Displacement, Emplacement, and Migration

An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays

Touhid Ahmed Chowdhury (Ed.)

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this volume to the loving memory of **Professor Dr Christoph Houswitschka**, who passed away unexpectedly in February 2022. He was a kind superior, a supportive supervisor, a witty and warm-hearted friend, and, above all, a father figure.

Content

Displacement, Emplacement, and Migration: An Introduction

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Migration is one of the most prominent cultural, socio-political, and economic challenges of our time. It would not be hard to find people with migration experience in both industrialised and less developed countries. Moreover, recent global economic, political, social, and technological developments have had an ever-greater effect on migration than anything else. As a result, human mobility, along with displacement and emplacement, "become the hallmark of the age of migration" (Castles et al. 12). Salman Rushdie, in his seminal book *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), states, "the culture and political history of the phenomenon of migration, displacement, life in a minority group" constitutes its own community cross and interculturally (124). And the life of such communities, he concludes, is undoubtedly "one of the central themes of this century of displaced persons" (Rushdie 124). According to the "World Migration Report 2022", 3.6% (281 million) of the world population are international migrants, and they make "significant sociocultural, civic-political and economic contributions in origin and destination countries and community" (McAuliffe and Khadria 6). However, a great majority of people do not migrate across borders; instead, many people migrate within countries. That said, the number of international migrants has increased over time – both numerically and proportionally – and at a faster rate than anticipated (McAuliffe and Khadria 5). Whether internal or cross-border, whether voluntary or forced, migration occurs for a variety of reasons that are influenced by and rooted in regional and national, local and global interrelations, social and technological networks, organisations, and institutions.

Whatever the factors are for migration, the separation of people from their native land and culture, either through physical dislocation (as refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles, or expatriates) or the colonising imposition of a foreign culture, is one of the most formative experiences of the current century. By all counts, the numbers are staggering. To take only

one instance – the displacement of people as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine – it is estimated, according to the United Nations Refugee Agency, that approximately 12 million Ukrainians have been uprooted and forcibly displaced ("Ukraine Situation"). It also resulted in the fastest displacement crisis ever as "[i]n the early days of the war, more than 200,000 refugees per day sought safety across borders, initially in countries neighbouring Ukraine" ("Global Trends" 8). But war is not the only reason people leave their homes. Persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, and finally, climate-induced natural disasters are also forcing people to leave their native habitats.

In light of these figures, it is no surprise that displacement has been a prominent theme in the theoretical paradigms used to understand and explain the human condition and knowledge of the current century. Everyone is affected by migration in some way, making displacement a defining feature of the century. Therefore, an underlying question throughout this volume is the nature of the relationships between displacement as a theoretical signifier, a textual strategy, and a lived experience.

To be displaced can mean not having a place, not being placed, or being away/apart from a place. Displacement, therefore, is the loss and absence of a place. The concept of displacement, thus, evokes images of being cut off from social and physical worlds that one calls home, which generates differentiated accounts of dispossession, disruption, and dislocation. Displacement, however, is not only about a loss and absence of a place, but also, most importantly, a loss of context. This context exists physically and temporally in our culture and history, allowing us to interact and communicate with the world. Stuart Hall says that we ". . . all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always 'in context'. Positioned" (222). It is exactly the loss of that positioning, both in the physical and non-physical sense, that creates a sense of displacement.

To anthropologist David Turton, "displacement is . . . about the struggles to make a place in the world, a place which makes action meaningful through shared understandings and a shared interpretation of action" (278). Taking a cue from David Turton's idea of making a place in the

world, the possible responses to displacement would be developing global consciousness, forming hybrid identities, and creating a new life in host localities. Turton uses the term 'emplacement' to describe practices of place-making, where displaced persons share stories of earlier places of belonging by maintaining the connection to real or imagined places and re-organising new places by using familiar features from the lost environment. David Turton, therefore, echoes Liisa Malkki's observation that "displacement is the 'flip side' of emplacement" (517).

Annika Lems, on the other hand, challenges established understandings of displacement in her book *Being-Here: Placemaking in a World of Movement* (2018). In her book, she does not consider "displacement as a metaphor for a sense of alienation from society," but as "ways people actively make sense of new, left behind or lost places" (20). She argues for "felt, experienced and storied dimensions of place, rather than reducing it to its analytical and structural properties," which ultimately presents displacement as an "attempt to 'get back into place'" (20). However, she does not deny the negative impact of displacement on migrants:

> Experiences of displacement can sometimes be felt as so removed from the everyday world of the here and now, as so extremely other, that people struggle to integrate them into a constituent flow of words that make sense, into a story that can be shared. What is left, then, are mutterings, stutters and silence. (179)

The active participation of migrants in making sense of new and left-behind places opens up and advances the notion of place-making or emplacement. Roberto Castillo provides a useful definition of place-making as "a process [that] transforms space into familiar places and generates personal attachments and commitments – it is often used as a survival strategy and as a tool to unveil opportunities in a new place. In short, . . . it is a process that entails a dialectical unfolding of affective correlations between self and place that helps individual to make sense of an unfamiliar environment" (244). Thus, everyday place-making or emplacement is material and effective, resulting in migrants leaving traces also in the places they cross. Emplacement, therefore, becomes a place-making practice where migrants repeatedly tell stories about their former homes, reflect on memories, seek affective engagement with the new place, and

finally, amend with the present life. So, emplacement encompasses the social, economic, political, cultural, and spatial aspects of settling in a new place. Accordingly, Wessendorf and Phillimore define emplacement as the process of building a "sense of belonging" in the host locality (128). For Çağlar and Glick-Schiller, emplacement is "the relationship between, on the one hand, the continuing restructuring of place within multiscalar networks of power and, on the other, a person's efforts, within the barriers and opportunities that contingencies of local place-making offer, to build a life within networks of local, national, supranational, and global interconnections" (20-21). They further argue, emplacement "invokes a sense of place-making and allows us to focus on a set of experiences shared by people . . ." in general (21). Bjarnesen and Vigh define emplacement as "a process of socio-affective attachment, as a point of valued or tenable being" in the new place (13). The above-mentioned definitions underscore the importance of examining how the contextual settings of settling into a new place are intertwined with migrants' endeavours to participate in social, economic, political, and cultural interactions within host localities. Additionally, these definitions allude to the significance of migrants' strategies in establishing and participating in social relationships. These definitions, therefore, place emphasis on the role of social relationships in the process of emplacement for migrants, highlighting the facilitating role of social networks in aiding migrants' social integration. Bjarnesen and Vigh see it as "a social positioning that enables the pursuit of existentially meaningful life-making, but as an ongoing struggle for access, rather than a fixed position or status" for migrants. (14). In brief, migrants progressively engage with and integrate into a particular community, along with its economies, institutions, and social networks.

Living in a world more mobile than ever, and with an astounding number of people on the move (voluntary or forced), it must be emphasised that emplacement is not the counter opposite of displacement. Both emplacement and displacement processes are the outcomes and integral parts of migrants' mobility and, thus, are not binary dichotomies. Displacement and emplacement, rather, should be considered as mutually constitutive processes of (dis)embeddedness that are fundamental to understanding the dynamics of twenty-first-century migration. For Annika Lems, ". . . the line between emplacement and displacement is . . . so thin

that they cannot easily be separated" (212). Essays in this volume recognise this thin line by acknowledging the intertwined relationship between displacement, migration, and emplacement. Based not only on literary and cultural studies perspectives but also on a socio-political and historically induced understanding of the phenomenon, this volume advocates migration narratives as sites of resistance and resilience. Despite the fictional aspects of the migration research, it is also a site where one can understand a given society's socio-historical values and culture. Therefore, the current volume included essays that discuss the concept of displacement and emplacement from historical, political, literary, and cultural studies perspectives. Finally, one of the goals of this volume is to re-grounding the discussion of displacement and emplacement in the history of our times, a history of displaced and emplaced.

This edited volume includes ten essays and an afterword, most of which are written by early-career researchers. The first essay, "Borderline Stories: Migrants at the Limits of World History" by William Q. Boelhower, illustrates how migrants today have lives, a plurality of lives that uniformly appear borderline, how migrant life-writing invites the world to reflect on the current migration flow, how today's migration flows announce a different range of historical crises within a qualitatively different paradigm, how storytelling project like *Refugee Tales* (2016-2021) provides a semiophoric focus on migrant literature as a literary historical novum. Boelhower argues that through life-writing, migrants and refugees reimagine their mobility and reclaim their humanity. Through this reclamation process, migrant life writing functions as a form of felt history. On the other hand, Carole Martin's essay ""We Had No Belongings Except Our Stories": Storytelling and Countermemory in Vietnamese American Refugee Literature" emphasises dialectics between displacement and emplacement in contemporary Vietnamese American literature. Her essay analyses literary productions by Ocean Vuong and other contemporary Vietnamese American authors by visualising displacement and emplacement in theme and form within them. Martin argues that novels and short stories by and about Vietnamese Americans illustrate that emplacement through storytelling works on multiple levels and acts as an agent for producing collective memory in the form of counter-memory. She also argues that storytelling frequently operates as an

essential impetus for 1.5 and second-generation children to understand their hybridity, which often acts as a coping mechanism in the face of displacement.

In "Unsettling Identities on Refugee Routes in Omar El Akkad's *What Strange Paradise*," Nuha Askar shows how the refugee route turns from a deathscape to a death-escape. Her analysis focuses on Omar El Akkad's fictionalisation of the occurrence of the Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, whose body washed up on the Greek seashore after a journey on one of the death boats in 2015. Askar's essay also discusses the multilayered contests the characters face within themselves and others on the boat and in communities they cross on the refugee routes. Keeping the focus on the refugee narratives, the following chapter by Paula Brauer, "The Refugee Camp Between Displacement and Emplacement in Ben Rawlence's *City of Thorns*," explores the idea of refugee camps being the site of both displacement and emplacement at the same time. In this paper, Brauer argues that refugee camps act not only as a layover place for the migrants but often become an urban cosmos, with its internal logic, social order, structures, and institutions along with its economic market. In her analysis of the novel, Brauer shows how Ben Rawlence depicts the complex life stories of different refugees living in the infamous Dadaab refugee camp in the eastern part of Kenya. She argues that refugee camps, as presented in *City of Thorns* (2016), are characterised by the dichotomy between struggling to make a life and being at home, between waiting and agency, between feelings of displacement in a place that is supposed to be but a temporary shelter and its factually permanent emplacement. Therefore, she argues, refugee camps become an emplaced displacement.

Unlike the earlier essays, the next few essays explore displacement and emplacement in the context of cultural encounters and how migration is being addressed and represented in literature. "Alienation à la Madeleine: The Migration Experience of a French Woman in Radwa Ashour's *Blue Lorries*" by Safinaz Saad discusses migration from Europe to Africa, namely from France to Egypt, and the struggle of coping with the new society, lifestyle, and environment by newly arrived European in the Arab world. In this essay, Saad analyses how Rawda Ashour portrays a grim picture of her protagonist, Madeline, a French woman who struggles to

get along and forms a sense of bondage with others in Cairo, Egypt, and how this struggle to fit in alongside losing contact with France created a sense of alienation within Madelin. By analysing the character portrayal of Madeline by Ashour in *Blue Lorries* (2014 [originally 2008]), Saad has pointed out the perpetual stereotypical representation of Western women in Arab literature, more specifically, in Egyptian literature. She argues that Madeline represents a unique case of displacement and introduces the reader to a new liminal space that does not include conflicting or negotiating identities; it instead opens up possibilities to see displacement, dislocation, and emplacement from a non-binary Orient vs Occident perspective. The next chapter, "'...But People Like Us Would Always Be Outsiders': Cultural Identity, Hybridity, and the Role of Belonging in Elif Shafak's *Honour*," by Gizem Doğrul shows the way literary fictionalisation represents experiences of unbelonging, discrimination, and identity struggles of second-generation migrants. In her analysis of the novel *Honour* (2012), Doğrul highlights that a sense of belonging can lead to feelings of both displacement and emplacement for diasporic characters. Despite interference from their old culture or norms, these characters strive to create new (hybrid) identities within the society they grow up in. Doğrul argues that through her characterisation of Iskandar and Esma, Elif Shafak opens a Third Space in *Honour*; this space, as a result, contributes to the two diasporic characters' identity formation process and impacts their feelings of belonging or not belonging in the space they occupy.

The next few essays deal with the representation of migrants and refugees in cinema and art projects. In "The Mediterranean Sea as a Cultural Object in Migration Films", Thomas Richard discusses the filmic representation of the Mediterranean Sea in recent fiction films. In his essay, Richard addresses the artistic renditions of migrations, working on the mythology attached to it, as well as on its representations, through the study of films. Richard proposes to consider the Mediterranean Sea as a transformative space, one which acts as a metaphor for the liquidity of borders that kill characters as well as have them reborn. "Imagining Alternative Futures: Migrations in the Art of Yael Bartana" by Giacomo Paci analyses Israeli artist Yael Bartana's artworks to point out that fictive migrations can work as an effective tool to talk about real historical events and bring them to public discussion. Paci shows how Yael Bartana's

projects become ways to reconsider real-world problems and challenge assumptions and beliefs from collective imagery. His essay also addresses questions on representation and collective memory to understand Bartana's films as imaginative alternative futures for Jews in Europe. In his reading of Bartana's Polish Trilogy (2007-2011) and *Malka Germania* (2021), Paci establishes that fiction can be a metaphor for reality, and imaginary migrations and displacements are ways to reflect on thorny issues like the Holocaust.

The next two essays deal with issues regarding ethnic minorities and their struggle from two different centuries and two different contexts. In "The Search for Freedom: Suiheisha's Transpacific Journey and Afro-Asian Intersection," Qianqing Huang explores how the Suiheisha activists looked at Black America to develop an internationalist framework to critique domestic discrimination of buraku minorities in imperial Japan. Huang examines the writings of Tahara Haruji, one buraku emigrant to the US, to unearth the influence of Marcus Garvey on him and his idea of creating a new homeland through participation in the imperial project. Huang argues that by participating in the imperial war machine many of the buraku residents, Tahara Haruji was one of the ardent supporters of this idea, saw the possibility of full membership and recognition of burakumin from the empire; in short, burakumin's emplacement in Japanese society. "Voluntary Repatriation as a Durable Solution: The Case of Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh" by Sharmin Begum identifies key factors that facilitate voluntary repatriation of Rohingya refugees and examines whether it is the most durable solution. It suggests that assurance of citizenship, property restitution, financial assistance, and the choice of refugees to return are the contexts that facilitate repatriation as a durable solution. Begum argues about the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, highlighting how their sense of identity has developed amidst being displaced, being stuck in an in-between space where both returning to their homeland or obtaining citizenship in Myanmar are not in sight.

The volume ends with an afterword from Jopi Nyman, a prominent literary scholar who has extensively published on displacement and migration. Nyman points out how displacement influences migrant identity. According to him, the past and its places remain significant to the

displaced and emplaced. His afterword emphasises the importance of storytelling and its role in reclaiming humanity and counter-imposed narratives and histories for those who may have been traumatised by the experience of being displaced.

This collection of essays opens up a spectrum of materials and investigative approaches which will help to promote further interdisciplinary dialogue in the fields of displacement and migration studies, refugee studies, and comparative studies in literature and culture.

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Borderline Stories: Migrants at the Limits of World History

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Before focusing directly on the thematic nexus of "Displacement, Emplacement, and Migration," I would like to insert myself in the margins of my reflections on the borderline stories of my title. In doing so, I wish to advocate personal involvement in our intellectual work on migration. Also, I am conscious of belonging to a generation that had its intellectual awakening in the seismic experience of the student and anti-war movements of the late 1960s and 1970s. Karl Mannheim's thoughts on generation as a sociological category remind us of our historical situatedness. It seems insufficient to study refugee tales as coolheaded scholars without ourselves becoming involved in human rights activism. Hannah Arendt once commented, "we seem to have seen everything, and yet we are witnesses of nothing" (Stancanelli 49). Apparently, we are no longer able to assume any responsibility. We have become consumers of the sorrow and horror embedded in images of migrant children washed up on the shores of the Mediterranean without feeling that something can be done about it. Standpoint – my standpoint, your standpoint – is already a form of theory, whether we want to acknowledge it or not. As Pierre Bourdieu once put it, point of view is a view from a point. A view from everywhere is a view from nowhere (Bourdieu and Wacquant 74 n14).

I find it much more challenging to talk about migrant lives than migration, although the terms obviously go hand in hand. Migrant lives, even when studied demographically as social movements, are mobile, diffuse, disruptive, and hard to grasp; or from the view of the state, to govern. Defined by their makeshift errant condition, such lives and movements are statistically hard to measure, let alone encompass. More responsive to metaphor than a concept, they are best narrated from within by the participants themselves. Life writing, witnessing, and oral history are the representative forms of recounting the *inside* experiences of people in motion. Migrant life writing not only provides quality accounts of migratory

agency and experience but helps us avoid the reification of a global phenomenon induced by structural and quantitative analyses. Through personal narrative, the macro- and micro-dynamics of migration – their intra- and transnational horizons, intersectional flashpoints, networks, and elusive itineraries – are woven together in what paradoxically is packaged as a single story.

I grew up in a small Dutch-American immigrant village in northern Wisconsin in the second half of the twentieth century. My grandparents and several relatives came to work in one of the many booming papermills along the Fox River. Growing up, if you stepped out of line, police chief Red Williams called your parents rather than threw you in jail. It was that tight a community where everybody knew everybody, and most of the family names were Dutch. When I elected to go away to boarding school after elementary school, the most puzzling thing was that all the service people, the janitors, the yard workers, were Native American – bronze-skinned, in drab-green overalls, utterly silent, and masked with an intriguing reserve. We students were told at the beginning of each school year not to greet or trouble them or interfere with their work. For me, this prohibition only made them loom larger as indigenous signifiers with a broom. Indeed, the school, which is now a bingo palace for gambling, has been returned to the Oneida Indian tribe on whose land it stood.

When I left the Indian reservation and went to an urban university, it was my first time in a big city, a metropolis of African-Americans on the North Side and a huge Polish community on the South Side, with the German element present everywhere downtown: the restaurants, the beer gardens, the architecture, the progressive politics. The difference for me was enormous and energising. Instead of skinny-dipping in the Fox, now it was like swimming in the ocean, that is, Lake Michigan. I became city-wise quickly and learned to appreciate big-city vertigo. I also learned new sidewalk codes and how to move across ethnic boundaries without always greeting people whose eyes met mine, as I did back home.

During the summer in graduate school, I crossed the ocean for the first time to study Shakespearean drama at Stratford-upon-Avon. To hear people speak with a British accent was a marvel for the ear. And the fish and

chips and bobbies and red buses confirmed many of my schoolbook expectations. All of this was extremely novel for me and astonishing, as I confessed when writing home in outbursts of purple prose. I owed my working-class parents at least that much. Several of my Stratford classmates were amused by my flat midwestern accent and goaded me to sing "When that I was and a little tiny boy" (92) from William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* for a pint of suds, and I laughed along with them at my own expense. The point for me went a notch deeper. We all had Shakespeare and the English language in common, so I didn't need to stutter or, remain silent or feel too out of place.

Feeling out of place in a different language and a different culture happened a year later when I visited my girlfriend in Venice, Italy. I had to communicate with her parents and friends almost entirely through her. Not having the Italian language abundantly at hand and not being able to express myself idiomatically and intimately with people who were eager to include me in their conversations was excruciating and mentally exhausting. Often, I was not only speechless but quite literally dumb. By the time my girlfriend and I settled down together, I had learned Italian entirely by speaking it with her, and later by reading and translating and writing in it. But it took time to feel at home syntactically. Let me assure you, I still retain vivid and humiliating images of my struggle to crash into another language, insert myself socially among Italian academics, and later find odd jobs while writing my doctoral dissertation in Venice and Paris. These memories are surely about existential survival and not wanting to be socially dead. And yet, I never felt less than privileged.

If we look back together at this condensed but sweeping account, as elliptical as it is banal, we notice a series of breaks which correspond to an equal number of spatial moves in a developmental process apparently motivated by some sort of plan, a plan presumably driven by conscious desires and outcomes. As a blueprint for narrative self-analysis, it pulls a series of scattered autobiographical episodes together into "my life." And this life, by looking backwards to narrate it, celebrates a progression of sorts, as if a series of quite positive but discrete memories added up to a continuous journey, one that I forged consciously across time and largely through my own efforts. Perhaps one of the salient impulses behind life

writing is the desire, however tenuous, to posit oneself as a unique individual – one who, through productive work and personal agency, has achieved something and contributed this something to the common good of the country or societies we live in.

Through this kind of autobiographical effort, the author may be seeking to overcome – or on the contrary, confirm – the negative forces of social and existential anonymity. This psychic impulse to recount one's life is as profound as it is superficial. It goes to the heart of our dynamic sense of democratic and civic life characterising Western constitutionalism, with its understood rights and duties and rewards and punishments. It equally evokes the economic language of debt, credit, exchange, saving, spending, borrowing, lending, trust, and panic. The words recounting and counting share the same etymon of the Latin verb *computare*, to calculate. Tale-telling and tallying are equally intertwined. While recounting how they are embedded in a series of life worlds within a single or perhaps several national societies, life-writers find themselves having to calculate and invest in the fluctuating values of freedom and equality and, depending on one's residence, the right to life and the pursuit of happiness. In his book *Governing the World, the History of an Idea* (2013), Mark Mazower explains how people everywhere now take for granted the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (320-28). As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn stated optimistically in his Nobel Prize lecture back in 1970, "no such thing as INTERNAL AFFAIRS remains on our crowded Earth!" (qtd. in Mazower 321). In theory, human rights are now attributed to people as individuals and not as citizens belonging to a specific nation. It is understood that governments could be against their own people.

What migrants today do not have is a life like the one I recounted above. Instead, they have lives, a plurality of lives that uniformly appear borderline, in both an ontological and material sense. In his introduction to the anthology *The Displaced, Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives* (2018), Viet Thanh Nguyen says that "displaced persons are mostly unwanted where they fled from; unwanted where they are, in refugee camps; and unwanted where they want to go" ("Introduction" 17). Being unwanted helps to produce borderline subjects. Stripped of their dignity and their possessions, migrants straddle borders trying to survive. Günther Anders explains, in

L'Emigrante (1962/2022), that the philosophy of emigration is such that migrants, too, pass from one place to another, but not according to plan. Instead, they are pushed around by chance and thrown into situations entirely beyond their control. They end up here and there without always knowing where "there" is. Their main preoccupations are about food, clothing, shelter, and finding work. These are all matters Giorgio Agamben has referred to as "the glare of 'bare life' . . . where their existence is nothing more than a biological fact." (qtd. in Nguyen, "Introduction" 182).

According to Anders, rather than a work permit or a permit to stay, the refugee above all needs a life permit. The difference between the two is abysmal. The quest for a life permit describes a limit-situation that lays bear what it means to be human, only now by subtraction. Anders's emigrant, and he uses himself as a model, suffers from an absence of the world and from social hunger (14). In his brief migrant narrative "Guests of the Holy Roman Empress Maria Theresa," Lev Golinkin writes, "Becoming a refugee is a gradual process, a bleaching out, a transition into a ghostly existence . . . until at last you're floating outside of society, an untethered phantom in need of a new life" (76). Instead of being pushed away or detained in a holding pen, refugees want to be recognized and counted on. They want to produce and contribute. Often stateless and suspended in detention centres for months and even years, migrants are treated as surplus, as beings-in-excess (Anders 15).

As a distinct literary phenomenon, refugee tales and migrant life writing bear witness to the state of the world in which we now find ourselves. Inasmuch as this body of literature invests in the thematic of migration and its identifying topology of sites, experiences, and temporal horizons, it evokes a corresponding homology to the global crises now besetting our planet. We may not be involved in migrant matters, but we are all personally entangled in the world's climate predicaments. The sheer volume of migratory flows in recent decades is due not only to the perennial round of armed conflicts and inter-ethnic violence but also to an irreparably compromised biosphere. The latter fact is a paradigmatically distinct phenomenon which scientists have elaborated as a spawn of planetary crises: global warming, drought, rising sea levels, wild weather, famine, melting of the polar ice caps, and devastating forest fires. These same phenomena

have forced us to revise what we mean when using the word migrant, a generic term that includes legal, sociological, and media referents such as asylum seeker, political refugee, economic refugee, guest worker, disaster migrant, displaced person, climate refugee, student abroad, domestic worker, caretaker, stateless person, undocumented (or illegal) alien, trafficking victim, expatriate, and resident alien (Boelhower and Zittel 12).

Many of these labels find application within various government organisations, such as Homeland Security in the United States and border-control authorities across the European Union. Conversely, some of these labels are wielded by journalists tethered to far-right political parties. In Italy, for example, the populist Lega Nord political party uses the derogatory term *clandestine* to stigmatise refugees arriving at Lampedusa. Humanitarian aid workers and members of the UN Refugee Agency also use certain labels to determine who is a refugee and who is not. On the other hand, similar to the Palestinians, stateless migrants find themselves without a homeland to return to. Climate refugees tend to be internal or intra-national migrants who are forced to move because of natural disasters. In contrast, a privileged category of persons – like students, expatriates, professionals, and retired people – are voluntary migrants, but most of those who leave their motherlands do so involuntarily, in order to survive.

As for poverty, few governments consider it a sufficient cause for asylum. More often than not, responses to poverty are relegated to solidarity among people. As Reyna Grande, a Mexican migrant to the US, states in her life story "The Parent Who Stays," she was not considered a "real" refugee because "Poverty, no matter how extreme, doesn't meet any of the criteria for asylum" (82). People seem not to be particularly moved by the term economic refugee, she adds. Capitalism and capitalist ethics generally exclude it as a problem of the first order. And yet, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, along with several national constitutions, refers specifically to the importance of social rights and the need for solidarity. A merely economistic vision of society ignores rights associated with the commons, the right to clean air, a healthy environment, non-toxic drinking water, a decent education, and a job. But how do we gain access to these rights? We create all kinds of laws to protect our rights of liberty and equality, but *fraternité*? Article 1 of the Declaration reads, "All human

beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood" (4). Today, the importance of Article 1 is like what the North Star was for runaway slaves in antebellum America.

A mere forty years ago, historians and sociologists in the West did not talk about migration the way we do now. Instead, they talked about emigration and immigration in much the same way as Günther Anders did in 1962. Due not only to push but also pull factors, people from around the world flooded into the Americas, where there was land to be had and a bottomless need for workers. The United States, for example, is a nation populated by waves of immigration. From the 1880s to 1924, millions and millions of European emigrants came to work in the country's factories and build its infrastructures and skyscrapers. In a few decades, these immigrants and their offspring began to write about their achievements as well as their abiding attachments to their ancestral lands (Daniels 121-286, Jones 177-246). Well before this literature was called ethnic and mainstream in the mid-to-late 1970s, following upon the creation of Black Studies departments in the universities, and well before public intellectuals declared the death of the American melting pot, the immigrants themselves (mostly from European and Mediterranean countries, but also from the Caribbean, China, and Japan) had recounted their experiences in countless autobiographies and lightly disguised novels. The bulk of this literature – Jewish, Italian, German, Asian American, Greek – was diasporic and recounted the trials of assimilation and acculturation, not to mention the intergenerational battles between immigrant parents and their wayward Americanised children (See Sollors). All this was offset by memories of the homeland and the need to remember one's roots. The autobiographies and fiction of this first outpouring beg to be read according to distinct structural patterns identified by scholars in the early 1980s as immigration literature (See Boelhower, "The Immigrant Novel"; Boelhower, "The Brave New World"). But in the last decades of the twentieth century, national economies worldwide jumped on the bandwagon of globalisation. Since then, much has changed.

Today's migration flows announce a different range of historical crises within a qualitatively different paradigm. As a result of this shift, we can

posit a commensurability of contemporary migrant literature and the dire situation of the world not only as a cartography of competing nation-states but also as a suffering planet. Economic globalisation (deregulation, outsourcing, liberalisation) and the birth of the infosphere have converged to create a planetary consciousness (Floridi 25-58, Spivak 100). Given the multiple causes and effects involved in analysing migration flows, interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches combining the social sciences and the humanities have come to define the field. The relevant social sciences include anthropology, sociology, political science, international law, and human and migrant rights, while among the human sciences are history, geography, religious, ethnic, cultural, gender, intersectional, and literary studies. The thematic spectrum of migration studies is extremely wide-ranging, consonant with the sheer fact of migrant mobility and the state of the world. These themes include matters of travel, dislocation, borders, kinship networks and transnational contacts, working conditions and public welfare, host country migrant policy, civic integration, cultural assimilation and hybridity, diasporic and gender identities, sex slavery, populist and anti-migrant politics, religious and inter-ethnic conflicts, climate change, poverty, health and educational access, and human rights.

For all practical purposes, the migrant, whether as an individual or en masse, now stands for the world's conscience. Their plight is ours; their suffering haunts us. Due in part to the news and social media, the migrant in our midst has become a saturated figure representing many things: a human tsunami, a menace, a workforce, and the person sitting next to us on the train. As the phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion would say, they appear, giving themselves to us, always overloaded with given intuitions – intuitions which produce a contradictory surplus of meaning (113-23). In his story collection *La Speranza sta oltre confine?* (2015), the Senegalese Italian writer Laye Gueye laments, "If some violent event happens, the stranger is the first to blame and only later do they see if it might be an Italian" (7). Gueye's stranger is perceived as a floating signifier who shows up unscheduled – one day in the public square, another in front of the supermarket – with hands extended, face marked by their history.

As an anonymous lorry driver who smuggles migrants into England recounts in "The Lorry Driver's Tale," the first of four volumes of *Refugee*

Tales (2016) edited by David Herd and Anna Pincus, "[I]t's different once you've seen their eyes. You realise if they can carry all that, maybe you can take some of the load. You might as well help – life's over so fast" (Cleave 34). Asylum seekers confront us "once and for all" and hermeneutically "without end," Marion would say (33-44). As Caroline Bergvall, the transcriber of "The Voluntary Returner's Tale," reports at the close of the narrative, "One in 33 people in the world is on the move" (72). What does this all mean? In an attempt to personalize such statistics, poet-activist Shailja Patel used her own migrations across three continents to write a book that combines history and biography. She gave it a one-word title, *Migritude* (2010).

The use of the word migrant to describe the condition of 'migritude' has pushed aside the formerly conventional terms emigrant and immigrant. This new usage focuses entirely on what has now become the dominant existential experience of refugees and asylum seekers of all stripes. To be sure, one is a migrant apart from seeking immigrant status with a work permit, and there is little time to dwell on where one comes from when pressed by matters of survival. The word in itself, migrant, is a present participle functioning as a noun. In short, a noun-verb. As such, it uniquely captures the precariousness and instability of migrant agency – a floating condition with neither harbour nor receding shoreline in sight. In our time, migration, not immigration, has become the representative or general experience. While this is certainly true, refugee tales and migrant life writing continue to invest in the same deep structures we find in the earlier body of immigrant literature. Both articulate a dialectic of hope and memory, or what Reinhart Koselleck has more appropriately called "the space of experience" and "the horizon of expectation" (255-75). Whether they seek citizenship in another country or are bent down by memories of their homeland, migrant authors invariably construe their fraught journey in terms of "experience" and "expectation." In short, they elaborate their stories according to Koselleck's anthropological categories, which constitute both migrant narratives and our appreciation of them (258).

In this last section, I would like to identify what I think are the salient features of migrant literature by concentrating on the four volumes of

Refugee Tales published in England between the years 2016 and 2021. Although they seem limited in focus, this very restriction helps to provide a semiophoric focus on migrant literature as a literary historical *novum*. In the afterword to the first volume, editor David Herd explains the project as "A Walk in Solidarity with Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Detainees (from Dover to Crawley via Canterbury)" (133). At various stops along the way, two tales were recounted in a public space, one by an asylum seeker, former migrant detainee, or refugee, and the second by a person who has offered them some kind of personal assistance. These brief but emotionally intense life-story segments vividly describe the psychological toll of indefinite detention on the migrants and its lingering after-effects, but they also frame their detention experience as part of a larger continuum of trials besetting migrant life everywhere. In the words of deportee Avaes Mohammad, "This is a tale of where humanity hides" (106).

