

Boelhower, William Q.

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In:

Chowdhury, Touhid Ahmed (Hrsg.) (2024): Displacement, Emplacement, and Migration : an Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays, Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, p. 11-26. 2024. DOI: 10.20378/irb-58625

Bookpart - Published Version

DOI of the Article: 10.20378/irb-94470

Date of Publication: 27.03.2024

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Borderline Stories: Migrants at the Limits of World History

William Q. Boelhower  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1700-465X>
Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, USA

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 bare 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 economic 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 thematically 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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