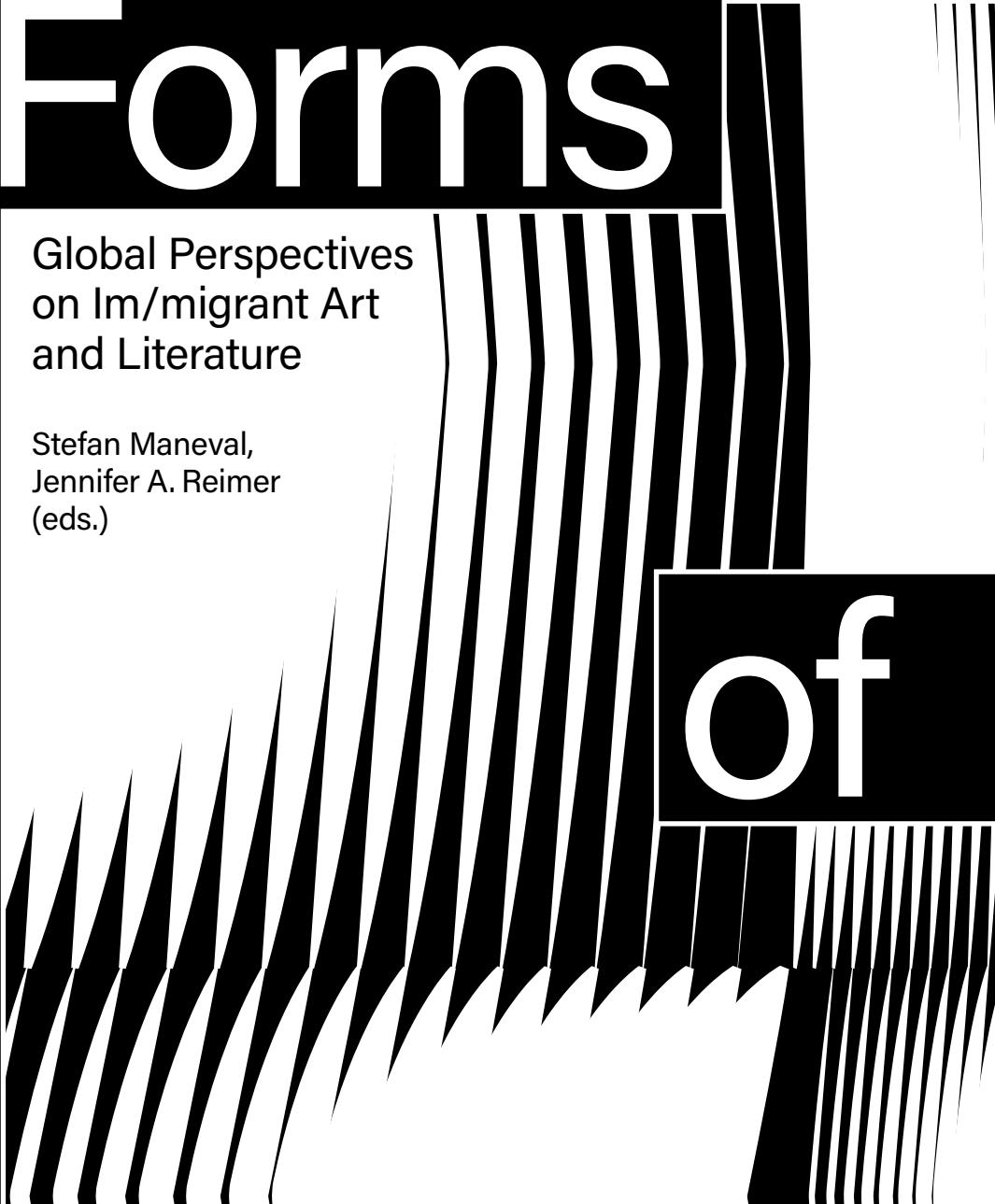


Forms

Global Perspectives
on Im/migrant Art
and Literature

Stefan Maneval,
Jennifer A. Reimer
(eds.)



of

Migration

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THEORY FILE

+

to walk through an invisible wall
and turn around with

a kind of muteness
obscures what's left of the sun

of the last century ...

call it *retoryka cienia*
(shadow's speech,
shadow's eloquence?)

how do you lose a language

what is a tongue

file under theory

+

master the code master the art
the mouth a jealous wound
vocabulary without feeling
syntax the key syntax the lie

+

words on the page
words are ghosts!
words contain ghosts of other words

words: a kind of madness

words: of the lost country

words: always more words ...

words [stop reading]

words [can't be unread]

after the invention of mirrors

words to you and me

words to no one in particular

EDITORS' NOTE: GHOSTS & CATS & OTHER HAUNTING THINGS

Stefan Maneval & Jennifer A. Reimer

~ *How do you lose language. What is a tongue.* The questions posed by Piotr Gwiazda in "Theory File" are questions that haunt ~ *words are ghosts! words contain ghosts of other words* ~ the pages of what follows. In the poem, language is a spell cast by words, both the object of and medium for ghostings and hauntings. In other words, the poem, we believe, shows how language is both haunted by (history) and haunting (us). In exploring im/migrant aesthetics, we, too, find form as both product and process. Language, art, forms of expression ~ they not only *result from* movement, displacement, and diaspora ~ they are not only inevitable, hybrid products of transculturation ~ not only measurable outcomes ~ they also enact migration through their very construction. Language loss and language accumulation are on-going acts of colonization and resistance, assimilation and fortification, exile and return. *syntax the key syntax the lie.*

And this brings us to the Cheshire cat, about which we have been thinking. The creepy, synecdochical cartoon cat of Disney fame and the one U.S. poet Rae Armantrout invokes as poetics: "It's a Cheshire poetics, one that points two ways then vanishes in the blur of what is seen and what is seeing, what can be known and what it is to know." It is "a simultaneous being there and not being there." 2020, the year we began this book, was a year of *Cheshirinity* or *Cheshirinidad* or *Cheshirinität* or *Çeşirlik* or *Tshishiriyya*. With one eye on a better future and one eye turned backwards in nostalgia for the times BC (Before COVID), we were suspended or vanishing. Like our cartoon avatar, we were topsy-turvy, destabilized and destabilizing, uncanny and, sometimes, ala Gwiazda, ghostly. As it turns out, these were ideal conditions for editing a collection on im/migrant art. Like that shape-shifting feline (and Gwiazda's trickster syntax), im/migrant art simultaneously points you in two directions at once: here and there, then and now, departure and arrival, beginnings and returns, to what is being said and how it is being said.

In our transnational and interdisciplinary collection, we set out to explore the creative potential of the encounters which occur when people leave their home country or place of origin for various reasons ~ the kinds of movements that trouble the distinction between forced and voluntary. In order to accomplish this, we ask: what forms of expression are shaping our understanding and knowledge of the dynamics in and around transnational migration processes? How do aesthetic forms change when people move and what is the creative potential of intercultural encounter? What role do collective and individual identities play in these processes, and how are they reflected in, and created by, forms of expression?

In curating a kaleidoscopic lens through which to ask our questions, we placed an emphasis on form. Far from abstracting or aestheticizing colonial trauma or exilic/migrant/refugee identities, our intent has been to bring awareness to material realities *through* form, as an essential constituent of art and literature, arguing that it is also because of form that literature and art matter. It is often the compositional structure and rhetoric of texts and images, the literary nature and formal qualities of certain images and stories, that impact

8 readers and beholders, thereby opening up new perspectives on, and readings of, reality. To learn about migration and its effects, not only through the journalistic lens (in news media or online sources), but also through innovative storytelling or visual material, is a chance to see things differently, to grasp the complexity of these processes, and, thus, to differentiate more. Drawing on scholars such as Susan Sontag, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Silvia Schultermandl, Katharina Gerund and Anja Mrak, our project argues art's formal attributes can bring us, as readers and viewers, into powerful, transformative experiences that we do not yet know how to name – although these experiences have been labeled as "empathy" by Martha C. Nussbaum, "affect" by Fredric Jameson, and "agency" by Alfred Gell, for example.⁰¹ Creating proximity and empathy, artistic and literary expressions allow audiences to identify with other peoples' lives, to relate to political events and locations that otherwise appear distant and abstract. This book is one manifestation of a larger, transnational collective of researchers and artists that begins, in one temporality, in 2019, when Jennifer co-hosted an international conference titled *Forms of Migration: Literature, Performance, the World* with Silvia Schultermandl at the University of Graz in Graz, Austria, funded generously by the Austrian Science Fund's (FWF) Lise Meitner Postdoctoral Fellowship. Here, she met Stefan Maneval, as well as several of the contributors to this book. A collaboration was born.

Stefan proposed the idea of an edited volume on the various aesthetic forms used to give expression to experiences of migration to the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) as part of their Working Group "Common Heritage, Common Challenges" of which he's been a member since 2019. Joining forces with fellow AGYA members Ikram Hili and Matthias Pasdzierny, AGYA kindly supported the publication with a grant. The result is a rich collection of texts and images of various genres and styles, some of which were presented as papers and performances at the 2019 conference in Graz, while others were created for the book by AGYA members, as well as international authors, artists, and researchers.

In other temporalities, the story begins elsewhere: in a university in Berlin in the early 1930s..., in Australia's East Hills Migrant Hostel in 1982..., Mosul, Iraq in 1966..., Siena, Italy during the Renaissance..., in a cookie factory in Bilbao, Spain in 1903..., in a Turkish movie from the 1970s..., in a refugee camp in Lebanon... The story begins before, during, and after colonialism, in California, Poland, Tunisia, Romania, Palestine, Queens... And in one spacetime configuration, the story unfolds on the planet of Memoria.

The work collected here showcases the forms of expression that emerge from translocal and transcultural encounters from the perspective of multiple disciplines, including comparative literature, art history, musicology, Middle Eastern and translation studies, as well as artwork, essay, photography and poetry. We made a particular effort to include artwork and visual material, as we believe that images, as well as language-based texts, play an important role in shaping our imagination and opinion.

01
Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013); Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997); Silvia Schultermandl, Katharina Gerund and Anja Mrak, "The Affective Aesthetics of Transnational Feminism," *WIN: The EAAS Women's Network Journal* 1 (2018): 1-23; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in an Era of Globalization* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2012); Susan Sontag, *At the Same Time: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).

This book is not a culmination. It is a web spun, a palimpsest, a mobile archive. It is an exercise in Cheshire Cat-ing. We, too, appear to you in synecdoche, offering a part for a whole, paw prints in the dust, a wide, toothy grin floating in space. Welcome to *Forms of Migration* ~

Stefan Maneval ~ Berlin, Germany

Jennifer A. Reimer ~ Biarritz, France ~ Oregon, USA

INTRO- DUCTION

Stefan Maneval & Jennifer A. Reimer

01

Hans Belting, *Florenz und Bagdad: Eine westöstliche Geschichte des Blicks* (München: Beck, 2021); Wendy M. K. Shaw, *What is "Islamic" Art?: Between Religion and Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

02

"IMISCOE Institutes," International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion (IMISCOE) network, www.imiscoe.org/about-imiscoe/members, accessed September 10, 2019.

03

Erica Hunt, "Notes for an Oppositional Poetics," in *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*, ed. Charles Bernstein, (New York: Roof Books, 1990), 203.

While migration studies, particularly in Europe, have exploded during the last 10–15 years, the international research profile remains overwhelmingly dominated by the social sciences and public policy initiatives with a marked emphasis on discourses of crisis, calamity, and emergency. In public discourse, as much as in academic research, migration is often framed in terms of crises in a dual sense: whilst disaster, hardship, and misery often force people to leave their place of origin, their arrival to a new place is often perceived as a threat to the host community's integrity. The fact that such movements have, in the past and present, fostered the circulation of thoughts, ideas, images and aesthetics, and even resulted in the emergence of new aesthetic forms, is frequently overlooked.⁰¹ *Forms of Migration* breaks new ground in transnational im/migrant studies by addressing the current paucity of research dedicated to questions of im/migrant and transnational aesthetics from a global perspective and with a particular interest in the diversity of both migrant experiences and forms of expression.

Research, on literary-artistic aesthetics emerging from im/migrant communities and in translocal/transcultural contexts, remains an underdeveloped vector of the international research and policy agendas related to studies of migration. IMISCOE (International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe), the largest migration research network in Europe, maintains a website with a database of over 51 EU-based member research centers and initiatives which focus on migration, diversity, and integration.⁰² A thorough excavation of the list revealed only three institutions (5.8% of the total) with a specific research focus on the cultural study of migration through imaginative texts such as literature, art, film or performance. Although literary-cultural studies of migration do not seem to be a priority for international research programs, the material gathered in *Forms of Migration* indicates that such studies are nevertheless taking place – conducted often by individual scholars of various disciplines around the globe. In bringing examples of such work together in the present volume, we asked ourselves: Should our study focus on how im/migrant cultural texts can raise awareness around social and cultural identities and historical narratives, or as art material? Both, we believe.

Preliminary research points to an emerging canon of im/migrant arts and literature whose resistance to the status quo functions on both the level of social critique and as aesthetic innovation. We can see examples of this new trend in U.S. ethnic and literary studies since the late 1990s. In writing of African American poetry at the end of the 20th century, Erica Hunt described being caught between an experimental rock and an oppositional hard place: "[...] there are oppositional projects that engage language as social artifact, as art material, as powerfully transformative, which view themselves as distinct from projects that have as their explicit goal the use of language as a vehicle for the consciousness and liberation of oppressed communities."⁰³ While, to date, there has been no one comprehensive monograph or anthology that tracks this movement across U.S. ethnic groups, conversations are vibrant within specific writing communities.

in overcrowded camps and shelters, in the streets or irregular settlements, whereas only a tiny proportion of them arrived in the rich countries of North America or Western Europe. In fact, 86% of the global refugees were living in countries with low or medium average income, 27% of them in the least developed countries of the world.¹¹ Only a small proportion of refugees have sought asylum in the states of the Global North (a total number of 4.1 million asylum-seekers, according to the UNHCR registrations records).¹²

Despite the relatively small numbers of refugees and asylum seekers entering the countries of the Global North, at the time of this writing, concerns over migration and social cohesion dominate the headlines throughout Europe, North America, and Australia. Across the Global North, rightwing populist movements and parties are thriving on fears of social decline. Their anti-migrant rhetoric continues to dominate public debates, blaming the arrival of poor immigrants for increasing social insecurity and income inequality instead of questioning the accumulation and hoarding of wealth by the global economic elites.¹³ It is largely these global elites, and the industrial nations to which they belong, who profit from the exploitation of cheap labour, the "War on Terror," the extraction and use of fossil fuels, a refusal to confront climate change, and ongoing colonial activity, including the illegal occupation of territories – all causes of global migration movements.¹⁴ Instead of dismantling the structures, institutions, and policies that perpetuate insecurity, it's easier to blame immigrants and harness the power of xenophobia. Declaring immigrants to be the cause of society's problems, rather than the effect of problems created by the states of the Global North, offers simpler solutions – build walls and fences, militarize borders, and deport "illegals."

Building walls to prevent immigration has been described, in the context of the fence between India and Bangladesh, as "the least disruptive way of doing nothing while appearing to be doing something."¹⁵ In the case of more recent fences, as well as of other forms of border fortification, the irony of "the least disruptive way of doing nothing" points in two directions (simultaneously, like the Cheshire cat in our preface): First, the leaders of the rightwing nationalist movements are often part of the economic elite themselves (think: former U.S. president Donald Trump), and are not at all interested in actually "doing something" to ease the economic pressure on the lower social strata and providing greater social security. Any effective redistribution of wealth on a global level that would reduce the incentives for people in the Global South to emigrate while reducing the fear of social decline (as a result of the arrival of needy "foreigners") in the Global North would shift the economic imbalance to the elites' own disadvantage.

In this context, editor and poet Francisco Aragón observes a historical trajectory of Latinx poetry that, in the 20th century, often focused on "creating art informed by our community's stories and our social and political struggles."¹⁴ While "poems that address the social and the political" were dominant in the past, Aragón says the "canvas" of Latinx poetry has "expanded to include subject matter that is not overtly political" and "is equally, if not more, informed by an exploration of language and aesthetics."¹⁵ He notes that, while social and political struggles continue, the recognition of struggle is "also joined by a celebration, as well as an exploration of language" in what he terms "New Latino Poetry."¹⁶ Timothy Yu makes a similar case for Asian American poetry in the first decade of the 2000s. He identifies a direction that "combines the engagement with history and politics that has traditionally characterized Asian American poetry with a burrowing into language, exploring both its limits and its creative potential in poetic styles influenced by experimental modes of American poetry."¹⁷ Likewise, the Filipina American poet Barbara Jane Reyes has said she's "drawn to poems and stories in which the storyteller/poet uses the poem/story to figure out her state of being multiple and hybrid. It's satisfying to see this worked out elegantly in language and form."¹⁸

Our project engages similar debates on the function of art as a vehicle for raising consciousness and social awareness versus art that treats its mediums solely as art material. However, rather than limiting our perspective to the U.S., our goal was to create a platform for a global and transnational conversation, moving beyond and between the borders of nation or community. Experimental and innovative in its nature, *Forms of Migration* offers a dialogue between aesthetic forms and traditions, while also taking into consideration the consequences of artists' and authors' own lived experiences of movement. As such, our volume's aesthetic forms are in the vanguard of migration studies and transnational literary-artistic trends, pointing to new directions in several academic fields, including comparative literature, art history, musicology, Middle Eastern and translation studies. Our contributions cover a wide range of topics, from analyses of Arabic diasporic art and literature, to literary reflections on experiences of Eastern European migrants in the U.S., historical approaches, e.g. to Turkish cinema or Palestinian material culture and fashion, and non-fiction essays focusing on biographies of migrant artists and authors.

