

Master thesis presentation – *Migration and Citizenship Studies*

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**Asylum seekers in narrative action: An exploration into the process of narration within the framework of asylum from the perspective of the claimants.**

**March 13, 2015 at 14:00**

MAPS Building – Faubourg de l'Hopital 27 (small room)

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**Abstract**

How do individuals engage in the process of narrating their life as asylum seekers? Two observations led to this initial question. On the one hand their narrative serves to provide meaning to their experiences thereby contributing to the construction of a sense of self. On the other hand they are required to tell their story in the context of the asylum application in order to demonstrate their worthiness of the refugee status. Departing from these observations this research sets out to explore whether and how being an asylum seeker may frame an individuals' sense of self. This central interrogation is tackled using the theoretical concept of narrative identity. It provides an ontological conception of individuals' selfhood as emerging from the narrative. Moreover the concept also guides the methodological approach. In-depth narrative analysis of the asylum seekers' life stories are conducted in light of their representation of asylum. In order to better understand the link between narration and the asylum framework the perspective of legal caseworkers is also included. The research led to the identification of three sets of issues. First, the representation of the refugee experience as traumatic can lead to a self-victimization of the asylum seekers impeding on a dignified sense of self as capable agents. Second, the role of knowledge of the procedure and narrative competence has an important incidence on the asylum seekers' perception of the outcome of their case. A strong uncertainty with regards to the decision can generate a lack of future projection necessary for a narrative to take complete shape. Third, legal practitioners have noted a tendency to conceive of the story as providing a source for factual information thereby presuming the capacity to access an objective reality. This can lead to decisions that appear as arbitrary to the asylum seekers.