The compactness of these fifty-eight stories is due to the project itself. It aims specifically to expose the cruelty and illegality of Britain's detention and removal centres, which the Theresa May government put into place with the Immigration Act of 2014 and toughened further in 2018. The stories themselves, however, have a broader resonance than the project's immediate goal, inasmuch as they are fleshed out by earlier moments of the migrant's deeply personal life and its world-sized implications. Taken as a single literary corpus, they entangle us in a praxis of concretion elaborated by Wolfgang Iser and the school of Konstanz. The more tales we read, the better we are able to understand the innuendos, ellipses, gaps, and silences suffusing the single narrative units. The migrant/detainees tell their stories to various members of the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group and other well-known writers who listen and then transcribe them. The listening and witnessing are an essential feature of the project. Often, the listener foregrounds the proxy work itself, so that the listener-in-the-text figure becomes a ready analogue for all of us readers. At stake here is an ethical summons to witness the migrant condition and the travails of migrant lives. We cannot come away indifferent. Thus, the protagonist of "The Listener's Tale" speaks of her "listening life" (Slovo 135) as a fundamental human stance vis-à-vis the migrant. Reading as listening-in is a way everyone can be of help, she implies.

The format, purpose, and thematic structure of these life stories make them generically alike. Each of the authors vividly recounts the experience of indefinite detention that has made their life psychologically borderline, although their previous trials involving borders were no less daunting. All of the narrators are eerily anonymous, as if they could be punished if identified. As the teller of "The Embroiderer's Tale" says to Patrick Gale, "Every traveller here, every refugee, has their own story as different as they are. The trouble is that all the stories become the same in the same way because they all, sooner or later, narrow down to a lorry, a box, a cell" (79). While their stories are radically their own, taken together they share common ground consisting of their suffering, entrapment, and overall migrant condition. All of them epitomise the experience of existential waiting, arbitrary arrest, stripping, and various forms of humiliation by the police, detention wardens, and interviewers at the Home Office. Having to tell and retell a traumatic experience like rape to different interviewers often revives the trauma all over again. All those in detention are forced to put their temporal expectations for a better life on hold. The immediate experience of captivity becomes the salient focus and flashpoint of their tales.

Like earlier text types such as the slave narrative and memoirs of the *shoah*, migrant life stories focus on the suffering body, survival, and loss of the world. The felt sense of life they seek to convey is expressed in what Raymond Williams has called "structures of feeling" and which today we would refer to as literature's affective economy (128). Williams attributed to literature a special power, that of being able to capture the fluid, uncertain sense of life as it is lived in a specific period (128-35). Migrant life writing and the above refugee tales uniquely witness the emotional and corporeal cost exacted from their protagonists. These tales invariably begin with flight as a potentially radical act of individuation. However elliptically, they then assume the form of a wayward journey across a number of perilous geographies and highly policed borders before coming to the dead-end or anti-world of the detention centre, whether in Greece, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Great Britain, France or the United States. The detainees are shocked that their request for sanctuary has led them into an inferno. While we assume that the migrant is a figure on the move, the detention centre stops them dead. It radically modifies the relation

between the protagonist's space of experience and the horizon of expectation.

The British detention or removal centre seems designed to break down the migrant's spirit through a hectoring scheme of early dawn arrests, frequent transfers, carceral regimentation, obstruction of the asylum request process, restriction of socialisation, visits from a hostile engagement officer, and above all, waiting. As Emma Parsons states in "The Teacher's Tale," "Waiting is a synonym for the whole bloody system" (138). N, the narrator in "The Observer's Tale," comments on his imprisonment, "I had never known myself so impotent and insignificant. It's been a long time since I have seen myself in a mirror. At the same time I miss myself and hate myself" (125). N is finally released "from a specific, localised detention to a more generalised one, . . . where work, rebuilding my life and travelling abroad are banned, where waiting is my evening meal, and my guest when I fall asleep is a nightmare of bars and cells" (130).

That detention often damages its inmates thymically is further confirmed by "The Voluntary Returner's Tale," where after fifteen years of being "neither here nor home," (Bergvall 63) the protagonist states, "I'm here yet I'm not. You'll never know. That I was here. Nor that I still am" (65). The theme of anonymity and waiting floats through all of the tales like a cloud of despair. The detainee's comment in the above tale told by Caroline Bergvall is typical: "This is worse than prison. Prison was tough but detention is worst. You're just there. No-one knows you. Wake up nothing to do. Wake up eat sleep wait. In prison there's a calendar" (67). Migrant internees yearn to be free as beings out in the world rather than beings waiting to be removed. It is this will-to-presence that is denied them. Every one of the refugee tales articulates the migrant's condition of vulnerability and loss of agency.

The purpose of these tales, much like the slave narratives, is to move us by describing, or presenting, the migrant body and psyche in moments of unendurable duress. The loss of hope, suicide attempts, and deterioration of health, all these are part of the detention process. The reader is meant to feel the pain. As Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht would say, these tales are much less concerned with meaning effects than with presence effects

(1-9). They achieve their rhetorical and aesthetic purpose by producing indignation. In this sense, the refugee tales are nonhermeneutical. We do not need to ask what they mean. They describe a limit-situation in which indefinite detention functions as an absolute metaphor, to use Hans Blumenberg's term (6-39). Through a narrative process of materialisation, these refugee tales take us inside a schizotope, literally a place that is cut off from the normal social fabric. We are talking here about police patrolling with dogs, barbed wire fences, locked cells, and a carceral-like regime inside. As the protagonist of "The Prisoner's Tale" says, "They call it a detention centre, but it's a prison. It violates your mind because you have no way to know what is going to happen next" (Lefteri 132). Being confined in one of these centres, author Dina Nayeri's detainee says, is like disappearing (Nayeri 60).

In trying to describe the notion of a limit-situation, Karl Jaspers said it is like running into a wall, a wall against which we founder (178, 218f). Detention-centre walls split space in two. On one side we have the homogeneous site of detention, on the other the outside. For Jaspers, the other side of the wall stands for openness and possibility. Although the refugee tales discussed here focus on what life is like in the detention schizotope, hope lurks on the other side of the wall. They know there is that other side and they hope somehow to regain what they lost inside. Migrants straddle this wall; their lives are borderline. They themselves are the border. Inside the wall, as asylum seekers, they must tell their stories. Once in detention they become legal cases and are assigned a caseworker and must concentrate on their case, which depends entirely on the story they tell during hours of interviewing. Detail is everything. Consistency is everything. The word migrant in the Geneva Convention is an abstract category that must be made concrete, singular, and coherent.

But migrant stories are rarely consistent or entirely coherent. Life writing offers them a second chance to tell their story, with all its absurdities and contradictions. In a very basic sense, migrant tales are about running back and forth, as the Latin etymon of discourse (*dis-currere*) indicates. While refugees are often reduced to a condition of bare life, their stories allow them to reimagine their mobility and reclaim their calamitous humanity. Through this reclamation process migrant life writing functions

as a form of felt history. In his *Prison Notebooks* (1975), Antonio Gramsci argued that in order to know, we must try to understand. And to understand, we must learn to feel (1505). As Chris Abani states in his refugee tale "The Road," "We fear, and sometimes hate, refugees, because their existence is our deepest fear: that we don't and never will belong anywhere" (27). He adds: "in the body of the refugee we come to terms with the fragility of nationhood and stability. With the realization that when we are looking into the face of refugees, we are looking directly into our own possibility" (26). The notion of identity itself is fluid and unstable and our recognition of this goes to the heart of the human condition. The fifty-eight borderline stories of the *Refugee Tales* project are all about ordinary life in Western democracies today. They place us all at the very limits of world history.

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"We Had No Belonging Except Our Stories": Storytelling and Countermemory in Vietnamese American Refugee Literature

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Displaced by war and an ocean away from home, Vietnamese refugees' new beginnings in their destination country are often marked by a lack of feeling included in the American social circles in which they arrive after their traumatising escapes and precarious stays in refugee camps. Moreover, even though some might, over time, adhere to the infamous Asian American 'model minority' stereotype[1] and work their way up to leading affluent lives, most refugees commence their stays devoid of economic means – further marginalising them in a consumerist society that upholds the value of financial success. For instance, when reminiscing about her early days in the US, the ghostwriter narrator in "Black-Eyed Women" (2017), a short story by influential Vietnamese American writer Viet Thanh Nguyen, remembers how her mother would not believe in their family's belonging in the host country due to their shortage of wealth. Nevertheless, they arrived enriched by less palpable goods: "In a country where possessions counted for everything, we had no belongings except our stories" (7). Regardless of their lack of material possessions, stories are viewed as nonphysical belongings that serve the family as an anchor in their new surroundings, simultaneously enabling belonging in the Vietnamese diaspora and opening the possibility of nurturing future feelings of specifically Vietnamese American belonging. Before practising place-making in a more tangible fashion, storytelling in the form of recounting family histories and other tales set in Vietnam emerges as an effective collective strategy for refugees to understand their past and

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[1] The notion of Asian Americans as the model minority homogenises the group "as hardworking, highly educated, successful, and lacking social problems" (Võ 33). Despite concealing inequalities within a diverse group while enhancing divides between Asian Americans and other non-white American communities, this image has been a prevalent myth ever since the 1960s that continues to prevail in popular discourses.

overcome uncertainties in present situations, especially for members of younger generations, whose corporeal recollection of their homeland remains blurry or even inaccessible.

Narratives are thus not only temporal but space-bound, too – "one can think of storytelling as a spatial form and practice" (Bieger 11). Hence, it performs several functions regarding emplacement, which can be perceived as "the strategies of coming to belong somewhere" both physically and in "an imaginative process, the orienting of self within multiple frameworks of meaning" (Narayan 472). Storytelling allows uprooted individuals to position their ancestral homelands and themselves while recognising their own and their family's past despite their dislocation. Concurrently, this awareness not only enacts a spatial and experiential understanding of a place from which refugees have been displaced, but it may also stabilise their sense of belonging in unfamiliar settings, mainly through the typically community-based character of storytelling. Therefore, collective memory is pivotal when discussing storytelling in the face of shared crises: "By constructing, relating and sharing stories, people contrive to restore viability to their relationship with others, redressing a bias toward autonomy when it has been lost, and affirming collective ideals in the face of disparate experiences" (Jackson 18). Regaining agency is critical in the context of remembering the American war in Vietnam, whose memory in mainstream consciousness has for decades been dominated by US-centred narratives that neglected Vietnamese American perspectives. These factors align with Nguyen's nonfictional arguments on the war and its memory: "Storytelling allows us to tell a different story about war and its relationship to our identity. In this way, storytelling changes how we remember and forget war" (Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies* 292). Collective memory is about remembering *and* forgetting and may resurface as countermemory. Countermemory designates "oppositional memory, the memory of the subordinated and the marginalized, memory from below versus memory from above" ("Memory" 154) – a practice that the examples to be examined here engage in, within the text and as the texts themselves.

In this essay, the emphasis lies on fictional representations of storytelling, which is understood in a broad sense but always as a "coping strategy"

(Jackson 18). However, there are parallels to anthropological and sociological approaches in the larger field of transnational migration scholarship. Kirin Narayan, whose definition of emplacement was provided earlier, claims "that telling one's own stories, staking out a space for one's own meaning, is a powerful discursive means of emplacement" (472) when examining life stories by South Asian Americans of the second generation. Similarly, but focusing on telling, writing *and* listening to stories alike, I argue that novels and short stories by and about Vietnamese Americans illustrate that emplacement through storytelling works on multiple levels and acts as an agent for producing collective memory in the form of countermemory. At first, I inspect the practice of storytelling as represented in selected works, contemplating how storytellers construct their stories and how this affects their own and their audience's sense of belonging. Along with mentioning short fictions by Aimee Phan, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and Andrew Lam, Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (*OEWBG* 2019) shall serve as the principal source and the depiction of storytelling in oral and written form in the novel will be scrutinised. In a secondary step, I briefly touch upon the role of the authors themselves, who arguably create new types of storytelling through their hybrid novels and short stories.

Typically, stories within the narratives under consideration are told by the first generation and transgenerationally transmitted to members of the 1.5 generation – people who were born in Vietnam and fled to the US at a young age – and the second generation. In addition to recollections of perilous journeys by boat and other kinds of escape, most of the stories are set in Vietnam before and during the war and range from epics to fairy tales and family histories. At the same time, storytelling unfolds in the here and now – the past and the present become enmeshed via storytelling: "Storytelling, then, is the meeting point between past and present; it is another crossroad at which places and memories from the past and impressions and experiences from the present begin to leak into each other" (Lems 216). Accordingly, storytelling frequently operates as an essential impetus for 1.5- and second-generation children to understand their hybridity and to emplace them in their American environments by acquiring an enhanced understanding of their own and their family's past.

However, specific memories of the past are difficult to discuss: sharing stories means sharing trauma, yet those affected might not always find the words to express what they have endured and some parents will never be able to open up to their children. Thus, whereas some refugees deal with processing their own or their family's traumatic memories, the origin of unease for others is their inability to access their own and their family's past. The stories of orphans epitomise this; they will never even receive the chance to ask their parents about their life in Vietnam. This conflict is captured in Aimee Phan's *We Should Never Meet* (2004), a fragmented work spanning continents and decades that features orphaned narrators of the 1.5 generation. The most important characters in the short story cycle entered the world as unwanted babies of Vietnamese mothers and predominantly anonymous American fathers. The orphans left Vietnam through Operation Babylift, a mass evacuation scheme that was orchestrated just before the war's end in 1975 and removed more than 3,000 children by plane to western countries. The Babylift orphans' alienation in the US is, at least, threefold: besides staying in the dark about their past, they face varying degrees of difficulty in their experiences with the foster care system and, as half-Asians and half-Americans, are confronted with racial prejudice from different sources. These circumstances combined lead to unresolved ambivalences that are reflected in literary form through gaps, fragmentation and open-endedness.

Unlike the Babylift orphans, Rose, the narratee in Vuong's seminal work, lives together with her mother until the day the latter dies. Just like them, though, she is "a direct product of the war in Vietnam" (*OEWBG* 53) and her biological father, an American serviceman who meets her mother as a sex worker, remains unknown. Her ambiguous hybridity denies her belonging in Vietnam – "get the white off her" (63), children in the neighbourhood would shout after her when she was still a girl – and language barriers add to her complications of fitting in in America. Rose sustains a challenging relationship with her son Little Dog, the novel's first-person narrator, and over the years only discloses some of her stories to him. Meanwhile, her abusive husband has mostly been missing from the family's life and for their son, fatherly absence is the norm he encounters growing up in Hartford, Connecticut, "where fathers were phantoms, dipping in and out of their children's lives" (213).

In cases where parents' storytelling remains sparse for disparate reasons, stories may still be transfused through generation-skipping from grandparents to grandchildren. For example, Little Dog cherishes a deep connection to his grandmother Lan, whose storytelling continues to console and stabilise him as a child and during his later years. In a cyclical, nonlinear and undetermined style – "the past never a fixed and dormant landscape but one that is re-seen" (28) – she recounts her own journeys in Vietnam during the war and recites scenes of folklore while her grandson is plucking her grey hairs:

> As I plucked, the blank walls around us did not so much fill with fantastical landscapes as open into them, the plaster disintegrating to reveal the past behind it. Scenes from the war, mythologies of manlike monkeys, of ancient ghost catchers from the hills of Da Lat [city in Vietnam's Central Highlands region] who were paid in jugs of rice wine, who traveled through villages with packs of wild dogs and spells written on palm leaves to dispel evil spirits. (22)

Little Dog has heard her stories before; nevertheless, they keep their force in transcending time and space as her voice carries him from the American East Coast to the West Coast across the Pacific Ocean to their genealogical homeland and to times before he was even born. In this fashion, Lan's vivid storytelling exceeds its capacity of merely sparking her grandson's imagination. Instead, he goes beyond visualising her stories and feels his present spatial surroundings transformed by her tales, demonstrating that "the past . . . is not a foreign country; it is relevant and present for the here and now and continues to play into and form our lifeworlds" (Lems 215). Little Dog's current environments "open into" the landscapes, framing the act of listening as a sensory experience, vigorously fabricating space and surpassing linear time restrictions.

In addition to encouraging belonging, stories are also viewed as immaterial possessions worthy in a transaction, which is illustrated in the following passage where Little Dog deems obtaining stories as his payment for plucking hairs:

> For this work I was paid in stories. After positioning her head under the window's light, I would kneel on a pillow behind her, the tweezers ready in my grip. She

would start to talk, her tone dropping an octave, drifting deep into a narrative. Mostly, as was her way, she rambled, the tales cycling one after another. . . . A familiar story would follow, punctuated with the same dramatic pauses and inflections during moments of suspense or crucial turns. I'd mouth along with the sentences, as if watching a film for the umpteenth time – a movie made by Lan's words and animated by my imagination. In this way, we collaborated. (*OEWBG* 22)

This collaboration can be read in light of what Marianne Hirsch calls 'postmemory', a term that

describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. (5)

Wordlessly, the narrator acquires postmemory by internalising his mother's and his grandmother's PTSD through their conduct: "Little Dog did not live the war as Rose and Lan did, but he does witness their violent outbursts, flashbacks, and nightmares. He observes how trauma distorts the boundaries of space and time. . . . Through his intimate proximity to Rose and Lan's psychological damage from the war, Little Dog inherits their memories as postmemory" (Ha and Tompkins 208). Furthermore, his grandmother's stories, too, repeated over and over, appeal to Little Dog on an affective level, rendering him much more than a passive listener as he is also regularly reinscribed into the occasionally changing stories, exemplifying how they actively remember together: "I was standing next to her as her purple dress swayed in the smoky bar, the glasses clinking under the scent of motor oil and cigars, of vodka and gunsmoke from the soldiers' uniforms" (*OEWBG* 23), Little Dog envisions when Lan narrates how she met his grandfather decades ago as a sex worker. The past is malleable and his grandmother's memory has seemingly become his own: "Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (Hirsch 5). In this vein, Little Dog and Lan's storytelling practices are constituted not

simply as a rendition of facts but as collective, creative and dynamic efforts between the storyteller and her audience.

Despite the appeal of the dynamic nature of oral storytelling, many Vietnamese Americans express a wish or need to solidify stories in writing. Storytelling through writing is significant because conserving stories and memories in this form means they cannot get lost while forgetting stories and memories in old age is often associated with losing the homeland all over again. Highlighting the entanglements of remembering and writing is a prominent ingredient in Nguyen's introduction to *The Displaced* (2018), a collection of nineteen essays and two illustrations by displaced writers from around the world. Referring to local Vietnamese businesses like his parents' grocery store that populated downtown San Jose before the rise in wealth of the Silicon Valley region, he muses, "I remember all these things because if I did not remember them and write them down then perhaps they would all disappear, as all those Vietnamese businesses have vanished" (14). Remembering Vietnamese enterprises points to a different angle of the importance of storytelling; not only is it vital for remembering the homeland but also for remembering Vietnamese American refugees' early arrivals in the US and their active place-making, figuratively and physically, through shops like his parents' former "mom-and-pop Vietnamese grocery store catering to refugees" (15).

Later on in the same text, Nguyen continues to talk about displaced writers and their engagement in discussing displacement through their writings:

> Many writers, perhaps most writers or even all writers, are people who do not feel completely at home. . . . I cannot help but suspect that it is from this displacement that writers come into being, and why so many writers have sympathy and empathy for those who are displaced in one way or another, whether it is the lonely social misfit or whether it is the millions rendered homeless by forces beyond their control. In my case, I remember my displacement so that I can feel for those now displaced. I remember the injustice of displacement so that I can imagine my writing as attempting to perform some justice for those compelled to move. ("Introduction" 17-18)

Rather than lamenting displacement, Nguyen proposes that it acts as the creator of writers and, consequently, functions as the main generator of any piece of writing. This insistent refusal to pathologies refugees' trauma and displacement echoes Yến Lê Espiritu's call to reconceptualise the term of the 'refugee'. Emphasising refugees' productive potential beyond victimisation, she urges that "instead of producing narratives of traumatized refugees, in which trauma is conceptualized only as pain, suffering, and distress, we can read trauma productively . . . as the condition that makes visible the relationship between war, race, and violence" (422-23). Furthermore, this passage from Nguyen's introduction reveals a supplementary element of storytelling by suggesting that written stories will facilitate remembering the past and finding one's place in the present and may even help future refugees in different contexts.

Likewise, Nguyen's aforementioned short story "Black-Eyed Women" rejects the essentialisation of refugees as helpless victims immobilised by suffering and unveils storytelling's forward-looking stance. For years, the ghostwriter has repressed the painful memories of her escape, a strategy that obstructed her sense of belonging in the country of arrival. Her profession allegorises this condition: rather than taking charge of her own story, she makes a living by recording other people's narratives. She feels detached from her present until she finally confronts her past trauma – materialised in ghost form through the apparition of her long-dead brother – and even starts designing new plans for her future as she switches from ghostwriting to compiling a book of her own. To accomplish this project, she revitalises the relationship with her mother through storytelling, accentuating the significance of collective memory for processing individual trauma. Moreover, the (former) ghostwriter commemorates other women's trauma when she is faced with her brother's ghost: "Most of all, I cried for those other girls who had vanished and never come back" (18), conjuring collective female solidarity and in a way, by writing a book and capturing stories – a practice unavailable to the lost girls – she assumes Nguyen's challenge of "perform[ing] some justice for those compelled to move" ("Introduction" 18) and "to speak for the voiceless" (19). Literally leaving an imprint on her surroundings, she engages in active

placemaking and, through her stories, encourages other hybrid individuals' emplacement.[2]

The ghostwriter is by no means the only character found in contemporary Vietnamese American literature who has discovered some kind of belonging through language and becoming a writer-storyteller. Vuong's work is composed in epistolary form as a letter by Little Dog addressed to his mother, who is illiterate. The act of writing thus provides the protagonist with cathartic insights into his own subjectivity, yet Rose's illiteracy represents a boundary between her son's storytelling and her reception of the story that remains an obvious restriction, hindering his storytelling from becoming mutually efficient. On the assumption that she can never read Little Dog's words, Rose is ultimately excluded from the story, hinting at rifts between different generations of Vietnamese Americans and the fact that certain traumata are unspeakable.

In spite of the doubtfulness of Rose receiving Little Dog's letter, penning it to her is imperative for the narrator and the story itself. Even if his text may never reach its intended audience, Little Dog is no uncooperative storyteller; especially in the third and last part of the novel, he asks his mother – whom he can "change, embellish, and preserve . . . all at once" (*OEWBG* 85) – to actively join his narrative. The narrator attempts to make his narratee sense and grasp the milieu of substance abuse that he found himself in for many years. Rather than just giving an account of his experience, he takes her on a lifelike journey through Hartford, the city of his childhood and adolescence. Similar to Little Dog's inclusion in Lan's orally transmitted stories, he places his mother into the remembered spaces through engaging storytelling and invites her to "[t]ake the long way home with [him]" (174) as he navigates her from one building to the next. The oral and written storytelling examples demonstrate how Vuong's narrative elicits storytelling's spatial dimensions and, accordingly, its capacity to invoke emplacement. Nevertheless, neither Lan nor Rose manages "to be seamlessly assimilated into the United States

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[2] In the essay "Of Ghosts, Gifts, and Globetrotters: Tracing Homes and Homelands in Vietnamese American Refugee Short Stories" (2022), I elaborate on the ghostwriter's negotiation of trauma and reconciliation of conflicting sentiments towards home and homeland.

through their participation in the model minority paradigm" (Cho 136) and even Little Dog's participation is limited through his intersectionality as a queer Vietnamese American refugee: "To be refugee and queer, as Vuong conveys, requires conceding to the conditional terms of one's belonging and to the pervasive shame produced by recognitions of one's outsider status and failure to live up to white heteronormative ideals of the US nation" (132-33). Hence while attesting to refugees' agency in engaging with their surroundings, their place-making practices must not be romanticised and it should be added that these strategies' potential for generating belonging continues to be constrained.

Traditional, essentialist approaches that view cultural identity as fixed and complete might consider the fragmented patterns of the narrator's storytelling, unpredictably leaping in time and space, as another demonstration of the limitation to his belonging. In contrast, Little Dog reflects that these circumstances ultimately produce perspicuity: "I'm not telling you a story so much as a shipwreck – the pieces floating, finally legible" (*OEWBG* 190). His storytelling defies the conventional assumption that a story should be told in a linear, unambiguous fashion with a well-defined beginning and end. Instead, the epistolary narrative introduces 'displaced stories', which Annika Lems characterises as follows: "While storytelling and displacement can sometimes be experienced as opposing forces, it is important to double-listen and recognise the different expressions of 'displaced stories'. Such stories can, for example, be uttered as whispers, fragments or half-told stories" (216). Little Dog's story is not intelligible despite its fragmentation, but *because* of it – it matches his displacement in content and form. At the same time, this complexity elucidates the ambivalent dynamics between storytelling, displacement and emplacement; narrating and distributing displaced stories gives voice to marginalised people, thus cultivating countermemory, which may provide belonging-inducing emplacement.

The examples presented here are loosely categorised as works of literary fiction, yet they might incorporate certain autobiographical elements, too. Noticeably, the real-life authors share with their Vietnamese American characters a love for playing with language to craft displaced stories. Therefore, along with representing writing within their narrative worlds,

the novels and short stories themselves may be considered new types of storytelling capable of engendering enduring collective memory of displacement. In an overview of Vietnamese American literature, Michele Janette distinguishes the texts of an earlier generation of Vietnamese (American) authors writing in English from the productions of their 21st-century counterparts of 1.5- and second-generation Vietnamese American writers: "While all literature contains politics and ideology, these works are often more politicized than political – imbued with political and ideological critique, attuned to social context, but approaching their topics with the indirections of poetry and art rather than the linearity of explanation" (386). Besides Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, lê thi diem thúy's novel *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* (2003) also bends the rules of linearity of explanation and time, constructing a comparably fractured, lyrical and liquid narrative.

Regarding the fragmentation of Phan's Babylift short story cycle, Long Le-Khac notes that the work "confronts us with the fragmenting effects of displacement in the gaps between stories and challenges us to develop new principles of connection across narrative and national borders" (110). For further analysis, Le-Khac proposes the concept of 'transnarrative', which "theorizes the relations across the gaps separating individual narratives, the aesthetic means by which story cycles with transnational ambitions apprehend social relations across national borders" (107). The notion of transnarative is powerful because it shifts the focus from immobilising trauma and loss to displacement's productive capability to foster transnational connections. Moreover, it might also be utilised when discussing episodic and border-crossing novels like Vuong's and lê's.

These types of storytelling matter because, unlike sensationalist media accounts that persist across different refugee contexts, they provide Vietnamese American self-representations saturating the figure of the refugee with meaning and agency to counter damage-centred approaches. Andrew Lam's short story "Hunger" (2013) offers an example of the kind of alienation that external, undifferentiated distributions of stories may cause. The protagonist is tempted by the hope of achieving financial revenue that may increase the "probability of a good life for his daughter" (90), which evokes the image of the American Dream as well as the idea

of stories as immaterial possessions with the potential of generating material possessions in the shape of financial revenue. Eventually, his cousin persuades him to sell his story to a TV channel, but the protagonist is disheartened when he subsequently sees the segment on air. In its filtered and adapted form, he "feels that it is no longer his story" (91), underscoring the need for self-determined storytelling from below by and about refugees that do justice to their actual experiences. Yogita Goyal contrasts the refugee novel to common media representations as follows: "Because so much of the representation of refugees in the media relies on spectacle, crisis, and catastrophe, the novel's concern with interiority and psychological depth, the cultivation of empathy, and the navigation of the relationship between an individual and the community can help counter such spectacularization" (249), which might similarly be said about the discussed refugee short stories.

Before concluding, the circumstance that this essay has explored several features of storytelling – orating, listening, writing, representing – necessitates a consideration of various facets of collective memory, too. To continue to employ this umbrella term critically, Aleida Assmann suggests distinguishing between different formats of memory: "Interactive and social memory are both formats that are embodied, grounded in lived experience that vanish with their carriers. The manifestations of political and cultural memory, on the other hand, are radically different in that they are grounded on the more durable carriers of external symbols and representation" (55). Without the aim of diminishing its immediate and intimate strength in stimulating belonging, it must be recognized that oral storytelling within families – like Lan's transmission of stories to her grandson – is of an ephemeral nature that may be remembered by a few generations at most. In contrast, published writings may exert influence for centuries to come, especially if they are popular and institutionalised in libraries, just like Vuong's. In the year 2020, he was chosen as the seventh contributor to the Future Library project, a public artwork collecting manuscripts that will remain sealed until the year 2114 (Cain). Although at this point, no one except the author is familiar with the work's contents and form, it is intriguing to observe the novelist's antedated institutionalisation in the light of Assmann's distinctions and speculate on his renewed impact on future generations in around nine decades' time.

In this essay, Vuong's recent, acclaimed novel and other contemporary Vietnamese American pieces of literary fiction have served to illustrate the various ways in which involved refugees of the 1.5 and second generation within and outside the narratives employ storytelling as a coping strategy in the face of displacement and to thwart dominant, spectacularising discourses. Coping, in this context, refers to hybrid individuals' preservation through ingraining meaning to their present surroundings by remembering and forgetting past occurrences and imagining future connections – in other words, engaging in a mixture of practices of transnational place-making that encourage a feeling of belonging. Ultimately, this analysis illuminates the critical dialectics between displacement and emplacement; whereas displacement serves as the catalyst for the fabrication of fragmented stories, their production simultaneously creates a durable cornerstone for enacting collective memory in the form of countermemory and, hence, the opportunity for future generations' emplacement.

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Unsettling Identities on Refugee Routes in Omar El Akkad's *What Strange Paradise*

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Refugee routes are often portrayed as physical paths; they are illegal, risky and highly significant because of their functionality as bridges from war zones to secure zones. The secure lands, in themselves, have remarkably become a destination for observers of migrants' mental and psychological oscillation between their homelands and new host societies; whereas, the refugee routes are seldom considered to be as dynamic as a (post-)arrival point, as a space, a process of displacement and emplacement, and of change and exchange in identities and perspectives. However, considering those who did not arrive it would be interesting to know what they might have endured. What if the dead are endowed with life and given voice to narrate their routes and their internal struggles in coping with the new societies hosting them temporarily before their last journey into survival? Against this backdrop, this essay analyses the novel of Omar El Akkad – *What Strange Paradise* (2021).

What Strange Paradise turns a deathscape into a death-escape, and thus, manifests the power of fiction in delivering new insights and new possibilities. The novel is a fictionalised rendition of the occurrence of the Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, whose body washed up on the Greek seashore after a journey on one of the death boats in 2015. The ghastly spectacle of his small body laid out on the coast stunned the world; but, here, in this novel, he is given life in the character of Amir to proceed with his escape journey. The protagonists start their journey from Syria passing through Egypt before Amir mounts a feeble raft sailing with other strangers to a Greek island. In many ways, the Greek island per se, as a setting, is a frontier land and if considered in a more sophisticated reflection upon its geopolitical dynamics, it perhaps manifests the temporariness of stations, having in mind how Bhabha sees islands, "as being a sort of extra-territorial territories, . . . a space where a whole range of forms of illegality, forms of

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untimeliness are being practiced" (49:15 – 49:36). In this 'space', the soul is agitated, the mind is captured between a troubled memory and restless anticipation.

