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Afterword: Stories of Displacement and Emplacement

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There appear to be two different perspectives onto displacement in research on the literature and culture of migration. While it is often approached negatively and understood as a tragedy characterizing the experience of forced migrants in particular as evident in their loss of home and familiar places, others such as Edward Said see it as a liberating possibility where the potential of exile provides a sharper vision from a distance and a deeper understanding of identity in a new place. Such oppositionality is, however, true to some extent only. The two views are synthesized in Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity and the concept of the Third Space where the experience of uprooting is seen as generating ambivalence and leading to the formation of a new identity that resembles the old one but is not the same. In this way, the effects of displacement are addressed by negotiating a new identity in a new location. This is what sociologists Nina Glick Schiller and Ayşe Çağlar understand by emplacement, as seen in their definition of the term as "the social processes through which a dispossessed individual builds or rebuilds networks of connection within the constraints and opportunities of a specific city" (21).

Bhabha's conceptualization of hybridity suggests that displacement and emplacement are embedded in each other, and that rather than polar oppositions, they are two different modalities characterizing the spatio-temporal processes of migration and mobility. For example, the global journeys of the main character Jasmine in Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* (1989) are at the same time signs of the protagonist's displacement from her past Indian identity as well as an indicator of her emplacement in the spaces and discourses associated with the United States and her Americanization. In such a process, identities and their places are both active and affect each other both diachronically and synchronically, as also shown in many narratives of migration where past histories surface in the

present and question the migrant's identity, often revealed in the failures evident upon the migrant's return (see Toivanen).

What this suggests is that displacement is not merely an expression of the loss of place and that it always has to be lamented. Rather, the past and its places may remain significant to those who are both displaced and emplaced, as anthropologists such as Annika Lems have suggested. In her study of Somali migrants in Australia, Lems challenges established understandings of displacement. For example, one of her key informants, Mohamed, remains strongly affiliated with Somalia and its places. This is testified in the photographs he has taken upon his return to Mogadishu, which are linked to memories of the city of his adolescence (Lems 3). As Lems writes:

Mohamed's strong attachment to place also evokes questions about the common portrayal of people who have experienced displacement as homelessness as being out of place, or, literally, as placelessness; it challenges us to ask how people actually shape and reshape places, and how they negotiate their position in relation to the wider world. (4)

The past and its places continue to play a role in the emplaced presence of the migrant, although the conventional view emphasizing migrant displacement and alienation tends to be dominant. Lems, however, argues that the past remains significant in the present: "Mohamed's photographs also speak of people's enduring relationships with places – even if at first glance these places might seem utterly lost to them" (212). In other words, the past with its places persists and extends to the present. This resembles Achille Mbembe's view suggesting that the migrant may create and live in alternative or interlocked temporalities (15-16). It can also be claimed that the lives of migrants involve different spatialities that are not as strictly opposed to each other as the displacement paradigm suggests. Rather, they are mapped onto each other, forming different layers. This is also evident in the view of Lems and her suggestion that the past is defined spatially as the site of "our being-here" that is accessible "through the persistence of memory places, imaginary past or future landscapes or the transforming power of stories" (212).

The essays in this volume show diverse approaches and strategies to the study of displacement and emplacement as the authors explore various historical, cultural, literary, and autobiographical narratives addressing the topic. The geographical spread of the essays is extensive, ranging from the Mediterranean and Africa to North America and contemporary Europe, which reveals the global significance of the topic. Thematically, the pains of displacement are frequently addressed, especially in essays dealing with forced migration (Askar, Begum, Boelhower, Brauer, Martin, Richard), but also in contributions focusing on the problem of cultural encounters and adaptation as well as their representation (Doğrul, Huang, Paci, Saad).

Contemporary narratives of forced migration feature prominently amongst the contributions, and these essays develop new critical vocabularies to address the thematic. Some contributions focus on expressions of the phenomenon in relation to Europe and the recent increase in irregular migration. Here, Nuha Askar addresses Omar El Akkad's *What Strange Paradise* (2021) in the context of refugee routes and deathscapes familiar from the news media, Bill Boelhower explores migrant life writing and the four volumes of the collaborative *Refugee Tales* (2016-2021) project in particular to emphasize their singularity and affective power as history to be felt, and Thomas Richard addresses the cinematic representation of the Mediterranean in contemporary fiction films as a means to contemplate on and critique established ideas of European and migration identity. Some essays choose their focus from Africa and North America to provide a more global perspective. Such work includes Paula Brauer's reading of Ben Rawlence's refugee camp novel *City of Thorns* (2016) where the notorious Kenyan camps of Dabaab emerge as a space where waiting is the dominant temporality, and Carole Martin's analysis of the production of countermemory in contemporary Vietnamese American narratives of forced migration. In these literary and cinematic representation of the journeys of the forced migrants, the potential of the border-crossing as a means of becoming, as a way of forming a new identity in the safety available on the other side, is what motivates many people on the move, regardless of the perils of what Askar discusses as "discomfort zones" and Brauer as "emplaced displacement."

