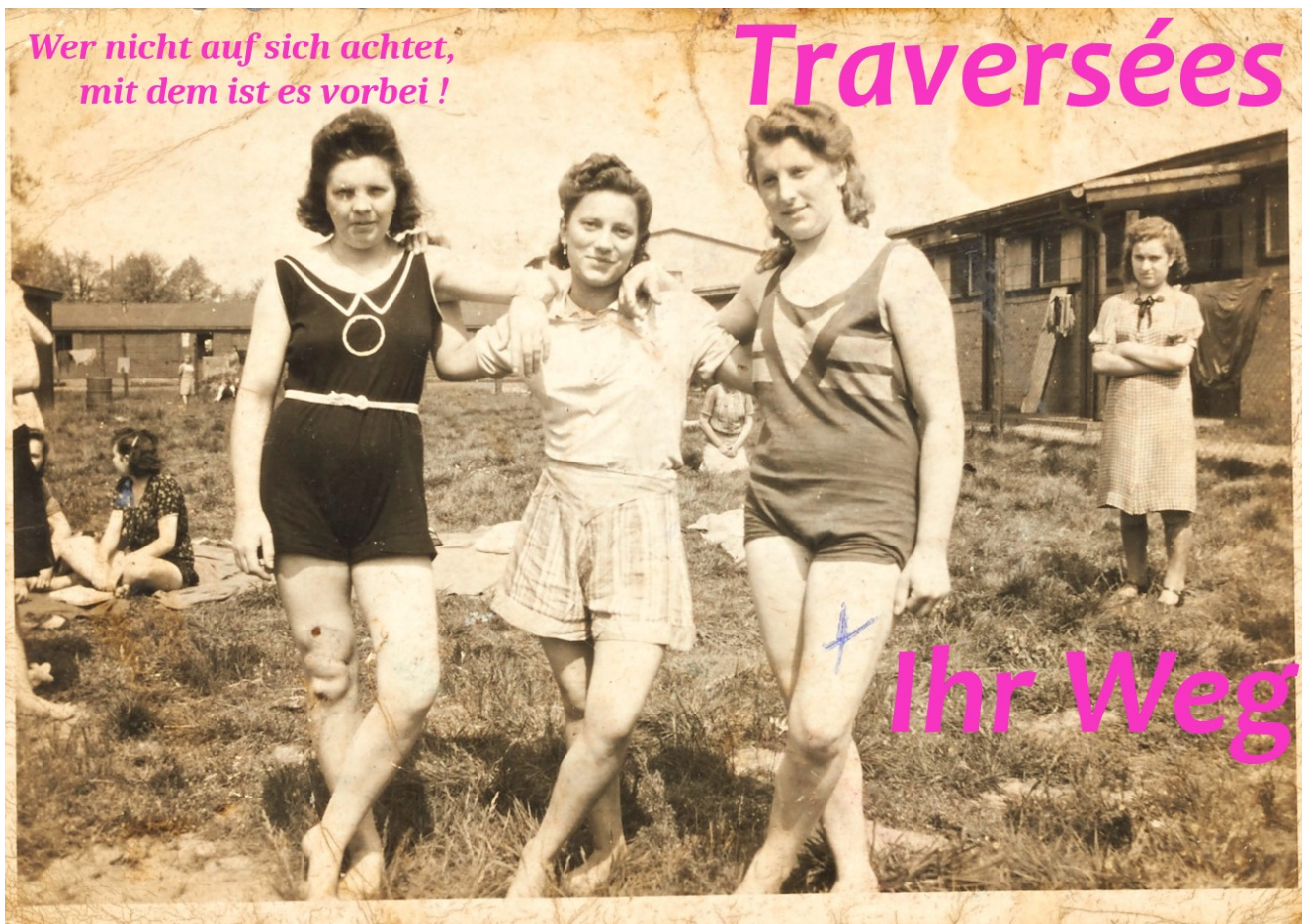


Traversées / Ihr Weg (Crossings)

*A fictional and acousmatic musical sound creation by Benoit Bories¹
with the scientific support of socio-historian Camille Fauroux²
binaural stereo version for broadcasting and podcasting
live version in immersive binaural sound
german and french versions*



1 Benoit Bories / Sound artist / <http://faidosonore.net>

2 <https://master-histoire-moderne-contemporaine.univ-tlse2.fr/camille-fauroux>

Notes of intent

In the past, I have produced three sound pieces based on one of the many French internment camps: "Soeurs de camp"³ (Arte Radio production 2013, Prix Bohemia 2013 and 2nd Prix Europa 2013) following the journey of three women who were interned in the Brens concentration camp (Tarn, France), "Un temps de cochon"⁴ (RTS Culture production 2019, Prix Ondas Barcelone 2019) about Spanish refugees who passed through the Septfonds camp (Tarn-et-Garonne, France) and "Les gardiennes du temple"⁵ (co-production Théâtre des Quatre Saisons and SMAC Le Florida 2022, finalist Nyork Radio Awards 2023) whose characters grew up in the reception camp for French citizens from Indochina in Sainte-Livrade-sur-Lot.

I found myself immersed in the history of the French camps by chance, when I met an association working for the memory of the women interned at the Brens camp. Two years later, "Soeurs de camp" (Camp Sisters) came out, and has travelled extensively internationally. I myself was amazed at how such a specific story could resonate with a universal theme, such as sisterhood between women in situations of extreme hardship, and how these bonds could be synonymous with profound change. The play resonated with many people, because it spoke to everyone, far beyond the context of the Brens internment camp. This theme of sisterhood has remained a strong leitmotif in my artistic career.

« Un temps de cochon » was constructed in such a way that listeners could forget the time and place of the story. "Un temps de cochon" ended up being a poetic soundtrack to the story of anyone who has had to flee their country of origin as a result of conflict. "Un temps de cochon" also had a great international response. This creation confirmed the power of a narrative composed from testimonies from French internment camps. My latest creation, "Les gardiennes du temple", which is currently on tour, has enabled me to further develop my formal approach to storytelling and sound writing. This piece was about drawing the threads of the universal language of the social and cultural construction of people who have grown up in places situated between several worlds. This was the former Camp d'Accueil des Français d'Indochine, where the protagonists were brought up between North Vietnamese family traditions and integration in the Lot-et-Garonne region. The desire

3 https://www.arteradio.com/son/616198/soeurs_de_camp

4 <https://soundcloud.com/labo-rts/un-temps-de-cochon-binaural>

5 <https://www.le-florida.org/evenement/les-gardiennes-du-temple/>

gradually arose to create a fictional sound piece compiling my various documentary experiences of the French internment camps.

