a human panopticon whose sun-glassed eyes ricochet the infrared sensor lights of Fortress Europe’s reconnaissance technology. Consequently, these contact zones become disciplinary zones of high-tech surveillance and punishment transforming the open coastline into a bordered penitentiary. Within this carceral space:

Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere. This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which power is exercised without division ... in which each individual is constantly located ...—all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism. (Foucault 195–96)

The watery contact zone morphs into a state authorized “biopolitical border” (Topak) with its disciplinary controls over human life as a form of refugee

management. Within this liminal space of exception, “the body becomes a zone recorded, mapped, and traversed by technologies of management and governance,” argues Sanyal (17).

The biopolitical restrictions of the contact zone are inscribed on the bodies of the refugees who are weighted down by “les lèvres fendues / Les langues poisseuses / Le sel dans les plaies” ‘cracked lips / Drenched tongues / Salty wounds’ (12). These inscriptions of pain generate an embodied text of suffering in the form of ulcerated wounds and muted expressions resulting from cracked lips and parched throats. The refugees’ pain remains lodged within the gut as evidence of its inexpressibility and invisibility when confronted by the negating eyes of the border patrol. As Elaine Scarry states, “whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language” (4). The refugees are forced to swallow their foreign tongues in the encounter with the dominant language of the European border as a sign of *aphasic incommunicability*, just as drowning bodies are rendered mute and invisible when strong currents and rip tides submerge them beneath the frigid waters: “Tu plongeras dans l’eau / Perdant tes doigts violets” ‘You will plunge into the water / Losing your purple fingers’ (11). Bloating bodies and bruised psyches typify the traumas of refugeeism. Cathy Caruth compares these traumas to wounds that resist healing, “a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (*Unclaimed Experience* 1996 7). These lingering wounds fester in physical and psychosomatic symptoms displayed by these “corps en berne” ‘half-masted bodies’ (11) weighed down by the triple burden of crossing, perceived trespassing, and resulting detention in refugee camps. Their circumscribed movements are revealed in “les jambes brisées par le passé” ‘legs broken by the weight of the past’ (10).

On the one hand, the waterlogged legs of the refugees can be crippled when the sea forces them to swim at an anti-rhythmic pace against its choppy tides. On the other hand, this metaphoric disabling could also be related to the weight of history borne by the refugees in the form of their flight from war, persecution, economic hardship, and ethnic cleansing: “In many ways, then, the hardships that immigrants experience—including linguistic difficulties, cultural negotiations, isolation, economic struggles, social alienation, hostility, and violence—may be deemed traumatic events, which when prolonged or repeated, have a profound impact on the psyche” (Hron 37). Refugeeism thereby represents a dual predicament: physical disembodiment within a state of political stasis and psychological unraveling in the form of psychosomatic suffering.

At the same time, *Ceux du large* questions the poet’s ability to translate the pain of others in text. The poet herself feels weighed down by “the burden of commitment” (Cazenave and Célérier 2011) when she confronts the enormity of her task. She asks herself: “Did I really believe that by writing about them, I was doing something positive, something good about their plight? Did I believe that opening up a conversation about them was enough? What right have I to write about them and say I care?” (Devi, “An Interview with” 148). The collection raises other questions about the poet’s intentionality. Does the poet have access to the “vocabulary of the visceral” to document these equally instinctive expressions of pain? Can she reveal the hidden expressivity of the refugees as a way to contest their subaltern status as people without identity? Can the poet feminize the masculine discourses

on refugeeism to include the gender-specific experiences of the women trapped in “une vie bien trop mâle pour être une vie” ‘a life that is too male to be considered a life’ (13)? By referencing the experiences of women, Devi contests the overt masculinity of refugeeism by drawing attention to the embedded violence faced by the women during the process, this “assaut musculeux et grotesque” ‘muscular and grotesque assault’ (13). If the men’s suffering is characterized by its corporeality in several poems, the women’s expressions are more introverted in the form of “d’acier et de rage” ‘steel and rage’ (13). This introversion symbolizes the hidden aggressions committed against the women who enter the hyper-masculinized border zones in which they are “prises en tenaille / Entre loups et chiens” ‘caught in the grip / of wolves and dogs’ (13).

The border zone is the domain of predatory guards, these wolves and dogs, who engage in sexualized forms of border control represented by rape, unauthorized groping, and other bodily violations against the women. As stated by Jane Freedman and Bahija Jamal:

For migrant and refugee women who are victims of violence, insecurity may be reinforced by a lack of protection afforded by the relevant national authorities. This lack of protection may be aggravated by the women’s legal status ... and by the interaction of gendered and racial discrimination which mean that violence against them is not recognized or taken seriously.

The criminal acts of the guards are legitimized within the institutionalized contact zones of border detention centers as a permitted form of law enforcement (Mehta 41). Their illicit acts are aimed at humiliating and objectifying the women into submission.