We have compiled this volume at a point in history when the total number of international migrants was estimated by the UN to be 281 million.¹⁹ "Imagine that in every generation, going back. / You add it all up, and nobody is from where they are from," writes Wendy Shaw in her contribution to this volume. In 2020, 82.4 million people around the world were counted by the UNHCR as "forcibly displaced," escaping persecution, "human rights violations," wars and other forms of violence. Constituting more than 1% of the world's population, this was the highest number of refugees ever counted, with 2020 being the ninth year in a row in which the number increased.²⁰ According to the UNHCR, the vast majority of refugees, 73%, had escaped to neighbouring countries of the Global South, often living

04
Francisco Aragón, ed., *The Wind Shifts: New Latino Poetry* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 10.

05
Ibid. 1.

06
Ibid.

07
Timothy Yu, "Asian American Poetry in the First Decade of the 2000s," *Contemporary Literature* 52, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 819.

08
Barbara Jane Reyes, "Talking with Barbara Jane Reyes," interview by Craig Santos Perez, *Jacket2*, Kelly Writers House, May 10, 2011, <http://jacket2.org/commentary/talking-barbara-jane-reyes>.

09
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), Population Division, *International Migration 2020 Highlights* (New York: United Nations Publication, 2020), <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/news/international-migration-2020>.

10
"Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2020," UNHCR, last modified June 18, 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>.

11
Ibid.

12
Ibid.

13
For example, in 2020, the U.S. counted 2,189 billionaires with a total net worth of \$10.2 trillion, compared to 969 billionaires with a total of \$3.4 trillion in 2009, just eleven years prior. See "Riding the storm: Billionaires Insights 2020," PwC and UBS, <https://www.pwc.ch/en/insights/fs/billionaires-insights-2020.html>, accessed September 16, 2021.

14
See Jeff Faux, *The Global Class War* (New York: Wiley, 2006); Saskia Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles, London: Sage, 2012), 241–296.

15
Jagdish Bhagwati, "U.S. Immigration Policy: What Next?" in *Essays on Legal and Illegal Immigration*, ed. Susan Pozo (Kalamazoo, Mich.: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1986), 124, quoted in Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 93.



Top: The fence constructed along the border between the USA and Mexico, near El Paso, Texas.
Photo © Stefan Maneval, 2019.

Bottom: Graffiti of a serpent painted on the Mexican side of the border fence in the city of Nogales.
Photo © Stefan Maneval, 2019.



Top: The wall between the USA and Mexico cutting through the city of Nogales, view from Arizona.
Photo © Stefan Maneval, 2019.

Bottom: A shrine commemorating the killing of José Rodríguez. He was a 16-year-old boy, unarmed, and on the Mexican side of the fence, when shot in the back 10 times by a US Border Patrol agent.
Photo © Stefan Maneval, 2019.

Secondly, even the most impressive infrastructure of control – endless walls cutting through both empty lands and densely populated cities, or futuristic war ships employed to protect Europe's maritime borders against intruders in rubber boats – are ultimately costly ways of "doing nothing." In view of the fact that not even far more dangerous natural barriers such as the Sahara, the Sonora desert between Mexico and the USA, or the Mediterranean Sea are capable of warding off immigrants; therefore, it is hardly surprising that walls, fences and increased border militarization do not deter migration. In the case of the U.S.-Mexico border, data show that the increase in militarization since the mid-1990s, and particularly in the wake of 9/11, has not stopped migration; it has only driven migrants to take more dangerous routes as well as increasingly desperate and riskier measures, resulting in a higher number of crossing-related deaths.¹⁶



"Migrando a la libertad" – graffiti on the Mexican side of the fence in Nogales. Photo © Stefan Maneval, 2019.

As Peter Andreas has noted, escalated border policing is not simply about deterring illegal crossings, but also "a symbolic representation of state authority; it communicates the state's commitment to marking and maintaining the borderline."¹⁷ This "expressive role" of law enforcement is just as important as other "instrumental goals," according to Andreas, who argues that "gestures" such as the appearance of heightened control and policing convey powerful messages to society.¹⁸ Built "to regulate, rather than to impede flows," the walls are, also according to Wendy Brown, first of all, "visual signifiers of overwhelming human power and state capacity," that symbolically "encase the nation as a protected compound and present to the outside world a mighty national shield."¹⁹ Thus, border walls demarcate not only an international boundary, but also political stages where politicians, lobbyists, and law enforcement agencies perform ceremonial practices – such as high-profile drug seizures and arrests – in order to reassure society that our borders are safe and secure.

As Wendy Brown writes about the wall constructed along the U.S.-Mexico border, "For would-be migrants, whether temporary or permanent, the effect of the spectacular new fortifications is to require a longer, more expansive, and harrowing journey – through mountains and deserts – than before the walls were built... This effect produces a chain of others, among them an exponential increase in the sophistication, size, and profit of smuggling operations and a greater likelihood that illegal entrants will stay and settle in the United States, rather than enter for seasonal work and then return home" Brown, *Walled States*, 91.

Peter Andreas, *Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 8.

Ibid., 11.

Brown, *Walled States*, 103.



Top: Sculpture along the fence in Nogales, Mexico, depicting a caravan of migrants crossing the desert with a "coyote" wearing a white shirt and blue vest, smuggling them across the border. On the coyote's upper body is a portrait of the folk saint Jesús Malverde, patron of the poor, the handicapped, and migrants, among others. Goods of consumption, bombs, and dead bodies are carried in the opposite direction. Photo © Stefan Maneval, 2019.

Bottom: Detail of a sculpture at the fence in Nogales, Mexico, depicting migrants running away from the US Border Patrol. The red figure in the center is adorned by a portrait of Juan Soldado ("Soldier Juan"), a local hero who became a folk saint of undocumented migrants. Photo © Stefan Maneval, 2019.



Top: Stencils of chickens on the Mexican side of the fence in Nogales. Migrants are often referred to as "pollos," chickens in Spanish. Photo © Stefan Maneval, 2019.

Bottom: Candles painted on the Mexican side of the fence in Nogales as a memorial to those who died when attempting to cross the border to the USA. Photo © Stefan Maneval, 2019

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As Barth wrote: "The cultural features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed, indeed, even the organizational form of the group may change – yet the fact of continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity..." In other words, the differentiation between one's own group and that of the others allows group members to deny their own differences and the continuous social transformation of the group. Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. F. Barth (Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1998 [1969]), 14.

21

Chantal Mouffe, "Democratic Politics and Conflict: An Agonistic Approach," *Politica Comun* 9 (2016): 15, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/pc.1232227.0009.011>.

22

For a post-foundational concept of imaginary collective identities, see Heike Delitz and Stefan Maneval, "The 'Hidden Kings,' or Hegemonic Imaginaries: Analytical Perspectives of Postfoundational Social Thought," *Im@go: Journal of the Social Imaginary* 10 (2017): 33–49.

23

Cf. Brown, *Walled States*, 22–24.

24

The term "constitutive outside" was coined by Henry Staten and also used by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. All these authors reference Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Limited Inc* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 1972), 1–24; and Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins UP, 1998 [1967]). Cf. Henry Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 24; Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (New York: Verso, 1990), 17; Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London/New York: Verso, 2013) 44–45. On architecture as a mode of stabilizing

As visual markers of the borders of the nation, walls and other forms of border fortification and militarization actually do quite a lot. Defining and defending the territorial borders of a nation, they facilitate a differentiation between who is migrant and who is citizen – categories depending, in more abstract terms, on a distinction between "us" and "them," or "insiders" and "outsiders."

The anthropologist Fredrik Barth was one of the first to highlight that the formation and imaginary continuity of, in his words, "ethnic units" depends on the maintenance of a boundary.²⁰ Similarly, Chantal Mouffe argues, the imaginary institution of a collective identity such as the nation rests on "the perception of something 'other' that constitutes its 'exterior,'" allowing to deny the differences, social divisions and inequalities within one's own society or nation.²¹ Demarcating one's own group, society or nation from that of an imaginary "other" is thus necessary to imagine the unity of a collective identity.²²

In a globalized world, national boundaries are often described and perceived as dissolving due to the ever-increasing mobility of people as well as to translocal flows of commodities, capital, and data, which enable also the proliferation of transnational political and religious movements. In addition, nation states have, over the past decades, lost or given up much of their sovereignty to both supranational institutions (such as the WTO and the World Bank), multinational companies, and a deregulated global financial market. As Wendy Brown has argued, it is precisely in view of the waning sovereignty of the nation state that walls and fences have become increasingly attractive.²³ Giving the contingent boundary between "us" and "them" a visual, tangible, and relatively durable form, the architecture of border fortifications defines and stabilizes the "constitutive outside" necessary to imagine the unity and continuity of one's own national identity.²⁴ Symbolic architecture, like walls along national borders, is thus a mode of bringing the otherwise "imagined community" of the nation into existence.²⁵

In literally and symbolically separating "us" from "them," border walls and fences shore up the ideological work of scapegoating migrants as economic, cultural, and security threats in ways that have become increasingly racialized all over the world. That is, in most people's imagination, the term "migrant" or "immigrant" almost exclusively signifies non-white people of low social status.²⁶ Writing about Asian Americans in the United States, scholar Angelo Ancheta refers to the compound othering of non-white and non-citizen as "outsider racialization."²⁷ Sometimes, "migrant" carries a third layer of religious difference. Particularly in the wake of 9/11, "migrant" tends to be conflated with "Muslim," a category that, simultaneously, became associated with security concerns, as it was further conflated with "terrorist."²⁸ In response to the ongoing process of racialization, our understanding of "racism" has expanded in order to denote not only discrimination based on a narrow concept of biological "race," but also all sorts of implicit essentialisms, cultural stereotypes and marginalizations, as well as derogatory figures of speech and images.

The intersections of national identity, skin color, class and religion within the category of "migrant" enable a collective amnesia of sorts:²⁹ They allow an unmarked white, secular or Christian population to deny their own history of migration. This is particularly striking in the U.S., a society of migrants who prospered from the unpaid labour of imported African slaves as well as the violent displacement and systematic marginalisation of the native population; and a nation that, until only a few generations ago, portrayed itself as the "Mother of Exiles," offering refuge for the poor and oppressed people of the world.

Such collective amnesia is also present in other societies in the Global North, although it can be harder to spot. Consider Germany, for example. In the first half of the 18th century, French and Czech-speaking Protestants found refuge there from the violent persecution they suffered in France under Louis XIV and in re-Catholicised Bohemia, respectively. While hundreds of thousands of migrants from territories in East and Southeast Europe, then belonging to the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, settled in Germany during the 19th century, a far larger number, approximately 6 million (largely German-speaking), arrived in the aftermath of World War II, making up approximately 15% of the Western German population. Over time, these migrant populations were considered to be German. This has not been the case for the descendants of Turkish migrant workers in Germany. After World War II, Turkish migrants were invited to help set up the Western German economy by working in factories. Present-day Germany is now home to the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of these original "guest workers" (as they were called, indicating their temporary status in the 1960s), yet they are still considered to be Turks, migrants, "others." Although the country could never have so quickly regained its economic strength without the labor of millions of Italian, Turkish, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, Moroccan, Tunisian, and Yugoslavian migrant workers, and in spite of the fact that the descendants of these migrants represent a significant population demographic, both public debate and political decisions call for limits or bans on immigration.

At the time of gathering and writing the contributions to this volume, the two rival social forces – one demanding the construction of walls, and the other one propagating the opening of borders; one defending white supremacy, and the other one engaging in post-colonial theory – appeared so hermetically closed, so deeply divided, that they might be said to be inhabiting two different "invisible planets," to borrow an image from Karen Tei Yamashita's contribution to this volume. Among the ironies of that time, the irony of the Cheshire cat, was that both of these camps perceived the other as on the rise, as having gained too much ground in the center of society, and as constituting an unprecedented threat to the social cohesion. This division has made it enormously difficult to read the present's grinning face – who *is* winning ground and who *is* in retreat? Are borders dissolving or being solidified? Meanwhile, the still-invisible planet Earth of the future promises to be an even more belligerent place to live in.

In the face of division, terror, and increasing isolation, yet convinced that "we are witnessing the end of the age of literary

imaginary collective identities, see Heike Delitz and Stefan Hizbulah's 'Mleeta Tourist Landmark of the Resistance' in South Lebanon," in *Boundary, Flows and the Making of Modern Muslim Selves through Architecture*, ed. Farhan Karim and Patricia Blessing (London: Intellect Books, forthcoming 2022).

25
For a discussion, informed by Benedict Anderson's famous concept of "imagined communities" of how states use architecture to promote and maintain national identities, see Paul Jones, *The Sociology of Architecture: Constructing Identities* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011).

26
Interestingly, the perception of the "illegal immigrant" or "migrant" as non-white is a relatively new concept in the U.S.A. Before the 1965 Hart-Celler Act changed the U.S.A.'s immigration system in ways that increased migration from the Global South, migrant stereotypes typically depicted immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, including Jews.

27
Angelo N. Ancheta, *Race, Rights, and the Asian American Experience*, 2nd edition (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

28
Cf. Stefan Maneval, "Introduction," in *Faith Travels by Streetcar*, ed. S. Maneval (Berlin: Falschrum, 2022), 18–20.

29
That "forgetting" is a prerequisite for the imaginary collective unity of the nation has been observed, with regards to the forgetting of past "fratricide" and violent conflicts, by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2006 [1983]), 199–203.

30
Kādhim Jihād, *Adūnīs muntahīlān* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1993), 8, quoted in Gregory Carlock, "Poetry, Modernity, and the Levantine Identity in Adūnīs' Literary and Social Criticism," PhD thesis, Freie Universität Berlin, 2017, 100.

'sheikhdom' [*al-mashā'ikhiyyah al-adabiyyah*]," as Kadhim Jihad Hassan once proclaimed,³⁰ and that what we now need are stories from the margins, the present volume reflects and contributes to the changing discourse on migration by foregrounding the voices of migrants in art and literature, by connecting individual experiences and local perspectives to global events, and by diversifying the narratives and images of migration. We address *Forms of Migration* around the globe, placing emphasis on the plurality of forms. In sum, we believe, the contributions to this volume are capable of challenging common perceptions of im/migrant realities.

We have chosen to arrange this rich and diverse material in (at least) two ways. First, the section headers function as coordinates, grouping the contributions according to common themes and providing some orientation in the book. Second, we embraced the logics of a mixtape, letting the affective quality of the various contributions determine their order, with the preceding material setting the tone of what follows. Our goal was not so much to create a harmonious whole, the idea of a mixtape being, after all, to present to someone else the gems and highlights of your personal record collection, proudly defying the streamlined monotony of a major radio station. Parts for a whole; a whole that is so much more than the sum of its parts.

The first chords will take you to the grassy shores of the Tucoerah (Georges) River, to a place in a Sydney suburb not far from the spot where the Anglo-colonial history of Australia began, approximately 250 years ago. Returning to the place where he spent his childhood, as the son of Vietnamese refugees, James Nguyen recounts a story of multiple displacements and resettlements, leading from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to the East Hills Migrant Hostel in Australia. Questioning the location of displaced people such as his family within the national, settler-colonial narrative of a country like Australia, Nguyen presents various strategies of dealing with a past that cannot be reduced to the myth of a terra nullius, and with a present still saturated by the rhetoric of colonialism.

Immigrants in a society of the descendants of immigrants – and, hence, questions of longing and belonging – also constitute the subjects of the ensuing two contributions, Karolina Golimowska's "The Queens of Queens," and Enaya Hammad Othman's chapter on "Diasporic Fashion." Golimowska's essay depicts "a Poland made of plush, soft and cuddly, idealized and full of splendor," discovered in the streets, shops, restaurants and homes of the Polish community in New York City. Light in tone, she raises questions around migrant identities that are informed by memories of places which have ceased to exist, as well as by the experience of cultural differences and the awareness of one's own self as becoming different. Tracing the history of the Palestinian dress, Othman provides an in-depth discussion of the process of continuity and alteration of cultural artefacts in the diaspora. Drawing on interviews with Palestinian women in the U.S., she explores the symbolic meaning of Palestinian embroidery for women of different generations. She argues that keeping the tradition of the Palestinian

dress alive, while adapting to a changing social environment, is a form of gendered activism aiming to preserve a collective Palestinian identity.