By dint of working on the history of the French camps, I ended up pushing open the door of the Rivesaltes memorial. It's also a place for research and production, combining scientific and artistic approaches. I proposed "**Traversées**" to the team at the memorial, a sound creation project combining a documentary approach, fictional writing and acousmatic composition based on phonographies of the places through which the narrative passes. The story of the main characters was devised following a meeting with a scientist and historian specialising in the issue of French camps during the Second World War in terms of gender. Whether they are documentary or fictional, I always write my pieces using sensitive anecdotes mixed with a landscape and musical composition to complete what is not said, in order to suggest mental images to the listener. I never use analytical or didactic language. So I often need scientific advice before and during the production of my piece. For example, it's important for me to choose extracts from stories that resonate best with the larger story and thus have a universal resonance with the audience.

At the start of the project, I met Camille Fauroux, a socio-historian who had written a thesis on the way in which Nazi Germany used foreign women to provide labour in its factories. Based on Camille's archive work and historical reading, I decided to write a fictional story following the intertwined paths of three women, two French and one Spanish, who went to work 'voluntarily' in the German industrial apparatus during the Second World War. Two of these women were imprisoned in French camps. The third left more 'voluntarily' in response to a call for labour from Nazi Germany relayed by the Vichy government at the time.

"**Traversées**" was also born out of a desire to work in a Franco-German co-production context. "**Traversées**" is a poetic form of sound writing that has to play across borders. It is essentially bilingual, Franco-German. So for this piece I imagined a narrative in which a fourth person, a German, tells the story of one of these three women. This device also enabled me to highlight the theme of sisterhood, the main theme of "**Traversées**". Like "*Soeurs de camp*" (Camp Sisters) in 2013, "**Traversées**" is also a sound piece paying tribute to the sisterhood that enabled some women to overcome the trials of war.

As its name suggests, "**Traversées**" is a play about movement, about people crossing a part of Europe, from France to Germany, during the Second World War and confronted with the harsh reality of concentration camps in France and forced labour in Germany. "**Traversées**" can be seen

both as a memorial to a Europe we no longer want, and as a foretaste of a Europe that is about to be overrun by boots and migration policies with no way out. "**Traversées**" is designed to have a timeless character, based on historical facts to create a sound narrative that spans the ages.

When I tried to imagine the compositional device for '**Traversées**', I quickly thought of 'Lettre à Irma'⁶ (RTS Culture 2020 production, 2nd prize, Grand Prix Nova Romania 2020), a text written to my daughter born during the year of the COVID pandemic, when Aurélien Caillaux and I composed from recordings of our night-time crossings of a Toulouse emptied of its inhabitants. The composition of 'Traversées' had to be born of the different phonographies in the present tense of the places crossed by the characters in the narrative, those of a Europe at war and the systematisation of mass confinement. This desire to compose using sounds in the present tense goes hand in hand with the desire to blur temporal reference points.

"**Traversées**" is the result of the dynamics of all these movements.

6 <https://soundcloud.com/user-945903241/lettre-a-irma>

Synopsis

Three women, who seem to have nothing in common, are forced to forge bonds of solidarity to look after each other as they experience forced labour in Berlin under Nazi Germany. Joséphine and Louisa leave to escape prolonged internment in France. One is branded a "woman of ill repute", while the other carries the burden of constant suspicion because of her Spanish nationality. As for Thérèse, she saw her move to Berlin as a voluntary worker as a way of escaping the harsh conditions on her family farm. Thérèse, Joséphine and Louisa meet on their way to Berlin. Through their contact with each other, they learn to develop an instinct for sisterhood, based on the small gestures and attentions that help them survive the experience. During their stay in Germany, they meet Hilda, a Berliner, and develop an ambiguous relationship with her, between occasional gestures of solidarity and mutual distrust.

Sound writing formalism

General comments: a poetic sound-writing approach

I work over a long period of time to build real relationships of trust with the characters in my stories. To be part of the walls, to understand the rituals of everyone in the places I want to visit in my stories. To hear the music of the place so that I can recompose it later. And then to offer the spectator an immersive, sensory sound experience without ever being didactic, which would tend to distance them. I work within a form of writing defined by Kaye Mortley⁷, that of the documentary of poetic sound creation.

I encourage you to read an interview I gave in *Revue documentaires* about my work as a sound artist⁸. Over the last few years I've been producing sound works that combine documentary approaches with acousmatic and landscape composition. By acousmatic composition I mean music made up of transformed sounds from the landscape. The musicality of the piece seems to emerge naturally from the landscape. So there's no longer the artificial effect of off-ground music added to a narrative. The composition is at the service of a narrative in which the listener follows the characters and makes audible what is not in the realm of the explicable by remaining within the suggested. The music becomes one with the rest of the piece, forming a coherent whole. This sound-writing technique encourages the listener to create his or her own mental images, making it easier to grasp the unfolding story.

This kind of writing, based on a sound cartography of the places travelled through and the characters encountered in a sound work, is particularly effective when I want to weave temporal links and create resonances between evocations and sounds of the present and the landscape.

The most important element of sound writing is the construction of acoustic spaces, or how to think about the interweaving of different sound planes to create a narrative and a music of places. Pierre Schaeffer, one of the French pioneers of *musique concrète*, called sound writing "dynemaphony", i.e. sound juxtaposed in layers by playing on different sound dynamics.

⁷ French-Australian documentary sound author, founder of the Atelier de la création on France Culture. SCAM Prize for her body of work 2017.

⁸ <https://larevuedocumentaires.fr/revue/la-revue-documentaires-n32-un-monde-sonore/>

I can break down the different sound planes in this way:

- the voices of the characters recorded bare and set in a recomposed soundscape.
- voices of the same characters recorded in sequence in a natural acoustic space, with or without interaction with other characters.
- stereo soundscapes. I recreate a landscape by adding these ambiances on several levels.
- percussive motifs, whether or not derived from these atmospheres, to give rhythm to the landscape composition. Some of the motifs are also recorded in the studio to obtain raw material. It is often practical to use micro-contacts to record the vibratory sound material in solids or liquids.
- a series of acousmatic elements to bring out the musicality of the soundscapes created.

The specific "Traversées" writing system

To get a clear idea of the piece, I invite you to listen to two teasers of '**Traversées** through your headphones,

<https://soundcloud.com/user-945903241/traversees-le-teaser-therese>,
<https://soundcloud.com/user-945903241/traversees-le-teaser-josephine>

You can listen to a teaser of the German version at this link : <https://soundcloud.com/user-945903241/ihr-weg-traversees-trailer>

You can also listen to the stereo version of the entire sound creation (68 minutes), as presented in live performance, in French :

https://faidosonore.net/sons/notes/Traversees_performance_francaise.wav

Or in its german version https://faidosonore.net/sons/notes/Ihr_Weg_live_deutsch.mp3

A fictional story in three voices for four women

"**Traversées**" is a fictional work based on a documentary approach. It tells the story of three women who came from France to work in Nazi Germany during the war. The text was written using archived testimonies selected from Camille Fauroux's research and my previous documentaries on the history of the French camps. Camille regularly accompanied me during the writing process as a historical advisor. The fourth woman is the granddaughter of a German woman whom the other three met during their stay in Berlin.