To capture these intensities, I am going to spotlight where the author illuminates subtle complexities impeding his characters' coexistence within each hosting community en route. These complexities are entangled politically and socially – not the least of which is discriminatory due to class, colour, and nationality. As such, the characters in the novel are precarious, fickle, self-reflexive, and primarily uneasy about framing their identities. I will investigate how the author elucidates multi-layered contests within selves and others on the boat and in communities regarded as familiar and non-foreign, for the characters are burdened by unresolved questions about their unreconciled past and unrelieved present and future. Mobility studies, in this respect, namely Greenblatt's contribution in his manifesto on mobility studies affords the theoretical basis for seeing the road as a precarious fulcrum for socio-political and historical constraints that lay their burdens on refuge seekers:

> *mobility studies should account in new ways for the tension between individual agency and structural constraint*. . . . And it is important to note . . . that moments in which the social structure applies the fiercest pressure on the individual may in fact be precisely those moments in which individuals are exercising the most stubborn will to autonomous movement. Mobility studies should be interested, among other things, in the way in which seemingly fixed migration paths are disrupted by the strategic acts of individual agents and by unexpected, unplanned, entirely contingent encounters between different cultures. (251-2, emphasis in original)

While Greenblatt showcases routes as "'contact zones' where cultural goods are exchanged" (251), Joris Schapendonk calls for a "mobilities turn" in migration studies. To Schapendonk, attention to the journey more than to the starting and arrival points

> complicates departures. . . At the same time, it challenges the finiteness of arrivals since a destination can be transformed into nothing more than another place of departure. . . . The focus on the supposedly "in-between phase" of migration introduces an ontological shift from settlement and permanency to mobility and process. This perspective suits better the turbulent character of contemporary migration. (12)

Arrival, as such and as the novel illustrates, is not a point in time and place, but rather a process that takes time and space until the protagonists reach the end, if it is ever reached.

The story of *What Strange Paradise* is told by the omniscient narrator switching events constantly between two different spatiotemporalities: before and after chapters. In 'After'-chapters, the author mediates the aftermath of the drowning boat on the island and displays the perspectives and intensities of a variety of inhabitants in the hosting land. The 'Before'-chapters trace Amir's refugee route with his family from Homs to Egypt, fleeing away from the barrel bombs falling over their neighbourhood to an unsettling accommodation in an unwelcoming atmosphere. By chance, Amir joins strange people on a boat without any idea of their destination. The intersection between what happened before and is happening thereafter cuts the narrative into two parallel worlds that are meticulously designed to present a compact story that eventually dispenses with prejudice and presumptions. Like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, the dialogues, as well as the narrative, interlock answering some questions, but also raising others. Moreover, the narrative abundantly evidences incidents where these migrants and refugees are exploited en route and in the hosting communities where they are rejected.

Amir meets Vänna, a local teenager from the island, and both become friends in spite of the obstacle of their speaking different languages. In juxtaposition to their readiness to accept each other sits another scene recalled by Amir in one of the 'Before'-chapters, before he steps onto the boat. His mother regularly watches Egyptian soap operas to learn and master speaking like the locals with their own dialect so that she can socialise easily and blend into her new neighbourhood with less trouble. To sound like an Egyptian seems roughly possible for a Syrian, yet certainly, the complexities impeding her coexistence within the hosting community are much more entangled.

> [S]he ever hoped to avoid the immigrants' markup, every last trace of home in her voice had to be wiped clean. She needed to sound like the place in which she hoped to restart her life. Sometimes when Amir listened to his mother talk with the other women who lived nearby, women who had fled from the same place she

had, he heard them say that what really mattered were other things: the colour of one's skin, the country of one's birth, the size of one's inheritance. But his mother always argued that what mattered most was to speak in a way that mimicked the majority tongue, to sound exactly like them. And even if those other things mattered more, this was all she could change. (El Akkad 33)

Amir continues recounting, a few lines later, how she acts differently and how she is called by different names in different places and on different occasions. "In moments such as these it was difficult to think of her as a single person, the same person he'd known all his life" (33). Her attitude of emulating the Egyptian accent and normalising her multiple identities reveal the trials and tribulations she undergoes in trying to fit in. In this regard, Greenblatt's thoughts on Mobility studies are worth mentioning, where

> [m]obility often is perceived as a threat – a force by which traditions, rituals, expressions, beliefs are decentered, thinned out, decontextualized, lost. In response to this perceived threat, many groups and individuals have attempted to wall themselves off from the world or, alternatively, they have resorted to violence. (252)

Significantly, the narrator – at the point of Amir's futile attempt to fathom the core of his mother's trouble with her identity – adeptly switches the reader's attention to another landscape, one of a myriad colonial histories. The narrator then shines a close light on the city of Alexandria where Amir's family ends up living. "It was a place sick with the ruins of colonial beauty" (El Akkad 34). Then the successive cultures that reigned over this land are introduced:

> British and French and Italian Villas, which stood on the graves of the Mamluk palaces, which stood on the graves of the Ottoman mosques, which stood on the graves of the Greek and Roman temples, which stood on the graves of myriad nameless and ancient villages long ago swallowed by the sea. (34)

In contemplation, the narrator muses: "Everywhere these identities warred and the warring produced *no victorious identity*, no identity at all, only the sense of manifold incompleteness, the universal aftertaste of

conquest" (34, emphasis added). This reflection overshadows his mother's dilemma; she also lives with 'no victorious identity' and overall it reminds us of the integrative struggle between what Greenblatt calls "structural constraint" and the "individual agency" (251). Agency in terms of holding power in leading their lives is not pursued saliently by Amir's family. Perhaps the visibility of their hardship and their dire need to pay for their lives in the eyes of the hosting societies propounds a less sophisticated form of agency and urgency which the narrative spotlights. We find that the recognition of their sheer human right to survive is set in opposition to the authoritative negligence of addressing this increasing flux of communities of displaced people. In effect, the visibility demanded by Amir's family vs the invisibility practised by the Egyptian government unfolds the dynamic intensity of this 'contact zone' and its impact on shaping and reshaping the characters' interactions with their surroundings. This is evident in the following scene. Before reflecting on the cacophony of his mother's words, Amir's attention had been caught by an interview on the television: "An old man with an ill-fitting military uniform stood at a podium, talking about a cure for all diseases. He praised the ingenuity of the Egyptian military for devising an end to illness, and added that it (the new invention) would soon mark another glorious chapter in the country's already glorious history" (El Akkad 30). And because it is "nonsense" (30), as his uncle affirms, Amir thinks about many unsettling things such as their unsettled situation in this country, their poor chance of recruitment and their being rejected because of who they are. All these factors may justify his mother's pressing need and desire to blend with the Egyptian people.

Parenthetically, El Akkad, in his interview with "The Sunday Magazine" of *CBC* Canada in June 2021, speaking about the insights of his novel, refers to the exploitation of Syrians in Egypt by manipulating prices: like raising the rentals and lowering the wages (4:10 – 4:58). What needs to be underlined here is the narrative manifestation of the fractured unsettled historical identities (colonial and postcolonial) cobbled, on one side, with social complexities (class and race discrimination) and with political dysfunction on the other side. All of that sheds light on the individuals' unsettled and restless identities. The fractured identity is not only of Amir's mother's linguistic dilemma but deeply rooted in other

identification taxonomies that are unnaturalised such as religion. This is clearly displayed in the following example, which also draws upon the intensity of regional politics. When the family crosses the Jordanian border to the Egyptian side, readers know that the Utus family are devastated because of the loss of their home, and divided because of being split in loyalty to the regime – into allies and opponents. In a climax to their misery, on the Egyptian border, they are suspected of being spies, even though they have their passports stamped with legal visas. The following conversation takes place at the checkpoint:

> "You Muslim?" the guard asked.
> "Yes, Sir."
> "But Shia."
> Quiet Uncle shrugged and looked down. The guard flipped through the pages of each passport, unconcerned with the visas, looking for something else, something he didn't find. He shook his head.
> "You're lying," he said. "You're Jews."
> Quiet Uncle looked around, hoping for some other senior officer to intervene. None did.
> "How can we be Jews?" Quiet Uncle asked. "Listen, listen – do we sound like Jews?"
> "You're spies," the guard said. "They train their spies to sound like your people."
> "We're not," Quiet Uncle pleaded, exasperated. "I swear to God we're not." (El Akkad 16-7)

Lacking evidence to hold them, they are moved on, passing by "the soldiers and through the checkpoint, under the eye of a massive billboard on which was painted a crude portrait of a different Leader and, below that, words of congratulations on his victory in the upcoming election" (17-8). While the ironic undertone here about the national politics tells of their uneven passing towards Egypt and foretells of their onerous life there, the capitalised 'Leader' overshadows the bitter reality that the family has changed their place of residence fleeing from a dictatorial regime to find itself tethered once again by challenging constraints of another authoritarian dysfunctional regime. In essence, as the narrative shows, the suspension of misery for these people en route is likely not possible. The accumulating poignant anxieties shape and reshape Amir's awareness of

what it means to be an outcast, an undesired refugee, not only later on the Greek island but also within the Arab countries and on the way to the unknown, to that better future that the passengers on the boat set sail for, the future that he cannot define.

The pervasive xenophobic sentiments on the island referred to intensely in the 'After'-chapters and represented mainly by Colonel Kethros, provide a background to understand Amir's choices in his continuous struggle to escape. When the war-injured colonel lost his leg, he was assigned to "lead(ing) the island's efforts at rounding up the illegals" (77). For him, runaway refugees need to be taken to the registration centre because they are not "[o]rdinary criminals (who) commit ordinary crimes" (114); they are "unregistered illegal(s)" (116). The deteriorating living situation in the camp, including the cramped space and the lack of water and hygiene are not considered by Colonel Kethros as significant reasons for the refugees' insistence on hitting the road. Arguably, these reasons for displaced people forcibly lodged into such temporary abodes function as reminders of their ingrained sense of unbelonging to a rejecting environment and, more significantly, as this paper argues, these reasons indicate the temporariness of stations and their contribution in (un)making the refugees' unsettled state of mind. When Kethros finally has a firm grip on Amir, he pours out his anger onto the child who does not understand his language. Kethros tells Amir that even those who demonstrate for the refugees' right to a better life are hypocrites:

> But you should know what you are . . . You are the temporary object of their fraudulent outrage, their fraudulent grief. They will march the streets on your behalf, they will write to politicians on your behalf, they will cry on your behalf, but you are to them in the end nothing but a hook on which to hang the best possible image of themselves. Today you are the only boy in the world and tomorrow it will be as though you never existed. (230-1)

When Kethros "drags Amir backward, grips him by the neck, pushes him against the back wall" to take him to the registration centre, "Amir screams. He kicks at the colonel, he thrashes and claws, but is easily subdued" (231). The case of facilitating refugees' passing through European borderlands is not an issue that is not targeted in the discussion of this

paper. Yet, as this case has been controversial politically, ethically, and publicly, the narrative negotiates such repercussions allowing fiction to weave different perspectives and multiple interactions into the whole story. For example, the crudeness of individuals like Colonel Kethros is juxtaposed by the sympathy of other characters, and as such, the author introduces a complex 'Other' who is non-homogeneous, opaque and less predictable. In the 'After'-chapters, by meeting other supportive characters we see the people on the island as multiple and diverse and in constant discord – which is also the case of the passengers on the decrepit raft in the 'Before'-chapters. However, by meeting these people of different attitudes in the worlds he knows through his escape journeys, Amir's sense of loss is intensified rather than attenuated. For example, sectarian and religious belonging is further illustrated as a problematic issue when Amir is to be taken ashore to the mainland by a kind local ferryman. The ferryman asserts that the boy will be embraced by

> "[h]is people, they take care of their own. Do you know his sect, his ancestry, his hometown?"
> "No," Vänna replies.
> "They'll help him anyway; they're not going to turn their backs on a little boy all alone. But it's better if . . . you know." (232, ellipses in original)

This detail alludes to the unending anxieties Amir, and the people like him, undergo not only throughout their journey but also subsequently. Between his homeland and the borderland (and what may come hereafter), Amir's journey on the raft was grievous and most strenuous; it deepened the layers of his mental and physical estrangement. In the following passage, evidence of internal conflict, racism, and villainy on deck, contrasted with naive futile ambitions to survive, is to be underscored. While the road from Syria to Egypt, where he temporarily stays, has been steeped in incessant anxieties, Amir's perilous journey in the raft together with other anonymous insecure people from all walks of life attests to the contestation and rejection experienced within a group that is expected to show sympathy for each other for the ostensibly simple reason that they are being lumped together under the same umbrella. The 'Before'-chapters are fraught with riots among passengers, mainly with Mohamed (the smuggler's apprentice); they can be labelled as the burden-chapters, the burden

of traumatised and unreconciled memory. The passengers' expectations of a smooth passing to the other side of the Mediterranean, safe and secure, fade away against the brutality of Mohamed. With his gun and sharp tongue, Mohamed significantly manages to seize control over the beguiled customers until the boat capsizes and they all lose their lives. However, the closer death approaches, the more his agency collapses. This occurs in what I would call a dispossession process whereby the passengers gradually dispense with their properties, beliefs and all that defines them until they reach a state of apathy and melt into nothingness. At the beginning, passengers are described as "a vast mixture of ethnicities and spoken languages and colors of skin" (50), holding onto their small luggage, clothes and views. They barely speak to each other, fully suspicious of each other's intentions. Soon, when Mohamed's lies are disclosed, they realise they are literally all in the same boat. "Something communal, a relief-born friendliness, now took hold among the passengers. They began to talk to one another" (70) telling of their hopes, thoughts, miseries, and escape routes. Maher, the Palestinian, and Teddy, the Eritrean, both introduced as educated persons exchange talks with Kamal and Walid, sometimes with Umm Ibrahim and always with Mohamed. Shortly before the boat crumbles, they become sullen and desperate; even Mohamed's threatening howls turn hollow. He eventually

> had lost their superficial obedience. . . . Because now the men and women, who, in undertaking this passage, had *shed* their belongings and their roots and their safety and their place of purpose and all claim to agency over their own being, had now finally *shed* their future. (191-2, emphasis added)

We see Umm Ibrahim appalled and deranged; she "pulled her niqab completely off" as a last gesture of her dispossession (215), keeping in mind that the most important dispossession such passengers frequently experience is the stripping away of their identities, their stories, and their names and being turned into figures (numbers) by the mainstream media. What the author here manages to do is to expose layer by layer contesting mental and emotional disruptions among a non-homogeneous mass of people of different biographies and aspirations. Accordingly, their convictions meet and part in their disputes to provide multiplicity in visions and perspectives.

As such, spaces of mobility are dynamic in as much as they do not interrogate the collective, but they do test the individual. Kudzai Matereke's article on African mobility criticised "[d]ominant discourses of globalisation" that "accord high currency to homogeneity while simultaneously playing down the multiplicity and heterogeneity of experiences in the distinct spatial and temporal zones of the globe" (114). By yielding to this multiplicity, we take for granted the protagonists' multiple transactions within themselves and with each other's questioning, as critics, their choices and become involved deeper in their escalating predicaments. The narrative allocates a wide space for showcasing the passengers' tense and erratic communications. For example, when a passenger is found dead from the cold temperatures, Walid dares, amid the denouncement of others, to try to check his pockets before throwing him into the water – which is both ethically and religiously controversial. He defends himself: "'Don't look at me like that. . . . Everyone here is thinking it. What, better the fish should keep it?'" (El Akkad 176). We see Walid grab Amir's lifejacket after the crushing of the boat and when the latter resists, he "pinned Amir by the throat . . . and slapped (him) across the face" (216-7). These passengers are driven by the sheer instinct for survival and to this end they will do anything, which may tell of their transient change of humour or their natural idle selves. For instance, Mohamed's brutality is displayed both in his physical threats to the passengers, and in his scourging words:

> You sad, stupid people. Look what you've done to yourselves. . . . Go ahead, change your country, change your name, change your accent, pull the skin right off your bones, but in their eyes they will always be engines and you will always, always be fuel. (179)

While this statement describes systemic discrimination in the Western capitalistic machinery referred to elsewhere in the narrative (109, 161, 178), it also draws attention to the fact that these passengers are victims of a chain of reasons, beliefs, and conjunctures: their countries and their people, on one side, and the host societies, on the other side. Above all, they are victims of themselves, which is the most poignant element in creating this tragedy. All this profoundly contributes to the passengers' volatile tempers and contradictory behaviours.

Mohamed's position amplified and exemplified in other situations drawn upon in on-boat chapters is counterposed by another image that manifests his fragility and frustration. Mohamed is soon to recognise the absurdity of his words and his unnecessary rage and accusations because he himself is earning a living from this job in order to "run his own migrant fleet one day" (179). He also shows a sense of morality on the occasion of the dead man on deck; he reprobates Walid's insistence to steal from the man and reproaches him saying: "You tiny, tiny man" (176). The broader image here portrays Mohamed as a victim as well as a victimiser in a predominant social, economic, and political system fraught with paradox and injustice. In the long run, stripped of their agency (possessions and dignity), the passengers and their tormentors become equal before death. Another episode that witnesses a change in the perspectives of the subjects on this road is the retrospection of Amir's uncle in the last moments before death. When hope of survival diminishes, Quiet Uncle approaches Amir and says in a moment of revelation, "I thought my brothers were selfish and stupid for speaking up (for standing against the Syrian regime). But the truth is we're all selfish and stupid" (195). Aside from the way the characters reflect upon their own troubles, sometimes even without completely denying their roles and responsibilities in creating these troubles and forging their misery, my point of emphasis here is to highlight the en route interplaying complexities which affect the identification of these characters and largely redefine their personae.

A further point that the novel effectively accomplishes is to give voice to the voiceless who in such tragic events will be designated as missing or be pronounced dead. Their incarnated voices have endowed them with a visibility that surmounts the invisibility of death. The novel here in imagining the ordeals of the dead, in giving them names and portraying their decrepit hopes and conflicting views and emotions, echoes what Homi Bhabha in one of his keynote speeches articulated, about survivors of death-boats, an "Eritrean man says, 'these people, the dead, have human rights' because any of us could be in that position" (Schulze-Engler 10). Bhabha continues:

> It is deeply tragic and poignant that the same argument about the change in life circumstances can be deployed by this man to talk about death. He said, "we could

be dead at any point", rather than voicing the usual argument, "we could be different at any point", or "we could save ourselves". (10)

The issue here is not the "natality/fatality dialectic" (10), nor is it the issue in the novel, nor is it necropolitical in determining who deserves to die and who deserves to live. While it is of "ethical position[ing]" to Bhabha (10), it is of representation in the narrative of the road and of the visibility of the *dispossessed* subjects of their voices, names and, in consequence, their identities.[1] The narrated life of the dead, of what they could have experienced, not only narrates their unsettled identities but also generates the rhetorical question raised at the beginning of this essay and that the novel raises: what if the dead are given a voice, and thus, a chance to narrate their misery? In the novel, the drowning scene comes as a culmination of the passengers' hardship. In this scene, Amir is pulled down to the bottom of the sea by the troubled waters and the jostling of the passengers. The author here creates a fantasy for these people where their differences, whether ethnic, religious, or national, melt away. In the depth of the sea, the boy fancies seeing all the people he once knew

> in their old lives and their new lives waiting, and from each drew confession and each he felt into as though there were no barrier between them, no silo of self to keep a soul waiting. What beautiful rebellion, to feel into another, to feel anything at all. And then he surfaced. (El Akkad 223)

Nevertheless, Amir's survival and the chance he is given in the narrative to proceed on his journey and to tell about the tribulations of the road turn out to be adeptly contrived by the unreliable narrator. With the title 'Now', the last chapter narrates a normal day on the island of loud music, tourists bustling, and rescuing units walking around piles of luggage's and corpses including a dead body of a child made to appear like Amir. This twisting plot brings us back to the first line of the novel of a common reality: "The child lies on the shore," (1) that promises a life full of

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[1] Although the narrator is given the agency of a witness that the writer does not have – which means the novel is not archival or autobiographical – the narrative registration can be seen as part of "cultural production" [Agnew 2020]. Agnew's argument draws on Hulme's and Arendt's thoughts on stories told by voices other than the implicated, that these stories are valid where "the telling of individuals' tales restores human dignity to them, and so constitutes an effective protest against the detention of refugees" (20).

possibilities when a few pages later the boy "opens his eyes" (5), driving us, readers, through the journey until reality prevails over fiction.

Between death and life, between reality and fiction lies a space of myriad potentials of compromising horrendous situations imposed by en route 'structural constraints', whether social, political, or historical. And although the assumption that "mobilities are often failed, unrealised, and unachievable" (Matereke 114) in comparison to the points of arrival, Matereke confirms that "[w]e need to go beyond generalisation to understand im/mobility experiences in their specificities" (115). The process of movement in time and place endows subjects on the move (in)transient transitions of their convictions, habits and all of what defines them in these discomfort zones that often impose on them undesirable interactions with others and with the transient places (structures) they pass by. Through the aesthetics and subtleties of the novel genre, literary representations, as in the novel *What Strange Paradise* (2021), allow untold stories to ripen and mature, to earn size and volume challenging as such "the finiteness of arrivals" (Schapendonk 12) in detailing the infiniteness and multiplicity of the self on the road.

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The Refugee Camp Between Displacement and Emplacement in Ben Rawlence's *City of Thorns*

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Introduction

Most forced migrants cross through at least one refugee camp on their journeys, some in passing, but others spend years, sometimes even decades, in them. So-called 'protracted refugee situations', i.e., cases where forced migrants remain in limbo for more than five years, are on the rise. In most of these cases, it means that people are stuck in a camp. As the historian Peter Gatrell explains, "[t]he experiences of countless refugees in the African continent have been bound up with the refugee camp" (241). This means that today forced migration, perhaps contrary to what one might believe, is to a large degree characterised by immobility.

Because they are of such central importance to journeys of forced migration, much of the contemporary literature narrating these journeys also sets foot in a camp at one point. One of these texts is Ben Rawlence's *City of Thorns* (2016). Unlike many others, it does not only pass through a camp but is entirely set there.[1] The common understanding that the refugee camp is a temporary space of transit or a sort of 'non-place' is therefore rebutted. Instead, it paints the picture of a place where people live and which they call home. Refugee camps are the sites of humanitarian catastrophes but at the same time places where people live their day-to-day lives. They may offer a momentary refuge from what the people are fleeing from and from the challenges they are still to meet, yet they themselves are full of hardships and dangers. This essay discusses the tension

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[1] Examples of the former are, to name but a few, Atia Abawi's *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes* (2019), Fabio Geda's *In the Sea there are Crocodiles* (2015) or Emma Jane Kirby's *The Optician of Lampedusa* (2017).

that comes with this, the camp being the setting of both displacement and emplacement at the same time.

Ben Rawlence is a writer, journalist and former researcher for Human Rights Watch. *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp*, which was published in 2016, is his second book. It is based on multiple long visits to Dadaab, a complex of refugee camps in eastern Kenya near the border with Somalia, and research he conducted as part of his position with Human Rights Watch. Dadaab consists of three camps – Dagahaley, Hagadera and Ifo – and had a registered population of over 200.000 in 2019. Until 2011, there were close to 500,000 people living there, which made it the largest refugee camp in the world at the time, whereas today it is the third largest. Its population is largely Somali.

The Camp as an Urbanized Cosmos

City of Thorns can be seen as a series of interspersed portraits of fictionalised camp inhabitants that Rawlence encountered during his time as a researcher. To this, the author repeatedly adds details about the overarching political conditions that affect life in the camps. With the help of multiple characters and their individual storylines, he illustrates how a camp such as Dadaab becomes its own cosmos. It has its own internal logic, social order, structures, and institutions along with its own economic market. It makes sense that the camp is constantly described as a "city" throughout the novel. Right at the beginning, Rawlence remarks:

> How to describe to people who have never visited, the many faces of that city? The term 'refugee camp' is misleading. Dadaab was established in 1992 to hold 90,000 refugees fleeing Somalia's civil war. At the beginning of 2016 it is twenty-five years old and nearly half a million strong, an urban area the size of New Orleans, Bristol or Zurich unmarked on any official map . . . . (2)

The camp's market contributes decisively to its urbanisation. The novel goes into its workings at length, describing what goods are traded and with whom (46; 65). The market is also where many of the novel's characters find employment and earn the necessary cash to supplement their food rations. Many of them come from smaller villages or from families

with nomadic backgrounds and must adapt to the hustle and bustle of the camp, an inevitable effect of its sheer size, at first. The effect of urbanity is especially generated in comparison to the camp's direct surroundings, which are "sparsely populated and economically underdeveloped" (Pérouse de Montclos and Kagwanja 206). Significantly, "Dadaab was the largest economy of the region" (Rawlence 176). Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos and Peter Mwangi Kagwanja explain that: "After a certain period of time, refugees appear to be some sort of 'urban dwellers in the making' and camps to be a preliminary step towards urbanisation. For pastoral people especially, the cosmopolitan make-up of the camps and the change to a sedentary lifestyle play a major role in this regard" (206). Anthropologist Michel Agier shares this assessment but at the same time scrutinises and puts a limit to it:

> The Dadaab example shows that the process of the camp is indeed that of a town in the making: an embryonic economy . . .; a social division adapted to the plurality of constraints and resources . . .; an occupation of space that, however precarious, gives meaning to a place that was originally deserted and is already no longer so . . . [e]verything happens 'as if' it was a town. Everything is potential, and yet nothing develops . . . . The camp, even when stabilized, remains an amputated town, bare by definition. (145)

This potential he alludes to is certainly palpable in the novel as is this notion of pretence, which we will go into more detail on later. Adding to the question of whether or not the camp can be called a city, Liisa Malkki opens up the question of why urbanisation *should* be regarded as desirable in the first place and why urban development is seen as an indicator of the quality of life in a refugee camp (355). But, although the comparison can only hold up until a certain degree and, Malkki is right to argue, should not be seen as normative, it gives an expression to the fact that the camp space in *City of Thorns* has become a permanent place of residence for its inhabitants.

Caught up in the In-between Space of the Camp

The fact of its permanence, however, is not officially recognised. Rawlence remarks that:

> No one wants to admit that the temporary camp of Dadaab has become perma-
> nent: not the Kenyan government who must host it, not the UN who must pay for
> it, and not the refugees who must live here. This paradox makes the ground un-
> steady. Caught between the ongoing war in Somalia and a world unwilling to wel-
> come them, the refugees can only survive in the camp by imagining a life else-
> where. It is unsettling: neither the past, nor the present, nor the future is a safe
> place for a mind to linger for long. To live in this city of thorns is to be trapped
> mentally, as well as physically, your thoughts constantly flickering between im-
> possible dreams and a nightmarish reality. In short, to come here you must be
> completely desperate. (5)

Rawlence uses spatial terminology, such as 'caught between' or 'flickering between', here in order to locate his characters in the in-between space of the camp.

The truth is that there is no real other option for people than to remain in the camp. Different characters in the text go through what could be perceived as other options, illegally settling in Kenya outside of the camp, returning to their home country or resettlement elsewhere, but neither are presented as valid alternatives. Life in Nairobi is just as, if not more, precarious than in the camp (180). The thought of returning awakes fears in the light of uncertainty, especially for those who were in the camp for a long time or who were even born there: "Kenya was a familiar tyrant. After twenty-five years, Somalia was a foreign country" (349). And even those who get the rare opportunity for resettlement, a generally lengthy and often uncertain process, like Kheyro who was chosen for one of few scholarships to a Canadian university, feel sad upon leaving: "It would be difficult to leave. She knew everything about her neighbours in A2, their characters, how they walked, laughed, snored even. She had seen the children crawl, totter, walk and marry and give birth to their own. She would be sad to say goodbye" (187). The camp is their home, mostly by necessity, but, as we can see, this does not mean that one cannot develop an emotional connection to it. What is more, the novel stresses that leaving must not mean leaving behind all problems, whether they existed before the camp or were picked up there, such as Muna's drug addiction that she developed as a result of the immense stress that she endured in the camp: "I heard in Australia there is khat too. Oh no!" (305).

In this way, the novel deviates from the dominant narrative of forced migration in which the camp is but an obstacle to be overcome and which usually ends with their protagonists' arrival somewhere that is deemed a 'safe' new place of residence, most often located in Europe or the Global North. The author alludes to the fact that it is precisely the predominance of this narrative that reinforces the problem concerning the pending status of the camp and that Kenya, as the camp's host nation, contributes to this significantly: "Kenya had succeeded in constructing an official narrative about the camp, one that had an ending. And even though it was a fantasy, that narrative arc cast a cruel shadow. Daily life simply got harder" (339). By pretending that the camp is only a passage in the migrants' journeys, the Kenyan government aims to avoid having to concede its de facto permanence, which would signify taking on a new and much more complex set of responsibilities.

Psychological Challenges Associated with Indefinite Waiting

What the text describes is a situation that many real-life forced migrants currently find themselves in:

> refugees in protracted situations find themselves trapped in a state of limbo: they cannot go back to their homeland, in most cases because it is not safe for them do so; they are unable to settle permanently in their country of first asylum, because the host state does not want them to remain indefinitely on its territory; and they do not have the option of moving on . . . . (Crisp 1)

Officially, there are three solutions to issues regarding forced migration in the UNHCR's repertoire: repatriation, integration in the land of asylum and resettlement in a third country. The camp is not one of them. It becomes the default response to forced migration, however, as, with conflicts stretching out over the years, repatriation ceases to be an option, and those fleeing are denied the option of integration or resettlement. This leads Maja Janmyr to locate the refugee camp "between the temporary and the permanent" (112). As we have seen, its in-betweenness applies both on a temporal as well as on a spatial level. Although such in-betweenness might be associated with feelings of displacement, the text illustrates how emplacement can take place under such unlikely conditions. Although

initially not by choice, over time, its inhabitants build a connection to the camp that defies the ever-present uncertainty, while, of course, they are still being subjected to it.

The opposition of these two forces working against one another is repeatedly expressed in the text. The passage quoted here points our attention to the fact that this uncertain state of limbo is immensely psychologically challenging:

> No one wants to admit that the temporary camp of Dadaab has become permanent: not the Kenyan government who must host it, not the UN who must pay for it, and not the refugees who must live here. This paradox makes the ground unsteady. Caught between the ongoing war in Somalia and a world unwilling to welcome them, the refugees can only survive in the camp by imagining a life elsewhere. It is unsettling: neither the past, nor the present, nor the future is a safe place for a mind to linger for long. To live in this city of thorns is to be trapped mentally, as well as physically, your thoughts constantly flickering between impossible dreams and a nightmarish reality. In short, to come here you must be completely desperate. (Rawlence 5)

The City of Thorns presents us with a spectrum of people psychologically affected, some so badly that they resort to chewing the narcotic khat that circulates widely within the camp. The author stresses, however, that it is not the camp as such that is the main culprit but the failure to acknowledge its permanence.

The detrimental effects of this are especially present in the novel's younger characters, who grew up in the camp. Rawlence points out how their upbringing is essentially determined by and unique to the camp environment. It introduces them to perspectives outside of their traditional cultures. An important factor in this is the UNHCR and its training courses:

> The youth of the camp saw themselves as leaders-in-waiting: indeed they had been encouraged in that vision by the rhetoric of countless NGO workshops and trainings. They adopted the political correctness, the bureaucratic habits and even the

dress of the NGOs, and they spoke in clichés. Words like 'democracy', 'transparency', and 'accountability' were to them like new outfits. Having marinated in the UN vocabulary their whole life they had a nave idea of the outside world: that there was a standard, a normality that existed somewhere, in America, in Europe, in the United Nations, for which they were practising. (245)

In spite of this, they retain a sense of optimism:

> The second half of the speech was motivational: 'We are refugees by status but not by choice;' Tawane said. 'We are not vulnerable people, we are super humans. Refugee is a state of mind. Look at the examples of Madeleine Albright, of K'naan.' It was a valiant effort, but it was more an expression of faith than experience. And that was the contradiction of Dadaab. To many of the educated young people coming up behind Tawane and trapped in the camp, Tawane's vision might have seemed like a distant dream. To the tens of thousands denied a place at primary or even secondary school, to the grinning boys pressed up against the mesh windows, it was in practice almost meaningless. And yet, the defining characteristic of the young people in the camp was a surfeit of brimming optimism: a conviction that life for them had not yet begun; even Fish, the wrong side of thirty, spoke in the future tense. Among the rowdy kids outside was a budding teacher, a doctor and a premier league football player. (246)

The optimism conveyed here is unfounded, as the novel stresses by referring to Fish's age. From this results an insurmountable intergenerational conflict between the camp youth and their elders, who were accultured outside of the camp according to more traditional value sets. Some traditions, like weddings, cannot be practised in the same manner due to the financial constraints of camp life and some values need to be adapted to the new material circumstances (120). For instance, in "Somali culture one wishes others *bash* – the blessing of the rain – but no one does that in Dadaab any more. For the farmers and the nomads, the rain was the rhythm and compass of life. But in a makeshift city, atop hard stone, with no drainage and no sewage, water brought new terrors: flooding and disease" (125). Most importantly, their different socialisations lead to insurmountable differences between those born in the camps and their parents: "Tawane stood on a threshold. He was a new kind of person from his parents. But the bonds of the old world were still visceral, still strong.