Wendy Shaw provides an interlude, gently interrupting the travel from one place to another while zooming out from the particular and personal with a meditation on the larger picture. In her poem "Migrations," Shaw interweaves facts about migrant birds with a global history of mankind, conveying a sense of migration as a fundamental part of the nature of our *human condition*. Far from romanticising migration, Shaw contrasts the "naturalisation" of migration, as one might call it, with a dystopian description of the present. The fires in California are paralleled by those in the camp of Lesbos, where 70% of the inhabitants came from Afghanistan: "Their natural habitat was ruined first by Russian bombs, / The United States invented the Taliban, then bombed and bombed them." A note on the unusual form Shaw chose for her contribution to this volume complements her poem, calling for more "enriched reason" in academic writing.

Under the header of "Periscope," the next three contributions all center around visual culture, offering views and insights of migrant experiences that often remain invisible, or unseen. In addition, the three contributions all share a connection, in one way or another, to Lebanon, a country no larger than 10,452 km² that, during more than a century, has both produced and accommodated large streams of migrants. Lebanese people in the past have fled famines and wars, and today they escape a devastating economic crisis. Lebanon became the home of hundreds of thousands of Armenians escaping the genocide in late Ottoman Turkey, of an estimated 300,000 Palestinians escaping the violent occupation of their land in 1948, and of approximately 1.5 million Syrians escaping the civil war that began in 2011. As a consequence, the country hosted the largest number of refugees relative to its national population (1 in 8) in 2020.³¹ Stefan Maneval's contribution provides an introduction to, and an interview with, the Lebanese artist and author Chaza Charafeddine, who, as a young adult, left her country for Switzerland and Germany during the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990) and returned twenty years later. In the interview, Maneval talks with Charafeddine about her most recent publications, in which she reflects upon the circumstances that led to her emigration and return. Charafeddine also talks about her artistic work that critically questions the role of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, as well as other Middle Eastern countries, who migrated from Southeast Asia and Africa.

The interview with Charafeddine is followed by a photo essay on Palestinian camps in Lebanon, the result of a photography workshop conceived and led by Reine Chahine. The photos were taken by the workshop participants, Ranin Youssef (aged 24), Fatmeh Youssef (17), and Hiba Yassin (24), three young Palestinian women who grew up and live in the camps they documented with the camera. The focus of the workshop was on the consequences of the walls surrounding the camps, which, for Chahine, represent the many visible and invisible boundaries Palestinians face in Lebanon, where even the third and

fourth generations of Palestinian refugees are not granted Lebanese citizenship.

Focusing on five Arab diasporic artists and authors – the Libyan writer Hisham Matar, the Lebanese photographers Fouad Elkoury and Doris Bittar, Lebanese author and painter Etel Adnan, and the Iraqi artist Adel Abidin – Lisa Marchi challenges widespread perceptions of migrant experiences as turbulent and tumultuous. The examples she presents, while very diverse in form and style, all highlight moments of stillness, be it in the contemplative calmness that Matar's narrator finds, after years of restless wandering, in the paintings of the Siene school, or in the enforced inactivity of the Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat, portrayed by Elkoury as he flees Lebanon (the former center of resistance against the Israeli occupation of Palestine) on a boat bound for Libya in 1982, or in Etel Adnan's series of minimalist cosmic landscapes depicting a universe in constant, silent movement.

Whereas public discourse in Europe tends to highlight the perspective of white Europeans, representing immigrants as numbers, figures, and socio-cultural challenges to be coped with, the next section's essays address migration both to and from Europe with a special emphasis on migrants' perspectives and the communities they come from. The bureaucratization of migrants is also visible in the academic terminology different fields use to write about migration, Matthias Pasdzierny's essay reminds us. While doing research, as a music historian, about the Jewish composer Brigitte Schiffer, who fled from Germany to Egypt to escape the Nazis in the 1930s, his field of expertise suddenly became "exile studies." Told in the style of a photo-love story, Pasdzierny's essay discusses the role of emotions in academic research and writing. Historians, as much as other researchers, are taught to remain objective, keeping a neutral distance to their subjects – but is this always possible, or even desirable? If not, what is the place of emotions in exile studies or, for that matter, research on migrant art and literature?

The music composed by Brigitte Schiffer, after visiting the Siwa Oasis, fades into the soundtrack of the next piece, Susanne Rieser and Silvia Schultermandl's interview with Michel Gasco and Parisa Delshad, directors of the documentary film *The Sounds of Hospitality: Migrant Musicians in Europe*. The open-access film revolves around six migrant musicians in different European cities and puts migrant subjectivities in the center, as Rieser and Schultermandl note. In doing so, the film also invites us to rethink our concepts of hospitality – who, after all, is hospitable here, comforting visitors and viewers with their musical gifts?

Migrant subjectivities are also at the core of Ömer Alkin's essay on "Figurations of Homecoming" in the Turkish cinema of the 1970s, a contribution that draws our attention to a widely overlooked chapter in the global history of migrant culture. Focusing on the moment when Turkish migrant workers return after years of working in Germany, as depicted in the Turkish *Yeşilçam* films, Alkin observes that homecoming is as critical as leaving in im/migration studies. Both the migrants and their home communities have changed over the

years, often turning the homecoming into a moment of disappointed expectations and crisis. Although cinema isn't reality, Alkin's analysis is capable of making us aware of a specific viewpoint that is hardly ever considered in the dominant narrative of post-war migration to Western Germany.

After another interlude, Piotr Gwiazda's poem "Bilingual Feelings," three contributions pose questions related to imperial power and subaltern agency in a postcolonial world. We chose to name this section "Xperial," with the "X" referring to both ex-imperial or post-colonial issues and the multi-directional crossings dealt with in the essays. The British-Egyptian artist Salma Ahmad Caller created, for *Forms of Migration*, a series of photo collages interacting with her writing. Her "Crossing Formations" are indeed collages of objects from her own family archive, photographed with an analogue lens mounted on a digital camera, objects whose meaning she explains in an "Inventory" and lists in a "Key." Referencing, and simultaneously subverting, inventories of colonial, anthropological collections of objects, her tableaus, that she calls "Crossing Tales," can be read as an attempt to render memories visually – memories of a childhood and youth between Mosul in Iraq, Kano in Nigeria, Jeddah and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, and the UK; memories in which, as the artist explains, the "residues of the realities and complexities of cross-cultural battles and entanglements" reside.

Bodies are not the only sites in which transgenerational memories of colonial, or otherwise cross-cultural, entanglements are inscribed. Sometimes, they linger in profane, seemingly innocent objects, such as cookies. In Stephanie Misa's performance "Filipinos, Cannibalism, and Mothers Dancing on Tongues," presented here in the form of an illustrated essay, she traces the history of Spanish colonialism through her encounter with an offensively named "Filipino" biscuit in a Spanish supermarket. Misa's essay travels from Spain to Manila and the Filipino provinces of her ancestry and back through the colonial politics of language, connecting the introduction of European terms and languages with the hierarchisation and marginalisation of local languages to the racialization and marginalization of Filipino identities. Misa's own creative use of language, as well as her symbolic devouring of a "Filipino," function as a form of decolonial protest. Similarly, language and poetry are the only weapons of Mohammed Al-Hamiri and Mohamedou Ould Slahi, whose acts of writing back Don Walicek's analysis in his chapter. He situates the stories of the two former inmates of the infamous prison in Guantánamo Bay within a long history of human trafficking and forced displacement in the Caribbean. This leads him to call for nothing less than a rethinking and rewriting of humanism, through the remembering of imperial exploitation and violence, and by way of liberating and empowering the marginalised.

Our last section, entitled "Fringes," which includes two essays and one piece of experimental writing, explores the boundaries of migrant literatures. Anne Quéma's chapter is dedicated to Oana Avasilichioaei's poetry and audiovisual performances. Avasilichioaei crosses linguistic borders as well as the boundaries of literary forms

and conventions, symbolically rebelling against the exclusions and violence facilitated by national and territorial borders. Ikram Hili and Jennifer A. Reimer's essay asks what distinguishes migrant literature from travel writing. If both types are defined by the authors' border-crossing and treatment of intercultural differences, how do the circumstances of travel, the authors' skin colour, social and cultural background determine their movements and experiences, as well as their written testimonies thereof? The book ends with a story by Karen Tei Yamashita, illustrated with drawings by Ronaldo Lopes de Oliveira. On her fictional death-bed, drugged and increasingly drunk, Yamashita's protagonist is haunted by intergalactic travellers of literary or artistic fame. As with Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, the visitors have come to tell stories about distant places they have seen, "Invisible Planets" that, at the same time, all constitute their home. As one of Yamashita's visitors exclaims: "You will travel through every possible landscape of city or countryside, vast ocean or snow peak mountain, desert dunes or tropical forest, populated, civil or savage, banal or exotic, expecting to experience another unknown part of this planet, but everything reminds you of what you already have known even as you cannot grasp how or when or what that knowing brings to mind."

The stories recounted and the images presented in *Forms of Migration*, wherever they are set, may remind you of what you have already known – of our differences, our boundaries and exclusions, our planet. Yet, as they are being integrated into that knowing, their particularities, by way of introducing differences to the already known, can contribute to a change in the way migration is being looked at, thought of, and spoken about. In their particularities, we believe, lies the chance to recognise that the global history of migration is all our history.

**LONGING
BELONGING**

EAST HILLS MIGRANT HOSTEL

James Nguyen

The dry summer heat is thickened by the din of cicadas. Drowning in tinnitus, the volume pitched to a maximum pulsates. Immersed in 360 degrees of surround sound. The whole place is deafening. Dodging the midday glare, we escape into the scrub below. As the chorus thins, it hangs in the canopy above. The heat, dry and prickly, is suddenly moist on my skin. The breeze bounces off the water. It flirts with the Casuarinas, trickling down the branches. We can breathe again.

Through a hole in the fence, I jerk it open for the others. We err on the riverbank. Framed by the trees, catching our breath, gasping for shade. We look around, taking it in. My eyes adjust. A shocking green of the Asparagus weed poking through dappled light. This carpet, spilling overshadows. Fernlike and groping. Scratching softly, but spiny to the touch. The riverbank is choked by cladodes, tiny feathery leaves. Dusted in flecks of tiny white flowers that in a few weeks would be dripping with berries.

Poet and filmmaker Jazz Money points me to a bushel of Warrigal Greens growing by the water. A respite of tangled native growth, stark contrast to the Asparagus Weed. These leaves, succulent, arrowhead shaped, with undersides covered in microscopic bubbles that glisten when struck by sunlight. I pluck at the tips, tasting this Wild Spinach. The flavour is raw, dark green, and astringent. Not very pleasant. She told me that the bitter oxalates should be blanched before eating. With this taste hanging in my mouth, I swallow rather than spit it out. Unlike the Asparagus weed, I knew I wouldn't get diarrhoea from their poison berries. Warrigal Greens, apparently, are full of Vitamin C. So nutritious that James Cook and Joseph Banks took them aboard the Endeavour to prevent scurvy on their way home. When they got back to England, the seeds from these Warrigal Greens were sent around, becoming established in parts of England and the European continent. Interesting to think how these weeds have ended up growing side by side, competing for sunlight along the river.

From among these weeds, I pull out pieces of polystyrene. Washed up all along the water's edge. I had taken back three large garbage bags of this stuff last time I came. It was as if the river kept regurgitating this stuff for us to take away. Left behind from the endless summers of broken ice boxes, fishing trips, and long-forgotten picnics, the polystyrene squeals when rubbed together. Rib-like, strigulating with the cicadas above. As we fool around with this trash, it crumbles and disintegrates in our hands. Settling like snow over asparagus weed. We decide to go before too long, picking up what rubbish we could from the river's edge. Emerging back into suburbia, I use a slab of polystyrene to shield my eyes from the sun and deflected heat off the asphalt.

I had first returned to this spot two summers ago, with my Mum and Dad. In the Sydney suburb of East Hills, it is now a densely built housing estate. Renamed *Voyager Point*, this site sits along the Tucoerah (Georges) River, 25 km upriver from where James Cook first set foot on the continent. We were not far from the first point of Anglo-colonial contact. Almost 250 years after that landing, we were walking along the riverbank, picking up pieces of polystyrene, being drowned out by the drone of cicadas.



Portion 53 (The National, Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia), Nguyễn Thị Kim Dung, Nguyễn Ngọc Cư, Kezia Yap, & James Nguyen, 2019, Screenshot. Image courtesy the artists. <https://vimeo.com/449963160/6425f7d5cd>

Noting these proximities, what are the settler implications for refugees like me and my family who came to Australia from far-off places like Vietnam? Where do we fit into the settler-coloniser narratives of our national discourse? Can we, as displaced people from elsewhere, make sense of the colonising psyche of Australia for ourselves? My friend Abigail Moncrieff describes how new migrants to Australia are promised a *Tabula Rasa*,⁰¹ a post-colonial *Terra Nullism* as it may.⁰² A land of milk and honey, unblemished by the histories and traumas we escaped from as refugees. This land, however, turns out to be a land of Warrigal Greens, rampant Asparagus Weed, and crumbling polystyrene.

Few Immigrants and Refugees are afforded the opportunity here to speak beyond their subject position, as traumatised people from elsewhere. But what about the traumas that had preceded our arrival? Traumas not confined to our refugee testimonial. So often, the contract for resettlement and asylum comes with a set of conditions that are never clearly stated but always felt. To be allowed to set foot on this country, we are expected to tacitly accept the violence inflicted on others here. This violence, we are told, is not our own. Better to not rock the boat, lest we throw ourselves overboard.⁰³ Better to deflect and quietly accept... even at times collaborate with the very people who will never see us as Australian. In this country, as Refugees and Immigrants, we learn to perpetually perform gratitude to the nation and administration that granted us asylum. As young recruits to the founding colonial traditions of this country, refugees are expected to demonstrate allegiance, mateship, and camaraderie with a nation that is always on the verge of lashing out at us. Love your abuser. Keep them happy. We quickly understood what Sarah Ahmed describes as the "phenomenology of whiteness," something that prompts us to adapt and find the means to exist inside its orbit.⁰⁴ Over time, what is felt as a phenomenological presence takes root like asparagus weed. Crowding out our own histories and memories. Our languages crumble, accents become eroded and softened. We learn to speak, eat, smell,

01

Abigail Moncrieff, "James Nguyen," in *The National 2019 : New Australian Art*, ed. Genevieve O'Callaghan and Faith Chisholm (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Carriageworks, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2019), 122.

02

In reference to the term *Terra Nullius*: a colonial foundational land law in Australia that describes the continent as a land belonging to no-one. On how British claims for possession were based. The *Mabo Decision* (1992) and the *Native Title Act* (1993) challenged this legal presumption, where Australia's First Nations peoples can seek recognition of their native title rights. I used the term a "new *Terra Nullism*" to describe an immigrant position that seeks to negate and ignore prior and continuing First Nations histories and sovereignty, in an interview with *Antidote* in 2016, <https://antidote.org.au/features/james-nguyen/>, accessed 19 July 2020.

03

In 2001, the Australian Government led by Prime Minister John Howard and Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock concocted and popularised the belief that asylum seekers from Iraq were deliberately "throwing their children overboard" at sea to be rescued by the Australian Navy and to be granted entry into Australia. Kate Slattery, "Drowning Not Waving: The 'Children Overboard' Event and Australia's Fear of the Other," *Media International Australia, Incorporating Culture & Policy* 109 (2003): 93.

04

Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 150.

05

The Melbourne International Comedy Festival (MICF) is the largest stand-alone comedy festival and the second-largest comedy festival in the world. Started in 1987, I was quite surprised to learn from Le that Ningali Lawford was the first Australian First Nations comedian to perform at the festival in 2000.

06

That is, Fitzroy in Melbourne, all the way to Ningali Lawford's nearest hometown at Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia.

07

"Hung Le & Ningali in *Black & Tran*," audio visual recording of a performance at the Melbourne Trades Hall, uploaded to Hung Le's YouTube Channel, 13:43 min, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_PIA95Cj-o&t=40s, accessed 12 August 2020.

digest, fart, and shit the rhetoric of colonialism that is fed to us. Bleaching like a dog turd in the summer sun, we assimilate.