The profiles of the three women who arrived from France in the narrative have been carefully chosen. Two of them, Louisa and Joséphine, were recruited under duress to work as voluntary workers in Germany. They had both spent time in various French internment camps, where they were marked as "undesirables". Joséphine was a woman of little virtue, while Louisa was a Spanish refugee, and therefore suspect. Going to work in Germany was a way of escaping their imprisonment in France. Thérèse enlisted on her own initiative, just as many women did in the 1940s when the Vichy government organised a call-up campaign for women workers. Thérèse, as she was called, lived on the small family farm. Joining up as a voluntary worker was her only way of standing on her own two feet in these times of war.

Discovering the powers of sisterhood

Each of the three French women will experience how to create bonds of solidarity between themselves in order to overcome their living conditions. They do not all start from the same place. Joséphine, a former cabaret dancer, embraced the values of sisterhood long before she was interned. We hear her writing her evening letters, a rare break from camp life. She addresses her words to her sister Marie, a former work colleague. As for Thérèse, she begins her independent life when she takes the train to Germany. She learnt from Joséphine. At first, her letters are systematically addressed to "her dear brother". At the end of the story, Thérèse writes to Joséphine to tell her her story.

As for Louisa, despite her young age, she has already been through a lot. In Germany, her nationality relegated her to a lower position than her companions in misfortune. However, Louisa has a precious skill, passed on to her by her mother: helping women to have abortions. It's a key that will enable her to forge links with the women she meets along the way.

The third person, the voice of a new generation in search of truth

As I said earlier. There are four women in this story. This fourth person, Elsa, is the granddaughter of a German woman, Hilda, whom the other three met during their stay in Berlin. Elsa reads Louisa's diary throughout the play. She is the third voice in the story. At the end of the play, the listener learns that Elsa found the diary in a file kept by the Berlin Judicial Affairs Office following Louisa's arrest. As the story unfolds, we gradually come to understand why Elsa was looking for it. Sixty years after the end of the war, Elsa finds a photograph at her grandmother's house showing her posing with Joséphine and Thérèse. A silhouette can be made out on the side. It's Louisa's. Elsa begins to wonder about the reasons for this unacknowledged presence, which Hilda doesn't want to talk about.

I wanted to introduce this element into the play on the sociological advice of Camille Fauroux. In praising the sisterhood that was necessary for these women in wartime, we must not forget the class relations that were forced upon them by the organisation of wartime societies, based on a racial hierarchy. Even if gestures of solidarity did exist, they were often limited by the social and political context of the period, making interpersonal relationships all the more complex if they involved people of different nationalities. I felt it was more appropriate to introduce this dramaturgical element in order to qualify my point.

A composition based on the present tense phonography of the places covered by the narrative

I'm going to spend some time recording different sounds between France and Germany, where I've chosen to send the four women. **Traversées**" is a landscape and musical composition that evokes the everyday reappropriation in the 21st century of places that symbolised a Europe at war in the 1940s.

The historical period of the Second World War was marked by the management of massive flows of people in exile, policies of confinement, annihilation and transit on a vast scale. When I asked myself what the modern transposition of these notions might be, I quickly thought of the places of transit and logistics platforms that are the concrete emanations of the almost total digitalisation of our de-socialised commercial exchanges. Like the shameful confinement camps of the 1940s, these places are located in outlying or peri-urban areas. Logistical zones of inhuman dimensions even border certain former camp sites, to the point of engulfing them, like the one at Rivesaltes.

"**Traversées**" is a poetic and sonorous stroll through the musicality of these new modern transit zones, where the digitisation of our lifestyles might seem to be the new face of post-20th century totalitarianism⁹.

So I'm going to record three French places of confinement and one place of population transit from every angle, four locations with different present-day environments: an industrial and logistics zone (Rivesaltes), a vast railway junction (Drancy and the Gare de l'Est), and two sites where nature has reclaimed its rights (Rieucros in Lozère and Brens in the Tarn). I deliberately chose sites where the sound materials allowed me to have as complete a palette as possible in terms of composition and allegorical resonances with the characters' stories. As well as using conventional stereophonic microphones, I'm also going to work with a whole range of tools that make it possible to record the inaudible soundscape (but which is an integral part of the landscape): infrabass and ultrasound, sounds conducted by solids or liquids.

The choice of these sites obviously had an effect on the writing of the fictional text, imposing the places that the women would visit during the story.

The example of phonography on the German side, a compositional principle linked to the narrative

On the German side, I already spent a week in residence in Berlin in April 2023, invited by SWR, the German radio station co-producing the project. I took sound recordings of various districts and places where labour camps had existed. Some of the camps had been preserved as they were. It was easy for me to recover certain sound materials that were already present at the time. I also paid particular attention to the sounds of city trams and trains. Various parks were also recorded at different times of the day, as they were the favourite places for foreign women workers to go out for their weekly outings during the Second World War. I also had to go and find sound allegories of the working environment for women in Berlin. I decided to concentrate on companies that had used this quasi-free labour and that still exist today. I was thus able to record the work lines and the immediate environment of the Siemens and Oxfram factories. My various trips to Berlin have given me a number of sonic surprises that I want to incorporate into '**Traversées**'. This obviously has a direct effect on the text. Because of the interplay between past and present, there is a constant back-and-forth between sound composition and handwriting.

9 http://www.elcorreo.eu.org/IMG/article_PDF/Pier-Paolo-Pasolini-Le-vide-du-pouvoir-ou-L-article-des-lucioles_a26326.pdf

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27Article_des_lucioles

Acousmatic composition, a window into women's inner worlds

"**Traversées**" is a sound creation made up of some twenty tableaux describing the journey of four characters. For most of the parts, the composition is based on a recomposed natural soundscape, gradually allowing the musicality of all the small elements that make up the sound space to unfold. The soundscape is thus transformed, giving way to acousmatic musical compositions derived from the same materials. The listener then enters into the mental images of the character. This compositional formalism is the one adopted for **Lettre à Irma, which takes the listener on** a stroll through the streets of Toulouse, emptied of its inhabitants, in eight tableaux. This compositional principle follows a narrative dramaturgy in which, for each tableau, the characters first describe a situation to us in sensory terms, before gradually leading us into their inner worlds, giving us an insight into the context of these women and their poetic escapes from untenable situations.