He was a prisoner of guilt and of fear. The fear belonged to his parents but the guilt was his own: at having survived, at not remembering" (145).

However, the novel stresses that these differences lead to nothing: "Having acquired all the educational garlands possible, they had reached Dadaab's glass ceiling and were eager for a bigger life elsewhere" (149). A life elsewhere, as we know, is unattainable for most. In their leadership roles within the camp, they still hold immense responsibility, but without receiving the appropriate compensation and/or prestige. As Rawlence puts it, they are "running a medium-sized city without a budget" (150). What little money they, or others engaged in other more profitable economic endeavours, make and are able to save, cannot be spent within the camp. There are no houses to be bought because permanent dwellings are not permitted, and owning a car is pointless given the movement restrictions (144). On top of this, Rawlence explains how mentally damaging it is to lose all prospects of a future, especially because it skewers with one's sense of time and makes present actions appear inconsequential:

> Life was only a process of waiting. And this was their problem too: in such circumstances, people are more inclined to act without consequences, without limits, to be caught by a hedonism of the senses or the indulgence of emotion, or the violent righteousness of religion. Nothing had any permanence, there was no building anything, since both the people you loved or the people you hurt could soon be gone. (107)

As Patricia Ehrkamp puts it, pointing to the central importance of camps and their perceived role as waiting grounds, "waiting is a central experience of contemporary refugees" (817).

The Refugee Camp as a 'Non-Place'?

In a sense, Rawlence's fictional refugee camp can, therefore, be likened to Marc Augé's non-place. According to him, non-places are phenomena produced by what he calls 'supermodernity' (Augé 34). They are the opposite of '(anthropological) places' and are defined as follows: "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned

with identity will be a non-place" (77 f.). He includes refugee camps on his list of examples: "The installations needed for the accelerated circulation of passengers and goods (high-speed roads and railways, interchanges, airports) are just as much non-places as the means of transport themselves, or the great commercial centres, or the extended transit camps where the planet's refugees are parked" (34). Although it appears drastic, 'parked' is a fitting word to describe the status of Rawlence's characters and in fact, closely resembles the vocabulary he uses to describe their situation. Augé further argues that the non-place is reigned by "actuality, the urgency of the present moment" (104). As we have seen, the same holds true for Rawlence's camp space, which is described as caught up in-between the past and an uncertain future. Without the ability to plan out a future, the only time that can be acted on is the present, so that the camp becomes a zone of temporality. The specific relationship between narrative place and time that Augé touches upon here can be best described in the words of Mikhail Bakhtin, who introduces different types of 'chronotopes' to describe different types of relationships between narrative place and time, such as the chronotope of threshold, which, according to him, is where "the temporal element predominates" over the spatial and "time is essentially instantaneous, . . . as if it has no duration and falls out of the normal course of biographical time" (243; 248). For Bakhtin, the threshold is a literary metaphor, but in the novel, this manifests spatially with the camp being fashioned as a transitory, if de facto permanent, space in between two stages of a migrant's life. As I mentioned earlier, actions that take place there appear inconsequential because the time spent in the camp is said not to count towards a person's biography.

Augé argues that in a non-place, people lose their individuality in favour of a shared temporary identity that is defined by anonymity and responds only to the function of the non-place: "a person entering the space of non-place is relieved of his usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer or driver. . . . The space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude" (103). This is where the novel's camp characterisation, which is the result of its multitude of different, individualised characters, decidedly differs from Augé's. Firstly, the camp does not exist in complete isolation. Rawlence stresses its economic

importance for the entire region. It is also "a major part of the coping mechanisms for the vulnerable across a whole region", with people entering to access the health care that is provided there, for instance (Rawlence 288). In this way it becomes intertwined with the surrounding areas and populations, meaning it does not exist in the kind of vacuum that would be characteristic of a non-place. Montclos and Kagwanja explain: "Camps are seldom isolated, as new local and international networks expand between them and their surrounding areas, as well as with other towns and diasporic groups" (206). Secondly, its inhabitants' time in the camp does not just consist of waiting, although that may play a significant part. They also find jobs, pursue careers, volunteer, become involved with the organisation of the camp, form friendships and relationships, and have children. The latter is most significant, as we can see when Guled's wife Maryam leaves without him: "With them gone, Ifo became again temporary, a transitional place. . . . Without Maryam's things and the children's clothes, and without the hope of money to oil his dreams of escape, the mud hut that had been their family home now resembled a cell" (Rawlance 261). In other words, family is what makes a place into a home.

The Question of Agency

Even if the camp is, to a very large degree, characterised by waiting, the question arises whether waiting must be seen as inactivity or whether it could also be active. Many of Rawlence's characters take action despite the uncertainty, such as starting families or businesses. This is more than just the pragmatic necessity of sustaining one's existence. Cathrine Brun uses the term 'agency-in-waiting' to describe what room for manoeuvre forced migrants have while living in camps. According to her, it "denotes the capacity to act in the present, in everyday time, based on the experience of displacement from the subject's history and a critical reflection of the future possibilities framed as waiting and hope. It does not indicate that people necessarily are able to control or shape their future" (24). The concept is illustrated well in the novel, which stresses that its characters possess more agency than what one may assume, even if that agency is heavily restricted and applies only to the present temporal dimension.

Its restrictions become especially clear when we witness the registration process of the camp together with Isha, one of the novel's many characters:

> Isha's name and those of her children were entered into the manifest on the computer. A wristband showed their family size in permanent marker. They smeared their fingerprints on the paper one by one and then a string around their upper arm graded their malnourishment. Isha had got them there just in time. Down the production line they went: interviewed about what had caused them to flee, immunized, wormed, injected with vitamin A, photographed with the webcam and issued with a health card. (Rawlence 90)

The register used here appears out of context. It consists of the vocabulary one would use to describe the herding of cattle, for instance. By creating a linguistic comparison between cattle and migrants, the latter are denied their agency. They are presented as though they were commodities to be handled by an outside party. The comparison even extends to the following page, where it is brought to a larger level when the novel discusses the practice of the refugee camp as such: "Hundreds of Sudanese refugees had been shipped from Kenya's western border with South Sudan on the other side of the country. Kenya liked to warehouse all its refugees in one place where someone else could be relied upon to feed them and where they were easily surveilled" (91). In other words, the nature of the camp as an institution means that its inhabitants' agency will always be restricted.

But nonetheless, the novel finds and points out pockets of agency and power. For one, it tells us about the political power the camp inhabitants hold:

> The approaching election raised the tension further. Although nominally full of aliens, the camp was in fact a key constituency: teeming with Kenyans and people with illegal Kenyan IDs, as well as large volumes of people who could be paid to ink their thumbs in favour of one candidate or another. In Kenyan elections poor people are a commodity and violence is an inexpensive campaign tool. (219)

The camp inhabitants are currently being used by others to further their political interests, but this nonetheless points to a potential. We can also spot traces of that in the camp youth's involvement in the organisational politics within the camp. Two characters, Tawane and Fish, for instance, found their own organisation and get a seat at the table (350). They are empowering themselves. But the camp and its provisions, especially the free education, also play a part in their possible empowerment: "With their newly minted English, the boys had written all over the tin door to their hut the proud declaration: 'PEOPLE WHO LIVE THIS HOUSE HAVE EDUCATION.' In case, even for a moment, they ever doubted that the journey had been worth it" (348). For Isha's family, all the hardship and restrictions endured are worth it in the end for the education of her children.

Conclusion

To conclude, the text shows us how fiction can be illustrative of the reality of the refugee camp between displacement and emplacement. It adds nuance to the idea that the refugee camp is an obstacle to be overcome and that a refugee camp narrative must thus end with the protagonists leaving the camp, a line which is followed by many other such novels. It shows instead that leaving is often not an option or, if it is, that it does not necessarily signify an improvement of living conditions or might require enormous sacrifices. The picture of the refugee camp that emerges in the process is more varied and nuanced than that which predominates current discourse. It is that of an almost urban cosmos. In fact, we can say that the refugee camp, as it is presented in *City of Thorns*, is characterised by the dichotomy between struggling to make a life and being at home, between waiting and agency, between feelings of displacement in a place that is supposed to be but a temporary shelter and its factually permanent emplacement. If you will, the camp itself could be described as emplaced displacement.

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Alienation à la Madeline: The Migration Experience of a French Woman in Radwa Ashour's *Blue Lorries*

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Migrant individuals in the Egyptian novel

In the postcolonial Egyptian novel, the stories of migrant individuals usually narrate the experiences of Egyptians or Arabs relocating to a foreign country, or non-native individuals living in Egypt. This essay is concerned with the migration experience of Madeleine, a French expatriate in Egypt in the novel *Farag* or *Blue Lorries* (2014 [originally 2008]) by the Egyptian author Radwa Ashour[1]. Before delving into Madeleine's story and analysing the representation of a Western feminine image, it is crucial to revisit briefly the recurring theme of this image in Arabic literature, particularly in Egyptian literature. This examination sheds light on the perpetuating stereotypes that have shaped the portrayal of western women, providing a valuable and necessary backdrop to the divergent depiction of Madeleine.

In an effort to contextualize, Rasheed El-Enany surveys the Western representations in Arabic literature and traces it from the contemporary period back to the late nineteenth century. Since this essay is interested in representations in Egyptian literature, it speaks solely of depictions within its scope. In doing so, it concurs with El-Enany's position on the term "the Arab World" being "loose" and "unscientific"; although "the Arab world is made up of Arabic-speaking communities that indeed share a common enough culture to justify the use of such a term, . . . significant distinctions exist, particularly in terms of socio-political and intellectual development" (205). El-Enany states that the depiction of the occident by Arabs and, by extension, Egyptians went through multiple phases,

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[1] I use the established English spelling of the authors' names and provide the correct transcription of names and titles, when necessary, throughout the paper.

depending on the response of the literati to colonialism. However, starting from the precolonial period up to the postcolonial, it oscillated between 'enchanted encounters' in which the western other is idealized, and challenging encounters in which the 'Fremdartigkeit' or the alienness of the European is emphasized (Wielandt 313). As further asserted by Rotraud Wielandt in an earlier study of the same thematic, narrative works published since the early 1930s in Egypt accentuated "the superiority of [the Egyptian self] over the European world view" (314).[2] Right after the postcolonial period, the East/West encounters in Egyptian literature favoured the liberated self, however, this view had a short life and was replaced by the 'humbled disillusioned' reflections of the Egyptian self in the aftermath of "the failure of the national cause despite the end of military colonization" (El-Enany 113).

Returning to the specificity of this paper's focus, Wielandt asserts that the Western female subject is a recurring theme with abundant presence in the Egyptian literature. She elaborates that these portrayals deal consistently with "bold creatures with an attractive appearance, who willingly give themselves up to Arabs sexually after they have met each other for a very short time" (490). Wielandt uses the term "leichtfertig", which can be translated in English to promiscuous or frivolous, to describe the cliché of the French woman presented in a blanket judgment by numerous prominent authors to their readers (489). Furthermore, she sustains that:

> These ladies are . . . with few exceptions all blond. Therefore, their hair color matches that by Susi, the prototype of the careless European in Tawfiq al- Hakims ʿUṣfūr min ash-sharq. Their eyes are usually blue, less often green. . . . The type of woman thus described has been represented in such large numbers in the narrative work of so many different well-known authors over the last thirty years that the public can very easily get the idea from novels and short stories that every European woman is a potential prostitute. (490-1)

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[2] All citations from Wielandt, in this paper, are my own abbreviated translations from the German original text.

Notwithstanding, by the end of the twentieth century and until the publication of *Blue Lorries* in 2008, the treatment of female Western subjects in literature has taken broader dimensions that go beyond the overworked patterns. Western women characters began to be depicted "as equal[s]", breaking free from the obsession with their physical appearance and the expression of their sexualities (El-Enany 87). Examples of such portrayals can be seen in the characters of Marsha in *Taghrīdat al-Bagaʿa* (2006) by Mikkāwī Saʿīd, and Brigitte in *al-ḥubb fī al-manfā* (1995) by Bahāʾ Ṭāhir. However, the portrayal of Madeleine, the subject of this article's investigation, is unique in presenting the character's experience through a non-stereotypical approach from multiple perspectives. Madeleine is portrayed as having a cultural identity that differs from the conventional Western feminine image in postcolonial Egyptian literature. Her story tackles the theme of migration with respect to displacement, emplacement, and alienation of a 'presumed other' while providing a nuanced and humanizing portrayal through allowing space for an in-depth direct speech. Madeleine's characterization does not follow a straight, unbroken line, nor does she represent "a universal spirit [that departs] from some fixed origin" with a story of predetermined begin and end, as argued by Stuart Hall in his exposé on the fluidity of cultural identities (226). Madeleine is depicted, not labelled, as a complex human being with insecurities, strengths, and flaws; other than that, Madeleine's bodily appearance, attire, and sexual ethics are not topics of interest or discussion in the novel.

Subversion of the dichotomy 'self and other'

Edward Said defines orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident'. Thus [,] a very large mass of writers, among whom are . . . novelists . . ., have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions . . . concerning 'the Orient', its people, customs, 'mind', destiny, and so on" (2-3). Against the backdrop of this definition, one finds Ashour offering a subversion or a reversal of this perspective. Here, the subaltern Middle Eastern sets the rules and constructs the world of the story of a Western subject. Ashour's story takes it even further by offering an alternative world where, both, the Western and the Eastern exhibit a human

experience at its finest while blurring the strict binary structure evoked by their presence, i.e., the self and the other. Furthermore, the text neither demonizes nor demoralizes the other, but humanizes it. In that sense, its examination becomes a stimulating experience.

To be precise, this essay aims to examine the experience of migration as it discloses notions of displacement and liminal spaces of dwelling as expressed by Madeleine. The following analysis shows that her encounter with migration produces a state of alienation that, to manifest itself, borrows Homi K. Bhabha's notion of liminality. Bhabha states that liminal spaces occupied by migrant individuals are sites of the "in-between" (321); however, cultures of hybridity are "neither the one thing nor the other" (49). Madeleine's alienation evokes this notion of hybridity, but not in the sense of an oscillation between two cultures, rather between two versions of history and reality, in other words, past and present.

Notwithstanding, the liminal space she occupies cannot be simply embraced by the previously mentioned dichotomy of the past and the present, other factors play an important role too, and contribute to her feelings of loss which will be discussed in detail in this essay. In an unsent letter to her daughter, she exhibits existential anxiety as she attempts to understand where things failed, but she ends her confrontation without a resolution. Madeleine experiences what Bhabha calls "the unbearable ordeal of the collapse of certainty" (214).

About the Author: Radwa Ashour

Radwa Ashour (1946) is an Egyptian writer, critic, and academic. She received her postgraduate education in Cairo and the United States. She was a professor of English literature at Ain Shams University and an activist engaged in the political struggles of her nation. Ashour had ample literary and non-literary production. Among her distinguished works is the famous edited volume *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide, 1873-1999,* which was first published in Arabic in 2004 and then in English in 2008.

What makes the readings of Ashour specifically interesting is that she is a very conscious writer. This is not only an assumption, but also how she describes herself as a writer; in a testimonial speech, Ashour states, "I am aware of the ideological element in what I write -- it is always present in writing by any author, but I am conscious of its presence" ("My Experience" 175). She adds,

> I am an Arab woman and a Third World citizen, and my heritage in both cases is stifled. I know this truth right down to the marrow of my bones, and I fear it to the extent that I write in self-defense and in defense of countless others with whom I identify or who are like me. I want to write because reality fills me with a sense of alienation. Silence only increases my alienation while confession opens me up so that I may head out toward the others or they may come to me themselves. (170)

Therefore, she writes because she wants to register histories and record voices. This makes undertaking a close reading of her account of a French woman's experience in Egypt a compelling intellectual journey, especially if we take into consideration the subversion of the notion of the subaltern within the binary structure of the silent and speaking, in which Ashour, the middle eastern woman gives voice to a western woman in distress.

Farag/Blue Lorries (2008/2014)

The novel narrates the life of Nada Abdel Qader Selim, from her childhood until she became almost 47 years old. Without a specific time frame, the events reveal a temporal setting starting at the Nasserite regime up to the beginning of the twenty-first century. The reader sees almost all the events from Nada's perspective, which develops with her growth as a character. At first, the girl describes the events in an abstract manner dominated by the nature of her age that lacks insightful depth, and then the narration unfolds with the accumulation of awareness. Her life intertwines with the lives of her close family members such as her parents, her twin brothers, her stepmother, and her close friends.

This discussion, however, is not about Nada; it is about her mother, who was not mentioned by her name, Madeleine, until almost halfway

through the novel. This essay investigates Madeleine's experience of migration against the background of the different locations she occupies. In her discussion of mapping intersectionality, Susan Friedmann approaches hybrid identities while "raising the meanings of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, and national origin as axes of difference constitut[ing] multiplex of identities and challenge binarist ways of thinking" (*Mappings* 4). She focuses on the "locational [aspect] that pays attention to the specificities of time and place," and invites the exploration of identities through other intersectional positions (5).

Using intersectionality as a methodology, this analysis examines how the different positions, in other words, nationality, language, geographical location, and familial ties affect Madeleine's encounters with dislocation leading up to the moment of purging or confession, writing the letter. These positions or aspects are identified by specific moments that unfold her experience, her character, and her unique subjectivity as a migrant in Egypt in the aftermath of the 1952 revolution.

Madeleine as a Mother and a Wife

From the outset of the novel, we meet Madeleine through the eyes of her daughter, as a mother of a young girl, whom she constantly guides and instructs, "say thank you to Monsieur, my mother tells me in French", "behave or else we will cancel our visit to your father" (Ashour, *Blue Lorries* 1-2). At the same moment, we know she is a French lady residing with her family in Egypt, and a little later we also know she has political opinions and does "not agree with everything [her] country's government does!" (18), as she exclaims when her daughter accuses her teasingly of favouring French colonization.

Still, through the eyes of her daughter Nada, we are introduced to her other role as the wife of an imprisoned man, a holder of a PhD from the Sorbonne, who got imprisoned because he "disagreed with officers who held a different opinion . . . [and who think that] the system must be run their way" (12), as she explains to her 8 years old daughter asking about the sudden disappearance of her father. Madeleine answers her daughter's perplexities with patience and persistence. When she cannot reason

with her, she picks up the large red book of the atlas to tell her stories of geography and history (3-18). So, we also learn through this and later incidents that Madeleine is educated or at least literate.

Madeleine and Language Barrier

Migration, as it unfolds through Madeleine's character, is associated with feelings of irreconcilable alienation, dislocation, loss and unbelonging. Despite marrying an Egyptian and living in Egypt for many years, Madeleine does not speak nor understand Arabic. So, her daughter was the translator or the "gofer" all her life, who learned to transfer information through a "sieve" that does not contaminate "the waters flowing between" her mother and the family of her father (20-1). As a result, Madeleine never got the true message, as it was; Nada always added her touch by holding back words or whitewashing reproaches. Madeleine acknowledges this years later in her unfinished and unsent letter to her daughter.

Migrants or relocated individuals respond variably to displacement. This "condition of liminality, of being at the threshold, or in-between sociocultural, economic, political, and ideological contradictions [pushes] subjects constantly to negotiate these conflicting ideologies in order to make a life for themselves in the metropolis" (Fongang 139). However, what happens here is different; Madeleine does not attempt to open up or negotiate her alienated position, she rather contemplates it. One of the manifestations of this status is the problem of language; Arabic remains a barrier for her to fully integrate with the socio-cultural sphere. She repeatedly mentions in the famous letter that she did not understand most of the people around her in a helpless manner as if this act of incomprehension was imposed on her.

In a moment marked as a translation problem by her daughter, after the passing of Nada's grandfather, Madeleine behaves in a manner that causes a permanent rift with her in-laws. Below is a narration of this episode through the eyes of Nada in the novel:

> At my grandfather's house the woman wailed. . . . [All of them were] sitting on the floor despite the seats that line the wall. I asked my aunt, who explained to me that such were the rites of mourning in our part of the world, and I passed this information along to my mother when she asked. She said, "But I don't want to sit on

the floor!" With that, she seated herself on a chair, crossed her legs, and lit a cigarette! (Ashour, *Blue Lorries* 22)

Although she passionately awaits the release of her imprisoned husband, the lack of proper communication with his family, because of the language barrier, pushes her to maintain a position of 'Otherness.' Despite being aware of the family's customary mourning rituals, she refuses to tolerate or respect them. Later, Madeleine feels bored as she does not comprehend the situation, and no one is bothered to explain it to her elaborately. In frustration, she asks for food and accuses her in-laws of being mean, even though she knows the food she requests is not in line with the local customs during a state of mourning. This final act offends her sister-in-law, Nada's aunt, who severs ties with Madeleine until the end of the story.

Madeleine and Failing Marriage

Madeleine's relationship with her husband faces difficulties after his release from prison. The disputes they had, which might appear to be cultural differences or intolerance, could occur between partners of the same culture. I argue that the absence of their "shared feeling of alienation that brought [them] together - initially" damaged their common sense of belonging (153). The detachment is manifested in a moment when Madeleine fails to understand her husband's grief at the death of the Egyptian president, Abdel Nasser, who was the reason for his imprisonment. Her husband accuses her of blindness and does not explain his emotional turmoil. He is experiencing a nationalist disillusionment with the political scene of Egypt in the sixties, which places him in a new position of alienation that he occupies alone unwilling to share it with his wife. This leads to a disturbance of the shared marginal space that the married couple used to inhabit together, forcing Madeleine into a solo-position of alienation within a culture that actually pushes her not to belong, as will be discussed further in this paper.

Her feelings of displacement are augmented with the failure of her marriage. She lost the Sartrean sense of existential importance, of belonging that was fortified with her love in marriage. The affection she shared with her husband was the only thing that gave her a sense of belonging to her position in Egypt. Therefore, when that love disappeared, she had no

choice but to leave Egypt and Nada, who chose to stay with her father, and return to her roots.

After leaving for France, Madeleine tries to maintain contact with her daughter through various letters, but Nada is too young to understand or pay attention. Until one final unsent and unfinished letter, which Nada discovers only after the death of Madeleine as if to highlight the irreconcilable state of alienation. The letter expands over one full chapter in the novel titled "The Unfinished Letter" and provides a shift of perspective as we finally hear the mother in her own voice. In direct speech, Madeleine introduces herself by name and explains how the positions she occupies, her nationality, language, her geographical location - whether in Egypt or France - function in her migrant experience. She takes us back to her past, before her marriage and her moving to Egypt.

According to the letters, Madeleine was the daughter of a modest Fishermen family living in a small village far away from the city. She led a simple life. However, upon her arrival in Egypt, this change of location combined with other aspects such as being a French national and speaking only French, imposed on her a certain position in the society that she felt obliged to occupy, despite her failure to identify with it. She suddenly became "Madame Selim, the wife of the university professor" and the French language teacher in a school for children of upper-class citizens (153). She refers to the imposed elevated position as an elite fur that, incongruent with her personality, felt like a strange 'coat of thorns'. While other French women enjoyed the status this expensive coat bestowed upon them, she suffered from estrangement because of it.

Madeleine and Displacement

Categorised by the average Egyptian based on her nationality and language, Madeleine was faced with the colonised's perspective of the Egyptian bourgeois and upper class that favoured foreign over local. In *Black Skin, White Mask* (1967), Fanon defines the colonised people as those "in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality" (Loomba 43). Let us not forget the spatial and temporal context of Cairo of the mid-twentieth century, at which the novel's events start. There was a strong sense of fascination and assimilation with anything foreign adopted by a vast majority of the

population as residues of long-term colonisers' strategies to demonize the local and fantasize the colonial. The foreigner's complex still exists. This might sound strange due to the aforementioned anti-west rhetoric adopted by the literati of Egypt. However, it is important to specify that "anti-West or anti-Western is something completely different from anti-Westernism. 'Anti-West' is a term operative in the political arena alone and is applied from an intellectual position that is paradoxically Westernist. Antagonism to [western] policy in the Middle East is just that; it is not antagonism to what the West stands for as a civilization" (El-Enany 206).

To clarify, Madeleine's specific circumstances, including her background and relocation, greatly influenced her experience. She moved from the marginal status of an ordinary citizen in Paris to the centre of Cairene attention and authority. Her foreign nationality and language made people view her differently, which she struggled to comprehend, as she had not encountered this treatment before. "Even now I do not completely understand how people saw me or the ways in which they dealt with me. I found myself all at once in an unfamiliar situation. I wasn't Madeleine, the village girl, a typist who lived in Paris among the marginalized . . . Suddenly I was possessed of a kind of authority . . . it was like a cloak that had been thrown over my body" (Ashour, *Blue Lorries* 153).

The repercussions of the inferiority complex of the colonised are not always in favour of the foreigner. It privileges Madeleine in the society but imposes a certain identity on her to which she does not belong, so it ends up excluding her. It is because of the factor of her nationality; occupying the position of the foreigner, she is excluded. Her work at the school does not guarantee her inclusion in the society. Combined with her ignorance of the native language in Egypt, she remains an outsider, a stranger and foreign to Egyptians. Having explained that, I can briefly return to the dynamics of Madeleine's choice not to learn the language. This society, welcoming foreigners and accepting them as they are or accommodating them, has not motivated her to exert any efforts to find a common ground for effective communication and obstructed her movement outside the peripheries of liminality. It facilitated preserving the foreigner position with a heightened sense of exclusion. In her letter in the novel, she emphasizes the fact that she did not understand the people around her in a helpless manner, "I don't know Arabic. I lived for years in Egypt, and I

was unable to speak the Arabic language, much less master it," as if this status of incomprehension was imposed on her (152).

Madeleine's choice against learning Arabic could be explained by invoking Friedman's take on bilingualism and multilingualism as "key markers of transit; of the refusal to assimilate completely; and of the insistence on retention of the past" ("Migration, Diasporas" 280). Although Madeleine is monolingual, her passive rejection of acquiring this new language as a tool of communication reflects her incapacity or reluctance to reproduce a version of the self that is capable of coping with changes occurring in her life, as discussed further in this paper.

Returning to tracing her path to alienation, Madeleine discovers that, upon the failure of her marriage, she has not only lost her place in her family life in Egypt but also in her homeland. She went back to France with hopes to restart or at least resume her life. However, she finds herself living as an alienated and displaced person there, too. Madeleine embodies the paradoxical position that many migrants occupied and still occupy; a struggle with not belonging and displacement.

During her long absence, Yvoire – the village where she was born and spent her childhood and adolescence – had changed into a completely different locality. It was now a beautiful tourist attraction, but devoid of privacy; of the unique characteristics and details that once made it a place belonging to specific individuals. It had become just another random public place, visited by hundreds of people. Madeleine describes the change that occurred to the place with the metaphor "eaten by the wolf" (Ashour, *Blue Lorries* 155).

Bridging Spaces

The reference to "eaten by the wolf" is quite revealing within the Arab-Islamic context. Reading it immediately evokes the verses from the Qur'an that tell the story of the Prophet Yūsuf whose brothers deceived their father, Prophet Yaʿqūb, to his unfortunate death. This expression was used in a number of verses consecutively. Prophet Yaʿqūb used it in the present form to refer to his fear of losing his son, and the brothers used it in the past tense to signify the permanent loss and death of their brother who "was eaten by the wolf" (*The Qur'an* 12.13-17). Here, it is

worth mentioning that the story of Yūsuf or Joseph appears also in the Bible; however, it bears varied versions. On the other hand, Yūsuf's story has a uniform account in the Qur'an. Madeleine used this metaphor to describe the permanent loss of her parent's house, where she once belonged. In her own words, she maintains that her lived experience was "painful beyond imagining" (Ashour, *Blue Lorries* 154). The place has changed utterly, was eaten by the wolf; and taken away by an external force. Therefore, her madness at her daughter who visited her hometown as another tourist is justified because her daughter did not understand her pain of losing something that "is specific to her, in which her own story resides and which [used to] house her five senses" (156).

Regardless of the significance of this Qur'anic reference, it sounds bizarre when a French-speaking woman such as Madeleine utters it. Thus, it remains uncertain if Madeleine's usage of this metaphor, in her unique hybrid identity, signifies an implicit degree of openness towards religious identity in Egypt, which allows her to reproduce such a reference, or reflects an understanding or an awareness of the culture while maintaining a distance.

Alienation on many levels

In *Blue Lorries*, Madeleine says decisively and conclusively in the letter, "I left only to discover afterward that the world whether here or there no longer existed for me" (Ashour 153-4). She exclaims indisputably, "I knew for certain then that my alienation was total whether in Yvoire, in Paris or in Cairo" (156-7). This feeling of marginalization at her place of birth, which she dearly sees as home, however, does not start with her return from Cairo upon her divorce. It started earlier, with the semi-coercive migration she undertook from village to city given the economic reasons. Influenced by her upbringing in the non-industrialized village, she fails to function at the spiritual level in the new industrialized version of her rural world.

This could be explained on two levels. The first, borrowing Stuart Hall's discourse on Africa as the home lost forever, one can say for Madeleine, as Edward Said explains about spaces acquiring emotional sense, Yvoire was an "imaginative geography and history" which "helped [her mind] to intensify its own sense of itself" (55). Madeleine's village experience was

embracing her "five senses", as she says in the novel (Ashour, *Blue Lorries* 156). Thus, when the village changes into a version of the city with tourists, buses, and different tongues, it loses its healing effect and leads her to a further state of fragmentation and alienation because she realizes that she "can't literally go home again" (Hall 232). The village, too, becomes a liminal space, to which she both belongs and does not belong, which is both her home and not her home anymore. It arouses lots of pain on visiting it; nevertheless, she never ceases desiring to return to it. The second issue is her inability to grasp the idea that the cultural identity she was looking for, by revisiting her village, in order to regain her sense of belonging, "is not a fixed origin and it is not a site to which [one] can make some final and absolute return" (226).

Hall maintains in his discourse on the experience of the diaspora that this experience "is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (235). Building upon that, if we consider Madeleine disclosing a diasporic experience, we can deduce that the failure happened when she did not succeed in acknowledging the need for this constant production and reproduction, which is a prerequisite for continuity. This resulted in the final non-escapable feeling of alienation in her own home country, France.

On another level, it is worth mentioning that Madeleine's feelings of displacement originated not in being othered within the world of the novel, but in being othered within her own world, in her experience. To explain further, this feeling of alienation is shared with other characters in the novel, such as with her own daughter, Nada, and her generation's experience of disillusionment depicted in the story of the dove that appears towards the end of the novel. The dove is born in a prison in Morocco and is looked after by the prisoners, who consider his survival their responsibility. The dove, despite being imprisoned as a fledgling, regards the prison as his home and keeps on returning to it even after he gains the skills to break free and fly away. The prisoners rejoice at his ability to attain his freedom and are delighted at his returning visits.

The dove echoes "the price that her generation paid in disrupted lives and lost potential for even the mildest protest at world events, protest that their government could not abide, even though it, like them, was a passive witness to the events, largely powerless to affect their outcomes" (Romaine and Wilmsen 191). Other characters demonstrating this sense of alienation are Arwa Saleh, an acquaintance of Nada who chooses not to fight and commits suicide; Siham Sabry, Nada's best friend in college of whom she recollects memories of a true warrior, who disappears from her circles intentionally and maybe she ended up killing herself; Hazim, Nada's best friend who dies suddenly of heart failure. Owing to their experience of disillusionment, they all eschew marriage and the traditional institution of the family. Therefore, in comparison to other characters, Madeleine is neither demoralized nor favoured which appears "to be the prevailing mood in representations of the West in Arabic literature today"; she is rather part of a prevailing mood of alienation and disillusionment at worldly matters within this novel (El-Enany 186).

