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

1

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 inter-connections" (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 be-ing" 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' strat-egies in establishing and participating in social relationships. These defi-nitions, 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 progres-sively 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 num-ber of people on the move (voluntary or forced), it must be emphasised that emplacement is not the counter opposite of displacement. Both em-placement and displacement processes are the outcomes and integral parts of migrants' mobility and, thus, are not binary dichotomies. Dis-placement and emplacement, rather, should be considered as mutually constitutive processes of (dis)embeddedness that are fundamental to un-derstanding 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 regrounding 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 countermemory. 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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