Three broadcast formats

"**Traversées**" will be available in several broadcast formats:

- A binaural stereo format for podcasting and a stereo format for FM broadcasting. These two fixed formats will be used for broadcasts on SWR and La Première RTBF.
- A live performance also using the binaural stereo format. Listeners will be invited to wander freely around the Rivesaltes camp site during the performance. I will be set up in a central location, easily visible to the audience. I will play the piece live using virtual instruments, MIDI interfaces and live sound pick-up on the site by placing different types of stereo microphones around the place. The different places where I place the microphones will allow me to amplify certain materials or resonances present on the site. This system allows me to integrate soundscapes in the present tense into the composition and to create a confusion between sound fiction and reality. At the end of the performance, the audience listens to the ambience in real time while having the impression of continuing to listen to the piece. The mental images of the story are then prolonged for a while for the audience. The recording of the performance will then be used as a fixed sound installation in the memorial. I would like to propose this performance with the Schöneweide memorial in Berlin, in partnership with the French Institute of Berlin.
- A live performance spatialised in 8.1 for the auditorium. For this version, I'll be playing face to face with the audience. On certain dates, I will also be accompanied by two French

actresses, Mathilde Bardou and Martine Amissé, who have given their voices to the roles of Thérèse and Joséphine respectively.

Production schedule

- April-July 2023: locations to be sound recorded between France and Germany are identified and sound recording begins.
- September 2023: completion of the three-part text of "**Traversées**".
- March 2023 - December 2023: recording of sound material between France and Germany.
- January 2024 - March 2024: recording of the actors' voices in French and German. Composition of the play in its stereo version.
- April 2024: preparation of the live version to be broadcast in immersive binaural sound.
- August-September 2024: the first on the French side will take place on 26 August 2024 at the Rivesaltes Memorial, while the first on the German side will take place on 8 September 2024 at the Schöneweide Memorial in Berlin in partnership with the Institut Français de Berlin. The public will be equipped with headphones and smartphones and invited to listen as they wander around the former site of the Rivesaltes camp. The play will be broadcast in September on SWR and RTBF La Première.
- August 2024 - 2025: "Traversées" continues its journey as a fixed sound installation at the Rivesaltes and Schöneweide Memorials in Berlin and as a live performance in other venues.

Support and co-production framework

I am co-produced by German radio SWR and the Mémorial de Rivesaltes. RTBF La Première, through the programme Par ouï dire, is also involved as a broadcaster on the French-speaking side. "**Traversées**" is supported by the DRAC Occitanie and the Occitanie Region.

About the author

Benoit Bories is a sound designer. He has produced sound creations for France Culture, Arte radio, RTBF, RTS, Deutschland Radio Kultur and ABC. His work as a sound designer began as a sound documentary. Over time, it has gradually evolved into more hybrid productions combining forms borrowed from sound art, acousmatic composition and field recording, while retaining the desire to document societal issues. As a documentary filmmaker, he is always keen to tell the story of the intimate in an attempt to make the universal resonate. He teaches documentary sound creation at Phonurgia Nova, ENSAV Toulouse and the Master 2 Art et com d'études théâtrales at Université Jean-Jaurès, and is involved in a number of one-off workshops.

Since 2016, he has mainly been developing sound creations for live performance, installations and hybrid live performances. He has collaborated with several festivals and cultural venues for his performances (Quinzaine des réalisateurs in Cannes, Acephalo festival Santiago, Pixelache festival Helsinki, Soundscape Malmö, Radiophrenia Glasgow, Couvent des Jacobins in Toulouse, Hearsay Audio festival in Ireland, Polyphonik in Greece) and regularly takes part in artistic residencies abroad (Harvestworks in New-York, RMIT and Bogong Center for Sound Culture in Melbourne, Spatial Sound Institute Budapest). He has won several international prizes and awards for his sound work (Phonurgia Nova Awards, New-York Radio Awards, Premios Ondas, Prix Europa, Grand Prix Nova, Prix Italia, IDA Awards Los Angeles).

An artistic approach to sensitive documentary sound writing

This is a text written after the composition of "Un temps de cochon", explaining my approach to sound.

Reconstructing feelings, not events.
Svetlana Alexievitch, Supplication.

We don't build a documentary narrative on a current event, even if it's a significant one, but by recounting singular journeys that can have universal value. To create a work in which each viewer can proactively take ownership of the form and content to nourish their own journey. In making "Un temps de cochon", I worked with my five main characters (Floréal, Joaquim, Mercedes, Juan and Luis) over a period of around six months. Their personal stories, often shrouded in modesty, gradually came to light. "Our fathers, defeated in a foreign land, kept silent" José told me so well. We had to overcome the moments of shame experienced by the young sons and daughters of refugees at school, when they first came into contact with the authorities or the world of work, before they could finally speak out. I came back often. Recording, but not just recording. Sometimes I put my recorder down and help Juan with the groundwork. We do a bit of gardening one afternoon with Floréal. We spend some quality time together and we dig up buried, hidden layers of memory. The word exhumate takes on its full meaning here. We're already beginning to reach a more transversal resonance. The origin of the belligerents is no longer important: they could just as easily be Kurds, Syrians, Italians, Mexicans - in short, citizens of the world. The era is also secondary, and the universality of the narrative creates a timelessness in the documentary.

After this first layer of memory was unearthed, other layers appeared, freed from the weight of the previous ones. Unexpected ones, sudden ones, stories of breakdowns, of broken family ties that each character tries to put back together as best they can. The timbre of Floréal's voice suddenly changes when he tells me about the indelible mark, a makeshift tattoo, left on him by a father he has never seen. Like Mercedes and Luis, Floréal discovered part of his family in Spain, roots left underground some seventy years later. Some of the character traits that emerged as I spent more time with them make sense to me as I understand their newfound family origins. Mercedes loves to sing, the trace of a music-loving uncle lost early in life, driven mad during the Spanish Civil War. Floréal now has an image, that of his father, to understand his own. Luis has discovered that he has a sister at the age of sixty, and that he has traits in common with her. It is now the administrative

frontier that is becoming obsolete, thanks to the universality of personal stories. By working patiently with my characters to uncover layers of memory, I have tried to meet the challenge of proposing a shared understanding of the notion of exile. To understand others in the knowledge that we all carry within us the brokenness of our own lives. And in so doing, we can make these stories our own, based on our own experiences.

"Un temps de cochon" was born of this desire. It's a proposal for a work written as a sound transcription of a universal language about exile. The border that creates a break between people can be represented by a doorway, a sudden decision to change one's life. It is no longer linked to a geographical distance and can affect anyone. "We are all passers-by" is what I would like "Un temps de cochon" to whisper to listeners.