In rethinking our assimilation, to extricate and dislodge ourselves from the inevitable whiteness of art and politics in Australia, I keep coming back to the comedy show *Black and Tran* (2000–2003). Written and performed by Vietnamese-Australian stand-up comic Hung Le, and Wangkatjungka theatre actor, dancer, and performer Ningali Lawford (who passed away in 2019). Their collaboration attempted to disrupt the pervasive rhetoric of settler colonialism in Australia through the personal exchange and storytelling between an Australian First Nations and Vietnamese artist. Le told me on the phone that it was the first time that an Aboriginal performer, let alone one performing with a Vietnamese refugee team-mate, had appeared on stage at the Melbourne Festival.⁰⁵ Le and Lawford also had sold out tours at the Adelaide Fringe, Hong Kong Fringe; and as they described it, everywhere between *Fitzroy* to *Fitzroy Crossing*.⁰⁶ Their style of casual comedy, set in a Melbourne pub, sparked conversations that feel as important then, as they do today. *Black and Tran* was a way for two friends to have a few laughs and share their personal stories. And in doing so, these two artists relegate the mainstream-Anglo perspective to that of the bystander; the paying and predominantly white audience. A 2000 performance at the Melbourne Trades Hall can now be viewed on Hung Le's YouTube channel.⁰⁷ Towards the end of the first clip, Lawford and Le talk to each other about their encounters with the English language. Despite their cultural differences, they instantly recognise in each the parallel idiosyncrasies of learning a second language:



Hung Le and Ningali Lawford performing *Black and Tran*, recording made at the Trades Hall in Melbourne, 2000. Online screen capture. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_PIA95Cj-o&t=40s. Image courtesy Hung Le.

Tran (Le): So the immigration department tried to help us out. And they thought they'd give us an interpreter. To help us get bankbooks and stuff like that. Do you know how close they came to an English-speaking-Vietnamese guy in 1975? They gave us a guy from Malta! [Laughs] Mate,

first thing I thought in this country was that Maltese was the official language.

Black (Lawford): You reckon you never spoke English? Mate I never spoke English till I was about 11 years old, and I come from this country! Yeah, I didn't know that the English language bloody existed eh? See, I learnt to speak English by listening to Country and Western shows...

The exchanges between Lawford and Le challenged who could be counted as a "mate," and who could engage in conventional presumptions of "mateship," that is, not having to bring in a white protagonist to lead their conversations.⁰⁸ Having met at the pub in real life, these two non-Anglo characters speak to each other with a disarmingly Aussie accent. As two minority bodies inhabiting a typically white space (socially and linguistically), Lawford and Le joke about their absurd run-ins with whiteness.⁰⁹ Refreshingly though, they never essentialise Australian whiteness or announce the racism they were critiquing.

Despite side-stepping mainstream expectations to explicitly make their work about identity politics or racism, this type of work inevitably faces the dilemma of being read by white critics as being either too overtly concerned with identity politics, or never quite political enough. Reviewing *Black and Tran*, critic and academic Helena Grehan criticised the performance as being ineffective at addressing racism. To Grehan, their performance was a missed opportunity: "I believe that the use of comic strategies ... all worked to dilute the political power of *Black and Tran* and resulted in an evening of slapstick entertainment rather than one of biting satire."¹⁰ Given that the comedy didn't shy from cringeworthy moments like dog-eating and Vietnamese mum jokes, Grehan's critique of how this type of "slap-stick" comedy fails to give her the political satisfaction of addressing Australia's systemic problem with race is absurd. The "double irony" that Grehan notes as a cheap comedic trick is, in fact, her own unfortunate double irony of critique.¹¹ Grehan fails to recognise the double bind of being a minority Australian. With so few opportunities to share our stories and occupy the stage with others like us, non-white artists are inevitably drawn into narratives and the impossible task of white deliverance. Our inclusion comes with the expectation to magically solve the crisis of racism and colonialism that the mainstream has itself neglected and cumulatively avoided (despite having all the time, resources, and historic opportunity to do so). These confounding expectations have led many artists to seek intimacies among friends, families, and peers. To focus and solve our own issues without having to deal with the meddling critique and lazy expectations of the phenomenology of whiteness around us.

A few months after coming home to Sydney from New York (just in time to experience the 2016 US presidential elections from afar), my friend Xi Liu sent me a link that was being circulated among her networks. Clicking on the link, I landed on Christina Xu's Google.doc titled *Letters for Black Lives*. Acknowledging how she lacked the

08

Nick Dyrenfurth argues that during his Prime Ministership (1996–2007), John Howard co-opted the historically egalitarian and radically socialist terms of "mateship," "mate," "a-fair-go" etc. into his rhetoric of misogynist conservative identity politics. Howard, like many others were actively realigning these terms with a neo-liberal Nationalistic agenda. During this time, there was an escalation of right-wing racist language deployed by people like Pauline Hanson, whose disruptive and radically racist policies targeted recent immigrants and Indigenous rights. The underlying anti-feminist rhetoric and anti-political correctness continues to dominate contemporary political and public discourse in Australia to this day. Hanson continues to controversially hold onto her senate seat at the writing of this essay in 2020. Cf. Nick Dyrenfurth, "John Howard's Hegemony of Values: The Politics of 'mateship' in the Howard Decade," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 2 (June 2007): 211–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10361140701319994>, accessed 2 August 2020.

09

Ibid, 150.

10

Helena Grehan, "'Black and Tran': A Comedy That Laughs in the Face of Racism?" *Australasian Drama Studies* 42 (2003): 112.

11

Ibid, 115.

The screenshot shows a Google Doc interface with the title 'Letters for Black Lives Translations'. The page contains a brief introduction: 'Letters for Black Lives is a set of crowdsourced, multilingual, and culturally-aware resources aimed at creating a space for open and honest conversations about racial justice, police violence, and anti-Blackness in our families and communities.' Below this, it says 'We wrote a letter in 2016, [which you can read here](#) along with how this project came together.' At the bottom, there is a section titled 'Here are the finished translated 2016 Letters (and Readings):' listing various languages including Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Malaysia, Bengali, Portuguese, Chinese (Simplified), Chinese (Traditional), Hindi, Hmong (Green dialect), Hmong (White dialect), Farsi, French, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Tamil, Telugu, Thai, Urdu, and Vietnamese. A note below states: 'And here's some background on how this all began:' followed by a link to 'A Letter From Young Asian-Americans To Their Families About Black Lives Matter'.

Letters for Black Lives (Online Google.doc) Christina Xu & collaborators, July 6, 2016. Screenshot of project Google.doc landing page.

complex language skills to talk and share her stories with her own parents and Elders, Christina Xu wrote an English-language letter to unpack the entrenched racism within her family and the general apathy (and even at times animosity) towards the #BlackLivesMatter movement by Asian Immigrants in America. Unable to articulate her thoughts in her Mother tongue, Xu reached out to her friends and colleagues to help her translate herself, to her non-English speaking and non-English fluent Elders. What emerged was a diasporic ground swell to Xu's simple gesture. The Google.doc was spread throughout a network of young Asian migrants from the US and beyond, many of us recognising Xu's predicament in losing connection to both language and culture: a consequence of becoming a little too well-integrated, too adjusted, too westernised, and too comfortably assimilated into the Anglosphere.

Within weeks, the Google.doc was collectively translated into over fifty different languages. Many who clicked on Xu's link used her Letter, and the labour of translating it with friends and family, to start their own conversations and reflections on the diverse forms of racism within their own communities. I asked my dad to help me to proof-read the Vietnamese version of the letter. Contributing to the cascade of tracked changes, I had an excuse to talk with him about the #BlackLivesMatters movement in relation to our personal experiences of racism in Australia. By editing and proof-reading this letter, my dad became complicit in the global conversations and activities around us. The common baggage of respecting my Elders and holding onto my mother tongue by my Mum and Dad suddenly found relevance as we sat down and tried to have these conversations with our profoundly broken languages and tongues.



Portion 53 (*The National, Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia*), Nguyễn Thị Kim Dung, Nguyễn Ngọc Cư, Kezia Yap, & James Nguyen, 2019, screenshot. Image courtesy the artists.
<https://vimeo.com/450001259/876304ce92>

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 Shu-Sha A Guan, Patricia M Greenfield, and Marjorie F Orellana, "Translating Into Understanding: Language Brokering and Prosocial Development in Emerging Adults From Immigrant Families," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 29, no. 3 (2014): 331–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558413520223>, accessed 12 August 2020.

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 Elizabeth van Acker, "Trade Liberalisation and Its Impact on the Australian Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Industries," *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 2, no. 1 (1997): 14; Laura Berger-Thompson, John Breush, and Louise Lilley, "Australia's Experience with Economic Reform, Treasury Working Paper," The Macroeconomic Group, Department of Treasury, October 2018, <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-03/p2018-t332486-economic-reform-v2.pdf>, accessed 12 August 2020.

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 Heather Goodall and Allison Cadzow, *Rivers and Resilience: Aboriginal People on Sydney's Georges River* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009).

Asking my dad about his own experience of arriving in Australia, and his own relationship to the English language, I started to think more deeply about how he, my brother, and I had somehow gained a fluency with English that my mother and my aunty had never managed. To this day, the women in my family continue to speak very little English, relying on my brother and I to regularly broker and translate the English language for them.¹² These differences were not intrinsic limitations but emerged in the gendered work and career opportunities available to many non-English speaking women and the economic reforms that profoundly impacted on their lives.

Following the floating of the Australian Dollar in 1983, a chain reaction of sweeping economic cascades saw the removal of tariffs and deregulation in labour-intensive manufacturing industries, including the textiles, clothing, and footwear sector.¹³ The economic fallout had an immediate effect on the women in my family. Like many other Vietnamese women at the time, my mum and aunty did piecework to make ends meet, sewing and assembling clothes at a rate that had to increasingly compete with tariff-free imports from Asia. Asian women competing with other Asian women. Nonetheless, my mum's relentless sewing was able to pay for me, my younger brother, and my dad to go to school and finish University. Through these years, I got used to the never-ending drone of the over-locker and grinding shuttle mechanism humming in our garage. Every seam was marked by a double-click of the foot peddle as my mum fed the dogteeth with yet another puzzle piece of fabric. Building up layer upon layer of multicoloured sediment, her feed tray would overflow like the never-ending batches and deadlines that kept her from practicing what little English she had learnt.

It was only by talking with my parents about Christina Xu's letter and learning about their own struggles with language – the everyday struggle, and the isolation and alienation of resettlement – that I began to seriously reflect on my own family's experience of Australia. At the same time, I was reading Heather Goodall and Allison Cadzow's book *Rivers and Resilience: Aboriginal People on Sydney's Georges River*.¹⁴ It took me a while to make the connection between where my dad was first processed as a refugee in Australia; at the East Hills Migrant Hostel, and the settler-colonial landscape of my own neighbourhood.

Meeting Heather Goodall over a coffee, I discovered that as recent as 1949, a number of Dharawal/Tharawal families like the Goggeys were removed from land historically reserved as Aboriginal Sanctuaries along the river. At East Hills, these lands were "rezoned" for national security and military use, preparing for the massive influx of European refugees from the Second World War. Australia needed new settlers and a young workforce. It needed to fuel the postwar industrialisation and development of the country. Talking to my parents about these histories, I realised that my dad was himself processed on the same piece of land that was taken away from the Goggeys. The East Hills Migrant Hostel, where he had his first English lessons were eventually demolished. In its place a rebranded and asphalt-filled housing estate on Voyager Point.



Speaking uncommon tongues.

Portion 53 (The National, Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia), Nguyễn Thị Kim Dung, Nguyễn Ngọc Cư, Kezia Yap, & James Nguyen, 2019, screenshot. Image courtesy the artists.
<https://vimeo.com/450001433/b91850ba40>

When I took my parents back to the site of the Migrant Hostel, we talked about how our arrival in this country was part of a continuous history of removal and displacement of other families from their ancestral lands. Colonisation was not just a one-off event 250 years ago. Nor was it something that happened 25km downriver at Botany Bay. We counted on our fingers a mere 33 years between the removal of the Dharawal/Tharawal families and my dad's arrival on their piece of land.

A few weeks after visiting the site, my mum wrote me a poem. I was completely thrown by the fact that in all these years, sitting at the sewing machine, my mum had been writing poetry. Jotting down notes and assembling poems on scraps of pattern-making paper. Ashamed that I had not even noticed her artistic work beyond my own practice, I realized that I, too, had been underestimating her as someone who didn't speak good English - as someone perennially dependent on me to translate for her. I sat down, and asked her to read her poem to me:



Portion 53 (The National, Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia),
Nguyễn Thị Kim Dung, Nguyễn Ngọc Cư, Kezia Yap, & James Nguyen, 2019,
screenshot. Image courtesy the artists.

Lâu lăm không dám về nơi ấy
Vùng đất nhuộm giòng máu tổ tiên
Có giòng suối ngọt thơm ngon
Có muôn đồng cỏ hoa vàng thương thương
Có ngôi nhà nhỏ xinh xinh
Có cha có mẹ họ hàng gần xa
Có muôn vàn ký ức tuổi thơ
Hái hoa, đuổi bướm bên đường
Nâng niu mái tóc cha già sớm hôm

Rồi một chiều hoàng hôn tím đỏ
Một đoàn lính rầm rầm bước tới
Người xưa người ra khỏi nơi chốn ấy
Bước đi ngoảnh lại muôn vàn xót xa
Kìa ngôi nhà lá đơn sơ
Hằng đêm yên giấc trong tay mẹ hiền

Khi xa rồi bỗng thì nơi ấy
Từng dây nhà vòm mọc lên như nấm
Ngạo nghẽ cười đè nát chòi xưa
Cành đã lụa, cá người cũng lụa
Họ đem vào nhiều người mới lụa
nói không cùng một ngôn ngữ

Sau những lúc tàn chinh chiến
Lính đi rồi người còn ở lại
Xây phố thị trên mảnh đất thân thương
Sầm uất lăm
Đông đúc lăm nhưng toàn người xứ lạ

...
33 năm sau ngày bạn rời nơi ấy
Chúng tôi được vào mảnh đất yêu thương của bạn
Không cầm được nỗi xót xa vì nghĩ tới bạn
Xin muôn đời tri ân tổ tiên mảnh đất thanh bình này
Xin đa tạ

Kim Dung người tỵ nạn CSVN

So long since, not daring to return,
A place dyed by the bloodlines of ancestors.

A sweet river, fragrant water.
Fields of green and yellow blooms,
A humble home
A father, mother
Relations near and far.
These souvenirs of a childhood -
Picking flowers, chasing butterflies
Plucking greying hairs in the early afternoon.

One late evening, a dusky purple-red.
A squadron of soldiers did advance
As one was pushed the other shoved.
Reeling from this place, this distance aches,
A simple home displaced.
Waiting each night to rest in a mothers' arms.

How easy is it then, to be erased?
As row upon row of corrugated huts,
sprout up like mushrooms.
A resounding laughter, our homes are lost
In their place, a strange and brand-new vista.
Stranger still, the people
Speaking uncommon tongues.

The soldiers moved on once war was quelled.
Leaving it for the newcomers
arriving in waves to build and industrialise.
A new settlement filled
with crowds of elsewhere people.

...
33 years since your removal,
My family came,
housed on this patch, of your beloved soil.
I don't have to think so far, to feel a loss,
and think how my new life, owes much to your ancestors
Granted a peaceful refuge here.
My gratitude.

Kim Dung Nguyễn, a refugee from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Translated with James Nguyen

THE QUEENS OF QUEENS

Karolina Golimowska

Taking train line 7 from Manhattan provides a view of the streets of Queens through the windows. It is a sunny day in spring, the train is pleasantly half-full; we leave the downtown skyline behind us and enter Long Island City. Outside, a bus is burning, orange flames reach for the sky. I can hear a siren speeding up; the train keeps going. On the next stop, a dark-haired man wearing a sombrero enters the car. He is selling Oreo cookies – \$2.50 for a package of two. Nobody is buying. I get off at Jackson Heights and change to the E train that takes me past LaGuardia Airport and Forest Hills to Kew Gardens. Mila meets me at the station. We drive to the dry cleaners to pick up her jacket and then go shopping for groceries at a "Kosher-Halal-Russian-Mediterranean" supermarket called "Kalinka." We buy eggplant salad, herrings, Polish sausage, cottage cheese and dried cranberries. Mila seems to know everyone in there and speaks Russian to Ivan who works at the till. On our way back, we drive past a huge metal globe in a park and several buildings that have been there since the World's Fair of 1964, almost entirely forgotten, rusting slowly in the sun. A family of four prepares a barbecue; further down men are playing cricket.

Mila has lived in Queens for the last 20 years. She came here from a Texas that she loved but left after a divorce. Before Texas there was Warsaw, which Mila cannot stop missing. She is in her mid-60s, elegant, attractive, with big eyes and a young smile and voice. Good job, nice flat, no kids, Eastern European accent and "Polish dreams," as she says.