Conclusion

In her experience, as a French lady within an Egyptian Arabic narrative, Madeleine presents a colourful, vivid and dynamic image with anchored origins. Her feeling of alienation that spreads over multiple layers and places provides a reversal to the notion of the Orient being the object of inspection. The complexity of her depiction transcends the "binary structures" of self and other, us and them, belonging and non-belonging (Hall 228). The novel presents her story of displacement in a sincere and lucid description; it also presents Madeleine's feelings in her own words; it does not label her within a certain category or group, thus attesting to its commitment to a humanizing encounter.

The letter where she candidly shares her thoughts on losing and trying to uncover the cause of her disappointment serves as a window into her innermost thoughts and consciousness. The different positions she occupies due to her nationality, mother tongue, geographical location, and position within the family (as a daughter, mother, and wife) intertwine to produce a unique experience of dislocation. Madeleine introduces the site of a new liminal space that does not include conflicting or negotiating identities. Her missing sense of belonging does not stem from a self-split

between two cultures and grounds, but rather a self that is alienated because of losing what was once a solid ground on which she existed.

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"... But People Like Us Always Be Outsiders": Cultural Identity, Hybridity, and the Role of Belonging in Elif Shafak's *Honour*

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Introduction

> The question 'where are you from?' has always mattered to me, and felt deeply personal, albeit equally complicated. For a long time, it was the one question I dreaded being asked. 'I am from multiple places,' I wanted to be able to say in return. 'I come from many cities and cultures, plural and diverse, but I am also from the ruins and remnants of these, from the memories and forgettings, from the stories and silences.' ... 'Yes, but where are you really from?' they would insist ... You could only fit one word in that box, no more. In an age of speed, simplicity and fleeting glimpses, few people had either the time or the patience for long answers. So I would simply say 'Turkey', and they would nod, satisfied. (Shafak, *Age of Division* 20-22)

Elif Shafak describes in this passage from her manifesto, *How to Stay Sane in an Age of Division* (2020), that the ideas of belonging and home can be fraught concepts that embody more than who we are, our country of origin and more generally, our place in the world. Shafak's feelings surrounding her identity and sense of belonging are shaped by hybridity and multiplicity. She does not feel she belongs to only one place or one culture but to "multiple places ... cities and cultures" (20-22). Her cultural history, roots, and first-hand experiences contribute to these feelings. However, her experiences are also shaped by confusion and misunderstanding.

Shafak feels a connection to her cultural roots and ancestral history, which forms a significant part of her identity. She clarifies that she is "also from the ruins and remnants of these, from the memories and forgettings, from the stories and silences" (20-22). This epigraph highlights that while her experiences of having lived in multiple cities and places matter, her identity also consists of this connection to her roots. The stories that

have been forgotten and were not able to be told, and the people who have been silenced, are a part of her sense of self. She clearly positions herself as a hybrid individual whose feelings of belonging are not bound to one physical location but appear much more complex than that. Therefore, she gives other people who feel similar about the topics of home and belonging a voice through her writing.

Given the context of the ostracization and mistreatment of migrants, the depiction of migrant experiences in the UK, as presented in novels, films, television shows, and plays, becomes essential. They give us an insight into the lives and struggles of people with diverse heritages. This can be seen through the burgeoning genre of inter- and transcultural pieces of contemporary literature and novels dealing with the experiences of migrants, including experiences of unbelonging, discrimination, and identity struggles. By looking at *Honour* (2012), this paper pays attention to how fictional literature depicts society and minorities' experiences, particularly their struggles and conflicts. The role of representation and lack thereof, as well as identity conflicts and struggles with their hybridity, are in the foreground of their lives and experiences in their diasporic environment.

Some characters in *Honour* construct and negotiate their cultural identities in different ways and thus offer multiple ways of addressing identities. Evidently, *Honour* is not only relevant because it shows how identities can be viewed and constructed differently and how developing a sense of home and belonging can be rather complex for migrants, but it also shows that the experiences of individuals are valid and needed to deconstruct the stereotyping migrants and other people deemed strangers experience.

Identities, the Third Space and Representation

Questions of Cultural Identities

Questions and concerns surrounding the topic of identities frequently emerge from debates and discourses surrounding cultural diversity (Hall, "Introduction" 1). There is little agreement on the causes of the rise in the importance of identities and the lasting effects this rise of interest and

importance has. However, what becomes clear from these questions and debates is that identities are relevant, and thus it is essential to realise and recognise what identities are, how they form and how they can be transformed (Alcoff 2).

Stuart Hall mentions two distinct ways of looking at cultural identities, the first focusing on the idea of a stable and fixed cultural identity based on shared ancestry and history. This leads to feelings of "oneness" and belonging (Hall, "Introduction" 4) and a "shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial, or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 223). This first way of looking at cultural identities emphasises common historical experiences and shared ancestry and provides a stable frame for the individual's cultural identity (223). Secondly, cultural identities can focus on similarities and differences among people concerning the questions of "what we really are" and "what we have become" (225). Finally, he clarifies that one cannot speak of one collective experience regarding all cultures and formations of cultural identities but instead speaks of different individual experiences. According to this approach, cultural identities are not fixed but changeable and transformable, and not something secure and stable that contains a oneness inside. However, they are ". . . the different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (225). Therefore, as Shafak also points out in her epigraph, individuals positioning themselves and being positioned in relation to specific historical narratives impacts how identities are formed.

Hall makes it clear that identities emerge in connection to power and have a relation to exclusion and difference ("Introduction" 4). In this context, Hall explains that this is the reason they are not a naturally existing unity, which is all about "sameness" and "oneness" (4). Identities are constructed through difference; thus, it is essential to note that through what is deemed different, what is deemed on the outside, and what is there in relation to the Other, one's identity can be constructed (4).

The Hybrid Third Space

When discussing the multiplicity of identities and the possibility of hybrid identities, it is crucial to look at hybridity. Homi K. Bhabha is a postcolonial writer most well-known for his writings on hybridity, mimicry, and his concept of the Third Space. Bhabha argues that there is no such thing as purity in culture and that cultural hybridities emerge through historical transformation (Bhabha, *Location* 54). Furthermore, similar to Hall, Bhabha argues that "cultures are never unitary in themselves" ("Cultural Diversity" 207), clarifying that no culture is homogeneous but rather always has to be viewed in connection to other cultures. Nevertheless, he also clarifies that cultures are not solely defined by the relation of the self and Other; much must be unpacked to understand cultures and our views on them, such as hybridity (207).

Throughout *Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha defines hybridity and emphasises the necessity to look at history to realise the meanings of hybridity (3). Trying to explain hybridity appears more complex than one might think. Bhabha uses the term to talk about individuals and cultures who have had contact with other people, "the colonialist Self or the colonised Other" (*Location* 64), thus influencing each other, existing in an in-between and creating hybridity. Bhabha defines hybrid individuals as having "a hybridity, a difference 'within,' a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality" (19). Hybridity can activate a position in-between, a position "that may be asymmetrical, disjunctive and contradictory" (Bhabha, "Foreword" xii). This reveals that hybridity opens a space that might show an ambivalent or different position, giving space to a plurality of voices. This space Bhabha defines as the Third Space (xii-xiii).

Furthermore, Bhabha clarifies that the interpretation and communication between two parties, between the self and the Other, does not just happen but should happen through the Third Space ("Cultural Diversity" 208). Negotiation is significant here, as "we are always negotiating in any situation of political opposition or antagonism" (Rutherford 216). Thus, the Third Space can "make . . . the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process" (Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity" 208) and therefore can also disrupt narratives of the Western world about the Other.

In the context of Bhabha's Third Space, an imaginary space, it is also important to talk about real spaces and locations that can connect to our cultural backgrounds and identities. Edward Soja and his notions on places and spaces come to mind in this case. Soja defines the Thirdspace (spelt as one word) as "a tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings" (2). He describes space and spatiality not solely as real locations but mentions imagined places, unique and historical imaginations, and their social and cultural implications (15). While talking about a different kind of Thirdspace, Soja mentions that the reason for such a creation of this notion is to "encourage . . . to think differently about the meanings and significance of space and those related concepts that composed and compromise the inherent spatiality of human life: place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory and geography" (1). He explores the real and imagined worlds of Thirdspace, making his notion distinguishable and distinctive from Bhabha's notion (3). According to him, the Thirdspace is "the space where all places are, capable of being seen from every angle, each standing clear; but also a secret and conjectured object, filled with illusions and allusions" (56). This underscores, similar to Bhabha's Third Space of enunciation that Thirdspaces address the experiences of Othering and being the subaltern. Furthermore, these spaces can be used for self-representation and work against the notions of stereotypes and Othering evident in society (Wieselberg, n.p.).

Representation and a Sense of Belonging

The restoration of a sense of self that is not connected to how one is defined as the Other can happen through representation and self-representation (Craig-Norten et al. 55). However, the notions of the self, the Other, and representation are intricately connected. As Stuart Hall described in his work *Representation* (1997), how we represent places and people and how we do that while distinguishing these people and places from ourselves is relevant. This gives us a sense of assurance and safety (225). Furthermore, Hall mentions that "identities are . . . constituted within, not outside representation" ("Introduction" 4), clarifying that individuals can find themselves and make sense of their place in the world within the

representation. Likewise, Bhabha deems this as "the right to narrate" and defines this as "the fundamental human interest in freedom itself, the right to be heard, to be recognised and represented" ("Right to Narrate" n.p.). This also demonstrates how self-representation is significant for the voices of the Other and the voiceless to be heard; the agency of these marginalised groups is significant.

When talking about cultural identities and the right of BIPoC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) to position themselves, the topics of home and where we belong are related and become of interest in the postcolonial world. How individuals of diverse heritage dream of their home, conceptualise and experience it thus becomes relevant (Ralph and Staeheli 518). Feeling at home and belonging can be experienced through different things, such as specific places, locations, and objects. As the phrase "sense of belonging" alludes to, different senses can bring us a feeling of belonging and home, so, for instance, specific sounds, smells, or sensations can evoke such feelings in individuals (Allen 3). Therefore, home and belonging entail many things, appear complex, and must be viewed as such. They can be identified as personal and public, as political in some cases and transcending physical borders and locations. The site of home can be both a physical location but also an imagined and metaphorical feeling, a sense of ease and belonging one feels (Franz and Silva 15).

There is also a social aspect regarding the topic of belonging, as whether we are included or often excluded, in essence, leads us to feel like we belong or like we do not. Therefore, the way others represent us, how others define us, and how others define our home, where we belong, is relevant in context with one's own cultural identity and sense of home and belonging. It is not solely about whether we fit in but whether people make us feel like we fit in and belong (Ralph and Staeheli 523; Allen 3). In this context, it becomes evident that a sense of home and belonging, while being self-defined and dependent on the individual's feelings and experiences, is also other-defined and can depend on our representation and perception by others (Ralph and Staeheli 523).

Iskender's and Esma's Hybrid Identities, Conflicts, and Feelings of Belonging

". . . but people like us would always be outsiders": Iskender's Trials and Tribulations

Honour's protagonist Iskender Toprak is a second-generation individual who occupies what Bhabha defines as the Third Space and is shaped by hybridity due to his cultural background and upbringing in England. His in-betweenness, in particular, becomes evident in his teenage years in England, which is at the forefront of the novel. These arguably pivotal years in Iskender's life are much more complex and shaped by an identity conflict and general conflict with himself and his surroundings. He does not necessarily recognise this as a possibility nor realise that his identity can be hybrid. Influenced by his parental figures, and lack thereof in the case of his father's abandonment, his experiences of being the Other and struggles of being in-between two cultures enhance his identity struggles and lead him to question his place of belonging. These feelings of unbelonging lead him to search for belonging elsewhere. Rather than gaining a sense of belonging, he does the opposite through violent actions.

Shafak presents Iskender's inability to feel at home in England and his feelings of abandonment throughout the novel. It seems like Iskender is in conflict with who he is throughout his life. Like his mother's name, Pembe's name, his name implies his hybridity and existence in the Third Space. "Askander in Kurdish and Iskender in Turkish" and "Alex-. . . this was the name he would be known by" (Shafak, *Honour* 25) in London indicate the hybridity his life is shaped by as a Turkish-Kurdish boy living in England. However, Iskender's identity struggles start early on in his life; one could even argue at the time of his birth. His mother, Pembe, fears for his well-being and becomes superstitious, giving her a sense of safety; thus, "the boy spent his first year on earth without a name, like an envelope with no address" (21). Pembe's fear of naming her child leads to Iskender not having a name for the first five years of his life. This is interesting to note because names arguably are the first identity markers of human beings. Therefore, in Iskender's case, he has nothing to identify.

Therefore, one could argue that Iskender lacks a sense of self during the first five years of his life.

Moreover, Pembe's term of endearment she uses for her son, "Sultanım" (my sultan), makes this a complicated matter as well (30). Through not having a name and only being able to identify with "my sultan," Iskender is put on a pedestal by his mother. So, he starts identifying with being a "sultan." Tatiana Golban even argues that "Pembe construct[s] the identity for her son" by calling him sultan (105). Sultan implies a powerful position that cannot be implied by other terms of endearment, particularly when we regard terms of endearment for girls. In Iskender's case, it distinguishes him from his mother and his sister.

This term of endearment also highlights that Pembe raises Iskender in a specific way as a boy. This becomes particularly evident when we look at one of Iskender's earliest memories, the day of his circumcision. It is mentioned that he does not understand why "he would become a man with one cut of a knife" (Shafak, *Honour* 27). Iskender does not want to get circumcised, fears this procedure and hides in a tree. At this moment, he wonders, "what would people say when they learned that he had died not because of illness or accident like everyone else seemed to do, but because of cowardice?" (28). He fears the reaction of the people around him and what they would say about him. This pinpoints one thing Iskender has been taught; as a man, he is not supposed to be a coward.

Furthermore, the gender roles and specific expectations Iskender grows up with influence his behaviour and shape his identity, as a boy in Turkey and as a young man in England. On the day of his circumcision, he cannot "fathom why he was told not to cry, though it was clear he would be hurt – while his mother could weep to her heart's content, though absolutely nothing was happening to her" (27). This moment in Iskender's life reveals how the gender roles he grows up with impact his way of thinking. As a boy, he should not cry, even when hurt, while his mother is free to cry. His circumcision marks a pivotal moment in Iskender's life, and his mixed feelings towards his mother appear in the foreground from this moment onwards. He starts questioning his mother's trust and love for

him after these events, which is described in *Honour* as "his first lesson in the complexity of love" (31). This is not only his first lesson in love and trust, but this foreshadows the distrust he feels towards his mother at the end of the novel, which leads to his own demise.

Everything he learns about how a man and a woman should behave is connected to the Kurdish and Turkish culture he grew up with and are factors contributing to Iskender's identity formation process. This is only further enhanced once the family moved to London, a completely new and unknown place to Iskender. In combination with an absent father, Iskender's life in London is shaped by feelings of Otherness, which complicates his search for his sense of self in the world. Furthermore, through his cultural upbringing, including the ideas of femininity and masculinity he grows up with, Iskender is burdened to act in a certain way as a man. This also becomes evident later in the novel after his father abandons his family. In particular, after learning about his mother's affair, Iskender feels overwhelmed and pressured to take action. The following passage describes his feelings:

> 'You don't seem well, my sultan.' Don't call me that, I wanted to say. Don't call me anything . . . I went straight to my room, slammed the door, and put a chair in front of it so that no one could get in. I climbed up on the bed, pulled the sheets over my head and concentrated on breathing . . . Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. (51)

By mentioning that he does not want to be called sultan, he directly shows how much of a burden it has been throughout his life to be the sultan and to grow up with these gender roles and expectations. He is the "sultan" and is thus in a powerful position, however he is supposed to be unemotional and show no weaknesses, according to his upbringing. These gender roles and expectations, mainly shown through contrasting Iskender with his younger sister Esma and his mother Pembe, can be described as patriarchal ideas and oppressing ideas to the women in his life as well as himself. For instance, in this passage, he hyperventilates, showing us the immense pressure, he feels. He feels "compelled to save the family's honor" but is overwhelmed by this task and responsibility (Mustafa and Ahmed 262).

Even though overwhelmed, Iskender tries to save his family's honour and thus implements specific rules for his mother and sister. For example, when Esma joins his friends and the Orator at Aladdin's Cave, she is told to stay silent and that "this stuff isn't for girls!" (Shafak, *Honour* 214). As a result, Esma does not say anything during their talk, and when she makes a noise, she is told to "behave" by her brother (216). This reveals the authority Iskender, even though only a year older than Esma, has over her, but it also reveals that Iskender has specific images in mind of what girls can and cannot do. However, the double standard he applies plays a more critical role when he wants to punish his mother for her affair because Iskender views it as a sin and unhonourable. At the same time, he impregnates his girlfriend at the age of sixteen. The same rules and regulations he implements concerning women's bodies and sexualities are neither applied to his English girlfriend nor his own life, making this double standard and hypocritical behaviour clear. This becomes evident after he learns about his mother's meetups with Elias and forbids her from leaving their home, emphasising how he views himself as more powerful. Through his actions, he is "enforce[ing] his conservative and patriarchal ideology regarding women's body and sexuality" (Seblini 4) on his mother and sister. In essence, Iskender takes away his mother's agency and voice entirely.

Iskender's group of friends and involvement with the Orator give him a sense of being understood and belonging somewhere. His frequent talks with the Orator contribute to Iskender's sense of belonging; the Orator even recognising that Iskender needs this by mentioning that he "need[s] to belong somewhere" and he "need[s] a purpose in life, a new direction" (Shafak, *Honour* 253). Aladdin's Cave, in this case, appears to be a physical Thirdspace that contributes to his temporary sense of belonging. It offers a space for discussions, as it is mentioned that "everyday there was talk about another incident somewhere" and that "men were intimidated on these streets, women called names, children spat at" (212). This shows that a physical Thirdspace makes it possible for them to discuss issues of racism and attacks such as those mentioned above. Iskender tries to gain a sense of belonging in England through this group that he forms in Aladdin's Cave; however, this sense of belonging is of a temporary nature. Once he is outside of this space, he finds himself the

outcast. Iskender recognises it by mentioning that ". . . people like us would always be outsiders" and "only passersby" (50). His actions towards his family members, the rules and regulations he implements for his sister and his mother, as well as his attempt to hurt his mother, which leads to the death of her twin sister, are all signs of his estrangement from his family as well as his feelings of unbelonging in England. Iskender, in this case, not only stands for the patriarchal ideology and the consequences of such ideas for the women in his life, but Iskender himself is the victim of this oppressive ideology.

Esma's Journey of Belonging

Esma Toprak is also a second-generation migrant whose life, like her brother Iskender, is shaped by hybridity and identity struggles. She struggles with her sense of self in London as a woman of colour and finds herself on a journey to discover who she is throughout the novel's narrative. She struggles with being perceived as different and as the Other. This is mainly due to her physical differences, which are a focal point in her journey of finding a place to belong. However, even though Esma struggles with feeling vastly different from her family and the students in her dominantly white English school, she finds belonging in England. She questions her upbringing while balancing her cultural roots and the outside influences. This is why she is able to feel at home in London.

Throughout the novel, Esma can be described as trying to break free from her cultural upbringing and the norms of her culture. In particular, freeing herself from the gender roles and expectations she grew up with is significant for Esma, as seen through her interactions with her older brother Iskender and how she tries to get her mother, Pembe, to understand her perspective as well. She is described by her brother as "a frail girl, but she always expressed herself with giant ideas: equal opportunity, social justice, women's rights" (49). She wants to be viewed as equal and sometimes feels like her cultural upbringing restricts her. As a result, she struggles with finding her place in England and finds it difficult to find her place in her family as she feels vastly different from them.

Esma's upbringing and her feelings towards it are shaped by gender roles and the patriarchal ideology presented in *Honour*. This becomes clear when she wonders throughout the novel, "for the umpteenth time what I would look like had I been born a boy instead" (180). From Pembe's childhood and Esma's upbringing, it becomes clear that gender roles play a significant part in the Kurdish and Turkish culture depicted in *Honour*. Thus, it is not surprising that this is an essential aspect of Esma's growing up and one of the reasons why she feels disconnected from her family. Her feelings of not fitting in are connected mainly to her status as a woman, which becomes prominent when Esma draws a beard on her face and views her body in the mirror in the bathroom. She disguises herself as a man and inspects her body, recognising the differences between herself and her family.

Esma's relationship with her mother and her struggles at school are influenced by her hitting puberty, which also leads her to feel lost and alienated both at home and at school. She describes her relationship with her mother changing "the moment my breast started to bud and I had my first period" (184). Similarly, to her mother's childhood and relationship with her mother, Esma's relationship with Pembe suffers due to her being a woman and the expectations put on her. There is also a disconnection between Pembe and Esma because she disagrees with how her mother raises her son differently. Esma asks her mother, "Why do you give such privileges to him just because he's a boy?" (278), showing her awareness of how she is raised differently. This leads Esma to feel alienated and misunderstood at home, and in regard to her relationship with her mother, as they are not on the same page regarding the role of women in society and at home.

The question of representation and how a lack of representation leads Esma to further feel alienated and leads her to question herself in relation to her classmates, is raised throughout the novel and impacts Esma's development significantly. She wonders whether she would have felt more integrated at her school if she had been at a more culturally diverse school. She asks, "would things have been otherwise had I attended the local school with other neighbourhood children? If the names of my classmates had been Aisha, Farah, or Zeineb, instead of Tracey, Debbie or Clare,

would I have fitted in more easily?" (183). Esma appears to attend a majority white British school, leading her to stand out more and not feel represented. It can be argued that the lack of representation of BIPoC, namely the lack of BIPoC students and staff at her school, leads Esma feel she does not belong there. If she had peers or teachers with diverse backgrounds, Esma could feel more represented and that she has a place at this school.

In Esma's case, her physicality is also something that distinguishes her from her brothers and her male classmates. Esma describes her breasts as "pointy, with thin, blue veins, which I found repulsive" and as "two burdens to carry as if I didn't have enough already" (180). Esma's use of language when talking about her body indicates her negative feelings towards herself and the changes she goes through. She does not want these burdens, as this distinguishes her further from boys her age and magnifies the inequality she experiences and feels. Esma feels like the Other because of her cultural background, name, and womanhood. She does not want to feel different from the men around her. This is remarkable, as her upbringing at home leads her to this conclusion. In her cultural upbringing, she has been taught that women are in an inferior position, must be silent, and have specific expectations they must fulfil. Esma fears being a woman because she fears being silenced and not being free.

However, we experience an Esma who is keen on changing that and attempts to get her own and her mother's agency back, yearning for emancipation and freedom (Seblini 6), as it becomes clear from her actions as an adult. Esma negotiates her identity in this in-between and inferior position she occupies through the re-historicization of her culture and upbringing. For instance, she is presented as the narrator at the beginning of the novel, who tells the story of her family stretching back three generations and tries to come to terms with the terrible murder her brother has committed.

> My mother died twice. I promised myself I would not let her story be forgotten, but I could never find the time or the will or the courage to write about it . . . But I had to tell the story, even if only to one person. I had to send it into some corner of the

universe where it would float freely, away from us. I owed it to Mum, this freedom. (Shafak, *Honour* 1)

While Pembe cannot tell her own story and is silenced, Esma chooses to tell Pembe's life story and thus makes her voice heard. According to Nour Seblini, "this reflects that abusive violence against women cannot be healed unless the silenced feminine voices are given the opportunity to speak about their lives in their own words" (3). Moreover, it can be argued that this is Esma's way of representing her mother and other ostracised women who have become victims of patriarchal ideologies and are left voiceless. By taking her mother's and her agency and voices back, Esma contributes to her feelings of belonging in England as we encounter her in the future, living happily in England and finding comfort in her home.

In addition to that, her feelings towards her neighbourhood and neighbours in London also contribute to Esma's ability to deal with her hybridity and identity, as they contribute to her feeling at home in England. For Esma, once upon a time, Istanbul was her home; however, now she has conflicted feelings towards it (Shafak, *Honour* 74). Through her relocation to London as a child, she has started considering London and the neighbourhood she grew up in as her home. As a result, Esma is able to form a sense of belonging in London. She describes Lavender Grove as: "Afro hair salons, the Jamaican café, the Jewish baker's, the Algerian boy behind his fruit stall who pronounced my name in a funny way and always had a little present for me . . . All creeds and colours" (73). Her neighbourhood is a Third Space and shaped by hybridity, just like she is. Esma is accustomed to a diasporic community and thus is able to make a world and a sense of belonging around her in London (Pourgharib et al. 54). Therefore, it is not a surprise when we get to know that Esma has stayed in London and has been able to feel at home there when we encounter her later in the novel. Even while struggling with her identity and place in the world, her fondness for her neighbourhood and the diversity she encounters daily contribute to her sense of home. Her neighbourhood's openness allows her to feel she belongs while not disregarding her cultural roots and ancestry.

Conclusions

It is unmistakable that *Honour* is a relevant novel regarding the discussion of identities, hybridity, and the lack of representation of marginalised individuals and the BIPoC experience and its consequences. By analysing the second-generation characters' individual experiences in England and their upbringing, this essay has shown how Esma's and Iskender's roots, cultural history, and individual experiences contribute to their identity formation process and impact their feelings of belonging or not belonging in the space they occupy. I have argued that the feelings of belonging are impacted by the characters' social standing, personal history and upbringing, and views on their cultural identities. Therefore, it can be articulated that through the depiction of characters like Iskender and Esma, Shafak is able to show how these individuals struggle with their identities, hybridity, and experiences they make in England. This novel is not only able to represent various experiences of migrants through the depictions of diverse characters, but it is also able to give the Othered voices a platform to be heard. We can discern from *Honour* that such a representation of the diverse experiences of BIPoC and migrants is needed. Elif Shafak, through the representation of such characters, opens a Third Space in her pieces of literature and shows through novels like *Honour* why the fight for representation and self-representation is so significant.

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The Mediterranean Sea as a Cultural Object in Migration Films

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Introduction

As years passed and dramas unfolded along the Mediterranean migration routes, the role of images in documenting these dramas and potentially stopping them has become a key issue for artists, documentary directors, and in the media. Some particularly striking images have achieved world-wide attention, as for instance the drowned body of Aylan Kurdi on a Turkish beach, while some have become generic representations of the migration crisis, as is the case for overloaded boats capsizing and people jumping in the water. However, despite the best intentions of militant film directors, activists and humanitarian workers, the dissemination of such images has failed to generate a social movement that would help to end the crisis, and questions the real power of such images, as striking and dramatic as they may be.

The crisis itself has been the subject of numerous scholarly works, with some of them devoted to the part played by images in publicising, representing, or symbolising the migrations. By this I particularly mean Nilgun Bayraktar's work on the images of migrations, *Mobility and Migration in Film and Moving Image Art* (2015), which focuses on artistic renditions of migrations, working on the mythology attached to it, as well as on its representations, through the study of films, art installations and video essays. The book develops two main themes, first about the filmic rendition of transnational flux and encounters with the other, then focuses on what she calls "fragmented journeys" (99). This study draws inspiration from her work, as well as from that done in early 2010 when Italy started to face a particularly important influx of migrants (O'Healy 2010; Faleschini 2010), and researchers such as Emma and Gabriele de Angelis (2021), or Michela Franceschelli and Adele Galipò (2021), focused more on the Mediterranean Sea. These authors developed their work around the use of

documentary films, as a tool to raise awareness among the public, on the one hand, on the other hand, as a way for film directors to make a statement about the ongoing migration crisis, while at the same time bearing witness to it. This essay aims to work in their footsteps but with a different film corpus. While documentaries have now been heavily discussed and imposed themselves as a main genre when it comes to migrations, the aim of this paper is to question the part played by the Mediterranean Sea in fiction about the same issue.

Migrations have been quite a common topic for cinema, developing some tropes and representations that took part in the creation of visual imagery of the subject. Such films may come from Western industries, such as famed Elia Kazan's *America, America* (1963), or from the global South, such as Djibril Diop Manbéty's *Touki Bouki* (1973), in which the dream of coming to Europe plays a key part, together with Europe being portrayed as an Eldorado. Portrayals of migrants, legal or illegal, to the US from Europe or Latin America, from the Balkans and Eastern Europe to the West, or from India and the Philippines to the Gulf and the West, among others, added some elements and reinterpreted the representations already ingrained. With these tropes and myths in mind, together with the myths attached to the sea itself, the aim of this essay is to understand how directors have portrayed the ongoing migration crisis in relation to the Mediterranean Sea through the reinterpretation of this cultural background. Through this work, this essay aims to better understand how images are transformed and reinterpreted by film directors for political purposes, in this case, to document the crisis and to question the viewer's identity. In this regard, this chapter aims to contribute to studies about the power of images (Wolff 2012; Azoulay 2001) in a case when images have been recreated, or at least edited, to create a narrative.

The question of fiction here needs to be clarified: the directors of the films studied here almost all had to think of their relation to raw and documentary images, and all films insist that they draw their inspiration from real events or at least from the crisis itself. This question in turn generated a series of binary questions about what to see, show, hear or not, and the big issue of pathos, when it comes to balancing the will to raise awareness about the crisis while avoiding poverty porn. As will be seen, for visual

and ethical reasons, directors have chosen different types of representations, while the one closest to pure documentary, *Fuocoammare* (Rosi 2016), albeit using actual images of Lampedusa and migrants, made careful use of editing in order to build a narrative that precisely questions these binary oppositions and ethical issues. My corpus consists of eleven films, shot between 2005, for example, *Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide* by Giordana, at the very start of the crisis, and 2017, such as *The Order of Things* by Segre, in which, significantly, European policemen are sent to war-torn Libya to set up refugee camps. The key criterion for the composition of this corpus was that the sea should play a significant part in it, even if its screen time is rather short, so as to include films where the sea appears in its physical dimension and in its various symbolic dimensions. On the European side, the corpus is composed of Italian and French films, while the North African side comprises films from Tunisia and Algeria, as these four countries have produced the bulk of films that focus on the Mediterranean Sea, as a border and as a liminal space, while also exploring its symbolic aspects.

To develop these issues, this work is divided into two main parts questioning the interaction between the characters and the sea. First, this study focuses on the Mediterranean Sea as a transformative space, one which acts as a metaphor for the liquidity of borders that kill characters or have them reborn (Davitti 1175). The second part deals with the sea as a space for encounter, as this transformation is presented as paving the way for questioning the idea of the self and the other, developing the idea of a Babel on the sea, that is, a space in which all origins and language encounter one another, but which lacks order, and where violence is looming. These issues become even more important, as film directors tie them with the body of international developments politics and control.

Migrants and the Sea

Contrary to most European characters, migrants are defined by their interaction with the sea, presented as a hostile, dangerous space that sums up all the borders they have to cross. Simultaneously, this ordeal also acts as some sort of epiphany, with characters being reborn through their relation to the sea.

The most common way to portray the Mediterranean Sea, given the ongoing crisis and the staggering number of casualties along migration routes, is to focus on it as a dangerous, uncertain space, as the apparently calm surface of the water can become a death trap for migrants. Danger itself is usually underlined by focusing on the poor condition of the boats used by the migrants, be it the common small boats seen in *Terraferma* (Crialese 2011), and *Harragas* (Allouache 2009), or the bigger ones (but in an appalling condition) that appears in *Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide* (Giordana 2005). In *Harragas*, the dialogues point to the poor condition of the vessel, with migrants almost revolting before embarking because of their (justified) fear that it might capsize or that the motor might break.

A common trope to underline the danger of the trip is wide, panoramic shots, presenting the overcrowded boat in a completely empty sea. Other ships, merchant or else, are rarely mentioned, even in the dialogues, or as in *Harragas*, just as a last hope in extreme circumstances. Otherwise, the sea appears as a watery desert, where the migrants are left to themselves, in danger of being left alone by human traffickers, which happens in *Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide*. The fact that in some films the sea appears as a follow-up to the crossing of the Sahara Desert (most notably in *Mediterranea* (2015) by Carpignano and *Hope* (2014) by Lojkine) reinforces this desertic aspect, as the migrants have to cross seemingly endless spaces devoid of any shelter, with the camera work emphasizing the void immensity with which they are confronted, and their comparative vulnerability. As migrants are commonly portrayed warmly clothed as they cross the sea, the futility of such protection appears all the more starkly on screen.