Traversées, the text

Language indications

- Version for broadcast to a French-speaking audience: Joséphine and Thérèse in French. Elsa (who is also the voice of Louisa) is first heard in German and then translated into French. Elsa in German as first language, partial translation into French integrated into the composition, after the natural language without ever overlapping the voice, for sensitive understanding by French listeners.
- Version for broadcast to a German-speaking audience: Joséphine and Thérèse first heard in French, then translated into German. Elsa is heard in German. Joséphine and Thérèse in French as first language, partial translation into German integrated into the composition, after the natural language without any overlapping of voices, for sensitive understanding by German listeners.
- The natural language and the translation are systematically performed by the same actresses for each character (three: Elsa-Louisa, Joséphine and Thérèse).
- Louisa's voice (Elsa reading her) will be treated slightly differently from Elsa's. The same applies to the translations from the original languages.

Text 1 Joséphine listens to the birds during her first incarceration in the Rieucros camp

-Joséphine

Dear Marie,

I'm writing to you just as the birds are waking up around our barracks. Their songs remind me of our past, so close and yet so far from where I am today. I miss the music and the atmosphere of our cabaret. Everything seems complicated here. I feel like I look terrible. The marks of the vermin on the bodies of my comrades in misfortune are a constant reminder of my own image.

As well as being locked up in this camp in the middle of the Auvergne forest, we're practically cloistered in this damned barrack. Labelled as "girls of ill repute", the other women systematically avoided us. You know me, I've always liked our life because it was made up of new encounters every evening that we worked together. Since my arrest, I've been condemned to dreaming images of my past life without being able to share them with others.

You'll laugh, but even in the rush to arrest me - fortunately you weren't at the cabaret that night - I managed to take my trunk of treasures with me. I was able to take some clothes, jewellery and accessories that reminded me of our most beautiful moments. As I write this, I have my Egyptian necklace around my neck - do you remember my act where I liked to wear this necklace? - I'm listening to the birds sing and their music transports me to the stage, back home.

I have to find ways of taking care of myself so that I can survive this.

Text 2 Elsa reads the first pages of Louisa's diary, kept in the Rivesaltes camp.

-Elsa

I'm reading you, Louisa, you whom I first met in an old photograph I found in a Berlin salon. I'm reading you, Louisa, because I want to get to know you after this long period of research. It's a way for me to get to know a little better my grandmother, Hilda, whom you met on your way to Berlin. I'm reading you, Louisa, because we

now need to hear from those who were quickly forgotten. I'm reading you, Louisa, and your story begins with your first day of confinement in a camp near Perpignan in France. Your words are now flowing into my mouth.

-Louisa

Mum, I don't know if you're still alive after our separation. But it's you I want to write about in my diary. Your memory and your presence keep me going through this hell.

The heat here is terrible. It's nothing like our green countryside. If it were only the heat. The wind fills all our space here. It rushes in, bending our bodies and the structures of the barracks in which we sleep.

I regularly feel like shouting to drown out the whistling of the gusts. The sound covers everything and seems to never stop getting louder. At times, all my mental space is reduced to listening to it. I have this terrible urge to plug my ears. And listen to my inner music. Alas, I always end up giving in. I'm tired of struggling to survive doing nothing

I'll always remember what you said to me during our last few weeks together. I remember your exact words: "It's a way of keeping a part of your destiny and those of your sisters in hand in these uncertain times". It was the first time I'd been with you to help a woman stop carrying a weight she didn't want to. I repeat some of your instructions to myself. "Ask questions to make sure that the operation doesn't take place too late in the pregnancy. Speak softly to reassure and relax. Continue to use caressing words. Watch out for any infection over the next few days".

Remembering your instructions and looking around me now, avoiding infections seems utopian. Every day is a turf battle with cockroaches and rats. Trying to wash what can be washed so as not to be overwhelmed. Overcoming my disgust to go and relieve myself in the communal latrines. I can't get used to sharing moments of intimacy, which are no longer intimate, with others. I mentioned the wind earlier. It's precisely in these latrines that it expresses itself the most, blowing through the holes in the concrete.

Text 3 Louisa and Joséphine arrive at the Brens camp, first encounters

-Joséphine

If we don't take care of ourselves, Marie, we'll be completely broke! We try to put a bit of fun into our collective bathing sessions, for example. I can assure you that it takes some imagination when your bathroom is just a poor strip of cement outside, in the middle of the trees. I've managed to establish a ritual with my other companions. Our mutual hair-brushing session has also become a singing lesson! Between us, we speak four different languages.

Our bathing sessions eventually attracted the attention of some of the women in the other barracks. We formed a slightly larger group. By dint of our insistence, the camp director agreed to let us put on a show from time to time. It's an opportunity to open up and share the treasures in my trunk. Soon, we're thinking of hijacking a song show scheduled for an official visit - we have no idea who's coming - by chanting "Free the mothers!" at the end of the performance. I'll tell you all about it.

All these moments have enabled us to get organised and get along well. We managed to set up a daily rota to look after the stove, the only source of heat in the hut.

-Louisa

I'm in a new camp now, Mum. The day I arrived took forever. I can still remember the sound of that huge gate closing behind me as I walked in. A long, metallic wail, then that loud slam echoing in the new enclosed space where I'm going to have to live. The conditions are better because we're now inland under the trees, away from the wind and the sun.

The woman sleeping above me in the hut warned me straight away not to go into the hut at the back. There are a lot of disreputable girls there, arrested for reasons that are hard to name. You know me, these words only aroused my curiosity. I couldn't help observing them as they went for their collective baths. The window next to my bed overlooks what we call the bathroom here. Watching these women, I envied their joy in singing together while taking care of each other. In particular, there is a woman with long brown hair and a beautiful voice.

-Joséphine

Over the last few days, I've sometimes noticed a young girl watching us. She reminds me a little of you, Marie, when you first came to the cabaret. You seemed intimidated by a world you didn't know. But it was clear that your curiosity would soon get the better of you.

-Louisa

I managed to overcome my fear - and the vigilance of the guards, it's not so hard you know, they always do the same rounds -. I pushed open the door of the hut where the woman I told you about was staying. Strangely enough, when she saw me come in, she didn't seem surprised. She invited me to join her on her straw mattress as she opened her trunk. Her name is Joséphine.

-Joséphine

In addition to the group bath, I have a new regular appointment with Marie. The young girl, whom I had caught watching me, comes to see me regularly. Her name is Louisa and despite her young age - she's not yet twenty - she shows a maturity that impresses me. That doesn't stop her having big childish eyes when she sees me doing dance steps. It does me good to see her laugh. The future, her future is uncertain. Last week, Germans came to take women and children. We knew we'd never see them again. You hear terrible things, you know. All I can do is influence Louisa's present. And even if this is to be her last moment, it might as well be one of laughter and sweetness. From now on, I'll do all I can to put make-up on this beautiful, resisting child's face.

Text 4 Louisa falls asleep listening to the sounds of the night. She has just told Joséphine her secret.