Like Mila, Barbara landed in New York after having been on the infamous 1968 train from communist Warsaw to Vienna that took many Polish Jews abroad with a one-way ticket. She got off the train at the Vienna Hauptbahnhof and stood at the platform trying to take a couple of deep breaths. The air smelled the same as it did in Warsaw. Originally, she had wanted to go to Sweden; it didn't work out and instead she decided to try her luck in New York.

It was hard at first; she worked at a grocery shop on weekdays, cleaned flats at night and turned into a baby-sitter on Saturdays. She didn't know any English; she "learned it all by herself." Life has been good to her, though, she says. She's run a German deli in Kew Gardens for the last 22 years. She has never been to Germany, but it does not seem to matter. She employs three people, and her daughter Agata helps, too. They sell "the original German strudel" that very much resembles a traditional Polish cheesecake. Most of the other products are Polish, made in Brooklyn or imported from Europe via Chicago – hometown of the largest Polish community outside of Poland. "It's been a great business, people love it," says Barbara while filling our glasses with homemade lemon liqueur.

Mila comes here every other day to talk to Barbara in the backroom of her shop after closing. They talk about work, love, food, Poland, clothes and shoes, ideas for new businesses, politics, and men. Sometimes they order a sushi plate, Chinese fried noodles or a pizza from around the corner. Barbara is married for the second time, but I don't get to meet her husband since he never shows up in the deli.

"It's my thing," says Barbara. And Mila adds, "We are the superwomen here; we don't need to rely on any men."

We raise our glasses and cheer to that.

Next weekend more people come to stay in Mila's flat – her old friends from Texas. Mila leaves them the bedroom and makes herself comfortable on the floor in the living room. She is smiling as always. In the morning, she announces:

"I love to sleep in big rooms. That is why I should be a queen, you know. I would make a bedroom out of this living room and have a huge bed in here. I would also have a lover whom I wouldn't have to take any further than to the bed. And the kitchen being close is just fine."

We both laugh.

Mila takes us all to her favorite Polish restaurant in Green Point, in northern Brooklyn. It is called "Królewskie Jadło" (King's Meal). In front of it stands an embarrassingly proud and rusty metal suit of armor with a visor, probably meant to allude to Polish power and greatness in the Middle Ages, suggesting that its heyday lies in a distant past.

Inside we are confronted with a mixture of folklore elegance and socialist realism. The pierogi that we order are huge; the sausage is the size of three average sausages in Poland. Along Manhattan Avenue, the street with the most Polish businesses, everything resembles Poland but is bigger, sweeter, pinker and generally exaggerated. It seems to me that all the memories brought here by thousands of immigrants have been covered with icing, marked with the American experience and capitalism and turned into something new: a Poland made of plush, soft and cuddly, idealized and full of splendor. I think about the difference between this proudly manifested Polishness and its much more discrete, less-splendid version in Germany where, indeed, it is hardly visible. I hear my own voice ordering in Polish and the half-Polish, half-American answer of the waiter who now knows that I am not from here. I think of what Julia Kristeva wrote about a second language becoming a new skin and a form of a resurrection, and at this very moment, I can strongly relate to the figure of the confused polyglot who often chooses silence.⁰¹

Monday morning after breakfast, Mila is leaving for work with elegant, blown-out hair, carefully applied makeup, and black ballerinas.

"After 9/11, we all stopped wearing high heels," she explains. "It's easier to run away in flat shoes."

When it happened, Mila was in her Midtown office and facing the burning towers. The whole building was evacuated. She and her colleague tried to catch a cab to go to Queens, but there were no cabs. Finally, a car stopped. The driver was Muslim and extremely frightened. On the way, they picked up two more people and drove east. The day engraved itself on Mila's memory and has functioned as a caesura ever since.

Mila was a part of the first Ground Zero rescue team and so was Mo – the taxi driver. Downtown Manhattan was completely empty. Only one retail store never stopped operating. Mila shows me

01

"Not speaking in one's mother tongue. Living with resonances and reasoning that are cut off from the body's nocturnal memory, from the bittersweet slumber of childhood. Bearing within oneself like a secret vault, or like a handicapped child – cherished and useless – that language of the past that withers without ever leaving you. You improve your ability with another instrument, as one expresses oneself with algebra or the violin. You can become a virtuoso with this new device that moreover gives you a new body, just as artificial and sublimated – some say sublime. You have a feeling that the new language is a resurrection: new skin, new sex. But the illusion bursts when you hear, upon listening to a recording for instance, that the melody of your voice comes back to you as a peculiar sound, out of nowhere. [...] Thus, between two languages, your realm is silence. By dint of saying things in various ways, one just as trite as the other, just as approximate, one ends up no longer saying them." Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1994), 15.

her T-shirt with "Manhattan Rescue Team" printed on it. Now she is running late, though, and has to leave.

"Manhattan changed after 9/11," she tells me. "People lost orientation, lost their reference point; the absence of the Towers confused them. Queens hasn't changed. Queens is still Queens, thank God."

Two evenings later, we sit again in Barbara's shop. Her son and daughter-in-law are meant to arrive the next day from Warsaw.

"They bring this Poland with them that I have no clue about," she says. "I suppose I am a New Yorker now."

After all these years, she was offered the Polish citizenship that she was forced to give up in 1968. She refused.

"My last Polish passport stated that I was no longer a Polish citizen. Defined by negation, have you ever heard of such a practice?" she asks me perplexed.

"My life is here now."

Mila raises her glass filled with home-made lemonade: "To us! To Queens!"

And Barbara looks at me and asks: "So, when are you moving here?"

DIASPORIC FASHION: THE PALESTINIAN DRESS AS A FORM OF GENDERED ACTIVISM

Enaya Hammad Othman



A collection of Palestinian dresses displayed in the exhibition "Beyond the Veil" at Milwaukee Public Museum in 2014. The dresses were collected from Palestinian immigrant women to be displayed in the museum. Photo © Yance Marti, 2014.

In the American Palestinian diaspora, Palestinian immigrant women and their American-born daughters and granddaughters are revitalizing the meaning of the Palestinian *thob* by incorporating contemporary fashion into its design. In the following pages, I suggest to consider this to be an act of contesting the binary between mainstream fashion and traditional garb, as well as the binaries of national borders. By reconfiguring what has been historically connected with tradition and antiquity into contemporary and fashionable, Palestinian women enlarge their social role while generating new meanings of "expressive culture of the community" for a displaced population.⁰¹ By integrating fashion and traditionalism, the national and the global, they create hybrid expressions of identity.

The traditional dress of Palestinian women, though diverse in style and form, is called *thob* (also spelled *thawb*).⁰² It is a full-length long-sleeved dress with elaborate, hand-embroidered designs and colors which vary from one region to another in Palestine.

The mobile aesthetics and cultural significance of the Palestinian *thob*'s significance exemplifies Jean A. Hamilton's understanding of dress as a "a dynamic, interacting system, unbounded by time and space that articulates directly with the larger cultural system in which dress operates."⁰³ Specifically, the *thob* has been transformed and re-invented against and alongside shifting understandings of the meaning of "the traditional" in different historical contexts, that I trace from the time of the British Mandate, i.e. before 1948, until the early 21st century. Over the course of time, the *thob* as the authentic dress of the *fallaha*, the Palestinian peasant, has become the embodiment of an idealized Palestinian identity and territory. Since the early days of refugee camps in neighboring countries to the contemporary global Palestinian diaspora, women have assumed preserving their dress was their duty to the Palestinian villages erased through the Israeli occupation in Palestine. As a result, the *thob* has evolved into a symbol of national unity, perseverance of culture, resistance to colonialism and occupation, and nostalgic longing for and political expression of identity as a displaced group. Indeed, it now constitutes one of the major objects of the Palestinian heritage preservation agenda.⁰⁴

In this essay, I draw on the narratives of twenty women belonging to the first generation arriving between the 1950s and 1970s and their American-born daughters in Milwaukee. The interviews were conducted as part of my research project on the changing meaning of the Palestinian dress, by student researchers whom I trained in the methods of conducting oral history interviews between 2013 and 2016.⁰⁵ My aim is to show how, in the US, Palestinian-American women are claiming space for themselves within and against national discourses, using their clothing as a sign of a transnational, diasporic cultural identity. I argue that the conservation of a cultural artifact does more than functioning as a national symbol. It operates as a female-controlled domain for increasing women's voice and visibility through fashion. While women have used dress to have control over the meaning of the national heritage and claim visibility and agency within the power structure of the national discourse, they also have the power

01 Susan Kaiser, "Minding Appearances: Style, Truth and Subjectivity," in *Body Dressing*, ed. J. Entwistle and E. Wilson (New York: Berg, 2001), 66.

02 By "traditional" Palestinian dress, I refer to what women generally used to wear in their villages before they had to leave their land.

03 Jean A. Hamilton, "Dress as a Cultural Sub-system: A Unifying Metatheory for Clothing and Textiles," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 6 (1987): 1.

04 The *thob* and the British Mandate coin were chosen as the two dynamic objects with changing meanings as part of the "Reconceptualising Heritage Collections" Project undertaken for Australian Research Council. See, F.R. Cameron, "Object-oriented Democracies: Conceptualising Museum Collections in Networks," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 23, no. 3 (2008): 234.

05 The student researchers worked on a 4-year-long oral history project conducted within AMWRRI (Arab and Muslim Women's Research and Resource Institute, <https://amwri.org>), a nonprofit organization I founded in 2009. This project was supported by a grant from the Wisconsin Humanities Council and Marquette University's College of Arts and Sciences Mellon Grants for Undergraduate Student Research.

06 Iman Saca and Maha Saca, *Embroidering Identities: A Century of Palestinian Clothing* (Chicago: Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago, 2006), 13.

07 Shelagh Weir, *Palestinian Costume* (Northampton: Interlink Books, 2008), 17.

08 Saca and Saca, *Embroidering Identities*, 17.

09 Weir, *Palestinian Costume*, 74; Widad Kamel Kawar is quoted by Tania Nasir, "The Traditional Palestinian Costume," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 10, no. 1 (1980): 125.

10 For instance, the *shawl* became an important complementary piece while some traditional pieces such as *khirka* were largely abandoned. See Weir, *Palestinian Costume*, 74.

11 Kawar quoted in Nasir, "The Traditional Palestinian Costume," 123.

to change and transform the meaning of the garment, as well as how to use and fashion it.

The Shifting Meaning of the Palestinian Dress before 1948

The expressive power and symbolic meaning of Palestinian clothes, particularly as political expression, existed before the creation of the Israeli state and the following Palestinian displacement. Within the national territory, clothing reflected regional identities with differences in the styles and embroidery, and interestingly these differences were displayed through women's clothing while men's clothing was largely unified and did not display much diversity.⁰⁶ Clothing similarly could reveal a woman's marital and social status. Such local and personal information conveyed through dresses largely disappeared with the modernization of the clothing. In her research on *Palestinian Costume*, Shelagh Weir summarized the symbolism and diversity of Palestinian clothing that was prevalent until 1948:

Up to 1948, and to an extent still today, styles of dress reflected the major social division of Palestinian society. Male and female costume differed primarily according to whether the wearer was a town dweller, villager or Bedouin, and secondarily according to the region they came from. Within each region there were also finer distinctions between the costumes worn by the women of different villages and Bedouin tribes, though less so that of men.⁰⁷

Motifs and designs not only indicated the region and status of the wearer, but also communicated personal wishes and feelings of a woman. They could even tell how many children a woman wanted.⁰⁸ As Weir noted, women created "their own language;" or as Widad K. Kawar, another researcher and collector of Palestinian costumes, said in an interview, they *read their stories* through the ornamentation of their clothes.⁰⁹

Before 1948, Palestinian clothing was also influenced by different cultures due to Ottoman rule and the British Mandate. The introduction of European textiles and motifs, and, with the British Mandate, elements of clothing that indicated higher status redefined Palestinian fashion.¹⁰ Yet, as the influence of the Ottoman and European styles was stronger in urban settings than in the villages, it gave way to a more explicit division. Towards the end of this period, with the founding of the state of Israel, Palestinian nationalism and its reflections in clothing began to emerge. Kawar noted that, based on this awareness, Ottoman and European hats were replaced by "Palestinian village headwear – the *keffiyeh* and *ikal*;" or women's scarves and veil.¹¹

However, clothing in this period was complicated by the role of missionaries in giving the dress binary and shifting meanings. They romanticized it by associating it with Jesus' mother Mary. At

the same time, women's appearance and the dress were targets of the modernizing project. Missionary teachers, for example, obliged their students to change the way they dressed, based on the assumption that *thobs* were premodern or village dresses, thus emphasizing the class division. When they were admitted to American schools, young girls were required to dress in European style. American teachers thought they would "rescue" these "victim" girls from both the veil and the *thob*.¹² Both the romanticization and the modernizing projects served to distance and "other" the *thob* and its wearers. In this sense, in the period before 1948, the use and meaning of the *thob* was already reflecting a fragmented society.

The Increasing National Significance of the *Thob* from 1948 to the 1990s

As a result of the migration and dispersal of Palestinians, the *thob* has become less varied and more "universal."¹³ After 1948, Palestinian dress evolved from individual, regional, and status-related symbolism into an object of national significance. This period signifies a myriad of efforts by Palestinian women in different settings to preserve, revive, and develop the Palestinian *thob* based on conscious involvement, resistance, and political activism. The prevalence, after 1948, of national symbolism instead of personal stories told through the *thob* reflects the Palestinian national and migration history, including the rise of nationalist movements and efforts to preserve the national heritage.

Initially, women who found themselves in the refugee camps in countries neighboring Palestine continued to make and wear the *thob* as a sign of the zeal to preserve and demonstrate their identity and tradition. The adverse economic conditions forced them to abandon delicate and rich embroidery. Women primarily used the fabric they had access to and focused on the practical use of clothing rather than representative and artistic considerations. Particularly in the 1960s, the embroidery was simplified, and more European styles were adapted. This change in the embroidery styles accompanied a larger transformation of regional differences into a common Palestinian identity and an increase in group feelings.¹⁴

During the 1980s and 1990s, particularly in the aftermath of the first intifada, the *thob* was revived, with women beginning to incorporate national symbols and their individual expressions of national identity in the designs and embroidery. The historical and political events produced immediate responses in the fashion; for example, after the Six-Day War, shops in New York sold large amounts of embroidered *thobs*, which were modernized to suit mini-skirts.¹⁵ According to Kawar, the preservation of the *thob* was a primary consideration after the wars in 1948 and 1967, as part of people's struggle for existence and cultural survival. As a child refugee herself, Kawar realized the importance of collecting and documenting Palestinian dresses seeing that people were selling out their valuable costumes and making simpler decorations on clothes due to the war.¹⁶ This attempt to revive and embrace

12 Enaya Othman, *Negotiating Palestinian Womanhood: Encounters between Palestinian Women and American Missionaries, 1880s–1940s* (Lanham, London: Lexington Books, 2016), 57.

13 Kitty Warnock, *Land before Honour: Palestinian Women in the Occupied Territories* (London: Macmillan, 1990), xiv.

14 Saca and Saca, *Embroidering Identities*, 15, 37–38.

15 Inea Bushnaq, "Palestinian Art," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 20, no. 3 (1991): 121.

16 Cf. Nasir, "The Traditional Palestinian Costume," 120.

17 Cameron, "Object-oriented Democracies," 229.

18 Ibid., 234.

the Palestinian dress was a postcolonial expression. By "postcolonial," I mean, here, the ideological struggle against colonialism in all its forms (cultural, territorial, etc.), rather than the political act of decolonization.

Women's initiatives to revive Palestinian clothes and craft also served the strengthening of the connection between homeland and diaspora. For instance, some immigrant women I interviewed expressed that the *thobs* they brought along reminded them of the families, clans and villages they belonged to and in which they still took pride, and provided a sense of belonging to the Palestinian nation. None of the second-generation women, however, referred to the regional or local significance the *thob* once possessed. Regional differences thus lost their importance also among immigrant communities, where nationalist feelings and a political agenda stimulated by wars and displacement constituted the dominant discourse.

Attempts to maintain and strengthen the connection to the homeland often included a combination of research, fieldwork in Palestine, the creation of cultural centers and museums, and the dissemination of heritage and knowledge beyond borders. The Palestinian Heritage Center in Bethlehem founded by Iman Saca, with her mother Maha Saca, and their extended work in the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago is an example of the collaboration among different disciplines as well as institutions in the US and Palestine. Such preservation attempts led to various collections of Palestinian dress, whether in the form of books, exhibitions, or museum collections. The increasing propensity to own and wear a Palestinian dress in global diasporic settings reflects the nostalgic yearning for one's history, tradition, and identity after the forced displacement. It connects the wearer with family, community, and other kinds of social relational linkage in which the dress is used as a performative act to display group identity.