Physical impositions, punishment, and fear are part of the carceral structures of the border politic. Its agenda to “découpez, déchirez, déchiquetez” ‘cut, tear, rip apart’ (13) reveals the sexualized violence against the women who are preyed on in their dehumanized refugee status. They suffer the additional marginalization of gendered ungrievability as refugee women. Those who enter the contact areas of the border zone represent the prohibited and the forbidden, warns Anzaldúa: “In short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal.’ Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot. The only ‘legitimate’ inhabitants are those in power” (25). The border politic is sustained by a power-inflected dynamic between male guards and female victims; these relationships are nevertheless inscribed in impermeable colonial bonds between the north and the south. At the same time, the poems refer to how women devise their own strategies of protection in the form of their impenetrable grit (13) and their stony glares (13) in an effort to maintain their dignity and reclaim their humanity described as “une brilliance accoutumée” ‘an accustomed brilliance’ (13). They contest prevailing tropes of powerlessness and victimization in mainstream discourses on refugeeism through “bodily protest” and a reclamation of their political subjectivity: “They fight with their own strength and resources, and draw and promote at the same time, different visions of the world, as real, as necessary,” states Sylvain George, director of the film *Qu’ils reposent en révolte* [*May They Rest in Revolt*]. George sees refugees as political subjects instead of victims of crisis (Sanyal 7).¹⁰ In this sense, the very act

of fleeing these imposed sites of pain is an active political act affording refugees some sense of agency in the face of increasing danger symbolized by the reference to heavy feet: “Les pieds sont si lourds quand on quitte / Son pays ...” ‘Your feet are so heavy when you leave / Your country’ (10). Unfortunately, the poems are limited to the poet’s consciousness-raising agenda related to the politics of “seeing”—the exposure and denunciation of a heart-wrenching and ongoing experience. The poems do not focus on the life-sustaining subjective agency demonstrated by refugees in their tenuous situations. Instead, the poet focuses on sounding the alert in her wounding scream to “see” beyond the boundaries of the sea.

The poet concludes her collection by underscoring the urgent need for creative protest in a world contaminated by social taboos, violence, censure, and intolerance. The end of hospitality is synonymous with the death of civilization, as evidenced by the culture of war, violence, and human displacement that characterizes the condition of refugeeism. Poetry provides an antidote to the world’s existential malaise “always with the aim of creating a more humane and more beautiful world” (Adonis). For Devi, poetry is a form of intellectual thought and revolutionary praxis to inspire change in a wounded world in which creativity has been badly bruised by the dissonant cacophony of “des chairs dynamitées” ‘dynamited flesh’ (Devi 27) and the brutalizing sounds of “un piano éventré” ‘a disemboweled piano’ (28). The fight for hospitality is in consonance with a humanitarian ethic and an anti-war politic to eliminate the egregious need for “ungrievable” lives created by the world’s careless indifference to our collective humanity. The poet begs for understanding and compassion as notable qualities to be passed on to future generations. She ends with a dare addressed to her reader, the ubiquitous “vous” ‘you’ of the collection: “Parle-leur d’espoir / Avant que le train / Redémarre / Avec son cheptel / Et son chant métallique” ‘Talk to them about hope / Before the train / Gets going again / With its livestock / And its metallic song’ (31).

These lines foreshadow an impending 21st-century Mediterranean holocaust with their reference to refugees as dehumanized chattel transported to Europe’s hidden “abattoirs, dépotoirs, fours et murs” ‘slaughterhouses, dumping grounds, ovens, and walls’ (29) in sinister cargo trains. Threat or prophesy? The poet leaves the choice to the rattled reader who must either embrace an energized humanitarian consciousness henceforth or be indicted for long-standing complicity in the unfolding of future tragedies, “ceux que la vie éventre / de son coutelas” ‘those that life rips apart / with its cutlass’ (31). Ananda Devi’s poetic entreaties to create and sustain a more hospitable world resonate with the calls for humanity made by other Global South authors who are looking for creative solutions to refugeeism through their creative thinking and “transoceanic” (Bragard) dialogues. Literature provides them with a cathartic medium to heal festering wounds by *imaging* and *imagining* a more generous and inclusive world: “Writing is a lifelong engagement, a continuous questioning,” states Devi in a fitting anti-conclusion (“Ananda Devi et la vie profonde”).

NOTES

1. Visit <http://ile-en-ile.org/devi/> for more details on the author.
2. The 1951 Refugee Convention formulated after World War II defines a refugee as a person who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality" (Sengupta 1). Migrants, on the other hand, are defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as: "Migrants are those who choose to move not because of a direct threat of persecution or death, but mainly to improve their lives by finding work, or in some cases for education, family reunion, or other reasons. Unlike refugees who cannot safely return home, migrants face no such impediment to return. If they choose to return home, they will continue to receive the protection of their government" (Edwards). The UNHCR definition raises a polemic in the face of the current tragedy of refugees and migrants escaping war, poverty, religious persecution, natural disasters, and other calamities. While the definition underscores the debatable question of *choice* for migrants, the current humanitarian crisis unfolding in the Mediterranean does not permit the convenient labeling of human suffering into refugee and migrant groupings. Institutionalized distinctions between refugees and migrants create asymmetrical hierarchies of humanity between the two groups as well as inappropriate binaries between acceptable and unacceptable forms of persecution as grounds for asylum or deportation (see Sanyal 29).
3. I am using the original quotes in French. Translations of the quotes into English are my own. All references will be made to this edition.
4. See Lionnet and Jean-François.
5. See Mehta and Banerjee.
6. The poems make brief reference to land journeys undertaken by refugees through harsh desert landscapes. However, this analysis will only focus on their sea routes.
7. Also see Jacques Derrida's *Of Hospitality*.
8. Mary Louise Pratt describes the contact zone as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (34).
9. Title borrowed from Hamza Hamouchène's article "The Wretched of the Sea: An Algerian Perspective."
10. Sanyal cites "Q & A: Sylvain George" from *desistfilm*.

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