-Louisa

We managed to spend some time together again today with Joséphine. I laughed a lot with her. I also decided to give her something in return. I told her what you told me. I'm ready to help her roommates if necessary.

I went back to bed before the matron started her night shift. Tonight, as I lie in bed, I listen to the cockroaches caracoling on the structure of my bed in rhythm with the heavy footsteps of the matron walking on the floor. I can feel the smile on my face from the day I spent with Joséphine. I'm about to fall asleep, lulled by the soft melody of the crickets.

Text 5 Thérèse writes to her brother about joining the voluntary work scheme

-Thérèse

I'm taking advantage of the quiet of the night to write to you, my brother. I can breathe and think without my parents behind my back checking that I'm doing my daily chores. I can't stand it any more when I hear Father shouting at me in the fields. This morning he came back from the village with some news. I've heard that the Recruitment Office is looking for female volunteers to go and work in Germany. Chances are it'll be Berlin. They say that's the big city over there and that there's no shortage of things compared to here. Father told me that the pay wasn't bad. What's more, he'll get the same amount every month as compensation for my departure. He seems to think it would be a good thing for our family.

It's probably a good opportunity. Moving away from here, living my life without my parents' gaze and the guilt of leaving them destitute. Maybe I'll discover places and things I can't even imagine. Maybe I'll meet someone too. At the Recruitment Office, they even showed me photos of French girls going out on Sundays to parks in Berlin.

I'm just a bit scared because, apparently, there are a lot of bad-living girls among the volunteers for Germany.

Text 6 Joséphine, Louisa and Thérèse meet on the platforms of the Gare de l'Est, when they leave to work as volunteers in Germany.

-Joséphine

I didn't really have a choice, Marie. I hope you'll understand. Either I stay in this camp, probably indefinitely, or I go and work as a 'volunteer' in Germany, probably in Berlin. That's what the camp director told me when I was last summoned to his office. I think that our little revolt when we chanted "Free the mothers" had something to do with this blackmail. This little bit of revenge keeps me smiling in spite of everything.

Apparently, over there, I can still have a few hours of freedom a week. I'm taking life as it comes now. Moving to Germany seems to offer the most possibilities. I thought about Louisa. I thought it would be an acceptable way out for her. I hope she won't hold it against me. I reported her to the Director. I told him that given her behaviour and what she'd told me about her old life, she should probably be in our barracks. I made up a bit of her life from yours, Marie. I hope you'll forgive me too. It didn't take the Director long to make up his mind. Louisa will also be leaving with me. I could feel that he had seized this opportunity for voluntary work to get rid of the disruptive elements in the camp as quickly as possible.

PS: I hope you understood my irony in the word voluntary, Marie.

-Thérèse

I was very excited about my departure, dear brother. Father didn't say a word of goodbye to me, but I didn't give a damn. I just felt a bit sick to my stomach at leaving Mother alone with him. But all I could think about was the exhilaration of the trip.

It didn't go so well, though, my brother. After my first train journey to Paris, I found myself waiting at the Gare de l'Est. I had two hours to spend before my train to Berlin left. You can't imagine how crowded it was. Alone, lost, in the middle of all those people, with my suitcase, my head quickly turned. And it wasn't long before I had an anxiety attack. You know me, you know how I can lose my nerve at times like that. Fortunately, two women came to help me onto the train.

I'm writing to you now from the train to Berlin, sitting opposite these two women. They are so different in age that one could be the mother and the other the daughter. The older one has a large trunk with her and doesn't

seem very approachable. She looks like a girl of ill repute. The younger one doesn't look very French to me, with her dark skin and jet-black hair. At times she uses strange expressions. They're both going to work in Berlin like me.

-Louisa

That's it, I'm off to Berlin, Mum. A poor girl, not much older than me, looked completely lost on the station platform. Joséphine and I went to her aid. Thérèse, that's her name, joined us on the train. She had the eyes of a panicked animal.

I was saddened to learn before we left that I probably wouldn't be able to be in the same camp as Joséphine in Berlin. I don't have her nationality. I'll have to make a new start without her. I didn't dare tell her before we left.

-Joséphine

They're both asleep now on the train to Berlin, Marie. I have a feeling that this new departure could lead to worse conditions than the previous ones. But we have no choice but to take this train at full speed. As I often say, all we have to do now is look after each other. I now have two companions to make you laugh and dance.

Text 7 Work aptitude tests on arrival in Germany

-Joséphine

I find myself outside, on a platform, crammed in with other women. Thérèse is there. I haven't seen Louisa since we arrived at Berlin station.

I'm ushered into a room. A woman stands in the centre of the room. After asking me to undress, she takes my hands briskly without saying a word.

-Thérèse

Her eyes express nothing but contempt. She turns my wrists and strikes them with her mallet. "Turn around" (in German) she tells me. I look at her without understanding.

-Joséphine

She feels me all over my body. I can feel her rough gloves irritating my skin. I hear "Turn around" again (in German).

-Joséphine

Then she turns off the light and shines a spotlight in my face.

-Thérèse

She brings her hands to my face and forces me to open my eyes.

-Joséphine

I step back. She hits me and shouts "Stay still" (in German).

-Thérèse

She turns the light back on and points to a door. I get dressed and get out as quickly as possible.

Text 8 Joséphine's new life in the camp

-Joséphine

I hadn't managed to take the time to write to you again, Marie. Adapting to my new living conditions has taken time and energy.

The camp here is at least as awful as the previous ones in France. But at least we French girls can get out a bit. I need to find out where Louisa has ended up, I haven't seen her since we arrived in Berlin. Who knows where she might be now?

Waking up in the morning is brutal. The matrons woke us up with force and we set off to work in the factory in almost complete darkness. One day, I have to thread filaments into bulbs, which I can hardly see because of the poor lighting. The next day, I have to test loudspeaker membranes. One day it's my eyes crying, the next day it's my ears bleeding. So far I haven't seen a penny of my pay. The food here is very sad. I dream of a good roast with a Burgundy. I keep my clothes and accessories in my trunk. So far, I haven't felt the atmosphere in the hut enough to risk sharing my wonders. Every Sunday, my day out, I wait to cross the threshold of the camp to change my clothes. Did you know that I had to give my Egyptian necklace to one of the guards to be allowed to keep my trunk? It makes me sick to see her wearing my necklace sometimes.

Little Thérèse is more and more overwhelmed. Lately she's developed a few idiosyncrasies. I have to find the strength to look after her a bit.