The second key thematic in the volume addresses the problems of displacement and emplacement in the context of migration-related cultural encounters, as well as in ways of addressing and representing migration. The essays by Gizem Doğrul and Safinaz Saad focus on immigrants in Britain and Egypt, respectively, and they use postcolonial theory to discuss the ways of encountering and coping with displacement in the works under study. In Doğrul's reading of Elif Shafak's *Honour* (2012), the diversity of the migrants in terms of ethnicity, gender, and generation is emphasized, as these variables structure the migrant's willingness to identify with the host country and to accept hybrid identity. In Saad's intersectional analysis of Radwa Ashour's *Blue Lorries* (2014 [originally 2008]), the process is somewhat similar. The novel focuses on an emigrating French-woman's sense of displacement and rejection of forming a functional hybrid identity, evident in her inability to cope with life in Egypt and her imposed identities, leading to her subsequent return and limited contact with her daughter. In Qianjing Huang's essay, addressing the role of migration in the discourse of the Japanese Suiheisha movement in the interwar period, emigration emerges a meaningful solution for the group seen as inferior by many at the time. For the burakumin, the transnational example of mass emigration provided by black US intellectual Marcus Garvey and his followers is crucial, since for them to form an autonomous state or a space outside Japan is a necessity to turn their identity from displacement to emplacement. Similarly, the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh addressed by Sharmin Begum form a group whose identity is formed in displacement. For them, repatriation and citizenship are both difficult to achieve. The essay by Giacomo Paci addresses questions of representation and collective memory to show how those displaced from history such as Jews in Poland can construct an alternative temporality and spatiality that serves as a location of emplacement. As the counterfactual history created in the films by the Israeli artist Yael Bartana reveals, the act of imaging a mass exodus from Israel to Poland can be seen as way of reinserting Jewish history to narratives where it has been lost by reconstructing potential memories and "imagining alternative futures."

The work of Lems quoted above emphasizes three tropes in whose use displacement and emplacement are closely connected, including memory, landscape, and storytelling (212), and these do play a role in the

work by several contributors. While the main focus in the essays is on events in our time, the role of memory extends from collective memory (e.g., Doğrul, Huang, Martin, Paci) to (fictional) personal and autobiographical memory (Boelhower, Saad) to show how the past extends to the present. Here Boelhower's narrative is particularly noteworthy. It operates at several levels, first addressing the writer's own displacement as a twentieth-century migrant and travelling through his memories of various moments of being displaced in terms of class, language, and nation, and then reading that memory into the paradigmatic white US-European immigrant narrative of the last century. An extra layer is added by linking the past with the present. While former migration literature shares with contemporary refugee narratives "a dialectic of hope and memory," as Boelhower puts it, today's migrant story tells of "bare life" (Agamben) and addresses the experience of the border in various ways, mapping borderline spaces and psychologies, as well as places and conditions unimaginable to classic twentieth-century migrants, termed as "schizotopes."

While the essay appears to suggest that the global condition is one of displacement and dystopia, this is not the case because of its commitment to the discourse of human rights. Since displacement and emplacement are separated by a thin line, as Lems suggests, Boelhower locates a means to reconstruct emplacement in storytelling. This makes it possible for the migrants to "reclaim their humanity" that inserts them into history and provides agency. Lems describes the significance of storytelling for emplacement in a way that emphasizes its role as a way to reflect on humanity with others: "It is through stories that humans travel their inner landscapes with others and thereby move them beyond their inner selves, and it is through stories that these landscapes morph and transcend and receive a presence in here and now" (Lems 5).

Through storytelling, whether cinematic or literary, it is possible to counter imposed narratives and histories that may have traumatized individual and groups. While several essays address stories told of displacement, in Martin's essay on contemporary Vietnamese American refugee narratives various forms of storytelling emerge as a central mode of emplacement, so that storytelling is both theme and a narrative strategy. Through stories told in fictional and autobiographical narratives, what can

be formed in Martin's view is "a countermemory." This is a way of remembering that is capable of bringing forth the stories of the marginalized and the voiceless that serves to oppose the dominant views associated with the past. Through stories, the past can be preserved and addressed openly, and it may assist in coping with displacement, generating emplacement, and enhancing belonging. While displacement can be negotiated and new beginnings are possible, it also true that we can never fully escape the past and its claims.

All in all, the essays in this volume, written mainly by early-career scholars, reflect a variety of fresh approaches and provide new innovative readings of the literature and culture of migration. The work collected here is an excellent example of the ways in which academic discourse in literary studies is capable of addressing globally significant and timely themes from highly socially relevant perspectives.

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