Among my interviewees, Afaf, a woman who immigrated to Milwaukee, US in 1957, may serve as an example. In an interview conducted in 2013, elaborating on the objects she brought from Palestine, Afaf mentioned "a lot of the Quran frames [framed pictures with Quranic calligraphy], crystal and cross-stitching pillows, a large piece of art with 'Palestinian' motifs, as well as clothes that she described as 'cultural.' By this, she meant dressing "like the old ladies, the way they wear the dresses." These objects functioned as mnemonic devices that spatially and temporally connected their owners to their "origins." Afaf said she brought these objects "to keep us thinking, not to forget about our culture, and always remember it."

Palestinian dress takes an active role in terms of conveying the heritage values because, as F.R. Cameron noted, "[a]n object's significance lies more in its role in sustaining a socially symbolic meaning, such as local or national identity, rather than in their contexts of use or consumption."¹⁷ For example, the wedding *thob* has operated as "a marker of identity; as a regional and national symbol; as a statement of resistance against the Israeli occupation, and a political map of the landscape to which the style and colour of each speaks of its specific location and the land lost in the occupied territories."¹⁸

Cameron quotes a participant in a research project conducted among Palestinian Australians who said that, "after the occupation the *thob* becomes a flag; while the flag cannot be displayed, the dress takes its place."¹⁹ In a similar vein, Afaf, much like many other immigrant women, expressed that she felt "proud" when she wore the *thob*.

Women also obtained clothes in order "to pass them onto their daughters and daughters-in-law so that they know about their culture," as Afaf said. Faten, also an immigrant woman, noted in an interview another interesting point. Back in her homeland, she did not use to wear traditional clothes because she was raised up in the city. She observed that, compared to her life in the Palestinian city in the past, American Palestinians had a greater tendency to wear traditional clothes. She said: "I did not wear those *thobs*. No, I just see it here, I had never seen it before." Unlike other women coming from villages, her mother had not passed clothes down to her. Then, at a time when nationalist movements strongly informed homeland and diaspora politics, discourses, and organizations, the *thob* gained political significance among migrant communities, sometimes even more so than in the homeland. In the 21st century, women's display of their cultural identity through fashion continues, albeit in still different forms, as I will show in the next section.

Post 2000s: The Millennial *Thob*

When Rashida Tlaib was sworn into Congress as one of first two Muslim Congresswomen, fashion magazines took interest in her clothing, sparking a celebration of the Palestinian *thob* on social media.²⁰ This was presumably the first moment when, in the context of US-Palestinian relations, the interrelationship among politics, society, and fashion was intensely and openly discussed. In 2019, another Palestinian American woman, Nujoud Merancy, who is a NASA space-craft engineer, announced that she updated her NASA official photo in a blazer designed with Palestinian embroidery. From Tlaib's entirely traditional design to Merancy's updated style, the *thob* now transcends its spatial and symbolic context.

The distinguishing characteristic in terms of women's efforts to redefine or popularize the Palestinian *thob* in the 21st century is the global significance it obtained through the Internet. The narrative of the *thob* is now conveyed and spread in the digital space, transmitting its popularity in weddings, cultural and national events, and local settings. The Internet not only facilitates the access to the cultural clothing, but also creates another space to show and present clothing. Even if some women wear *thobs* only during weddings or other cultural events, the Internet, especially social media, transcends this immediate presentation into a permanent demonstration with a stronger effect. The popularity of the traditional clothing is increased by the Internet and social media postings that show the identity markers to everyone rather than constraining it into in-community contexts where the observers are generally the community members. The visibility of the

19
Ibid.

20

She commented on this as, "an unapologetic display of the fabric of the people in this country." Rashida Tlaib, "Rashida Tlaib on Why She's Wearing a Palestinian Gown to be Sworn Into Congress," *ELLE*, January 3, 2019, <https://www.elle.com/culture/career-politics/a25714487/rashida-tlaib-thobe-sworn-into-congress/>.

21

Randa Bassem Serhan, "Suspended Community: An Ethnographic Study of Palestinian-Americans in New York and New Jersey," PhD Diss., Columbia University, 2009, 78.

clothing surely adds to the popularity and significance of the dress as an identity marker.

Among Palestinian women of the second generation, the wedding ceremonies, particularly the henna nights, are still the events when and where Palestinians express and demonstrate their connections to their origins by "exhibiting" national symbols such as the flag, wearing Palestinian clothes, and playing Palestinian folk music and songs. Randa Serhan views this as a way to handle dislocation:

Their project is one whereby they connect to the past through wedding rituals in order to cope with exile and instill Palestinian-ness in their children and grandchildren. The Palestinian nation is modeled on both the Western and post-colonial models of nationalism demonstrated through the idealization of the peasant, wearing *thobes* and scarves, carrying the flag, and finally in performing the ideal-type gender roles. The seamlessness of the weddings begs two additional questions: do these individuals live their daily lives according to these precepts? And how is the image maintained of the steadfast Palestinian peasants who "never left... never changed"?²¹

As to the Milwaukeean community, in terms of weddings, the cultural dresses, symbols, and rituals are even more favorable. Ghazal, for example, a student at the time of the interview, emphasized that, regardless of whom she would marry, she "would definitely wear the *thob*; the typical, traditional *thob*." While marrying men or women other than Palestinians is a tendency among young second-generation immigrants, intermarriages have led to the increased use of cultural elements, including "traditional" clothes, as a way of compensating for marrying an outsider. After defying fierce or minor oppositions from their families and cultural communities, women often wish to practice their own cultural conventions in weddings, in order to mitigate their families' reactions. Rania, for example, is a young woman married to a Jordanian. After a struggle to convince her parents, who had expected her to marry someone from the same village, she arranged a "super traditional" Palestinian wedding ceremony, as she put it in an interview, during which she wore the *thob*.

Also, similar to the immigrant women, their American-born daughters expressed that they feel "proud" when they wear the *thob*. Ayah, for example, said in an interview that she feels "cultural and proud" when she wears her *thob* that is passed down to her from her mother because it conveys the "authenticity of your culture." Ala expressed her feelings as follows: "I love it! Personally, it reminds me of being in Palestine. It is like a piece of my culture. I will stick to it; I want my kids to be able to have it and to wear it. It reminds me of my identity." Malak, a second-generation woman, told me that she was given the *thob* by her mother. As she said: "I made it into my own different style, but I like the embroidery on it; I kept it the same." In addition, she likes to buy modernized versions from both Palestine and the US. These combinations acknowledge that, as Jeni Allenby said

about Palestinian clothes, "the message now being communicated through the language of contemporary Palestinian costume is that we must not forget the past, but equally we must move forward in terms of design and culture."²²

These women's expression of pride can be attributed to the concept of home and roots as an idealized notion unbounded by space and time. Young women's narratives demonstrated that they feel "Palestinian" when it comes to politics whereas they widely discredit many traditions related to national origins and highlight their American and/or transnational identities at other times.

Conclusion

As W. Kawar noted, the dress of a Palestinian woman historically has become her "passport" – or "a bearer of her identity."²³ From the pre-1948 period, when it communicated the personal story of a woman and her regional identity, to the contemporary times when it has become a symbol of their national identity, the *thob* conveys women's skills, sense of belonging, and personal aspirations.

The acts of creating, choosing, and controlling dresses construct a space in which women can define their identities and choices and exert agency. From the days when village women incorporated into their embroidery their wishes and dreams, personal stories, and messages, which they were unable or denied to convey in an open way and equal to men, the *thob* was a form of expressing what could not be voiced openly. For contemporary women, however, dress as a language is not only a form of self-disclosure (indeed it was still latent and limited). Instead, women control this domain; and as the "artists" or creators, rather than objects, they use dress to contest and challenge social and political structures.

For the younger generation of descendants of Palestinian immigrants, the homeland is associated with a national struggle against colonial politics. The politically situated position of the youth is not a weaker tie with the origins than the nostalgia and remembrance of the first immigrant generation. The desire of older women and their daughters to sustain the tradition of passing down the *thob* is a shared aspiration for the preservation of heritage, and for a Palestinian "imagined community."²⁴ A striking point is that, while younger generations abandon and indeed challenge most of the practices of national culture that inform and shape their daily lives, particularly those related to their position as women, such as marriage, they increasingly incline to adapt ritualistic and symbolic expressions of culture. This demonstrates the dilemma posed by their context as members of a transnational community in a global setting. Within this dilemma, however, they find strategies to reconcile their personal choices and the demands of their society and culture. Signification of a sense of belonging to their parents' place of origin is a meaning, strategy, and political expression imbued in the *thob*. The messages it gives are layered considering the addressees of the message – their families and local communities, their globally dispersed "nation," or themselves.

22

Jeni Allenby, "Re-inventing Cultural Heritage: Palestinian Traditional Costume and Embroidery since 1948," *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings* (2002):106.

23

Kawar quoted in Nasir, "The Traditional Palestinian Costume," 125.

24

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Editions, 1983).

As part of the meaning and symbolism the *thob* has gained after the occupation and displacement, and through the use of modern communication technologies and social media platforms to popularize the dress and its transformation, the *thob* has been brought into the global mainstream. Through the revival of its usage, extension of its longevity, and efforts for transgenerational transmission, the *thob* has gained a more malleable and plastic cultural significance. It is no longer "just" traditional and old-fashioned. Contemporary interest in the *thob* brings traditional embroidery and motifs and Western clothing together, thus negotiating colonial as well as postcolonial politics.

MIGRATIONS

Wendy M. K. Shaw

01
Jhaneel Lockhart, "9 Awesome Facts About Bird Migration," *Audubon*, October 12, 2012, <https://www.audubon.org/news/9-awesome-facts-about-bird-migration>, accessed September 16, 2020.

02
Cornell University, "More than 4 billion birds stream overhead during fall migration: Scientists use radar to shed light on the massive numbers of migrating birds and how many may not return," *ScienceDaily*, September 17, 2018, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/09/180917135942.htm>, accessed September 16, 2020.

03
Wendy Shaw, *What Is 'Islamic' Art: Between Religion and Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 91.

04
Farid al-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Dick Davis and Afkham Darbandi (London: Penguin, 1984), 52.

Approximately forty percent of the world's birds migrate.⁰¹

Around nine billion birds migrate each season in the Americas alone.⁰²

**Birds cannot count their populations.
Birds do not know their own names.**

Birds are bird-brained. Birds are not at all stupid.

**With photochemical compasses our weak human senses lack,
they navigate the globe's magnetic poles,
never looking back.**

***Revolted by injustice clouding all the earthly lands,
the Hoopoe bird gathered all flocks, and before them, declaimed,***

***"My fellow feathered friends, do you yearn to be free?"
"Yes!" They cried and flocked together easily.***

***"Hooray, then fly with me!" cried the Hoopoe,
"And I shall take you to the seat of our unity!"***

***We shall fly to the Simurgh, our king
Who flies without moving and soars without wing!***

***His nest is in the East, yet inhabits the West no less.
He contains all colors, yet having none, is he blessed!⁰³***

***"When long ago Simurgh first appeared –
His face like sunlight when the clouds have cleared –
He cast unnumbered shadows on the earth,
On each one fixed his eyes, and each gave birth.
Thus we were born; the birds of every land
Are still his shadows – think and understand!"⁰⁴***

***Humans remarked an amazing conflagration,
As all the birds rose in a fearsome murmuration.***

**Starlings coordinate their flight at dusk,
each alone
Yet through seven friends they dance as one.⁰⁵**

**The number of international migrants in 2019
was 279 million,
With war and fire and floods, it is continually
rising.⁰⁶**

**Imagine that in every generation, going back.
You add it all up, and nobody is from where
they are from.**

**Bar-headed Geese fly the highest,
The Arctic tern flies the longest, and the Great
Snipe is the fastest.**

**The Black-tailed Godwit breeds in Iceland
and winters in Tanzania.**

**The Black-headed Bunting summers in
Turkey and winters in India.**

**Humanoid migrations from Africa started
about two million years ago.**

They never stopped.

**Homo sapiens dispersed around the time of
their speciation,
Three hundred thousand years ago began the
endless migration.**

**Land, without borders, as free as air
Wherever you go, you are always there.**

**Blue-tailed Bee-eaters in south-east Asia
migrate south for the winter
But Blue-tailed Bee-eaters in Australia do not.**

**Across seven hills and seven dales,
seven climes and seven seasons
The birds did travail. Some fell off along the way.**

**Tired from lack of preparation
Despairing of a pointless journey.**

**Since migration from Africa to Asia,
seventy thousand years have passed,
From Africa to young Europe,
a meager forty.⁰⁷**

05
Georg F. Young, Luca Scardovi, Andrea Cavagna, Irene Giardina, Naomi E. Leonard, "Starling Flock Networks Manage Uncertainty in Consensus at Low Cost," *PLOS Computational Biology* 9, no. 1 (2013): 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1002894>, accessed September 16, 2020.

06
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "The Number of International Migrants Reaches 272 Million," 17 September, 2019, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/international-migrant-stock-2019.html>, accessed September 17, 2020.

07
David Reich, *Who We Are and How We Got Here: Ancient DNA and the New Science of the Human Past* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2018), 5.

**And they kept moving. And kept failing.
And moved on again.**

**Practicing hyperphagia, birds feed gluttonously
Fueling up for seemingly endless flight.**

**"My jewelry weighs me down," wailed the parrot.
"I am too small," complained the sparrow.**

**Brown-breasted Flycatchers are hard
to follow,
But seem to prefer Thailand in summer and
Sri Lanka in winter.**

**The Northern Shoveler enjoys summering
in Britain
And wintering in the Caribbean.**

**Homo sapiens replaced the physically and
mentally superior Neanderthals.
Migrating modern humans bred with local
folks who had already arrived.**

**Populations cooperated and mixed.
This is how humans become stronger. This is
how we survived.**

**At the very end of their journey,
The few birds who persisted, arrived.**

**"Open the gates!" they cried,
demanding to view
The great promised king who was their
grand prize.**

**Yet for them the gates remained firmly closed.
Truth does not come from pride, but from even
deeper inside.**

**The female Peregrine Raptor is larger than
the male.
They prey equally on mid-size birds from the
Arctic to the Tropics.**

**The Mountain Bulbul enjoys India's mountains
in summer
And valleys in the winter.**

From North Eurasia to the Americas, twenty thousand years have passed Since migration; for Polynesia, it has been no more than a hundred score.

There was no Africa, Europe, Asia, or America. There were no oceans. None of these places had names yet.

Birds do not know the names of their destinations, But they know how to travel.

England is full of genetic material from the Yamnaya peoples. So am I.⁰⁸

The Yamnaya lived North of the Black Sea around five thousand years ago. They were nomads. The world back then was young.

Lesser Redpolls migrate irregularly. They go where there is food.

Nomads got a bad rap when settled peoples wrote their histories.

For Herodotus, Scythians were characterized by nothing but lack, Good for them, though, that lacking place, you couldn't catch them.⁰⁹

White Storks summer in the temperate climes of Europe And winter in Africa, south of the equator.

No successive generations of my family have been born in the same place. Where am I from?

My great-great-grandparents lived in Crete and in a Lithuanian Village They lived south of the Black Sea, and in Cairo, and in Manchester.

Lesser Sandhill Cranes have the longest migration, Between Northeastern Siberia and Mexico each year.

08

David W. Anthony, "Ancient DNA, Mating Networks, and the Anatolian Split," in *Dispersals and Diversification: Linguistic and Archaeological Perspectives on the Early Stages of Indo-European*, eds. Matilde Serangeli and Thomas Olander (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 21-54.

09

Francois Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 198-205.

Calliope Hummingbirds breed in North America and winter in Mexico. They try to return to the same nest.

In each place, white storks built nests on cold chimneys and ruins. Maybe they were the same storks.

I was born in California. There were no storks. There were hummingbirds. And bright orange Monarch butterflies.

Monarchs breed in North American milkweed patches, then winter in Mexico. The flocks know the way, but the individuals never return.

The sound of their wings used to be like summer rain. Now the milkweed is gone, and the storms wash them out early in the season.

Today half of California is burning. The sky is orange and ash.

Dirkcissels wintered in North America, where DDT was banned, and bred in Mexico, Where the pesticide used for northern exports, killed them.

Commercial fishing presents the greatest threat to migrating birds. Over forty million seabirds collide with oil rigs every year.

Today the camp of Moria on the Greek island of Lesbos is burning. It houses twenty thousand migrants but was built for three.

Seventy percent of migrants in Moria come from Afghanistan. They snuck across mountains then sailed in rubber dinghies.

Their natural habitat was ruined first by Russian bombs, The United States invented the Taliban, then bombed and bombed them.