Beyond the immensity of the sea, the most common ways to underline the danger are images of migrants jumping into the sea, shot from beneath the water: the audience just sees bubbles, limbs and bodies moving and drifting in a disorderly way, with various belongings (usually symbolic ones: passports, photos, items of clothing) falling to the bottom of the sea. Such images, inspired by media images of people jumping into the sea to

reach the coast, avoid arrest, or escape a sinking boat (Amores et al. 2019; Mangone and Pece 2017), appear very often in our corpus and have become so linked to the migration crisis that directors may use this trope beyond its immediate meaning, as a narrative tool: Carpignano, in *Mediterranea*, uses such images to create tension, as he makes a parallel between tourist boats with people diving and migrants struggling for their lives. Raja Amari, on the other hand, in *Foreign Body* (2016) uses the underwater shots as a leitmotiv that she intersperses with the main narrative of her film, about the self-discovery of a young undocumented migrant, which adds a layer of meaning to the main narrative.

Dead bodies are rarely seen, as they fall into what directors choose not to show, judging this would lead to voyeurism and pornography. Marco Tullio Giordana and Andrea Segre do show dead bodies, one that of a dead migrant who is abandoned overboard by smugglers, and one in a makeshift morgue in a so-called hotspot in Libya, but for the most part, film directors prefer to make death a looming presence, a constant threat. Dead bodies on the beach, rather than being shown, are mentioned in the dialogues, such as in *Terraferma* (2011) by Emanuele Crialese or suggested through linking sound with images of places where the bodies could land (or have come ashore), as Gianfranco Rosi does in *Fuocoammare* (2016). Film directors, in this regard, do not want to repeat media images when it comes to death, but choose to make its presence permanent rather than spectacular. In that aspect, fiction may reach a limit, as recreating images of dead people would hurt decency, and miss the point they are trying to make; hence, their self-censoring of what cannot be represented follows the footsteps of film directors who often have confronted with the question of representing major dramas and mass crimes (Chemelny 275-282). Furthermore, this looming danger enhances one key aspect of the migration crisis, that of the routinisation of death, as dramatic episodes keep happening along the coasts of Europe while the films are being shot.

The void immensity of the sea also plays a part in its symbolization of the liquidity of borders. In a few films, such as Lojkine's *Hope* (2014), borders, in this case, those of the Spanish city of Melilla, are visible and materialised by the fence that surrounds the city. But in most cases, the

border is invisible, being the sea itself, and only materialised by the patrol boats that try to stop the migrants, which may as well come from Europe as they may come from North Africa, particularly Libya, without any precision as to where the intervention zones begin or end. Even so, migrants are subject to being caught on the beaches, or in the countries they transit through, making the border immaterial, being everywhere and nowhere, but most deeply symbolized by the sea, its fluidity, and its dangers, as Daria Davitti demonstrates (1173-1196). Given that the border as a dangerous place has a long history in film representation, through the risk of denunciation or being repelled, these films develop this image as the liquid border can become a death trap, while migrants are trying to evade capture. Furthermore, the dialogues in films such as *Harragas* (2009) insist on the fact that migrants consider being caught as equivalent to death, with the main character considering himself as lost after being caught as his companions who drowned along the way. Through this presentation of the immaterial borders of Europe, film directors question the possibilities of art in representing what was meant to be invisible and take part in the reflection about offering a visual memento to the migrants who lost their lives in the process of crossing these borders (Horsti 83).

In that regard, crossing the Mediterranean and its dangers also lead to our second point, as the sea is presented as not only killing the migrants and creating dead bodies but also as a womb that allows them to be reborn.

The Sea as a Womb

Death and birth are quite commonly associated by film directors, who often make use of the double symbolism attached to water, all the more when it comes to birth, as the Mediterranean Sea is commonly associated with the idea of a civilizational cradle (Roy 1). This idea is also a follow-up to the images of migrants jumping into the sea. If they do not die, they emerge from the water as they would from a womb, being reborn as they reach the shore (Kovačević 428).

Visually, this is enhanced by the use of nudity. While migrants on board are usually portrayed in warm clothes, very often migrants are

shown coming out of the water naked or semi-naked. Costa-Gavras was among the first to use such an image with the arrival on shore of Elias, the main character of *Eden is West* (2009), whose first concern is to find some clothes. Merzak Allouache, in *Harragas* (2009), films the end of his characters' journey by having them shed their clothes to dive into the sea and swim to the shore. The power of this image is enhanced by wide shots portraying the characters' swimming, and the idea of love is even present as two of them are lovers. Then, one of them, when reaching the coastline first leaves what remaining clothes he has and proceeds to wash to get rid of the salt, but also in a symbolic way, as a baby is cleaned right after being born.

But the idea of being reborn does not stop at the symbolism of water. The same character, right after his shower, wears new clothes that he carries in a sealed bag, clothes that would, as he thinks, make him look European, together with the fake ID that he has prepared. Characters go through a process of shedding their old identity and gaining a new one, or in other words, preparing for a transitory identity towards their new life in Europe. In that way, Samia, the main character of *Foreign Body* (2016), abandoned her old identity in Tunisia, then donned heavy clothes and is taught how to look "European", as she gradually fits into French society, to finally make peace with her Tunisian original self. These steps are being rhythmed by the visual leitmotiv of the sea.

Migrant children, who rarely appear in these movies, play a similar part, as they are portrayed to signify this transformation through the crossing. In that way, the lovers of *Harragas* (2009) plan to have children once they reach Europe, while *Terraferma* (2011) and *Hope* (2014) portray mothers who intend to give birth once they reach Europe. For Emanuele Crialese, this is a follow-up to the love and hopes that he portrayed among Italian migrants to the US in *Golden Door* (2007). In this film, the eldest member of the family is barred from entering America, while the main characters decide to give birth in their new home, as they are themselves reborn (Faleschini 211). In the same way, in *Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide* (2005), Marco Tullio Giordana portrays an attempt to adoption of two young migrants into an Italian family, that would give them new names and identities. This move is also deeply linked to the

Mediterranean, as these migrants saved the family's son from drowning by jumping themselves into the sea. The failure of this adoption process takes them back to migrant, shelterless, and endangered identities that seemingly they are unable to escape.

Some films like *The Order of Things* (2017) have migrants talk about the new lives they imagine they will have once they have crossed the sea; however, the idea of being reborn and getting a new identity is vividly used, in a poetic way, by Ala Eddine Slim in *The Last of Us* (2016). As such, the film starts in a rather classical way, following the endeavours and hardships encountered by a migrant as he reaches the North African coast. Once he manages to steal a fishing boat and reach the other side of the sea, he arrives in a completely unexpected world, devoid of any human presence and technology; he is saved by an old man, whose appearance is that of a mix between an ogre and caveman. Despite this frightening look, the old man appears to be friendly, and he gradually teaches the African migrant how to live in this strange environment, before he dies. The last sequence of the film, significantly, portrays the migrant bathing naked in a river, in the midst of nature. The film itself has been compared by Clarisse Fabre, in her article "The Last of Us': 'Dead Man' au temps des migrants" published in *Le Monde*, to tales of living in the wilderness such as Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man* (1995) and offers multiple layers of symbolism. Being almost a silent film (no dialogues), it made a choice about what is to be seen and heard by focusing on nature and its sounds. If the migrant's voice is symbolically unheard, here, the relation to the visual and audio environment (wolves howling in the distance) is underlined. The film can be interpreted as a reflection on the possible disappearance of Europe, or of the Europe the migrant dreamt about. It can also be about the transformation of the African migrant, who finds an entirely new self, possibly in harmony with nature once the obstacles have been overcome. And it can also be seen as a reflection on migrations in the very long run, the migrant re-enacting the arrival of modern men from Africa to Europe, while the elder that welcomes him, with his huge forehead, could be symbolic of the Neandertal population. All interpretations are left open by the film director, who avoids any didacticism, but what remains is this transformation of the main character, who becomes another self by crossing the sea.

The title of the film, *The Last of Us* (2016), itself leaves the audience with open interpretations, as there is no mention of who is this "last", nor who are "us", and "last" also be interpreted as a new beginning. What is more, the Arabic part of the titles adds another layer of meaning as *Akher wahed fina* translates as *The Last of Us*, but "akher" means at the same time "last" and "other". This leads us to our second part, about the sea as a space of encounters, and its use by film directors to question identities.

The Sea as a Space of Encounters

Among the representations associated with the Mediterranean is also the idea that this sea, locked between Europe and Africa, contrary to the border aspect now associated with it, has long been a space that allowed encounters (Roy 2). Film directors have made use of this by portraying the migration process as a Babel on the sea, where people and languages come across each other, and as a way to set up encounters between characters that question the issue of power and control.

A Babel on the Sea

The crowded boats on which the migrants set sail are often presented as welcoming people from all over the world, speaking all kinds of languages that seemingly form a buzz of indistinguishable words. The one boarded by Elias in *Eden is West* (2009) is in that situation, as well as the one in *Once You're Born, You Can No Longer Hide* (2005), is full of different nationalities and ethnicities such as Syrians, Kurds, Romanian, various African nationalities, and so on, with the smugglers having difficulties communicating with them. The same can be said about *Hope* (2014), *Mediterranea* (2015), and *Terraferma* (2011). The main protagonists in these films have travelled with people seemingly coming from everywhere in the Global South, gathering together to come to Europe, giving the impression that a modern Babel has been recreated on the sea. The image itself is not new, as it is commonly used when speaking about migrations (Agier 24), and it can be traced back to former global migrations, particularly in the case of migrations to the US, with Ellis Island already being considered that way (Vidal 98). Such a link is easy, particularly for Italian directors such as Emanuele Crialese, who is familiar with the emigration

from Italy to the US, and with its mark on Italian history and memory (Capussotti 55). In that case, it serves the purpose of comparing the early twentieth-century situation, when Italy was a country of emigration, to the present situation when it itself is faced with an influx of migrants.

Seemingly, this idea of a Babel on the sea could appear as relatively positive, and even engaging, as people from all horizons mingle together. However, there are darker layers of interpretation to this image, that question the possibility of an encounter, and the violence that is rooted in the Babel trope. If directors choose to focus on the seemingly choral aspect of voices, echoing each other in different languages, these languages remain indiscernible and are quite often not translated, mimicking the mingling of languages of the Biblical story. There are voices, indeed, as in Tullio Giordana's film, but voices that fail to be heard, by the smugglers, or by the migrants themselves. Even in *Harragas* (2009) the focus on migrants all coming from the same country (Algeria), Merzak Allouache stresses the dialectal difference between migrants coming from the coast and the ones from the Sahara, with characters aggressively mocking each other on this issue, stressing the fact that, far from a common endeavour, crossing the sea is, for each of them, an individual experience marked by loneliness, only partially shared with the few very close companions with whom they travel. Crossing the national and language barrier, as done in *Hope* (2014), leads to hardships and even more loneliness.

Contrasting with this, the common language of this Babel also bears the mark of symbolic violence, being that of the former colonisers and of the ones who are in power during the journey. Be it English, French, Italian or Arabic, in all cases, language is a mark of power. *Mediterranea* (2015) stresses this by having one Italian character being asked not to speak in the Sicilian dialect (the language of power, that of the entrepreneurs and landlords who the migrants face) to the migrants who painfully managed to master some level of standard Italian through the classes that are specifically addressed to them to help them integrate. The same use of power can be seen in another scene in which a patronizing humanitarian worker has the migrants answer to her in the most childish way possible in Italian before allowing them to eat supper at the end of a long workday. It is significant that Gianfranco Rosi, who particularly focused

his movie on sounds only allows the audience to hear the migrants as they call for help on the radio in broken English, as any other language would be useless (De Angelis and De Angelis 147). *The Order of Things* (2017), for its part, establishes even a hierarchy among power languages, as each character is forced to learn the language of the other: Somali migrants have to turn to Italian, and Italian police officers have to use Arabic and English to communicate with Libyan militias and European officials.

Silence is used as a symbol of power more than the language in many of these films. As sound plays such an important part in these movies, its absence is all the more noticeable, and some directors have even chosen to portray the migrants as almost mute. As said, *The Last of Us* (2016) is almost a silent movie; Costa-Gavras' character Elias goes all through the Mediterranean and half of Europe almost without uttering a word. Other than the distress calls, *Fuocoammare* (2016) has no migrants speaking directly to the camera, and *Terraferma* (2011) follows almost the same path. In that way, directors have put to the screen the question of subalternity that Gayatri Spivak talked about in her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (Morris 100; 117). This aspect becomes all the more apparent as some migrants yield what power they can get from working as translators and middlemen, as seen in *Mediterranea* (2015) and in *Hope* (2014). Film directors put to the screen the question of power by demonstrating that who is in control of the words, also controls and frames the narrative about migrations. Given their own position, this move appears as self-reflexive. These silent migrants also hint at another issue, that of control in the most basic sense, particularly when it comes to body politics.

From Body Politics to Individual Encounters

The fact that migrants are portrayed as silent characters is only one aspect of a larger question that film directors have intended to put to the screen, that of control, namely control in the sense of body politics, as developed by Daria Davitti's work, inspired by Foucault and Agamben's development of the notion. However, the migrants' bodies have a long media history, particularly in the sense of a symbolic infestation (Inda 46). In the case of the films studied here, it takes, above all, the form of control as migrants are portrayed stacked, transported, and jailed, all in the name of

control. As *Fuocoammare* (2016) insists, there is no encounter when there is physical control over one of the participants, something Emanuele Crialese underlines by filming the gloves and hazmat suits donned by the Italian coast guards. On the other hand, one of his main characters, a young boy from Lampedusa, has vision issues in one of his eyes, symbolizing the imbalance in any kind of encounter, as it would be one-sided, and only half of it would be seen, linking it to the whole showing and seeing aspect directors have to tackle.

This control exerted over migrant bodies is that of the smugglers, the police, and the authorities in the so-called Libyan hotspot portrayed in *The Order of Things* (2017), as can be expected. Migrants go from boat to hotspot to the retention camp that appears in *Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide* (2005), all marked by symbols of violence and control (barbed wire, fences, weapons, gates, and locks). But it is also the control exerted by some migrants over others, precisely that of those who act as middlemen with local authorities, smugglers, and entrepreneurs. They appear in *Hope* (2014), where along the migration route, each stop has some chairmen who take charge of organizing the migrants and controlling them. It is also the potential control over the migrants' bodies that can, even unwillingly, be that of Europeans: the entrepreneurs in *Mediterranea* (2015) who employ the migrants, among whom a change in status is marked by the mere possession of gloves to pick up oranges. The same can be said of the people who help Elias to make it across Europe, the first being a tourist woman who has sex with him before letting him go, pointing at the ambivalence of the help he receives, and undermining a too-simplistic view of the Mediterranean as a place of encounters.

Control over the migrants also means control over their bodies, which makes this aspect of body politics even more blatant. Filming them as groups can, depending on the movie, be either a way to emphasize that they are treated as an influx of a flock (*The Order of Things*, *Hope*) or a choice to focus on the magnitude of the drama at stake, at the expense of individualisation, migrants being identified as a group per se (*Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide*). This politicisation of the body is especially apparent when migrants are put face-to-face with Europeans, the latter themselves often treated as groups of tourists at the beach. The nakedness

of both groups is put into contrast by their relation to the sea, adding to the awkwardness of the encounter, or lack of it (*Fuocoammare*). This way of opposing relations to the sea comes as a leitmotiv in the corpus, starting with *Eden is West* (2009), and reappearing in *Terraferma* (2011) and in *Riparo* (2007), among others, even *Terraferma* puts some emphasis on the hospitality of Italian islanders, as a reminder of the part played by the people of Lampedusa early in the crisis (Melotti et al. 215). *Riparo*, as well as *Foreign Body* (2016), make a link between sexuality, wealth, status, and power, linking these to the idea of control, in a way that is metaphorical of Europe's relation to the migrants. It mimics Europe's goal of controlling the migration influx through administrative and financial means (*The Order of Things*), following Daria Davitti's analysis of her own corpus.

This situation acts as a follow-up to the Babel image previously seen in all its violence. As the tower of Babel was built through violence in the Bible, so is the Babel of migrants left to the discretionary power of whoever has authority where they are. Their representation as a Babel is a way for directors to make the audience adopt an outside point of view, that of someone who sees migrants from a distance and who has at least potential power over them. This is underlined on screen through all the scenes which are shot from a distance, or through a fence (*Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide, Fuocoammare*). The artificiality of the Babel image is furthermore developed in films that have been shot in a more intimate way, sometimes with migrants playing their own part (*Hope*), stressing all the differences that separate migrants from one another, allowing the audience to individualise characters by no longer seeing them through the dehumanising lens of a flock or a crowd. In the film, migrants are not 'Africans', but from Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, Gabon etc and identify as such among others.

This process of individual humanisation is precisely the core narrative in *The Order of Things* (2016), with its title directly inspired by Foucault's work[1]. Sent to Libya to organise a hotspot, an Italian police officer,

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[1] *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* is the English title for the translation of Foucault's book *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines* published

originally cold and efficient, is forced to meet a Somali migrant whose brother died while being detained by a Libyan militia. As awkward and short-lived as the relation between them is, and laden with issues of power (language, among others, and a strong visual opposition between the boats that migrants board and the plane used by the policeman), it forces the officer to rehumanise the migrant, as he comes to see her as a person, and not only as part of a migrant influx. The few conversations between them have nothing special about them: just a few words about personal hopes, family, and tastes. These ordinary conversations matter because these are the words that would be exchanged between people who meet; hence, they humanise both characters and form what can be considered a social relationship between them. This relation as shown in *The Order of Things* (2016), as well as the ones built in the same way by Aviya, the main character in *Mediterranea* (2015), leads to nothing much, as this would probably be considered a simplistic painting of a rosy picture of a terrible situation. *The Order of Things* (2016), as the title of the film points out, is the one where encounter remains the exception and where social and political roles weigh heavily on characters such as this policeman. The same can be said about the doctor in Lampedusa who appears in *Fuocoammare* (2016). It is possible, but it is not the norm, and it is not really accepted, as other officers appear particularly reluctant when they hear of it. A few encounters cannot solve a whole continental crisis, as well-meaning as they may be (such as in *Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide*). The director of *Hope* (2014) states in interviews[2]: that as much as he wanted to help them, he was well aware that he could not give false hopes to the migrants he met and who played in his film, but only, through his work he could rehumanise and individualise this so-called Babel.

Conclusion

In the Polish film about European identity *Dolce fine giornata* (Borcuch 2019), an award-winning activist and poet is trapped in an art installation

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in 1966. In this book, Foucault explores the epistemic assumption of each historical period, what is considered to be true and acceptable at a given time.

[2] Bonus interview, Pyramide Video DVD edition 2015.

designed to raise attention to the plight of the migrants by making a link to more ancient European tragedies. As the migration crisis unfolded in the Mediterranean, beyond poignant documentaries that aimed at raising attention to a sense of emergency (*Sea Sorrow* (2017)) through the use of historical links and strong images, film directors have developed a reflection about how to portray the ongoing crisis in its uniqueness. All the while they indeed used references to some former migrations (particularly to the US) and tragedies, and to the Mediterranean identity itself, but at the same time they thrived to avoid becoming, trapped in such references, as the poet in *Dolce fine giornata*.

The aim of portraying the crisis' routinised violence without falling into easy pathos led film directors to question their own power as cultural entrepreneurs. As such, they frame issues for the audience and develop a representation of the crisis. Indeed, an evolution can be traced between the first film studied here (released in the mid-2000s) and the more recent ones (late 2010), as the tropes and references used, about Babel, about former migrations, and about identities gradually grow more complex. As important as each may be in their own right, the characters in *Eden is West* (2009), with its Chaplinesque undertone, and *Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide* (2005) appear as forerunners when it comes to describing the migration crisis, paving the way for the characters in *Hope* (2014) and in *The Last of Us* (2016) to evolve with their more complex background and symbolism. However, between the release of these films, the crisis had deepened and routinised, and humanitarian and bureaucratic concerns became more important and visible, all of which were gradually included in the directors' reflections too.

Film directors have based their films around a few core themes that have allowed them to deepen the reflection about the issues of representation of an ongoing tragedy as well as avoiding voyeurism or too far-fetched references. These themes, which revolve around the ambivalence of the sea, as a space where people both die and are reborn, and as a place for encounters, particularly through the various symbolisms attached to the story of Babel, have allowed them to raise complex political issues, such as body politics and control, the shortcomings of humanitarian help, or rendering invisible violence. Even if rehumanising the issue appears as

a core concern, it is in no way presented as a solution to the crisis, even if it is crucial. At a deeper level, what these directors have been trying to do is, through the relationship to the sea, to question European and migrant identities. Characters in these movies play parts which question the notion of identity, as does the "us" in Slim Ala Eddine's film, *The Last of Us* (2016). In this regard, beyond its role as a liminal and transformative space, the sea is not only a metaphor for liquid borders but also a revealing space that questions the limits of identity.

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Imagining Alternative Futures: Migrations in the Art of Yael Bartana

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Introduction

In opening up alternative or hypothetical scenarios, Israeli artist Yael Bartana reflects metaphorically on the history of her country of origin and its international entanglements. Her work touches on delicate topics and develops a platform for debate, digging into collective memory and strongly engaging the viewers.

Imaginary migrations have often been the starting point of Bartana's projects. The artist portrays unrealistic or paradoxical movements of people, with references to Israeli and European history. Fictive migrations, thus, become ways to ponder on real historical events and to open up discussions. This essay will analyse this strategy in relation to two of her most complex works: *And Europe Will Be Stunned* (2007-2011) and *Malka Germania* (2021).

Methodologically, the paper relies on the visual analysis of the artworks. It looks at them through an iconographical perspective and studies the way they are exhibited and how they engage and interact with the public. Additionally, it builds on interdisciplinary sources, such as historical or socio-political texts, to interpret the artist's explicit or implicit references. As to its results, it aims to understand how fictitious migrations in Bartana's projects become ways to reconsider real-world problems and challenge assumptions and beliefs from the collective imagery.

In and out of Israel: Yael Bartana

Yael Bartana was born into a family of Polish origins in 1970 in Kfar Yehezkel, a moshav ovdim: a traditional type of Zionist settlement from the first decades of the twentieth century. As early as 1996, however, she decided to move out of Israel, shortly after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995, the president much engaged in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. This event indeed "shaped her own and her generation's worldview and collective identity" (Barkai, "Neurotic Fantasy" 246). The decision to leave the country, out of personal and political reasons, has given her a first impression of what it means to migrate, and has transformed her approach to art radically.

In her early career, Bartana calls herself an "amateur anthropologist" (Esche and Bartana 42). It is an expression from the writer Eva Hoffmann, who claims that every immigrant becomes so, in the way he/she looks at the new society from an outsider perspective (Pantenburg 54). Bartana, however, turns her gaze not to her new host society, but to her country of origin. She develops a distanced perspective that allows her to explore topics related to Israeli society with a sense of freedom that she could not find within the state.

She problematises the ways Israel raises its citizens and creates a sense of belonging while bringing together communities with different geographical origins. She uses art to examine the various rituals that establish an "imagined community" (Anderson 25), filming events such as the collective rites from the days of remembrance, or the mandatory military upbringing of the Israeli youths.

After some years in New York, Bartana moves to Europe, initially to the Netherlands. Here she leaves aside a simple documentary-observational approach. Her projects get more complex and more politically engaged. She begins to portray alternative historical scenarios and to imagine their potential consequences. She often draws on archival material and challenges its narratives, finally claiming to recover the imagination that politicians have lost.

The artist translates in her projects her own experience of moving out of Israel and begins to imagine hypothetical collective Jewish migrations. These fictional journeys shed light on the void that the Jewish community has left in Europe and hint at European responsibility for the destabilisation of the Levant region.

And Europe Will Be Stunned (2007 – 2011)

Bartana creates *And Europe Will Be Stunned* (2007-2011) over several years and through long periods of field research, demonstrating her predisposition as an anthropologist. The main outcome is a trilogy of films, lasting just over 50 minutes in total. The project is set in Poland. The artist thus finds the opportunity to return and rediscover her family's roots.

The work narrates the story of a fictitious political movement which strives for the return of Jews to Poland: *the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland* (JRMiP). It features many references to the history of Zionism and twentieth-century Polish history, creating multiple levels of interpretation.

The Polish Trilogy's First Film: *Mary Koszmary* ("Nightmares," 2007)

The first film opens with a man entering an empty stadium. He is Sławomir Sierakowski, an actual Polish political activist, whom Bartana met in Poland. Sierakowski steps onto a platform and begins a long speech. He addresses the Jews directly, and tells them that the Polish motherland misses them, she has not forgotten them, and she dreams of them every night. He vigorously invites them to return to their country, and to heal its wounds.

"This is a call, not to the dead, but to the living", he states (*And Europe Will Be Stunned / Mary Koszmary* 2:30-2:40). Sierakowski seems to reverse the historical calls that leaders of Zionism made at the beginning of the twentieth-century. Back then, figures such as Yosef Vitkin were trying to convince Jewish people to do the *Aliyah*, emigration to Palestine (see Vitkin's "A Call to the Youth of Israel whose Hearts are with their People

and with Zion", 1905). Here, inversely, the Polish politician is asking forgiveness and for them to come back to Europe.

The stadium where the speech is delivered equally holds a very symbolic meaning. Bartana's film refers to Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* (1938), where the stadium is the central site for a dictatorial state's propaganda. The artist operates a visual subversion. Riefenstahl's film shows the stands full of people, who during the opening ceremony do the fascist Nazi salute. Bartana's stands, on the other hand, are sombre, spectral, and completely empty (fig. 1). Some sparse vegetation gives the only touch of colour. It is the most effective visual representation of the void that Polish Jews left behind after the genocide.

Indeed, Bartana mentions the feeling of emptiness she felt while visiting the villages in Poland where Jewish communities existed before the Holocaust: "It made a very emotional and powerful impact, even stronger than watching the real atrocities. To feel the void in these places was very strong" ("Yael Bartana Interview: Returning 3,3 Million Jews to Poland" 3:30-4:40).

Afterwards, Sierakowski continues his speech: "Return, and both of us, will finally cease to be the chosen people . . . Chosen for suffering, chosen for taking wounds, and chosen for inflicting wounds. Return, and we shall finally become Europeans" (*And Europe Will Be Stunned / Mary Koszmary* 5:40-6:00). The immigration project does not have a strictly Polish character. It dreams indeed of becoming an inspiration for a newly welcoming European community, as the leader will later add.

As he speaks, a group of children writes in white chalk on the playing field one of the movement's slogans: "3,300,000 Jews can change the life of 40,000,000 Poles" (*And Europe Will Be Stunned / Mary Koszmary* 2:40-4:50). The boys wear a brownish suit, the girls a dark blue skirt, and both have a red kerchief around the neck. The children's military clothing reminds the viewers of the official uniform of a fascist state and adds a militarist aesthetic in contrast with the words of peace of the movement's leaders. The children, however, enliven the stadium and weaken its

sombre atmosphere (fig. 2). They bring in a playful dimension and transform a solemn moment into a game-like reality, echoing Gadamer's idea of *Spiel der Kunst*. This detail aligns Bartana with other video-artists like Wael Shawky and his *Telematch Sadat* (2007) or Jumana Manna and her *Blessed Blessed Oblivion* (2010), where historical events such as the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat or the history of Israel-Palestine relations are similarly staged by child actors.

The second film: *Mur i wieża* ("Wall and Tower," 2009)

And Europe Will Be Stunned's second film parodies the aesthetic of old Zionist photographers like Yaacov Ben-Dov or Leni and Herbert Sonnenfeld (who inspire Bartana's 2008 photo series *The Missing Negatives of the Sonnenfeld Collection*). The movie draws inspiration from their glorification of the work of the land and the heroization of the Eretz-Israel Zionist farmer pioneers and colourises the pictures. It features new pioneers (fig. 3) who return presumably from Israel to Poland. They look proud and are dressed like their ancestors, but the urban landscape that surrounds them makes their historical transposition parodistic. Moreover, their number (only a few) is far distant from the one promised in the first film.

After their arrival in Warsaw, they start to build a wooden camp with a couple of barracks and a watchtower. The construction takes place in the square where the monument to the Warsaw Ghetto's heroes stands, which was renamed "Hitler square" during the German occupation and that today houses the Museum of the History of Polish Jews (Dirié et al. 139).

The Polish anthem accompanies their work of digging, hammering, and pulling up. The music adds a solemn tone as if to emphasise that the state itself is sponsoring the process. Once the construction is finished, Sierakowski arrives and brings the official flag of the movement, which juxtaposes an eagle from the flags of Poland and a David Star from Israel. The banner passes from hand to hand and is finally raised on the tower. This scene recovers again the aesthetic of a kibbutz's collective work from old Israeli photographs.

Afterwards, a language class is held inside the camp. The teacher translates from Hebrew to Polish words like 'land' and 'peace' for a few enthusiastic students. The film subverts once again Zionist history. After the birth of Israel in 1948, the imposition of Hebrew in the land was one of the key strategies to create a new nation out of different immigrant communities. Ilan Pappe describes "the dynamic expansion of Hebrew as a living language" as "one of the greatest achievements of the Zionist movement" (*Israel* 83). In Bartana's film, on the contrary, the neo-pioneers start to learn their future Polish compatriots' language as one of their first actions, beginning right away a process of integration.

Nevertheless, they surround the settlement with barbed wire. Visually, it creates the look of a concentration camp (fig. 4), or of a new ghetto on the ashes of the old one. On a second level, it could also refer to the militarization of the territory in Israel and Palestine. The sunny day, however, brightens up the whole scene and lowers the contrast between the camp and the city that surrounds the park where it stands.

Joa Ljungberg writes that "they are constructing the kibbutz as a *Homa Umigdal* – a type of prefabricated homestead developed during the Arab revolt in 1936" (Bartana et al. 41). She quotes Sharon Rotbard who "describes the powerful symbolic value of the *Homa Umigdal* to the nation's history – an embodiment of sacrifice, dedication, and heroism – but also argues that it served to perpetuate a ghetto mentality" (41).

In contrast, the neo-pioneers show, therefore, both openness and suspicion toward the Polish natives. They get in touch with them and start a process of social integration, while at the same time they arm their settlement as if to organise for a potential military defence. These ambiguities are a distinct hallmark of Bartana's artistic style, intended to raise doubt and reflection in the viewer.

The film indeed values viewers' reactions, as it features, for instance, Warsaw's citizens discovering the new construction in their neighbourhood. The camp is abandoned by its founders, and after a shortcut, we see some passersby who stop to examine it or even try to go inside.

Significantly, they find it empty, like the ruins of a concentration camp. These scenes break down the barrier between reality and fiction, confronting ordinary people with the possibility of unexpected turns of history.

The third film: *Zamach* ("Assassination," 2011)

The third film is centred around the funeral of Sierakowski, who has been assassinated. It opens with a shot from inside of the funeral car (fig. 5). The back doors open, and the coffin is taken up by a group of men who solemnly accompanies it inside a palace, seen afar through a De Chirico-like perspective.

After a last tribute to the movement's leader inside the palace, a procession then departs. Here we see signs stating "Jews and Poles refuse to be enemies", or "more colour, less blood" or even "fascism kills" (*And Europe Will Be Stunned / Zamach* 8:40-12:00). The crowd gathers under a stage, where some speeches and chants follow.

The whole event recalls, on a smaller scale, Israeli President Rabin's public funeral from 1995 (fig. 6). Sigal Barkai writes about it:

> Throughout the trilogy, Bartana appeals to Israeli viewers directly while bypassing the Poles and Europeans, communicating with them through schemes, ceremonial patterns and formal rituals known only to them. The construction of wall and tower settlements, youth delegations to Poland and the assassination of Rabin are cultural events . . . that can only be fully understood by Israelis. ("Historiographic Irony" 7)

Sierakowski's death, however, also evokes the assassination of the Polish President Gabriel Narutowicz in 1922. He was much engaged in the inclusion of the Jewish community in Polish political life, and he was killed in 1922 by an artist during a visit to the National Gallery in Warsaw. These kinds of references, like the numerous European Union flags at the memorial ceremony, contradict Barkai's argument and demonstrate how Bartana is addressing not only the Israeli public but also the European one.