Text 9 Thérèse is beginning to feel ill

-Thérèse

I'm sure the vermin have spread to my head. This evening I struggled to find the strength to write to you, dear brother. Nor did I find the strength to venture out on Sunday, despite being allowed to do so. Thank you for the parcel you sent me last week. I won't hide from you that it was more than welcome, even if it left too quickly for my liking. Joséphine, the woman who helped me up at the Gare de l'Est - do you remember? - lives in the same shack as me. I keep an eye on her. She seems to have a dissolute life. I caught her putting on a dress on the way out of camp last Sunday. I have to admit that she's been scaring me a bit lately. I regularly catch her looking at me sideways.

Text 10 Thérèse falls ill. Joséphine looks after her.

-Joséphine

I told you how worried I was about Thérèse. And I was. She collapsed after her last day's work. I stayed at her bedside all Sunday. The fever subsided after a day of raving about a brother she seems to confide in regularly.

The image of this wasted youth is terribly distressing. When I woke up, Thérèse looked at me strangely. I saw in her a little of what I had seen in Louisa. From now on, I vow to regularly dig out my treasure chest, which has remained closed to others for far too long since my arrival.

I've got to get Thérèse to come out and laugh.

Text 11 Louisa's new living arrangements. She survives thanks to the memories of Joséphine.

-Louisa

I force myself to think of my last moments singing with Joséphine, mother. It's my only way to keep my inner smiles. Life is hard here. Between the days spent at the factory and the evenings trying to sleep to recover a little in our barracks, almost adjacent to the work line.

Some mornings, I look at the clumps of hair left in my hands after passing them over my head, in order to have a semblance of hairstyle. A German woman, who works next to me, told me that it was because of the lead and acids contained in the batteries that the factory manufactures. I feel like I'm burning inside because the pungent smell of chemical reactions is so permeated everywhere. I have a constant thirst that I can never quench. Some evenings, I want to tear my skin off so I can no longer feel the burns. I have come to regret my first camp and its constant wind. He, at least, allowed me to forget my own physical pain.

Text 12 Thérèse's first outing

-Thérèse

Last Sunday, I let Joséphine dress me. I found a dress in her trunk long enough not to shock. It was very pretty with its floral patterns. We went for a walk following the tram lines. It's incredible as a means of transportation. You have to imagine a little train, but slower. They make an incredible noise when they brake while taking curves. The memories of his parents' house are very far away now. On Sunday, I am happy about it. The other days, I assure you it's much more complicated. My feelings unfortunately change too quickly when it is time to return to our barracks.

But now I have one day, Sunday, to look forward to during the first six days of the week. There are so many people to meet. Maybe my luck will change now. And I have a friend by my side to get through all these moments.

Text 13 Joséphine and Thérèse meet Hilda

-Joséphine

This week has been special, Marie. Thérèse and I have been inseparable for some time. We decided to go see the department stores near Alexander Platz. Women from the barracks spoke to me enthusiastically about the windows in this area.

You should have seen us, amazed at these businesses where objects were displayed that we didn't even know existed. I was particularly impressed by some stockings that some of the women were trying on. I had never seen one made of these materials.

While we were like two kids at the fair, a lady introduced herself to us. Her name is Hilda. It's difficult for me to give him an age. She looked at us with an amused look. We must have looked strange with Thérèse, speechless in front of the clothing section like two kids.

Hilda speaks a little French, it was easy to communicate with her. I immediately found him likeable with his laughing eyes. She quickly offered us to come and clean at her house on certain Sundays. It didn't take long for us to accept.

I immediately thought of warning Louisa. I didn't tell you but we found his trail.

Text 14 Joséphine, Thérèse and Louisa go to Hilda's house

-Thérèse

I met a German lady, my brother. She seems very nice and well behaved. Today, Sunday, we went to her house to clean for the first time. The idea of having some additional resources pleases me.

The building where Hilda lives is very beautiful, with beautiful moldings, like I saw in Paris. And this building is located in an alley where the trees are well trimmed and the other buildings are of exactly the same ilk. I was almost afraid to walk with Joséphine and Louisa in the streets of this neighborhood. I looked from side to side to see if someone was going to appear and threaten to call the police if we didn't leave. We were doing our job surveying this setting.

-Joséphine

I didn't want to appear impressed with Hilda. When we arrived, his spontaneity put me at ease and broke down my last defenses. However, I quickly noticed that she seemed upset by Louisa's presence. She didn't greet him, unlike us. Louisa pretended not to notice anything.

The work was not exhausting at Hilda's. But I was constantly embarrassed to see her talking to Thérèse and me without ever paying attention to Louisa. I didn't dare force things, so as not to spoil our first visit. However, the embarrassment I felt towards Louisa didn't leave me all day.

I had the joy of discovering a piano in the living room. It had only just been delivered. Hilda asked us to unpack it. I understood that this was the reason for our coming for this first day of work at her place. Hilda noticed my eyes glinting and my fingers stroking the instrument. You can imagine how all the memories of our dear cabaret came back to me at this precise moment.

When the piano was installed, Hilda went to get her camera. Thérèse and I had to hold two screens on each side of the piano. I didn't really understand at the time. I think Hilda was keen to create a specific setting for this occasion.

You know me, I couldn't resist the urge to play a few tunes. Hilda seemed surprised by my request but let me inaugurate the piano. We spent a little time singing together. Even Thérèse, usually so restrained, hummed with us. Since her discomfort, she seems to relax and open up a little more.

During all these times, Hilda continued to ignore Louisa. While writing to you, I still see the pained look of my friend.

-Louisa

I was very excited at the idea of discovering a new neighborhood with my friends. I left feeling like crying. I tried by all means to hide my pain from Joséphine. But at the end of that day, we both knew for a fact that I wouldn't be going back to Hilda's house with them again. On the way home, I had a hard time suppressing the urge to look at my reflection to find out what had caused this woman's reaction of disgust. Tonight, as I go to

sleep, I worry if I could ever provoke the same kind of reaction in Joséphine. I find myself alone with myself again.

-Elsa

It was the first time I heard your name, Louisa. It was a spring day at my grandmother Hilda's house. We were talking about his experiences during the war in Berlin, sixty years ago. She then took out a photo and told me about her piano, which arrived during this period. He is still present in her home today. In the image, there were two women on the sides holding screens with Asian motifs. On the right side, we could also make out a piece of a silhouette. I immediately asked my grandmother who these people were. "Both women were French who came to work in Berlin. They came to clean my house from time to time. One was a former cabaret singer, I think," she replied. "What about this one? » I asked, pointing to the piece of silhouette on the right side of the photo. "I think her name was Louisa but that doesn't matter much. She was Spanish, you know. I never saw her again. ", she replied quickly. However, all his body language told me that there was something else hidden behind this sentence said in a seemingly banal tone. So I said to myself that I had to find you to complete this photo.

Text 15 Thérèse makes friends at night around the hut

-Thérèse

That's it, I dared. I admit that I was a little scared at first. All these women installed in small groups, in the darkness of nightfall, around the barracks.