**Thirty-seven million refugees created in the United States' war on terror.
But it may be fifty-nine million, and these numbers ignore the dead.¹⁰**

***Bedraggled on the mountain top,
Depressed by the thick clouds, the birds gave up.***

**The White-Naped Friarbird of Manus Isle does not migrate,
But counts dawns and dusks with the refugees trapped beside it.¹¹**

***They dipped their bills to drink one final swill
From the disappointing lake that met them, no king in sight.***

***In that moment of self-release, the clouds once shut from pride
Now opened wide.***

"A hundred veils drew back, and there before

***The birds' incredulous, bewildered sight
Shone the unveiled, the inmost Light of Light...***

***Their life came from that close, insistent sun
And in its vivid rays,"***

knew themselves and the Simurgh as one.¹²

**One of every hundred people today is some kind of refugee.
They survive in a cage far from where anybody wants to be.**

***The thirteenth century Friend of the Divine, ibn Arabi said
That our only true home is beside God.¹³***

***This means that no bird on earth is ever truly at home,
It is up to us to build our nest wherever we find a branch.***

***Swirling together, this murmuration of souls,
this longing and this becoming is our human ghurba.***

10 Daniel Bessner, "The US 'War on Terror' Has Created at Least 37 Million Refugees," *Jacobin Magazine*, September 15, 2020, https://jacobinmag.com/2020/09/war-on-terror-displacement-refugees-us-imperialism?fbclid=WAR138nkTPcGPaUemNqb_TKRNI_l-p7xqvcksmQ70D-QfQpUsy_b7Gm2q7RA, accessed September 18, 2020.

11 Chauka, *Please Tell Us the Time* is a 2016 documentary surreptitiously shot on a cell-phone inside Australia's Manus Island detention center in Papua New Guinea and released with the help of Arash Kamali Sarvestani in 2017.

12 Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, 218.

13 Walid El-Khachab, "Sufis on Exile and Ghorba: Conceptualizing Displacement and Modern Subjectivity," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no.1 (2010): 58–68; Ibn al-Arabi, *The Meccan Revelations*, vol. 2, trans. Cyrille Chodkiewicz and Denis Gril (New York: Pir, 2004), 235.

**We love the migrating birds because
In the stillness of our confinement, we remain alien.**

**Even after all these Millenia,
their migrations are still our truest home.**

**Where there is no border, there can be
no refugee,
No "you" distinct from "me."**

**Your wings, my air,
Their wind, our sun.**

Sometimes the mold breaks. It breaks because the new form no longer fits the old form. It is born of it and also exceeds it. Like a sapling from the trunk of a tree with deep roots, it is new and yet it is also old.

The academic essay is a modern format that has broken the molds of writing many times over. It may be time to break it yet again.

The academic essay disseminates verifiable information which, under the epistemic regime of science, doubles as knowledge. Yet no structure can vouch for its content. Prose, the essay, historical writing... all of these are nothing but rhetorical conventions providing an illusion of truth. And science? We can amass a lot of evidence, but evidence alone is not the only form of knowledge. Scientific discourse provides information shorn of rhetorical tools with intuitive and emotional appeal, such as analogy and parable. Yet people reason through stories. Without them, information loses the medium through which people most easily absorb information. Such sterile information fails to do the political labor of informing people. Politicians know this. Artists know this.

Strangely, academics do not know this. We remain stuck between the voice of reason ("die Stimme der Vernunft") characterized by an even, impersonal tone promoted by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and the disenchantment of the world ("die Entzauberung der Welt") praised by Max Weber (1864-1920) as clearing the world of unreason.¹⁴ Academics admire artists and literary writers, and yet also see their art as less truthful than the analytic voice of reason, articulated in the straight speech of essays, books, and documentaries.

You think it was always this way? Think again. Let me remind you of Plato and of Aristotle. You think they are the fathers of Western Philosophy? Think again. The fathers of our intellectual fathers chose them as fathers. They had no choice in their children. Their texts could not talk back.¹⁵ Do we have to accept the fathers of the fathers who took them as fathers? And if they are the ultimate fathers, what happens if we actually look at what they said instead of laying wreaths at their written graves?

Plato (428-348 BCE) never wrote a word of philosophy. He gave us dialogues so we can make up our own minds.¹⁶ Aristotle (385-323 BCE) also wrote dialogues, but only his notes survived.¹⁷ If we treat them like an instruction manual, that's our fault for reading them as though they were scripture. And sure, it makes sense that modernity's Christian European intellectual forefathers read them as scripture, because as Christians – often as priests and monks, and very occasionally as nuns – that is how they read everything. We do not have to do this. We have choices. We have choices about how we take in their words, and how we put out ours.

There was no such thing as an essay in ancient Greece, and yet knowledge circulated (even without the internet, or even printing, which are miracles in their own right). There were speeches. There was rhetoric. Rhetoric, admittedly, is not always such a great thing. It can lie. But it is also unavoidable. Fortunately, it doesn't have to lie. It can also tell the truth. Everybody has to know how to use it if you want democracy. You have to care about truth, and also care about rhetoric.

14

Jacques Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy," *Oxford Literary Review* 6, no. 2 (1984): 12; Max Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, [1919] 2011), 17; Wendy Shaw, "Reenchantment: From the Facts of Orientalism to the Sustenance of Storytelling," May 7, 2020, <https://trafo.hypotheses.org/23643>.

15

In the dialogue *Phaedrus*, this is how Plato portrays Socrates as criticizing writing – a critique that survives in writing. Many people have written about this aporia. I think it has to be at the core of how we learn to write and think about writing. I've written a book about this, which is an instruction manual which teaches the very rules that it then destroys. A Platonic move if ever there was one. Wendy M. K. Shaw, *Loving Writing: Techniques for the University and Beyond* (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

16

Kenneth M. Sayre, *Plato's Literary Garden: How to Read a Platonic Dialogue* (Chicago: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), xiii–xiv. This interpretation comes from the *Seventh Letter*, which may or may not have been written by Plato, depending on which scholar you consult. Fitting, since that instability is the dialectic, and in it lies knowledge.

17

Danielle S. Allen, *Why Plato Wrote* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 13–15.

18

Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. H. C. Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 189, 1394a.

That's why Plato wrote, and why Aristotle took notes that Romans like Cicero (106-43 BC) studied as *Rhetorica*.

In that collection that has come down through the ages, Aristotle recognized two kinds of examples: one based on the narration of fact, and the other based on invention. An invented example might quote existing stories or be made up to fit the occasion, functioning as a parable. He finds such examples populist, but very useful to illustrate a point for which there might not be appropriate true stories. He suggests that the philosophically trained mind will be ready to understand the similarity between fictive examples and the subject that they are illustrating. Nonetheless, he finds it more sound to use facts to make decisions – not because the conclusion drawn from fictions are incorrect, but because events of the future are more likely to resemble things that have already happened.¹⁸

So yes, let's use facts. But also, there is no earthly axiom to dictate that stories and poetry cannot have footnotes. There is no rational reason that something that teaches cannot also attract and entertain. In fact, that's the main way people circulated information for centuries. Happy people learn more than bored ones.

It is high time to take the "dis" out of disenchantment.

Given that we have put so much faith in science, let's use the past two hundred years as an experiment. If the promise of all this neutralized tone-policing and disenchantment was for society to no longer be controlled by mysticism, oracles, faith, autocrats and demons, but become one of reason, has it worked? Are we free yet? Or are we ever more firmly planted in a world controlled by sophists, happily manipulating the human hunger for parable, analogy, and myth? Academics, purveyors of facts, blithely plod along declaring truth in the straight speech of dull essays that nobody wants to read.

We are offended when people say that what we say is "merely academic". We worry when humanities departments are destroyed, when history has already been written, when journalists are jailed, when arts are no more than pretty. And yet here is what we do not do: we fail to learn from the words that sing.

Here we are as scientists, looking at a two-hundred-year-old experiment in plain speech, no parables. This experiment, which was supposed to cure the world of all its sophistic demons, has only made it worse. It has left sophistry in the hands of those who could care less about facts and care only about power. The outcome of the experiment is this: it has failed.

We need facts just as we need impassioned voices of enchanted reason. Power to the poetry!

The changing of forms is also a migration.

PERISCOPE

MIGRATION AS A FORM OF EMANCIPATION: AN INTERVIEW WITH THE ARTIST AND AUTHOR CHAZA CHARAFEDDINE

Stefan Maneval
Translated from German by Magdalena Frost

"Kumaria," from the series "Maidames." Photo © Chaza Charafeddine, 2017–2018.



The artist and writer Chaza Charafeddine grew up in Lebanon and, as a teenager, experienced the beginning of the Lebanese civil war. As a young adult, she moved to Switzerland to study and then later to Germany. For twenty years, she lived in Savigny near Lausanne, in Hamburg and Berlin, before returning to Lebanon in 2008. She is the author of a novel, a collection of short stories, and numerous essays, and is represented as an artist by Agial Art/Saleh Barakat Gallery in Beirut. During an interview conducted online in February 2021, Stefan Maneval spoke to Charafeddine about her artwork and her texts on the topic of migration.

In her autobiographical novella *فلاش باك* [Flashback], published in German in 2021 under the title *Beirut für wilde Mädchen* [Beirut for Wild Girls], Charafeddine reflects on, among other things, her experiences as a Lebanese woman in Switzerland and Germany.⁰¹ The feeling of being different, different from what was expected of her, did not start abroad, however, but rather during her childhood in Lebanon. In *Beirut für wilde Mädchen*, she interweaves this sense of not belonging to one's own society with questions of gender. For example, at the beginning of the second section, which only appears in the German version, she reflects on what it would have been like for her to grow up as a boy:

"Had I been a boy I could have even chosen not to go to school. I would have instead travelled with my father to Africa and elsewhere around the globe. I would have set out in the world, smoked in public, drunk whiskey, gone out with girls, and been lauded for how many women I'd managed to get into bed. I would have gone off with our neighbours, the communists, a Kalashnikov slung across my shoulders, and driven the occupiers out of the Holy Land. Maybe I would have died a martyr, and my portrait would have been emblazoned along the roads from the south to the north..."⁰² But as she notes, she was born to "everyone's disappointment" as the second of three daughters and eventually "fled" to Switzerland: "It was not from the war or the occupation that I fled but from everything else: from family, from studying, from having to be a woman, from getting married, from having children, from being a mother, a grandmother, a great-grandmother, from getting sick, from dying."⁰³

During the conversation, she describes her journey from Lebanon to Europe and back again, first as a way of freeing herself from family expectations and social constraints, and finally of helping shape her homeland, which has changed greatly over time.

The Arabic-German publication *Jetzt bin ich also Deutsch – Unter dem Himmel von Berlin* / *هكذا أصبحت ألمانية: تحت سماء برلين* [Under the Berlin Sky – Looks Like I'm German Now], by Charafeddine and the Polish-German author Karolina Golimowska deals with the experiences of the two authors in Berlin.⁰⁴ Taking pleasure in ethnographic observations of both everyday life and symbolically charged rituals such as the process of acquiring German citizenship, the authors describe the environment they find themselves in, which they make their home by adapting to it to an extent, while at the same time maintaining a critical eye on it.

01

Charafeddine, *Beirut für wilde Mädchen* (Bad Herrenalb: Edition Converso, 2021).

02

Charafeddine, *Beirut für wilde Mädchen*, 109.

03

Charafeddine, *Beirut für wilde Mädchen*, 113

04

Charafeddine und Karolina Golimowska, *Jetzt bin ich also Deutsch – Unter dem Himmel von Berlin* / *هكذا أصبحت ألمانية: تحت سماء برلين* (Berlin: Falschrum, 2021).

Charafeddine has used photographs from her time in Berlin to illustrate the pages written in Arabic and digital collages for the pages in German. For the collages, she has combined German national emblems with textile patterns from typical countries of origin of migrants in Germany: the body of the bear from the Berlin coat of arms is covered with floral motifs of Polish embroidery, the Saxon Steed, a heraldic motif associated with the German provinces of Lower Saxony and Westphalia, appears colourfully spotted in the style of Moroccan textiles, and the lozenges of the Bavarian flag become a patchwork quilt made of Russian fabrics.

Jetzt bin ich also Deutsch – Unter dem Himmel von Berlin is published by Falschrum as part of the series "Tunis Encounters" which documents the results of collaboration between authors, artists, and designers from the Arab world, Iran, and Europe. All titles are illustrated and bilingual, either Arabic–English or Arabic–German, which presents the graphic designers with the challenge of combining illustrations and texts with different writing systems and directions of reading in one publication. In *Jetzt bin ich also Deutsch – Unter dem Himmel von Berlin*, for which the Lebanese graphic designer Farah Fayyad created a book with differently coloured pages of varying formats, Charafeddine's illustrations act as a unifying element. They invite readers to leaf through the book in its entirety, allowing them to encounter the other language and possibly to perceive it in a new light.

In her photo series "Maidames," Charafeddine deals with the topic of migration in a seemingly less autobiographical way. For the series, she has recreated well-known scenes using elaborate studio photography and cast female migrant workers from Lebanon in the central roles. Among them are paintings such as Johannes Vermeer's "Girl with the Pearl Earring" or Madonna in the style of Raphael, and photographs such as the well-known portraits of Marilyn Monroe, Marlene Dietrich, or Jackie Kennedy. In addition, she has recreated typical depictions of women in contemporary fashion photography for her portraits of Southeast Asian and African domestic servants. These domestic servants are largely employed as "maids" in middle and upper-class households in Lebanon. Often, they are very badly paid and have precarious living conditions in the households of their employers. Growing up, Charafeddine's family employed various domestic workers and she used to admire them for their strength and apparent independence.

Stefan Maneval: Can you explain the context of the images for "Maidames"?

Chaza Charafeddine: It is common in Lebanon, and in many Arabic countries in general, to have domestic servants. My generation mainly encountered migrant domestic workers. In the past, my mother's generation, it was Lebanese and Syrian women, poor people from the same society, so to speak. During my time, this changed. The first domestic servant I knew was Syrian, the second was from Egypt. When the civil war broke out, they left. And then slowly we started

to get people from East Asia, from Sri Lanka for example. Those from Syria or Egypt could speak Arabic. We had a lot in common. But from the nineties on, it was only migrants from East Asia and Africa.

The relationship with someone who is part of the family but who will never be a real member of the family is strange. She is constantly given orders regardless of whether she can at that moment carry them out or not. She is never asked what her needs are because for the employer she doesn't exist as an individual. We knew as children that had we been really naughty, we could have done whatever we wanted with her. For a child, this distorts the nature of relationships between people: There is always a person in your home who is considered "lower" than you, even though they are mostly adult women. Not always, but they were usually older than the children in the house.

Later, my parents had a girl from Africa who was as old as my younger brother. I didn't know how I should behave towards her; she was four years younger than me – I, 14 and she, 10 – but she made my bed in the morning, cleaned my room, washed my clothes. Yet at the same time, I would hear her arguing with my little brother over some toy or another, as kids do. This kind of relationship is confusing for a child. I have also written about this in my book...

Stefan: You mean *Beirut für wilde Mädchen*?

Chaza: Yes, there is a short chapter about the domestic servants. I always had a fondness towards them, even if their individuality wasn't acknowledged, only their services. The maid is there to cook and clean etc. It's of no importance what she thinks, what her opinion is of us, what she likes, and so on. Despite this, I always very much admired the Egyptian woman who worked for us because although her work was very degrading, she was very free. I had the feeling she didn't belong to anyone, she didn't have a family, no husband, no children, no cousins, no grandparents, no "clan" to protect her – not like me. And despite all this she was so strong. She was really very strong and didn't let the family get away with everything. It wasn't like my parents weren't kind towards them, they just never acknowledged their needs. And the worst part is, they never realised it. I always had a fondness for our "maids" because I thought they were somehow freer than us, living without the burden of "belonging." They could break away at any time and start a new life somewhere else. As a child, I obviously didn't realise it wasn't as easy as that.

Stefan: What ultimately prompted you to create the series "Maidames"?

Chaza: As I mentioned, domestic helpers are part of the family in Lebanon without being acknowledged as such. A domestic helper gets \$100 or \$120 per month. She works from morning until late at night and at the whim of the "madame" of the house or the rest of the family. The exploitation is shocking!

In 2010 or 2011, two migrant women threw themselves off a balcony in one week. That was the first year that KAFA – an organization that fights for women's rights, including migrant women – became very visible. They raised awareness of these incidents. According to their statistics, one to two migrants commit suicide every week. This incident was the catalyst for "Maidames." My question was: What kind of work could I create in order for these women to be acknowledged as individuals, as human beings – regardless of their skin colour, social background, or profession? And how could I specifically engage the "mesdames" or ladies of the house, and the employers in general?

The title is a play on the words "maid" and "madame," pronounced the same way as the French word "mesdames." I gave the work this title because it is meant to appeal to Lebanese "mesdames."

Stefan: Did you make the work for the Lebanese "mesdames" or for the "maids" in Lebanon?

Chaza: For both. I felt the need to give migrant women the opportunity to experience being something other than a "maid" in Lebanon. I wanted to empower them to believe that in a different context they could be models. And some of them could actually be models.