Indeed, one of the first venues that Bartana's project travelled to was the Venice Art Biennale. Here she represented the 2011 Polish pavilion: an exception, since usually the national pavilions present artists from the country itself. The pavilion's large hall was divided into multiple rooms: in each one a movie from the trilogy was projected, without, however, a structured or logical continuity. This left the viewer to experience the exhibition without a prefabricated mental path, leaving them a free interpretation of the works (fig. 7).

After showing it in Venice, Bartana brought the trilogy around Poland. She even screened it in small villages, to create a debate among the locals and all those who could not travel to Italy. She did the same in Israel, where she mentions that the audience's reactions were often strong and emotional. She has said that many people there did not understand why she was proposing that Jews return to a country like Poland, which, for obvious historical reasons, is still the worst possible destination in the collective Israeli imagination.

And Europe Will Be Stunned (2007-2011) thus develops as a courageous challenge, and it shows Bartana's interest in engaging locally and creating a debate out of the elitist art world. The Polish trilogy, however, also hides a personal journey. Through it, the artist returns to the roots of her family, and tries to reconnect with them: "When I went to Poland, I felt very connected to the place on some strange level. It is something I never felt in the Netherlands" (Bartana et al. 115).

Bartana's return to Poland gives her the opportunity to explore the European Jewish and Yiddish cultures. She often comments on how Israel has gone through a process of removal and denial of its European origins, echoing what Ilan Pappe has described as:

> [A] struggle against the rich Jewish heritage of the townships of Eastern Europe. The constructors of the new culture went through a process that critical Israeli historians and sociologists called 'the denial of exile'. Denying the Jewish culture of Europe was seen as the safest way of returning to a normal and healthy existence of nationhood, as it had been during the biblical time. (*Israel* 83)

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Additionally, Bartana also subverts the tradition of delegations to Poland's concentration camps regularly organized by Israel for young people. She has explained it explicitly:

> Zionism in Israel has made us very strongly disconnected to our previous history. Poland is used systematically by the politics of memory, for instance in the practice of sending young kids to visit the concentration camps, to visit the monuments in Poland, while having zero contact to Polish youth, or anyone in general. This makes sure that they will come back stronger and ready to become soldiers. It is very much part of a process of propaganda, that uses the victims to transform them into soldiers. ("Yael Bartana: Reflections on the construction of the national identity and the politics of memory" 19:40-20:35)

With her project, the artist reverses this tradition: she promotes contact with the local Polish population and creates a space for dialogue. In doing so, she courageously touches very delicate (or even taboo) topics, such as the memory of the Holocaust and the politics around it in Israel.

The proposal of a reverse migration to Poland has often been framed as impractical and labelled as a mere provocation. Sigal Barkai, for example, quotes Gideon Ofrat, who writes: "It goes without saying: no man in Poland would ever make this kind of call, and also the artist – post-Zionist as she is – doesn't advocate for a 'Jewish return to Poland'. Yael Bartana is an impostor, and irony is the intellectual and creative tool she uses in her deception" ("Historiographic Irony" 6).

Bartana's work looks, indeed, for such strong reactions. It gives no unquestionable solutions but rather asks questions. The Polish trilogy seems to take up what the Italian intellectual Pier Paolo Pasolini had already asked in a 1967 essay: "would Europeans be ready to welcome back the Jews, guaranteeing that the atrocities of the XX century would not happen again" (145)?

In 2012 Bartana organised the *First Congress of the JRMiP Movement* at the Berlin Biennale by setting up discussions with people from many different backgrounds. The debates focused on delicate topics from the

films, such as the European origins of Zionism, the colonisation of Palestine, the future of Europe, and the possible political solutions for the region's conflicts.

The Polish trilogy transforms here into a platform for a public debate and shows, indeed, how the whole project was not a mere provocation. The talks have a very serious visual configuration (fig. 8): they are held around a round table, which mimics those featuring reunions like the G20. Around it, dozens of spectators could sit in several circles of chairs and bring in the perspective of a general public – like the Warsaw's people did in the second film of the trilogy.

The event overturns the various Zionist congresses held in Europe prior to the colonisation of Palestine, which established the historical steps of the movement. Furthermore, it adds to the *And Europe Will Be Stunned* project a performative aspect. Unlike the movies, nothing is scripted and acted, although everything is filmed. The discussions are real, as are the debates that confront opposing positions. Like a play, it is attended by the audience of the Biennale, which brings the reaction of someone from outside the work.

One of the most burning issues which Bartana's movies imply is the potential consequences of such a migratory movement back to Poland for Israel. In the second film, we see only a few dozen people actually returning to Warsaw, but the first one promises a displacement of 3.3 million people. Such a phenomenon would require a "massive housing project," to quote a definition that Yael Allweil has coined for Zionism (5).

If those people had come from Israel, they would have left a great void in a population which in 2011 was only 7.7 million. This would determine a major demographic shift and undermine the Israeli historical process of Judaization of the land.

The congress in Berlin, however, discerned reality from fiction. Inspired by the hyperbolic scenarios of the Polish trilogy, it tackled actual demographic problems which pose sensitive issues in Israel, for instance,

the right of return for Palestinians. During one of the panels, the curator, Reem Fadda addresses this question. She had co-curated with the Israeli curator Galit Eiat the project *Liminal Spaces* (2006-2008), a dialogue between the Israeli and the Palestinian art scenes against the occupation and the separation wall. In Berlin, she states:

> I would like to ask that we acknowledge the right of return to both Jewish and non-Jewish people. There needs to be addressed a historical violence that was perpetrated on native people in Palestine through the insertion of a colonialist entity and the building of a nation, suppressing the right of one people in favour of the other with a large supremacist understanding that is predominantly white, let's say European model of a colonialist building of a nation started in a place that they are more deserving of it. ("Yael Bartana: Reflections on the construction of the national identity and the politics of memory" 1:21:35-1:22:30)

This is an example of how Bartana's work is able to blur the line between fiction and reality, and create an actual platform for debate addressing the concrete problems of the region. The fictive aspect of her films becomes an occasion to rethink history through a transnational perspective and to establish a dialogue about new possibilities and imaginative solutions.

Malka Germania (2021)

Malka Germania (2021) is a 43-minute film, with an oneiric, slowed-down rhythm very different from the Polish trilogy. It tells the story of the sudden arrival of an androgynous messiah in the city of Berlin and the side events that occur as a result. The messiah comes to awaken the ghosts of the past, but she also brings redemption. This coincides again with the return of Jews to a place where they had left a void. The movie is full of references to both the Holocaust and Israeli history, hence addressing a mixed audience.

It was first featured at the exhibition *Redemption Now* (2021) at the Jewish Museum in Berlin, which had commissioned it. It was projected on three huge slightly curved screens (fig. 12): on them, the images sometimes alternated, and sometimes came along together. This confused the perception of the viewer, who had to decide which screen to follow, but

was likewise enveloped by the pictures. The sound completed the immersive experience: the film has no dialogues but only sounds of eerie sirens, bells, footsteps, and barking dogs; constantly creating a tense atmosphere.

The film opens with the arrival of the Messiah in a forest, where she starts to walk along some rail lines. She is completely dressed in white, the same colour as her hair. Her dress resembles a sort of ancient peplos. A tunic with wide sleeves and a hood covers her around a pullover; around the waist, she has a strap looking vaguely like an explosive belt, contrasting her redeeming aura.

At her side, a white camel or a donkey alternatively accompanies her: she will ride the second proudly while entering victorious in Berlin. She thus resembles the traditional German figure of the Palmesel (Jesus on the Pamesel, see *Christus auf dem Palmesel* at the Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst).

While the messiah strolls through the trees, military men move around (fig. 10). Some youngsters run and exercise in the forest, as do some girls on another screen. They mimic faithfully the athletes at the beginning of the second part of Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* (*Fest der Schönheit*). The location is also the same: the light penetrates the vegetation, and the surrounding mist creates a suspended atmosphere. The Messiah is thus almost visiting Riefenstahl's movie as part of her wandering around the ghosts of the past: in this case, she examines fascist body worship and militaristic aesthetics.

Finally, the location reveals itself. We are at the Wannsee: while various people and family enjoy their day at the beach, on the other side of the lake we can see the famous villa where the Final Solution to the Jewish Question (the code name for the Jewish genocide) was taken. As a lugubrious reminder, at the end of the film Albert Speer's "Große Halle" (Halle des Volkes, part of the gigantic transformation plan of Berlin desired by Hitler) will emerge from the water. The Messiah will walk defiantly towards it.

Afterwards, she starts to walk around historical places in Berlin: the Brandenburg Gate, the Victory Column, and the Checkpoint Charlie. The film focuses on her emotional reactions and her inquisitive look as she discovers these sites. In one scene, she arrives at a station with a Hebrew signboard, where a group of people are waiting. They resemble the Shoah's deportees: the Messiah arrives and leads them away, following the tracks in the forest.

This last scene is part of a process of salvation and redemption, which in Judaism is inextricably linked to the arrival of the Messiah. One element, however, disturbs this salvific happening: the constant presence of the army. They roam the streets of Berlin, with barking dogs kept on leashes which epitomise their threatening presence.

The military men often carry the Israeli flag on their shoulders: this suggests an ongoing conquest of the city by their country. One of them is wearing *tefellins* (Jewish prayer tool) and plays the shofar (fig. 11). He might be a historical reference to Shlomo Goren, who, as Pappe writes, "was famous for blowing the shofar [after the end of the 1967 war] – the traditional Jewish horn – on the Wailing Wall, declaring his intention to accelerate the coming of the Jewish Messiah to Jerusalem" (*A History of Modern Palestine* 199).

The redemption process thus develops ambiguously not only through the arrival of the Messiah but also through military conquest. This echoes what the historian Masalha calls the "Zionist ideal of redeeming the biblical 'soil' by conquest" (33). In a very significant scene, we see a series of people replacing street names, and covering old street signs with new Hebrew inscriptions while the Messiah silently observes (fig. 12). This significantly takes place in Berlin, a city with a strong ongoing debate about the possible replacement of street names linked to the nation's colonial past. Yael Bartana claims that she was inspired by a dream. Anyone familiar with Israel's history, however, will immediately associate the scene with the politics of changing names in the Palestinian land's topography, which was part of the process of nation-building and Judaization of the territory, something that historians Nur Masalha and Ilan Pappe have

labelled, respectively, a "toponymicide" or a "memoricyde" (Masalha 10; Pappe, *A History of Modern Palestine* 146).

Bartana audaciously overlays many delicate and emotional references to the Holocaust and allusions to the modern history of Israel. She juxtaposes references to the fascist aesthetics of Riefenstahl's movies to hint at the role of the army in Israeli history. With the latter, she aligns herself with other Israeli artists, such as Adi Nes or Nir Hod, who equally address this topic (see the 2016 volume *Civic Aesthetics: Militarism in Israeli Art and Visual Culture* by Noa Roei).

Malka Germania works thus on two levels. The first one follows the Messiah's discovery of hidden Holocaust memories in Berlin. In the second one, the film refers to the messianic aspirations intertwined with a military history which have characterised the history of Zionism in Palestine. However, it gives no direct explanation of the relationship between the two (the army and the Messiah). It leaves to the viewers their interpretations and a questioning of the potential consequences of the portrayed scenarios. The arrival of the Messiah could transform Berlin into a new Jerusalem. Would that lead to a Jewish migration, or return, to the city, similar to what happens in the Polish trilogy?

Many issues interweave: the re-emergence of tragic memories, the possibilities of redemption, and the risks of new violence taking place. *Malka Germania*, just like *And Europe Will Be Stunned*, gives no answers to its questions, and aims to become once again a platform for debate. Indeed, just like the trilogy, it features the reactions of accidental spectators: in more than one scene, we see Berlin citizens looking out of their windows and observing the strange actions taking place in their streets. They represent the addressees of the project, whom the film wants to make think.

Conclusion

Both *Malka Germania* and *And Europe Will Be Stunned* act as reflections on history. They do so through hypothetical (or fantastic) alternative scenarios, imagining fictive migrations and displacement of people. They

suggest embracing history completely, to expose its ghosts in full, as if only through a cathartic process one could find redemption or new solutions.

They both start with a private journey of the artist. She moves out of Israel and travels around Europe as an immigrant, and as an "amateur anthropologist" (Bartana et al. 42). Here, she rediscovers the European origins of her family and of her country and develops a distanced perspective. However, Bartana's personal path aims to find a value for the community through artistic projects that engage the public and seek to create debate.

Bartana's fictional stories are filled with references to real history: when they tell of a fictive political movement striving for a Jewish return to Poland, or of the Messiah's arrival in Berlin and the alleged conquest of the city by the Israeli army. Fiction thus becomes a metaphor of reality, and imaginary migrations and displacements are ways to reflect on thorny issues. The plots take unlikely turns, and develop as "what ifs": what if Jews were really to return to countries like Poland or Germany? What if a new Jerusalem was set up out of Israel? What if the ghosts of history re-emerged in all of their obscure aspects? Bartana's works ask these questions directly to their viewers. Ideally, they try to test their responsiveness. This is why both the Polish trilogy and *Malka Germania* include scenes with the locals reacting to the strange events happening around them.

When it comes to exhibiting her work, Bartana shows them out of the elitist circles of art biennials and fairs. For instance, she showed *And Europe Will be Stunned* around little villages in Poland to provoke discussion about home and belongings for Jews and non-Jews. Her art unfolds, thus, naturally a platform that accommodates all the debates in and around Jewish migration. Here contrasting positions meet, while the artistic fiction retrieves the "fantasy that the politicians have lost" and the courage to tackle sensitive but crucial issues ("Artist Talk: Yael Bartana" 9:10-9:30).

Appendix: images

Fig. 1. Yael Bartana, Mary Koszmary ("Nightmares"), 2007, video still, courtesy of Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam and Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw

Fig. 2. Yael Bartana, Mary Koszmary ("Nightmares"), 2007, video still, courtesy of Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam and Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw

Fig. 3. Yael Bartana, *Mur i wieża* ("Wall and Tower"), 2009, video still, courtesy of Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam, and Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv

Fig. 4. Yael Bartana, *Mur i wieża* ("Wall and Tower"), 2009, video still, courtesy of Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam, and Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv

Fig. 5. Yael Bartana, *Zamach* ("Assassination"), 2011, video still, courtesy of Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam, and Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv

Fig. 6. Yael Bartana, *Zamach* ("Assassination"), 2011, video still, courtesy of Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam, and Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv
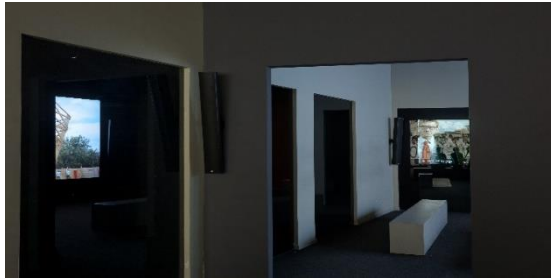
Fig. 7. Yael Bartana, *JRMiP*, Installation view Polish Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale, photo by Ilya Rabinovich

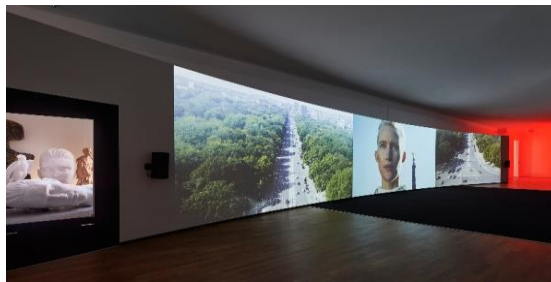**Fig. 8.** Yael Bartana, *Congress of The Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland* (JRMiP), Berlin, 2021

Fig. 9. Credit: Jüdisches Museum Berlin. Photo by Yves Sucksdorff

Fig. 10. Yael Bartana, *Malka Germania*, 2021, video still, courtesy of Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam; Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv; Galleria Raffaella Cortese, Milano; Petzel Gallery, New York; and Capitain Petzel, Berlin

Fig. 11. Yael Bartana, *Malka Germania*, 2021, video still, courtesy of Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam; Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv; Galleria Raffaella Cortese, Milano; Petzel Gallery, New York; and Capitain Petzel, Berlin

Fig. 12. Yael Bartana, *Malka Germania*, 2021, video still, courtesy of Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam; Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv; Galleria Raffaella Cortese, Milano; Petzel Gallery, New York; and Capitain Petzel, Berlin

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The Search for Freedom: Suiheisha's Transpacific Journey and Afro-Asian Intersection

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Introduction

The legacies of the Suiheisha movements by burakumin, Japan's Tokugawa outcast groups, have been studied by many scholars worldwide. With an attempt to look beyond the imperial borders of Japan in the 1920s, this article explores how the Suiheisha activists looked at Black America to develop an internationalist framework to critique the domestic discrimination and identify with African American movements, allowing many buraku leaders to craft a different vision to imagine a "new world" grounded in what Fred Ho calls "the common and often overlapping diasporic experience" (Ho and Mullen 3). Just as the Jim Crow regime followed the formal abolition of African slavery in the United States, the formal abolition of the social status system in Japan gave way to a new set of discriminatory policies and continuous segregation. Seeking economic opportunities and struggling for equal rights in the era of Japanese empire-building, the buraku communities coped with the changing narratives of the imperialist agenda to find their paths to freedom. Focusing on how the buraku intellectuals in the United States responded to, interacted with, and engaged in the minority struggle issues to make buraku problem not limited to the locality of Japan, this essay examines the writings of Tahara Haruji, one buraku emigrant to the US who travelled back to Japan and devoted himself to establishing migrant schools to train potential emigrants for settling into the destinations.

The narratives of buraku emigration are deeply intertwined with the expansion of the Japanese empire. The possession of land is a key term that comes up almost always in the narration of the dream of the deprived, displaced, and discriminated. Found in many narratives on buraku emigration, both buraku leaders and government officials used the idea of

having one's own land to persuade and convince potential buraku emigrants that emigration offers a free ticket to this dream. Those propaganda efforts often had a very explicit focus on land and material comfort to suggest emigration as a means for creating buraku's 'new heaven' or 'new homeland'. In a similar light, Tahara Haruji's interaction with and fascination with Garveyism's possibility of a new homeland through participation in the imperial project is worth highlighting. Though Tahara never explicitly confirmed that his later devotion to emigration schools was directly related to Garvey, those schools aimed toward this idea of a new homeland – desires to conquer and settle down in foreign lands – within and beyond the Japanese Empire proper, and ultimately becoming agents of imperialism. The Tokugawa social status system, via differentiation and classification based on occupation, had placed burakumin at the bottom of the social structure, while the early Meiji abolition of the system also did not lead to the true emancipation of burakumin. Buraku emigration to Hokkaido and Manchuria, both self-mobilised and state-promoted, was in accordance with the empire's effort to expand its territories while differentiating its subjects (See Tanaka; Barclay; Fujitani). The so-called *buraku mondai* (the buraku question) usually phrased as a national issue, can only be elucidated in the context of migrations, the global wave of self-determination movements, and racial capitalism. As Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley point out in their discussions on the African diaspora: "shifting the discussion from an African-centric approach to questions of black consciousness to the globality of the diaspora-in-making allows for a rethinking of how we view Africa and the world and opens up new avenues for writing a world history from below" (26-27). By looking at the diasporic bodies of buraku emigrant groups and trans-pacific/international dialogues they have facilitated, it is evident that their ideas of liberation were closely connected to other international movements; it is not a strictly Japanese problem, nor is Japan the only locus of the struggles.

Tahara Haruji's Journey to the United States

Tahara Haruji's journey to the United States started in 1923, shortly after graduating from Waseda University. Tahara crossed the sea on the coattails of his elder sister, who had emigrated to the US earlier. Tahara

studied journalism at Missouri State University while helping his sister with farming. Upon completing his degree, he worked for the Colorado Shimbun company for several years as a contributor to the local Japanese newspaper. Immigrating to the United States from a buraku community in Fukuoka Prefecture, he witnessed the economic plight and the discrimination Japanese immigrant communities had to confront in post-World War I America. After his return to Japan in 1928, Haruji was later elected to the National Diet of Japan and involved in unique activities straddling the anti-discrimination activism of Suiheisha and providing support for buraku emigrants. In the 1930s, he ran two emigration preparation schools in Tokyo and Fukuoka, intending to set up a systematic program to equip those intending to travel with the necessary farming skills and knowledge about the local place for future success. Tahara's blueprint for buraku immigration included most continents, ranging from North and South America all the way to the Philippines, though he had always considered South America and the newly established Manchukuo as the most feasible destinations due to the available government subsidies. Portrayed mainly as a pioneer in buraku activism and fervent supporter of immigration within and beyond the Empire proper, Haruji's earlier experiences in the United States and writings on the African-American movements remain less known to the public. The then-popular discourse of American-style "frontier development" inspired many Japanese to engage in overseas migration and agricultural settler colonialism inside and outside the formal empire under the slogan of kaigai hatten, translated as overseas development (Eiichiro 6). However, different from most promoters of frontier development, Tahara and his buraku-targeting emigration schools present a narrative in which overseas development is idealised as a practical method to achieve liberation for the discriminated buraku communities, finding a path corresponding to Japan's imperialist ambitions.

Living through the 1920s United States, during which anti-Asian sentiments heightened and discriminatory immigration laws introduced, Tahara wrote about the African American movements in the US and made efforts to connect them to his own struggles as a buraku in this foreign land. His various political commitments led him to visit Harlem to meet with the fellows of Marcus Garvey, who promoted a vision of global black freedom based on the redemption and reconstruction of a New Africa that

embraced certain Western ideas and technologies but transformed them to suit black people's needs. The UNIA, founded in 1914, transformed from a benevolent association into "a mass-based, global, black nationalist movement intent on redeeming Africa and establishing a homeland for the black world" (Kelley 24). At the time, Japan was also on the radar of many black activists, including Garvey; its victory in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 allowed them to see Japan's potential in ending white supremacy. As early as 1918, Garvey had expressed his interest in allying with Japan for a possible war against the white: "The next war will be between the Negros and the whites unless our demands for justice are recognized . . . With Japan to fight with us, we can win such a war" (Doan 12). Something Garvey would never know himself is that the idea of New Africa also sparked interest among the Suiheisha members, such as Tahara, who later pushed for similar emigration for the former outcasts of Japan. Shortly before his trip to Brazil to explore South America in the winter of 1926, Tahara headed to Harlem, hoping to meet Garvey. He later described the similarities he saw in the experiences of the two historically oppressed groups:

> It had been one hundred and fifty years [since chattel slavery first appeared in America.] During this period, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* went into publication. In gratitude of Abraham Lincoln, Booker T. Washington had been chanting for freedom from religious perspective. A black-only school was founded in Tuskegee of Alabama. After Lincoln's victory in the Civil War, the legal emancipation of the former slaves was achieved, [but] the arrogant Americans [failed] awaken [to the injustices] within [their society]. They practiced lynching [and] social segregation to continue their discriminatory abuse. This led to the rise of many African American movements, including the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) under the leadership of Marcus Garvey, the National Urban League led by Charles S. Johnson, and the Crisis founded by W.E.B Du Bois, as well as the socialist newspaper, *The Chicago Defender*. (Tahara, "Harlem No Nanokakan: Amerika Kokujin Undō No Chūshinchi Inshōki")

His take on the failure of the Emancipation Proclamation offers striking parallels to burakumin's historical plight. For buraku communities, liberation appeared on the horizon when the new Meiji government, three years after it seized power in 1868, issued an official promulgation of *Kaihōrei* (often translated as "Emancipation Edict,") to abolish the abject

names of Tokugawa outcastes and elevate them to the same status as commoners. However, this legal abolition of state-assigned abject social status failed in fully emancipating these groups despite its claim of equality and promotion of individualism (McKnight 17). On the one hand, the contours of burakumin have grown increasingly blurry over time for various reasons, including the now restricted access to the *koseki* (house registration) system. Meanwhile, scholars have argued that while these abject classes were 'liberated' from clothing restrictions and prohibited the use of certain public spaces, they were deprived of their tax-exempt status and economic security, which came with the strict occupation designation during the Tokugawa Era. In this sense, this promotion of formal equality and abolition of the distinctions between them and the commoners was traded by an attendant loss of economic security (See Kurokawa; Shiomi). This edict of liberation, in other words, transformed the geographically and occupationally locked subjects into landless free labourers who would soon be drawn into Japan's rapid industrialisation in the decades to come. The broad historical background of Japan's enclosure movement resulted in the ultimate proletarianization of these buraku tenant farmers and transformed the possession of one's own land into an ultimate symbol of self-sufficiency and economic freedom. This dream runs through both the state's propaganda for settler colonialism, the advertisements of emigration schools, and the testimonies of buraku emigrants, suggesting weaponry more powerful and attractive than the floating idea of national pride for those subjected to centuries of discrimination.

The parallels Tahara identified in the same destinies shared by burakumin in Japan and African Americans in the United States allowed him to share the aspirations of these black leaders. Tahara's participation in Suiheisha in the 1930s and his promotion of settler colonialism contradicts what many imagined to be the fundamental beliefs of buraku activism, but in fact, Japanese and American imperialism alike always possessed a liberating aspect. Since the 1920s, imperial authorities started encouraging buraku residents and colonial subjects in Korea to participate in its war machine to make a multi-ethnic Japan (See Morris-Suzuki; Oguma; Gluck; Ching). In this liberating aspect, these despised and stigmatised populations, including war-supporting burakumin and Korean soldiers, saw the possibility of the full membership of and recognition

from the empire, a change to be welcomed into its national community that had kept its door shut. Another piece Tahara wrote during his stay in America, in which he explains the two layers of discrimination burakumin encountered as overseas Japanese immigrants, addressed the correlation between the two empires and the two subjugated groups more directly. The Japanese empire did not emerge in a geographical vacuum detached from other parts of the world; the trans-imperialist perspective is paramount in understanding how it was always entangled with other imperialisms. As Azuma notes, by doing so, we might rescue the study of colonialism and migration from the conventional single-empire perspective that looks only at the relations between the imperial metropole and its colonies. As a buraku immigrant in the United States, Tahara describes his experience as follows:

> I am considered a new commoner in Japan.
> Once I get to America, I am both a Jap and a new commoner.
> I am a person subjected to two layers of exclusion.
> . . . .
> Here I tell the story of myself, a twofold victim rather than a dual citizen.
> (Tahara, "Nijū Ni Haiseki Sareru Mure Yori")

The limited studies on discrimination toward burakumin within Japanese-American communities have suggested that many buraku immigrants chose to hide their identities. Some even went further to avoid the occupations historically linked to buraku identity after migration. The earliest documentation on the existence of burakumin within Japanese-American communities could be traced to George DeVos and Hiroshi Wagamatsu's book published in 1966, *Japan's Invisible Race*, in which one person discussed the phenomenon under the pseudonym Hiroshi Ito (Ito 200-221). In recent years, Sekiguchi Hiroshi has taken up the clues left in Hiroshi Ito's writing to conduct oral history research and collect data on the burakumin who lived in Florin, Sacramento, California (Sekiguchi 55-84). In addition, Koji Lau-Ozawa's findings point to prevalent discrimination against burakumin in the Japanese-American internment camps; based on the short stories published in newspapers, personal letters, and anecdotes, Lau-Ozawa concludes that burakumin arises in contexts discussing marriage and intergenerational relationship, which points to

"generational anxieties around nisei losing an awareness of their identities, and crucially the identities of people they will marry" among issei (Lau-Ozawa, workshop, April 21st, 2023). Those works highlight the presence and continuation of buraku discrimination within Japanese-American communities and illustrate the difficulty many, especially issei groups, faced in grappling with their community identity. Unlike the many burakumins who sought to hide their identities, Tahara did not shy away from publicly disclosing his family origin. The duality of discrimination he faced, as a burakumin within Japanese-American communities and a racial minority in American society, enabled him to see through the hypocrisy of a multiethnic Japan and the Japanese public's anger at the Immigration Act of 1924.

The Immigration Act passed in 1924 (which is called the Japanese Exclusion Act in Japan) effectively ended almost all Japanese immigration until the passage of the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952. Naturalisation laws only allowed 'free white persons' and those of African descent to become naturalised citizens, and state-level alien land laws prohibited those ineligible to become naturalised citizens from owning land. Moreover, numerous states also passed anti-miscegenation laws. As Marc Gallicchio notes, this Immigration Act should be understood as "the apotheosis of scientific racism in American life" as it resulted from the booming popularity of scientific racism theories among scientists and academics to provide intellectual justification for imperialism and racist practices (35). Starting with the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, Adam McKeown argues that such immigration laws developed "an array of categories to define admissible immigrants and methods to those migrants" (McKeown). On the other hand, among American proponents of such immigration laws, it is worth singling out Theodore Lothrop Stoddard. His book, *The Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy* (1920), pushed for the idea that global proportions could threaten Western civilisations if no action were taken. For him, restrictions on immigration could be a national solution. Assessing the Versailles settlements, Stoddard says: "Earth's worst war closed with an unconstructive peace which left old sores unhealed and even dealt fresh wounds. The white world today lies debilitated and uncured; the colored world views conditions which are a standing incitement to rash dreams and violent action" (16). The danger of gigantic race wars,

he argues, could only be avoided if "we whites will have to abandon our tacit assumption of permanent domination over Asia, while Asiatics will have to forego their dreams of migration to white lands and penetration of Africa and Latin America" (308). At the time when African-Americans and buraku activists, among many groups, sensed the urgency to form solidarity among coloured peoples, Stoddard warned his fellows about the danger of such formation: he called the 1919 Pan-African Conference held in Paris "a growing sense of negro race-solidarity" and argued that the one thing that could stop Japan's expansionism into Latin America is "our veto" (99 and 132).

While people like Stoddard saw the Immigration Act of 1924 as a solution to the threats posed by the rising Japan and its threats on the Anglo-Saxon civilisation, the passage of this law was met with considerable anger from the Japanese public across the Pacific. Amidst the waves of protests that took place in Japan, both the Japanese ambassador to the U.S., Hanihara Masanao, and the American ambassador to Japan, Cyrus E. Woods, were forced to resign. In a letter Hanihara wrote to the U.S. secretary of labour, he argued that the passage of such discriminatory law would render the Japanese "unworthy and undesirable" and worried about the conditions of the Japanese in the United States (Gordon 177). In a news commentary titled "The Senate's Declaration of War," published on April 19th, 1924, *Japan Times and Mail* argued that such a law constitutes an "insult" to the Japanese people:

> The impression is not unnatural; therefore, on the Japanese side, that the American Senators took advantage of the adverse plight of Japan in developing and carrying into effect their scheme of making Japan and the Japanese victims of their political manoeuvring. This is extremely unfortunate . . . We are most deeply aggrieved that the American Senate has made itself an object of distrust and suspicion in the Japanese mind through an act which is characterized as unnecessary and ill-judged by the American organs of public opinions themselves. (Anonymous, "The Senate's Declaration of War")

Tahara could not quite share this sentiment with his fellow countryman. As a newly arrived foreign student in the United States, he soon realised

this country was not the land of freedom as pictured. Disappointed, he wrote, "It is shallow and shameful to see America as a Christian country or a land of freedom. Marx definitely did not think of Japanese workers in the US or black workers when he said, 'Workers of the world. Unite!' His theory was all about the white man and limited to white people" (Sekiguchi 72). In addition to exposing the hypocrisy of America's freedom dream, Tahara also found the anger from the Japanese side as double-standard and self-righteous. Reminding people back home about the centuries-long discrimination toward burakumin, he writes,

> The Immigration Act of 1924 has seemed to arouse much turmoil among people from the mainland. It appears to be meaningful, but it is indeed meaningless. Only the ignorant would naively believe in the existence of some ethics and morals in international politics. Sweeping those they don't like into the corner, isn't America doing the exact same thing they did? Isn't this something the powerful always do unconsciously or intentionally? (Tahara, "Nijū Ni Haiseki Sareru Mure Yori")

Calling the Japanese anger toward the immigration law meaningless, Tahara refers to the treatment burakumin are subjected to in Japan to argue that it is not much different from America's racism toward the Japanese. He rejects the existence of any ethics or morals in what he calls 'international politics': a power hierarchy that pushes the other into continuous liminality and unfair treatment. Simultaneously a burakumin and a Japanese immigrant, he was not moved by protests against a discriminatory law the people of Japan are subjected to, as the same people have been subjecting burakumin like himself to discrimination. However, he was sympathetic to the overseas Japanese communities; as a former temporary emigrant, Tahar wanted to support those living in isolation overseas (Yamamoto 39-44, quoted in Sekiguci 72). As Yamamoto Saeri notes, even after Tahara's return to Japan, he brought the proposal many times to convince the government to fund Japanese language education for second-generation and third-generation Japanese overseas. It could be easily imagined that Tahara's empathy stemmed from a sense of solidarity united through similar experiences of discrimination and homelessness. Despite its internal discrimination against burakumin, the Japanese expatriate communities themselves also constituted minority groups that were looked down upon as ignorant and uncivilised outsiders by white-

centric American society. Thus, he connected the anti-discrimination social movements with the support for emigrants for a global framework of solidarity and found many similarities in the plight shared by African-Americans and burakumin as both groups cope with the everyday violence from the majority society in their native countries.