I hope you will understand me. But these are rare moments when the harshness of life does not seem to have a hold on us. Moments of ours, stolen from the guards and from this camp. And during which I enjoyed listening to and getting to know better women that I would never have met back home.

I heard about a forest where you can come across groups of men, prisoners of war. I suggested to Joséphine that we go there on a Sunday when we didn't have to work at Hilda's.

Text 16 Joséphine gives some clothes to Louisa

-Louisa

I let your words flow through me again, Louisa. I continue to discover you while I read you

I heard my name whispered. Then someone started shouting it louder. I immediately recognized this voice. Josephine. I could see her through the fence. She threw a bag at me with a quick gesture over the wall. I discovered new clothes there. I cried with so many emotions. We hadn't seen each other since that horrible day at that German woman's house. Since that day, I had lived with the feeling of never seeing Joséphine again.

I didn't dare try them on in front of her. I was ashamed to show off the red spots covering my skin. I could see that Joséphine was having trouble containing her tears, too. I don't know if it was due to the joy of seeing myself again or to the discovery of my physical state, which has deteriorated considerably since then. I decided to only keep the first reason in mind. I'm sure that's what Joséphine would have wanted.

Joséphine ended up telling me before she left that these clothes came from Hilda's house. Even though I didn't show anything, I was very surprised. I didn't dare ask Joséphine if she had stolen these clothes.

Tonight I won't fall asleep alone again. Joséphine promised to come back regularly.

Text 17 Thérèse meets Léopold

-Thérèse

I finally met someone. His name is Leopold and he works in Germany like many young men, forced by compulsory labor service. I met him at the zoological garden. We went back together several times.

I still have a Sunday in mind. It was early in the morning. The zoo animals shouted and responded to the birds. Their mixed sounds gave the sensation of no longer knowing which of them were locked up or free. I couldn't help but think about my own fate.

I felt like I was living in Leopold's arms. Joséphine lets me go join him on Sunday without asking too many questions. She now goes to Hilda's house alone. Seeing me in love frees her from a weight, I think. Léopold will soon be leaving for France on leave. He intends not to be caught again to go work again in Germany. When all this is over, he promised me that we would move in together. For the moment, it is impossible for us to envisage any marriage here.

I know that my wishes may seem unfounded to you, in my situation, where I only have the day of Sunday to dream with Léopold and the nights of the week to talk about my dreams with my companions in the barracks. Understand that this is my only way to take care of myself a little.

"If we don't take care of ourselves, it's complete failure" as Joséphine likes to say.

Text 18 Thérèse recounts her abortion in Louisa's barracks

-Thérèse

I told Joséphine about my late period a month ago. I'm afraid of what might happen to me if the guards find out. It is not possible to get pregnant here and now. This Sunday, I understand that Joséphine is not going to work at Hilda's because I see her waiting for us at the end of the camp.

Joséphine looks at me seriously and says :

-Joséphine

« We're going to see Louisa today. »

-Thérèse

I haven't seen Louisa since our first day cleaning at Hilda's house. His camp is in a neighborhood on the outskirts of the city. The journey lasts a good hour, I feel the anxiety rising.

We arrive in front of a fence lined with barbed wire. Behind, we can see numerous barracks. Shadows pass between the doors.

Joséphine shows me a passage under the fence. She seems to have some familiarity with the place. My heart beats very fast. As I returned to the camp grounds, I had a jolt of fear and disgust. The state of the camp is much worse than what I know.

Joséphine greets several women. We arrive at the entrance to a windowless barracks. Three women, cigarettes in their mouths, beckon us to come inside. I'm a little scared but I follow Joséphine who pulls aside a blanket to slip inside. It is a large room with walls soaked with mold, around twenty bunk beds placed against the side walls, in the center, a stove. Next to this stove, Louisa is waiting for us.

She makes me lie down on a pallet. Joséphine has already come out. While Louisa examines me, I can't help but examine the marks of life left on her face. He's changed so much since then. The cheeks have hollowed out, the complexion is sallow. But there is always this mischievous glint in her eyes when she says to me:

-Louisa

« You're pregnant, that's for sure. I'm going to have to intervene, I won't hurt you. It will only take a few minutes. »

-Thérèse

My heart stops. I catch my breath and manage to emit only a weak "Yes".

Text 19 The search for Elsa in the Berlin archives.

-Elsa

I can no longer tell Louisa in your words. Your diary ends here. This diary which appeared to me one day while researching in the Berlin Judicial Archives, attached to an investigation file. I was intrigued when I saw your first name listed above. In it, it was indicated that the Louisa in question was suspected of facilitating clandestine abortions. Shortly after, I was sure I had found you when I came across the name of my grandmother, cited as a witness. She thought the accusations were likely.

When you were arrested, your diary was seized. By reading your words, I gradually reconstructed the links. The German police also got their hands on a portrait where we see you posing in beautiful clothes, undoubtedly in a photographer's studio. I was able to put a face to this piece of silhouette that I had glimpsed in a photo I found at my grandmother's house.

Your file doesn't say where you went after your arrest, I can only imagine possibilities. And they all make me shudder. You were almost my age at that time.

I didn't have the courage to talk to my grandmother about you again. I let your presence haunt her living room through this photo and the memories she has buried there. I know you now, even though we've never met. We won't be able to forget you anymore. And that's the most important thing in my eyes.

I tried to search for other legal files linked to your companions in misfortune Joséphine and Thérèse. I didn't find any traces of it. I dare to hope that they were able to slip through the cracks.

Text 20 Thérèse recounts her return with Joséphine

-Thérèse

This letter is for you, Joséphine. I am writing it right now from my bed in a reception center specially opened for workers returning from Germany. I am gradually discovering the ravages of the war that I did not experience here.

I hope to find your trace later. Our separation was extremely brutal. And I blame myself for not having had your strength when you relieved me at the Gare de l'Est. Do you remember this moment? It was our first meeting. Since that day, you have always been a sister to me. You accompanied me through many stages.

Despite this, I could not prevent what happened. If I had stayed next to you, maybe none of this would have happened. I was only about ten meters in front of you on the platform. By the time I turned around hearing screams, I only caught a glimpse of a group of people carrying you away. The crowd was too dense. I couldn't catch up with you. Thinking back to the interrogations we had undergone upon our arrival in France, to the suspicion shown to us by the repatriation officers, I could have suspected that our return was not so desired here.

I found myself alone again, with my suitcase, on a station platform. Not knowing where to go, I ended up in this horrible center in Charenton. As I write to you, I am anxiously awaiting a mandatory gynecological test. Thinking about our moments helps me overcome the shame I feel in this moment.

I hope we meet again, Joséphine. One day, perhaps, we will go out together again and lead our lives as we did on certain Sundays.