



Narrative Style and Cross-cultural Communication

**COAT Conference NSW: Diversity, Accessibility and Inclusion
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Considering Narrative Resources

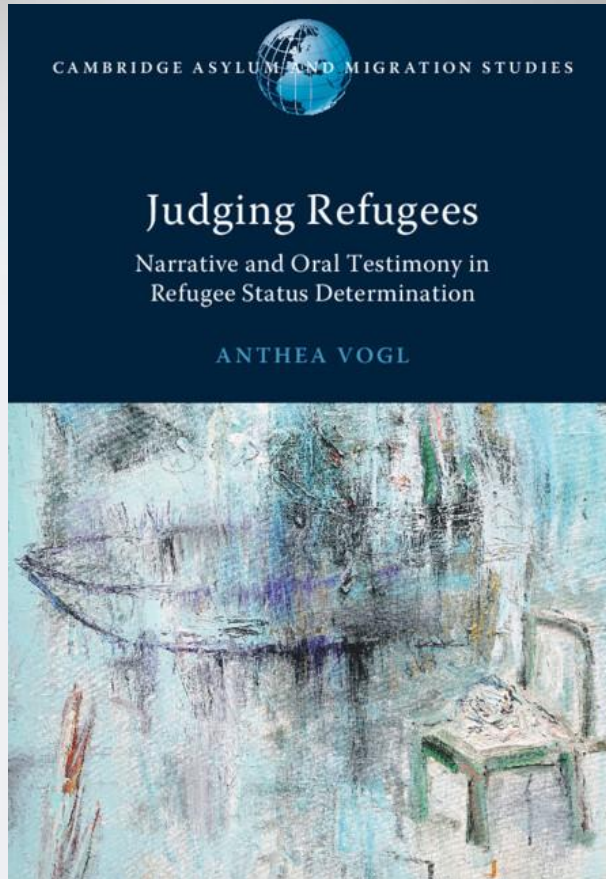
Testimony giving raises the problem of ‘**narrative inequality**’ or what Maryns and Blommaert call an applicant’s ‘**narrative resources**’ (in their study of asylum determinations).

Narrative resources: ability to manage complex set of cultural practices and language ideologies governing how to present testimony and account for one’s decision-making processes and biographical evidence.

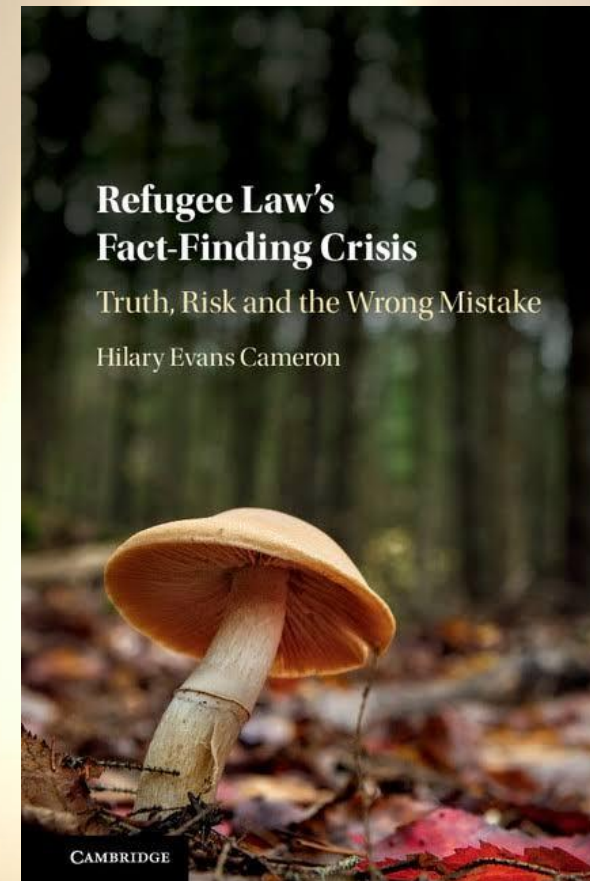
See *Katrijn Maryns and Jan Blommaert, ‘Stylistic and Thematic Shifting as a Narrative Resource: Assessing Asylum Seekers’ Repertoires’ (2001) 20(1) Multilingua 61*



A Vogl, Judging Refugees: Narrative and Oral Testimony in RSD (CUP, 2024)



And see: Hilary Evans Cameron, Refugee Law's Fact-Finding Crisis (CUP, 2018)



Cultural conceptions of time

Feature	Clock/physical (monochronic) time	Event (polychronic) time
Conception of time	Quantifiable, finite Fixed by reference to clock time Sequential	Not necessarily quantifiable Less if any attention to clock time (calendar dates and duration of events) Concurrent/polychronic
Orientation to time	Sense of time as linear Chronological or progressive Measurable	Event-based not clock-based Non-linear, intangible Possibly cyclical or simultaneous
Narrative style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of chronology • Events and action connected to dates or years • Life plotted in calendar time • Conception of endings/ beginnings (but not always!) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientated towards events not dates as focal points (“event time”) • Contextual and experiential rather than quantified/fixed • Less focus on chronology and resolution

Member: Is there anything further you want to change or add to your claim?

Applicant: No, but there is one thing that we can concentrate on. I have a problem with dates.

Member: Do you want to explain that? What do you mean you have a problem with dates?

Applicant: I have a problem with dates because I went through so many things and so many events happened one after the other and ... I have a problem with dates—I can't say this happened on that date, I can't say that.

Member: That's fine—when I am talking to you about the timing and when various things happened, what I'd like you to try and do is think about the order things happened and how long it was between various things happening. If you are able to give me approximate dates, that is also useful.

Member: When did you open your beauty salon in [XXX]?

Applicant : *[Pause.]* Umm, oh my god ... I'm sorry. *[Sigh.]* The problem is I say a date, that's it, the date goes away from me.

Member: Do you remember how long you had your salon in [XXX]?

Applicant: I have had it for years; I am not sure. *[Sigh]*

Member: In your statement, you said you opened it around mid-2007. Would that be about right?

Applicant: Yeah, yeah.

Member: And before that, what were you doing?

Applicant: I was working at a salon called [XXX], and after that, I opened the salon.

Member: And how long did you work at the other salon, roughly?

Applicant: *[Pause.]* About a year. More or less, around that

Member: So do you remember roughly what month the salon closed?

Applicant: Um, um I think. *[Pause for three or four seconds.]* I think... I think three or four, think March or April.

Member: In 2004?



Time/temporal questions in hearings

Factors to consider

Not suggesting questions relating to time or sequencing are always inappropriate, instead:

- ✓ Concepts of time, distance, and location are culturally relative.
- ✓ In certain cultures, temporal concepts may not be based on units of time such as clocks and Western calendars.
- ✓ Time may be marked instead by ref to seasons, religious days or other events.
- ✓ Certain cultures have approaches to time that may not be chronological/linear.
- ✓ Information significant in Western cultures, such as birth dates, may not be significant in others.
- ✓ Poor recall for dates, times, frequency, duration and sequence is compounded by trauma

From: UNHCR, 'Beyond Proof: Credibility Assessment in EU Asylum Systems: Full Report' (May 2013).

Contact

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Current projects

- Private/community sponsorship of humanitarian entrants
- Refugee status determination and credibility assessment
- The legal needs of non-citizens living with a blood borne virus