Many African-American leaders saw hope in Japan's rise after the Russo-Japanese War. During his invited visit to Tokyo by Japanese officials in 1937, W.E.B Du Bois revisited the importance for African-Americans to join the protests against the immigration act, an understanding based on the shared oppression in a white supremacist world. At an event at the Pan-Pacific Club, he said: "Negro prejudice in the United States was one cause of the anti-Japanese feeling" (Kearny 204). The trip also included Manchuria in the designated route, which allowed Du Bois to see first-hand Japanese imperialist operations. In his later reflection on the tour, he praised the smooth operation and management of the Southern Manchuria Railway Company, a state-established company that was instrumental in the economic exploitation of Manchuria. Failing to see how Japanese imperialism was structured around the exploitation of the land of other ethnicities, Du Bois identified with and praised the imperialist control of the region alongside its modern infrastructures in Manchuria, which he surmised showed the benevolent characters of the Japanese. For him, the absence of white masters in colonised Manchuria felt like a breeze of fresh air as the Japanese he shared conversations with could identify with his struggles against the white world. He imagined Japan to be the leader of a world revolution.

What Reginald Kearney calls the "pro-Japan utterances of Du Bois" won many Japanese hearts but certainly deviated from the living experiences of many burakumins, including Tahara's (7). Du Bois's support for Pan-Asianism, informed by his belief in collective action and solidarity among all people of colour, enabled him to see a race-less and caste-less Asia. However, as Yuichiro Onishi rightfully points out, Du Bois's Pan-Asianist theory was not too different from the Pan-Asianism used by Japan's imperial leadership to justify colonial subjugation and expansion through racial construction (Onishi 57). With a sarcastic touch, Tahara classifies the mentality of pro-Japan foreigners into two groups. The first

group referred to the calculated politicians, those he deemed to have personal political interests and ambitions in supporting Japan. The other group consisted of those he identified as the hypocritical and superior ones yearning for self-satisfaction. He argued that one could only discern this mentality after arrival in America (Tahara, "Nijū Ni Haiseki Sareru Mure Yori"). He was certainly critical of the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924. Still, he was never convinced by the mounting critics of the law from the Japanese public and even the pro-Japan Americans, even when they took his side. While the Japanese felt humiliated and irritated by passing an immigration law that targeted them, it worked squarely with the Japanese ultra-nationalists' commitment to make Japan the liberator of Asia's non-white peoples. Pan-Asianism, the idea that Japan, as a modern and powerful nation, would take the lead in promoting unity and cooperation among the peoples of Asia to counter the influence of Western powers, played hand in hand with Black-Japan solidarity. As Du Bois envisioned a world revolution led by Japan against the white world, Japanese leaders also believed they had a moral obligation to help uplift fellow Asians and protect them from Western domination.

The comradeship Tahara desired to form with the African-American movements was essentially different from the one those in Tokyo looked for. As mentioned above, he dismissed his fellow countryman's anger toward the immigration law and urged them to reflect on their treatment of minority groups within the Japanese. About the conditions of Japanese-Americans, he continues:

> Let's try to reflect on Japan's own situation. Now we are granted citizens' rights in form even without the Suiheisha activism. However, what about the real effect of that? How about the actual society-wide situation? How about the daily encounters with others? Aren't they clearly divided into abominations? It's the same thing happening here. Whether you have American citizenship or don't have it, you are always subjected to discrimination and humiliation in daily encounters. (Tahara, "Nijū Ni Haiseki Sareru Mure Yori")

As a burakumin who had moved elsewhere and been subjected to two different racial structures, Tahara remained critical of both nations for the hypocrisy embedded in the liberal and progressive narratives. Alluding to

the historical experience of freed burakumin alongside freed African-Americans, Tahara had reached the conclusion that Japanese-Americans, as racialised subjects in White America, would have fallen into the same situation even if the restrictions on citizenship were lifted. In short, he did not believe granting citizenship would impose any meaningful change to the status quo of the racial structure, nor did he see it as a defining feature of the liberties and rights burakumin and African-Americans struggled for. Despite his sarcastic tone toward the angry Japanese public, Tahara also called for Black-Japanese solidarity. Before his departure to South America, he travelled to Harlem hoping to meet Marcus Garvey in person. The conversation never took place, as Garvey was arrested for mail fraud in connection to the sale of stock in the Black Star Line. Although there were irregularities connected to the business, the prosecution, believed by Gerald Horne, was politically motivated as Garvey's activists had attracted considerable government attention. Garvey's engagement in undergrounded pro-Japanese movements, along with movements such as the Moorish Science Temple and the Pacific Movement of the Eastern World, among other Black-Japan movements, had a combined membership of about 15,000 people at the peak (Horne 12). Despite Garvey's detention, Tahara was hosted by the UNIA members and invited to talk to the editors of the *Negro World*. The most interesting part of the Tahara's connection to Marcus Garvey is how the idea of emigration played a huge role in the two's activism and envision for freedom. While Garvey saw Africa as this lost hometown to redeem for the children of the diaspora, Tahara advocated buraku immigration to different places worldwide and ran two emigration schools better to prepare buraku emigrants upon his return to Japan.

It is worth noting that his imagination of Black-Japan solidarity was radically different from both the Japanese leaders and the American liberals, which explains his criticism and frustration over the latter groups. Further reflecting on the liminality of buraku emigrants overseas, his deeply entrenched disbelief in the liberal tradition let him conclude that only superficial ones would regard America as the country of liberty. He writes, "Although Marx called for the solidarity of working-class laborers all over the world, the Japanese and black laborers in America formed no unity. This is due to the existence of white supremacy" (Tahara, "Nijū Ni

Haiseki Sareru Mure Yori"). The failure of any formed solidarity among minorities, an obstacle many generations of activists face, is due to structure; its core can be traced back to white supremacy. In addition to the pervasiveness of racial oppression for coloured workers, Tahara pointed to the rigid nexus of power that protected and enforced the structure. This system, reserving the best for wealthy white Americans, engendered resentment and zero-sum thinking among everyone else of whatever was left. What Tahara wanted to form with Garvey was a shared goal to dismantle white supremacy by fuelling the Black-Japan solidarity, drastically different from what the Japanese government sought in their alliance with African-Americans. Japan's proposal to include a clause on racial equity at the Paris Conference had gained it many black allies. However, it has regarded white supremacy as the model of development and modernity, and the competitor of power and territories. On the other hand, when he addressed Garvey's fellow colleagues, Tahara was concerned that racism and white supremacy have created longstanding rifts between communities of colour and stroked interracial conflicts (Tahara, "Harlem No Nanokakan: Amerika Kokujin Undō No Chūshinchi Inshōki").

Emigration as Liberation

Emigration, as both an idea and practice, offered Tahara and his fellow burakumin a way to imagine a self-ruled territory without discrimination and white supremacy. Tahara's time in the Americas significantly shaped his political identity and ideas for reform. In a 1935 issue of Fukuoka Kenji, he penned a brief article titled "*Mianmi no ni senpai,*" in which he recounted how a brief visit to South America during his study abroad years introduced him to the appeal of colonial education. Soon after his return to Japan in the late 1920s, Tahara started to allocate funds for his emigration school projects. By 1932, he was already in charge of three Suiheisha-related schools across the archipelago, including the Asakusa Proletarian Political School (*asakusa puroretaria seiji gakko*) in Tokyo, the Sakai Toshihiko Farmers' Work School (*nōmin rodō gakko*) in Fukuoka and the Yokohama Foreign Language School, a school closely related to colonisation and settlement projects (Koshōji 102). At all three schools, he took up the operation post and, more importantly, conducted curriculum reforms. Not until 1934 did Tahara acquire the resources and opportunity

to remodel the schools solely based on his political ambitions; the first place of the experiment was at the Sakai Toshihiko Farmers' Work School on Kyushu Island. Shortly after he ascended to the head of the school in 1934, he held lectures on the theme of continental colonisation in May of the same year. This lecture series was unsuccessful; despite the initial goal of attracting an audience of about one hundred, only eight people showed up to express support and interest (Koshōji 103). Whereas the specific content of Tahara's lecture is no longer accessible, the main theme declared at the lecture was clear: continental colonialism is the best way to break through the ongoing economic crisis in Japan's rural areas, which is in line with Japan's ambitious plan to send one million households to Manchuria in the 1930s. Tahara deemed this the goal to accomplish through his reorganisation of the academy. Two months after this initial failed attempt, the original proposal for establishing Kyushu Colonisation School was submitted in July, with the goal of creating the only permanent foreign migration institution in Kyushu. The founding committee leaders, represented by Tahara's signature on the proposal, pledged to establish a school that would provide short-term training to equip prospective migrants to Manchuria, South America, and Southeast Asia with the necessary skills. The initial matriculation offered two courses, each accommodating twenty students, for those intending to migrate to Brazil and Manchuria. The four-month programmes required enrolment qualifications that included being an adventurous Japanese male (above 18 years old) with a specific level of academic and physical aptitude (equivalent to second-year junior high education) and most importantly, a strong determination to relocate overseas (Koshōji 103). The committee aimed to train "intrepid and pioneering young men with intellectual acumen and experience" through a curriculum comprising foreign language, colonisation studies, history, overseas knowledge, agriculture, crafts, business, hygiene, and martial arts" (Koshōji 103). Examining the curriculum closely, one can infer that Tahara's vision of an exemplary coloniser embodied traits akin to Western modernity, especially the emphasis on hygiene.

Regarding Tahara's post-America experience, an inquiry arises in relation to his involvement in Japan's colonial expansion and his perception of it as a possible source of liberation for the burakumin and other Japanese. This notion, coupled with his affiliation with African-American

movements, particularly Garvey's ideologies, brings forth the unsettling reality that Tahara placed his hopes for liberation in the colonisation of other lands and peoples. Given Tahara's extensive writings on racism in the United States and his cognisance of discrimination in Japan, his reform of emigration schools suggests his conviction that emigration offers a liberating outlook for those seeking freedom. Regardless of the chosen emigration site, be it Manchuria or any other destination, for buraku leaders and the rank-and-file members that moved, it represented a new prospect: the prospect of embarking on a life of self-sufficiency and collectivism.

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Voluntary Repatriation as a Durable Solution: The Case of Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh

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Introduction

The refugee crisis is one of the global crises that require immediate and durable solutions. Around eighty million people are displaced forcibly from their homes because of war, violence, conflict, and persecution, consequently depriving them of basic human rights. These people include women, children, and elderly persons who are most vulnerable and live a miserable life as refugees ("What is a Refugee"). The countries with the most refugees are Turkey, Colombia, Pakistan, Uganda, Germany, and more recently Bangladesh has been added to the list. The Rohingya influx in Bangladesh in 2017 is one of the largest persecution events in recent years ("Refugee Data Finder"). The refugee crisis is increasing every year and creating pressure on governments, NGOs, humanitarian organisations, and private organisations as resources are limited and ensuring essential human needs and delivering services requires voluntary assistance from several institutions (Shultz et al. 1). The Global Trend Report 2019 of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) states that 5.6 million displaced people returned to their country of origin, whilst 107,800 refugees were resettled in twenty-six countries ("Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019" 2). In some cases, refugees are unwilling to go back to their country of origin as they might be subject to further persecution because of their race, religion, and nationality ("What is a Refugee"). Therefore, it is essential to address potential solutions to deal with the refugee crisis and rearrange them to ensure a better life without affecting the host countries. The UNHCR suggests durable solutions for refugees such as repatriation, local integration and resettlement. These solutions contain programmes and strategies for restitution, compensation, and satisfaction; these can diminish the unbearable suffering displaced people have gone through (Souter 173).

The Rohingya people started to flee from their home country Myanmar after World War II (Mallick 203), and after the influx in 2017, a total of 1.3 million Rohingya refugees are now living in Bangladesh. According to the UNHCR, 884,000 Rohingyas are registered, most of whom came to Bangladesh in 2017. The persecution of this Rohingya community was declared ethnic cleansing by the United Nations (Ahmed et al. 305). Despite being overpopulated, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) responded to the humanitarian crisis and gave shelter to the Rohingya people immediately in Cox's Bazar and in Bhasan Char later on ("Welcome Move"). To find a solution to the refugee crisis, the GoB has initiated a 'Physical Arrangement' through bilateral diplomacy with the government of Myanmar to repatriate refugees ("Physical Arrangement"). This study focuses on the contexts where the repatriation approach can be effective as a durable solution. Therefore, the main purpose of this study lies in identifying the key factors that facilitate voluntary repatriation and examining whether or not the repatriation of Rohingya refugees is the best durable solution and what contexts make the future of repatriation bleak. It argues that the assurance of citizenship with entitlement to rights, restitution of properties, financial assistance, and moreover, the choice of refugees to return are the contexts that facilitate repatriation as a durable solution. However, voluntary repatriation faces barriers such as the fragile socioeconomic condition of home countries and the reluctance of second-generation refugees. This study follows a desk review to examine the contexts in which the repatriation strategy may be helpful as a long-term fix for the Rohingya crisis.

Durable Solutions: Repatriation, Local Integration, and Resettlement

The durable solutions for the refugee crisis suggested by the UNHCR are repatriation, local integration, and resettlement. The UNHCR declares that these permanent solutions will be humanitarian, social, and non-political (Souter 172). Though the initiatives taken by the UNHCR so far for refugee settlement are not free from political influence, instead, these are undertaken to stimulate other political and economic targets that have incongruence with humanitarian purposes (Souter 172). However, these three approaches are complex in nature and urge the involvement of countries of origin, host states, development actors, and refugees themselves.

There are distinctions between these approaches; the application of approaches differs depending on the context, reasons of persecution, geographic locations and political and economic factors (Long, "Rethinking Durable" 2-4). Therefore, the success of one approach for a particular case does not guarantee that the same approach will be effective for other cases.

Repatriation is taken into account when the refugees want to go back to their country of origin, ensuring proper safety and dignity. The government's commitment to assist in reintegrating the people into their own country is also vital in repatriation ("Voluntary Repatriation"). Local integration is determined by the host countries' socio-economic conditions and the number of refugees who appeal for integration. Preference is often given to people born in the host country, who are stateless, have a narrow chance to be repatriated, and those with strong bonds with the host country. Initially, the host country gives permission to stay and later on, individuals are given access to rights and privileges ("The 10-Point Plan in Action" 194). Another durable solution is resettlement which is considered when voluntary repatriation and local integration are not possible. In the process of resettlement, refugees are considered by a third country in a situation where the country of origin and the country of asylum cannot provide protection to them ("The 10-Point Plan in Action" 197).

Voluntary Repatriation

Repatriation has been seen as a durable solution by policymakers since the 1980s (Kibreab 26). Repatriation of refugees has three contexts that have to be considered. Firstly, the voluntary decision to return under safety concerns. Secondly, the consequences of returning to the country of origin. The consequences of return are related to preparing for the return, physical relocation, and instantaneous experience after a return. The third context is reintegration, where refugees have to find ways to manage their livelihood after returning. In this context, refugees need to explore new ways other than their previous earning methods while uprooted. One thing that requires consideration here is that refugees might not go back to the exact place and environment from where they were displaced

(Hammond 1). Voluntary repatriation is when the refugees want to go back to their country of origin, with an assurance of proper safety and dignity ("Voluntary Repatriation"). There have to be physical, legal and material safety provisions for the returnees. As people displaced once show courage to go back to their home country, international development and humanitarian organisations must provide compensation, aid, and guidance for the settlement of the people in a sustainable way. The engagement of all stakeholders will ensure an adequate framework consisting of accurate information, documentation and monetary incentives. Moreover, effective repatriation is contingent on legislative assurances for amnesty, property recovery, and reintegration programmes ("Voluntary Repatriation"; Long 7). In UNHCR-assisted repatriation, a tripartite agreement is prepared between the UNHCR, the host country and the country of origin regarding the repatriation. The UNHCR arranges an 'Information Campaign' to notify future returnees about the environment, available services, and challenges they will face after their return. To create awareness and build confidence among refugees, the representatives from the refugee communities can visit their home country before their return, which is arranged by the UNHCR (Hammond 5).

Contexts of Voluntary Repatriation

Citizenship

The most significant reason why repatriation or voluntary repatriation is seen as a permanent solution for refugees or displaced people is the restoration of citizenship, as citizenship is pivotal to having legitimacy and entitlement to fundamental rights and security. In the case of voluntary repatriation, refugees are returning to the country from where they fled; in most cases, it is apparent that they had citizenship before the displacement or persecution. Citizenship of refugees will allow them to re-establish their place with properties or monetary benefits that will help them begin a new life. Kibreab states that citizenship creates a suitable context for refugees' returns and social, political, and civil rights (37). Citizenship is a prominent factor in the repatriation process as it acts as a safeguard for returnees' entitlement to fulfilment of basic needs and protection (Rashid, "Finding a Durable Solution" 177). However, it largely depends on

the political will of the concerned governments. The governments have to ensure that citizenship will entitle the returnees to security provisions, access to essential services and decision-making power. Effective citizenship is also seen as a reparation where the government is responsible for any harm and displacement of the refugees (Souter 174-175). In the question of Rohingya refugees' citizenship, the surprising fact is that, in 1982, the Rohingya community was discarded from the official list of 135 ethnic groups by the Burma Citizenship Law, effectively rendering them stateless (Rashid, "Finding a Durable Solution" 180). Despite citizenship, they were given a white card with a temporary resident status which was withdrawn in 2015, which resulted in removing their voting power (Kipgen 63). Consequently, the Rohingya Muslim community was deprived of essential services and documents, adequate education and health facilities, and job opportunities. These numerous injustices eventually culminated in the long-term displacement of Rohingya Muslims across several decades (Mallick 203; Rashid, "Finding a Durable Solution" 174). Kipgen states that, for successful repatriation, the Rohingya community's citizenship issue must be sorted out (62). Despite several meetings with international agencies pursued by the government of Bangladesh, the government of Myanmar has not changed its stance on Rohingya being denied citizenship and exiled from Myanmar, implying a standstill for Rohingya repatriation (Rashid, "Finding a Durable Solution" 175). Therefore, it is uncertain that after repatriation, the Rohingya people will get their citizenship. The background of the persecution shows that the Rohingya refugees did not have citizenship when they fled to Bangladesh (Rashid, "Finding a Durable Solution"177). As a result, in this case, voluntary repatriation will not be the best possible solution for the Rohingya refugees. As the government of Myanmar rescinded their citizenship, it will be difficult to ensure that the refugees will have citizenship after returning.

Restitution

Voluntary repatriation can be an effective solution through restitution. Warner states that voluntary repatriation is related to an individual's going back to his or her home and own community. The right to the restitution of people's own homes and land is essential for voluntary repatriation (Warner 162). The claim for restitution is applicable where there is

evidence that people were displaced through genocide and ethnic cleansing, and it caused severe harm to them (Souter 175). For instance, after the genocide of Bosnia and Herzegovina, through 'Dayton's Right to Return and Restitution', refugees received the right to claim their properties, and a significant number of refugees got back their properties (Buyse 25). Therefore, restitution can be an effective solution for forcefully displaced individuals.

Banerjee states that, in Myanmar, the widespread abuse of human rights was depicted by the UN General Assembly back in 1991; the International Labour Organization also noticed that the Myanmar authority committed offensive practices such as forced labour, unlawful detention, rape, and torture towards minor communities during the late nineties (4). Consequently, in August 2017, more than seven hundred thousand Rohingya people fled to Bangladesh after a brutal crackdown by the security forces of Myanmar (Mallick 203; Rashid, "Finding a Durable Solution" 174). These incidents raise the question of the possibility of restitution. The chances of repatriation through restitution got some light after the statement of the United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken. He states that the Myanmar military perpetrated genocide and atrocities against humanity ("Myanmar Committed Genocide"). However, some cases of displacement are irreversible. Furthermore, if refugees are returning home after decades, there is a chance that new people have already settled there with legitimate ownership rights. So, while restitution is going on, it is crucial to ensure that no further unfairness is generated through restitution by displacing secondary residents (Souter 175).

Refugees' Choice of Residence

Another prominent factor of voluntary repatriation is recognising refugees' choice of residence either in their home country or another country. This process entails that refugees will have effective citizenship from their country of origin after their return. Thereafter, they will be capable of living in a different country of their choice as migrants. The choice of residence creates an opportunity for the revival of the state-citizen relationship that does not imply a physical return. In this kind of case, refugees obtain valid citizenship in their country of origin but do not claim rights

with such citizenship (Long, "State Building" 369; Souter 176). For instance, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) citizenship gave Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees the chance to stay in the host countries as migrants. Their home countries gave them passports, and they settled in Nigeria by their own choice; this is a combination of two durable solutions – repatriation and local integration (Long, "Rethinking Durable" 10).

As refugees' consent in voluntary repatriation is essential, in the case of Rohingya refugees' repatriation, the attempt to prepare refugees for voluntary return failed several times. In August 2019, the officials of Bangladesh were ready to send back listed refugees to Myanmar, but eventually, no one appeared at the border. The refugees did not trust that the government of Myanmar would take the initiative to fulfil the five demands of the refugees (Rahman, "Rohingya Repatriation"). The demands include citizenship and inclusion in the ethnic group, restitution of properties, and military accountability for the persecution (Siddiqui). Moreover, at the meeting of the Joint Working Group for repatriation in June 2022, only 42,000 of the 0.84 million Rohingya names Myanmar received from Bangladesh were confirmed ("Bangladesh for Expediting"). The Myanmar government did not acknowledge the remaining 0.8 million refugees, making their repatriation a far-off fantasy.

The Second Generation and Their Consent

Voluntary repatriation is seen as a durable solution by policymakers; however, some aspects might make it unrealistic (Long, "Rethinking Durable" 3). One crucial factor is that refugees born in a host country do not have significant attachment towards their country of origin. Therefore, they rarely consent to returning home (Hammond 4). In this context, the Liberian refugees showed reluctance to go back home despite the UNHCR's discontinuation of support on the border of Guinea (Hammond 4). There is a close similarity among second-generation Liberians in Ghana too, who are generally ambivalent about the return to their parent's home country (Hammond 4).

According to Save the Children, until August 2020, approximately one hundred eight thousand thirty-seven Rohingya babies were born in camps at Cox's Bazar who are unknown to their home country and think that these camps are their home (Save the Children). Likewise, Liberians, if the chance to return arises decades from now, this second generation of Rohingya refugees, could not agree to do so deliberately.

Social and Economic Uncertainty

Another issue identified by Hammond is the social and economic uncertainty of the home country. Countries that have gone through a long war and destruction are fragile. The reconstruction of the economy and stabilisation of the socio-political environment might take years; while the violence and suppression may have ended, poverty is another factor that can restrict the return of refugees. Additionally, the vulnerability of the states is an impediment to the political inclusion of refugees through repatriation; the adaptability to the fragile economy, socio-political instability, and poverty is challenging for the refugees too. Therefore, repatriation becomes a development challenge (Long, "Rethinking Durable" 7). It is difficult to fully anticipate the threats for returnees and the outcome of the political decisions related to their citizenship and rights. There are risks that the government of the country of origin might not live up to their commitment to ensuring the citizenship and rights of the returnees (Hammond 3).

In Myanmar, a military coup happened in 2021, and the situation inside the country worsened. Though the Junta claimed to continue the repatriation process, no significant progress has been made (Hassan). The Rohingyas are supposed to be repatriated to the Rakhine state from where they were forcibly displaced, which is now under the Arakan Army, claimed to be a strong force with influence over the state. There is a high chance that the Rohingya refugees will show reluctance to return to Myanmar in the presence of the Arakan Army (Rahman, "Opportunity for Rohingya").

Willingness of State and International Organisations

The willingness of a home country to repatriate the refugees and displaced people is an essential factor for redressing the refugee crisis. For a state that is struggling to meet the requirements of existing citizens, handling the necessities of returnees is a great challenge (Souter 180). Muggeridge and Dona explain that refugees compare their facilities in host countries with home countries, such as education, healthcare, and financial incentives – and eventually do not agree to compromise the facilities that they have in host countries (418). The UNHCR states that, in states ravaged by war or social unrest, sustainable voluntary repatriation is a difficult, incremental long-term process that needs substantial capacity-building by the international community ("The State of the World's Refugees 2012" 68).

For successful repatriation the involvement of international organisations and neighbouring countries is pivotal. The role of UN agencies and neighbouring country India seems inactive in the case of the voluntary repatriation of Rohingya refugees (Mallick 216). However, the reintegration programmes, such as cash benefits, are primarily dependent on foreign aid and donors' support. There are different complexities to overcome in these programmes (Hammond 7). Though China has come forward to provide assistance, the programmes are not finalised yet ("China to Support"). Encashment facilities and aid from developed countries and humanitarian organisations can encourage voluntary repatriation. For instance, the encashment programmes of Afghan refugees' voluntary repatriation from Pakistan are a story of success. More than 8,000 refugees returned to their home country in 2019 and availed themselves of the multipurpose cash grant worth USD 200 ("Afghanistan Voluntary Repatriation Update" 1). Similar encashment programmes might have the potential to encourage the Rohingya refugees' voluntary repatriation in the future.

Alternative Solutions: Local Integration and Resettlement

There is no simple answer for whether or not repatriation is a durable solution for Rohingya refugees. The evidence shows that the Myanmar government is not assuring the citizenship with entitlement to essential services to the Rohingya Muslims; the refugees are not willing to return

as there is confusion about safety, security and liberty. However, the alternatives to repatriation could be local integration or resettlement. The Bangladeshi government is not capable of local integration of refugees, as the country is already overpopulated with a 21.8 per cent poverty rate and scarce job opportunities (Rashid, "Finding a Durable Solution" 181). The refugees are getting involved in crimes, such as smuggling, drug business, and trafficking (Rashid, "Many Rohingyas"). Therefore, Bangladesh refuses to offer local integration for national security and socio-economic stability purposes (Rashid, "Finding a Durable Solution" 181). Nonetheless, there is a threat of the involvement of refugees in terrorist activities out of agitation against the Myanmar government (Mallick 209).

The resettlement of Rohingya refugees in a third country could be a potential solution as developed countries, such as Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom have taken initiatives for the resettlement of Syrian refugees (Zaman). Rashid asserts that the Rohingya Muslim community can be considered a perceived threat to the host countries' social and political order. Rashid argues that the lower literacy rate and inadequate skills will not add value to the host countries' labour market and economy. Moreover, the resettlement might instigate further persecution of other minority communities in Myanmar, and the government can slow down the repatriation process (Rashid, "Finding a Durable Solution" 183).

The international community, such as the UN, the EU, and the OIC, must collaborate in order to reach a holistic and long-term solution to the Rohingya repatriation. Bangladesh is making attempts to resolve the problem through bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral diplomatic efforts. (Habib). In a roundtable discussion held in September 2022, Imtiaz asserts that 'Creative Diplomacy' can play a significant role in ensuring the repatriation of Rohingyas. For instance, the government of Bangladesh can approach Singapore to propose conditions for investment in Myanmar to speed up the repatriation process. Chowdhury suggests in the roundtable the creation of special economic zones for India and China on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border to restrict further border tensions ("Creative Diplomacy"). Apart from robust diplomatic efforts for voluntary repatriation of the Rohingya, Bangladesh, along with its stakeholders, may assess other viable strategic alternatives. Building strategic

communication with the key competing players of the military junta –National Unity Government (NUG), Arakan Army (AA), and Arakan Rohingya National Organization (ARNA) including a strong commitment to providing citizenship with legal arrangements to Rohingya, if they took over power, may find an alternative path for sustainable solution (Hossain, "Rohingya Crisis"). Moreover, supporting Myanmar's people in the restoration of democratic government might be another alternative way to find a solution. Hossain suggests evaluating a number of considerations for speedy repatriation, such as, a security guarantee after repatriation, not relying only on China, increased communication with other international players for mounting pressure on the military junta, assertive diplomatic measures for ensuring accountability to the perpetrators, and sealing Bangladeshi border for avoiding further influx in future (Hossain, "What Bangladesh").

Conclusion

The influx of Rohingya people in Bangladesh back in 2017 is one of the largest events of displacement in recent years that needs a durable solution. However, the refugees are now residing in Rohingya camps in Bangladesh, and their settlement is an important issue that needs immediate action. The number of displaced people increases and the distribution of displaced people by countries is not equal. The refugee camps and asylum centres cannot ensure the fundamental rights of people. To provide the refugees with a better future and mitigate the pressure on host countries, voluntary repatriation is prescribed as the best solution rather than local integration and resettlement. However, the notion of voluntary repatriation as the best solution depends on the context of the refugee cases. The home countries' attitude to ensuring citizenship and entitlement to rights and access to services is essential. The safety and dignity of the returnees have to be confirmed by the country of origin, host country and international organisations related to the repatriation process. Along with this, encashment opportunities by donor countries and international organisations create a potential for effective voluntary repatriation. However, refugees might be reluctant to return as they achieve new skills in host countries, and the new generation is attached to the communities in the host countries. Besides, countries impacted by wars are afflicted by social,

economic, and political instability. In some cases, the restitution of properties might not be possible, which stimulates fear of insecurity and disappointment among the refugees. The voluntary repatriation of Rohingya refugees is facing challenges as the Myanmar government has not guaranteed citizenship, or access to education, job and health services for returnees. Moreover, the refugees are afraid that they might face further oppression by the Myanmar government. Furthermore, the recent military coup in Myanmar has made the future of repatriation uncertain and stagnant. Local integration is not possible due to the host country's unwillingness and economic inadequacy. Nevertheless, resettlement might be possible for a small number of refugees; however, it is impossible to accommodate more than seven hundred thousand Rohingya refugees in developed countries. Therefore, UN agencies and international organisations have to play a proactive role to accelerate the voluntary repatriation process and convince the Myanmar government to ensure the return of refugees with safety, dignity, and security.

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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 Ayse 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 spatiotemporal 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 – ever 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 Frenchwoman'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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Migration is one of the most prominent cultural, socio-political, and economic questions of our time. Whether internal or cross-border, whether voluntary or forced, migration occurs for a variety of factors that are influenced by and rooted in regional and national, local and global interrelations, social and technological networks, organisations and institutions. In speaking about migration, one cannot ignore the possible intensification of migrants feeling displaced and their effort to re-embed their lives in host localities. Moreover, the concept of displacement evokes images of being cut off from social and physical worlds that one calls home, which generates differentiated accounts of dispossession, disruption, and dislocation. The feeling of being cut off pushes migrants to open up and advance the notion of place-making or emplacement. Everyday place-making or emplacement is material and effective, resulting in migrants leaving traces in the places they cross. Emplacement, therefore, is a place-making practice where migrants repeatedly tell stories about their former homes, maintain connections to imaginary or real places of belonging, and reorganise the new homes into common categories.

Displacement, Emplacement, and Migration: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays examines the impact of the interlocking relationships between displacement, emplacement, and migration. The contributors of this collection bring the perspectives of history, art, politics, films, and literature to bear on discussions of belonging, home, dislocation, and identity politics for individuals and groups in the current migration studies landscape.