But the Lebanese "mesdames" were also very present in my mind when I was developing the concept. The "maids" portrayed the very fashion icons the Lebanese "mesdames" imitate in their own outfits. The photograph, therefore, allows the "madam" the opportunity to acknowledge her "maid" as a woman or to encounter her as an individual.

Stefan: Clearly, you were also concerned with the process and not just the image itself. What was this process like?

Chaza: For me, the process was just as important as the end photograph itself. There were always twelve people on set: the crew was made up of ten people and there were two models per shoot. First, we always had to create the set. Most of the clothes were tailor-made for the models. They then had to be dressed, their make-up done, and then their hair. It wasn't possible to do more than four pictures per day as each model was photographed in two different roles and the set had to be changed each time. One day means 12 hours of work.

The relationship between the crew on set and the models was good. Most of the crew really treated them like models – but not all. Some found it difficult to accept the women's new identities. One member of the crew, for example, once told Hana to empty the bin and asked another model to make the coffee.

This person was actually a very nice man. But I think it was difficult for him to switch roles and behave as an employee towards a black "maid." In this instance, he behaved like a "madam" who refuses to acknowledge her "maid" as a human being.

All of a sudden, Bruktayt, one of the three Ethiopians who was very strong, or Vera from Cameroon, would tell him: "No, I don't

Miss Vera as Jacqueline Kennedy, from the series "Maidames." Photo © Chaza Charafeddine, 2017-2018.



like that! Please do it like this!" That got to him. They would act the diva and it was really funny!

And so, to the women. They were all very different. I asked Kumari, whom I have known for over 10 years, to be my assistant and to help recruit other women – also because of the language, as many Sri Lankan women don't speak Arabic or English, or at least not well enough. Kumari was also one of the models and recruited nine other women. That was the maximum number, as I didn't have a very big budget.

Stefan: Quick question: Kumari worked for you as domestic help?

Chaza: Yes, she comes to us three times a week, but she lives with her Lebanese boyfriend somewhere else.

Stefan: What was your experience of working with the protagonists? What were their reactions like?

Chaza: The first issue was trust. At the beginning they didn't trust me at all. For example, when it came to money: I had a budget of \$200 per woman; they were very happy as for many it was more than a month's wages, but they said, "You better pay us upfront!"

They wanted to be sure they would get their money. And I told them that we would have to meet at least four times before the shoot to try on the clothes etc., so I suggested paying them part of the \$200 each time we met. I also wanted to be sure, because I didn't have any guarantee that they would come back if I paid them all the money upfront. At the beginning trust was an issue on both sides.

Most were of the attitude: we'll make a bit of money from the project, and it'll be fun. We'll wear nice dresses which we can even pick out ourselves. I'll be able to say I'm a sultana, or I'm Marilyn Monroe. The women could choose which photograph they wanted to be in. I had made a catalogue for them to choose from. It was only Vermeer that no one wanted. For them there was nothing glamorous about it. So, I asked Hana if she wanted to be the girl with the pearl earring, and she agreed. That is the only photograph where I chose the model.

Hana had something special about her. During the shoot, she always had a book with her and was always reading. She told me that she was paying for her brothers and sisters to study, and when they had finished, she wanted to study English literature herself. She was very attentive during the shoot and always wanted to know what we were doing and why I wanted the photograph a certain way... Hana said she was very grateful because she now understood how a photograph was made and that she had had no idea how complicated photography was. In an interview with a journalist, she said: "After the project, I felt that I too could become a photographer." Hearing that made me very happy because I had got what I wanted: she had discovered an ability within herself that she might never have discovered otherwise.

So, there were these two attitudes: on the one hand skeptical and tending towards the pragmatic, and then there was Hana's atti-

tude of being open to an experience that would enrich her and open up new horizons.

Stefan: How did you go about choosing the images you wanted to recreate?

Chaza: I deliberately didn't use fashion icons from Sri Lanka or Ethiopia, but instead chose the fashion icons of Lebanese women, whilst also taking different generations into account. For example, Jackie Kennedy was the fashion icon of my mother's generation. Everyone wanted to be either Jackie Kennedy or Marilyn Monroe, depending on their character or background. This was very important, because, in order to critique, I wanted the Lebanese "madam," the rich white woman, to witness her own fantasy embodied by her "maid," a poor black girl. The moment in which the Lebanese "madam" looks at her "maid" was the decisive moment for me. This moment of course can't be captured. It happens at a very individual level.

Stefan: What was the reaction of the public?

Chaza: Many media outlets were interested, especially after I gave an interview to Al-Jazeera English and France 24. It was only after international media outlets had already reported on my project that I was also contacted by the Lebanese media.

Reactions varied. Some people were outraged that I had used Kumari to recreate Raphael's Maria, for example. Even if they didn't say so, the reason for this outrage was that she was a black "maid" and I had her embody Saint Mary. This, of course, belongs in the category of racism.

Another example: My sister wanted to give a friend of hers one of my pictures for her birthday and thought she would really like the Jackie Kennedy picture portrayed by Vera. Because it was very expensive, she wanted to be sure her friend would like it. So, she asked her friend's husband what he thought. He said the picture was really good – but better not! He said his wife had so "suffered" because of the maids. And he didn't think she would want to have to look at a picture of a maid on her wall every day. This was very interesting because this was a person from a circle of academics and artists. I was really taken aback.

Some people felt sorry for "these girls" and therefore thought it great that I could make them happy by doing this project. So absurd... As if feeling sorry for someone could be a motif in an artwork!

Some people maintained that it was immoral to make money from the pictures as the price of one was as much as a full year's wages for a migrant worker. The fact is the only picture that sold is the Vermeer one, as it's such a famous motif. Apart from that, not one picture has sold. So much for making a lot of money from them...

There were also articles about the pictures themselves written from an artistic perspective. But this was not from the public at large, rather from art critics.

Stefan: Let's now turn from "Maidames" to another project of yours. I would like to ask you a few questions about the short-story collection from the series "Tunis Encounters" which you produced together with Karolina Golimowska. *Jetzt bin ich also Deutsch – Unter dem Himmel von Berlin*, a small booklet containing two short stories, is also about migration experiences, but from a completely different perspective than that of the "Maidames": You both write about your personal experiences in Berlin. You also created illustrations for the publication. There were several authors involved in the project whom you could have worked with, but you immediately chose Karolina. What was it about her story that interested you?

Chaza: Firstly, I found her text very beautifully written: light, witty, subtle, and it deals with the question of belonging, which also preoccupied me during my time in Germany. K., the main character in Karolina's short story, reminded me of myself when I first arrived in Berlin, when I often asked myself whether I had to be an Erika Mustermann in order to be accepted by those around me.⁰⁵ I would never fully conform and – thank God – didn't need to.

I also found the way Karolina spoke of heraldic animals very striking as I too found them peculiar. Why should Berlin be represented by a bear? Do the bears come out from the forest at night when Berliners are sleeping to protect the city from attack? Or Karolina's question about why so many heraldic animals stick out their tongues: It made me imagine that if Germany were under attack, giant eagles would appear in the sky and spit fire out of their mouths, burning the attackers and reducing them to ashes in no time. Although the heraldic animals are supposed to represent the power of the state and frighten off foreigners, I find them somewhat ridiculous and see them more as fodder for the imagination.

Stefan: "Looks Like I'm German Now: Erika Mustermann and the Berlin Bear" is the title of Karolina Golimowska's short story.⁰⁶ You decided to work with these heraldic animals and make collages out of them. What gave you the idea for the collages?

Chaza: As I already mentioned, the idea of the animals was already there in the text. I simply saw them in front of my eyes as I was reading the text, and thought, the animals have to be integrated into the project somehow. I wasn't sure at first how I'd do it. I began by making drawings, although I don't usually work with drawings. Then I had the idea to work on the heraldic animals as they are. So, I downloaded the official coats of arms from the German federal state government websites and modified them, giving them a different identity using embroidery and textile patterns. Embroidery is typical for many of the various nationalities in Germany, so Turkish, Polish, Iraqi, Palestinian, as well as many African nationalities, for example,

05

Erika Mustermann is a frequently used name for fictitious persons in Germany and a placeholder name for any (real) woman, similar to Jane Doe in English. The name is also to refer to the average female German citizen.

06

The English translation of Golimowska's short story is available at <https://cafebabel.com/en/article/looks-like-im-german-now-5ae00a08f723b35a145e5ca4/>.

Togolese. Another idea was to transform the heraldic animals into an element that interweaves and connects different cultures. And so, for example, the Berlin Bear was made wearing a Polish "jacket."

Stefan: You then had the idea not only to illustrate Karolina's story but also to contribute your own story to the volume: "Under the Berlin Skies, With Jean Arp and Other Ghosts." That's why there are now two texts, both of which reflect on how it feels to live in Berlin as a non-German and perhaps on how it feels to become "German," as the title of Karolina's story suggests. Was there ever a point in your life where you thought to yourself: Ok, looks like I'm German now?

Chaza: Yes, when I received my German citizenship – but without the "looks like." Because yes, that is also true for me. I have learned so much in Germany, I love the language, I love the culture – despite Erika Mustermann, who can sometimes be unbearable because she usually thinks she knows everything better than me. But there are many other things which are very valuable. I felt as if I belonged. And it's true. Now I am German, without a "looks like" attached, just as much as I am Lebanese – that first of all.

I haven't lived in Germany for over ten years and hardly ever speak German, only when I speak to my German friends. But I try to read a lot in German and sometimes to write, because I don't want to lose the language.

But this sense of belonging was shattered in 2006, the year I wrote: "Under the Berlin Skies, With Jean Arp and Other Ghosts." It was during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. It was for me perhaps the first time I felt like a foreigner in Germany: Israel was attacking Lebanon and there was hardly any reaction at all from Germany. Germany always sides with Israel even though it was clear that we were under attack. Of course, in 2006, Hezbollah did provoke the war [by kidnapping and killing two Israeli soldiers; note, S.M.]. That is clear. But even still – the Israeli army almost destroyed the whole country! Some show of solidarity would have been nice.

Otherwise, I never really felt like a foreigner in that sense. I was never treated in a racist way. Maybe I was lucky, but it's the truth.

Stefan: And yet both stories are also about what it's like to be caught between worlds – at least that's how I would read them. There is a feeling of not quite belonging. In your story, there is this moment in the underground where you hear your mother tongue, your own dialect, being spoken. What is it like for you, this life caught between different worlds – being able to switch back and forth, to be one thing but also another – which you address in your story?

Chaza: The feeling of not belonging happens when you feel shut out from something, just as I felt in 2006. But it's not as if I can change. Yes, I switch languages, but I have never really had the feeling that

there are two versions of myself, although a friend of mine said I was different here [in Lebanon] than in Germany. It isn't something that I notice. Only other people do.

The different worlds are definitely always consciously or unconsciously merging. And hearing my mother tongue spoken in Berlin has become totally normal. When I heard it spoken in Hamburg, when I was living there, it made me turn around in amazement. It's very different there. At least in the eighties, it wasn't usual in Hamburg to hear Arabic being spoken in the street. In Berlin it's normal. All kinds of people live there, and they somehow coexist.

Stefan: While reading *Beirut für wilde Mädchen*, I had the impression that the civil war gave you a reason to leave Lebanon. But the reason why you then stayed in Germany was perhaps another?

Chaza: The reasons I left Lebanon were partly to do with the war, and partly personal. I just didn't want to stay at home anymore. I didn't want to have this societal pressure. It was inhibiting and oppressive. That's why I wanted to get away – and the war made it easier. It gave me a plausible reason to convince my parents that I had to leave.

And it was for these same reasons that I stayed in Germany. At first, I didn't want to go back at all. But at some point, I had the feeling that I was just running away and that as long as I was in Europe, I wouldn't be able to free myself from societal and family pressure. There came a point when I started to feel an urge to return to Beirut. I was 33 by the time I first went back. It was a struggle with my parents and against societal norms to really assert my way of life here. But I succeeded and could eventually live by my own rules.

Stefan: So that means in principle you emigrated twice: once from Lebanon to Switzerland and then to Germany, and then back again?

Chaza: Yes, I returned to Lebanon after thirteen years. That was in 1996. And in 2001, five years later, I left again. This time it wasn't because of societal pressure, but because I simply didn't see any future for me in Lebanon. On top of that, I had met my former husband and he was living in Berlin. That was another reason I went back to Berlin.

Stefan: And then you later returned to Lebanon again and have stayed ever since?

Chaza: Yes, at the end of 2006 I returned to Lebanon. This time for a project which was supposed to last six months. But it took longer. And then I met my current husband and I stayed. I left Berlin for good in 2008.

Stefan: And can you see a future for yourself now in Lebanon?

Chaza: A few months ago, and despite the dire situation in the country, I was still optimistic. Now you'd have to be blind to believe there's a future for yourself in Lebanon. At least for the next ten years and definitely at the moment.

Stefan: But despite all of this you still plan on staying in Lebanon, even though you have a German passport and could leave at any time? What's keeping you there despite the economic and political crisis?

Chaza: I continue to work and try to make the best of the opportunities available. For example, I'm currently working on building up a photo archive in Tyros, the town where my great-grandfather lived and taught as a Shiite scholar. I've now received funding to preserve the archive that I discovered two years ago. I'm really happy because this archive tells the story of South Lebanon, Tyros in particular. The archive contains photos of the school which my great-grandfather founded in the 1920s. It was the first high school south of Sayda and the Litani River. You can see from the photos the development of the Shiite community and how they began to embrace modernity. The photos are from the 1920s, 30s, 50s and 60s, and they go up until the 1970s. This photo collection is very important for the history of Lebanon.

My goal is to digitise everything and to slowly – this is my dream – build up a centre for photography in Tyros, which could collect other photos from South Lebanon and digitise them. The archive would be open to researchers and artists and anyone who is interested.

On the other hand, there is also my personal work as an artist. I have a project on Kafka [a work which deals with Kafka's Letter to His Father], which will be shown in the coming months. I am also working on other projects with my colleagues with whom I share my studio, including starting a publishing organisation that will mainly publish artists' books. As you can see, I have a lot going on here and wouldn't want to be anywhere else, at least as long our lives are not under threat.

Stefan: Your autobiographical novella shows that you were not exactly a model student at school in Lebanon. Nevertheless, you later started writing in standard Arabic, even though the standard Arabic taught in schools is very different from Lebanese Arabic and difficult for Lebanese people to learn. How did it come about that you later acquired this language at such a high level?

Chaza: It happened subconsciously. I have no idea how exactly, but that's what happened. For example: before I went to Switzerland just before I turned 19, I used to hate French because our French teacher at school was so strict and wouldn't let us speak Arabic. But when I got to Switzerland, I surprised myself by how well I could speak French. My subconscious had seemingly learned the language without my knowing.

Stefan: In Lebanon, you attended a French school, was Arabic taught as a subject there?

Chaza: Yes, Arabic was taught as a second language. French was the main language, but we also studied Arabic.

Stefan: When you say you weren't allowed to speak Arabic, do you mean you weren't allowed to speak Lebanese Arabic?

Chaza: Yes, exactly, Lebanese Arabic. During break time in the school-yard, we weren't allowed to speak Arabic at all. We were only supposed to speak French, even when we were chatting with friends. So, I had good reason to hate French. Subconsciously I had learned a lot, but something in me refused to acknowledge that in Lebanon.

When I returned to Berlin in 2001, I spent a lot of time at home. My former husband had a vast library and very many books in Arabic. At that time, I hadn't read anything in Arabic for maybe ten years. During my time in Europe, I first read only French books and later in Germany mainly German ones.

I looked at his library and saw so many famous names: Abbas Beydoun, Elias Khoury, Hassan Daoud, Najwa Barakat... All people whom I knew but whose books I'd never read. I was mainly familiar with Adonis und Mahmoud Darwish as I loved poetry. Then I began to read Arabic novels. And in doing so I discovered a new world, in fact my world, which up until then I didn't know at all. I decided then and there only to read in Arabic in order to improve my language.

The first text of mine to be published was a review of a book by Hassan Daoud, [لُعْبَ حِي الْبَيْاضِ] *Lu'ab ḥayy al-Bayyād*, English: The Dolls of al-Bayyad District]. I was so taken with the book that I wrote to Hassan to tell him. And because he liked what I had written about his book so much, he asked me if I would like to publish it.

And that's how I began to write. I remember how my former husband used to joke about the way I expressed myself in standard Arabic. My writing did use to be very awkward. But I continued to write and later I got books from Beirut in order to relearn the grammar. By reading a lot, my language did come back, but only with a lot of effort.

When I later began to write short stories, it was completely normal for me to write in Arabic rather than any other language. I quickly realised that Arabic is actually the language I feel most comfortable in. Not French, as I don't like it enough, and not German as I'm not fluent enough. Arabic is the language that comes most naturally to me, even standard Arabic funnily enough.

Stefan: So basically, you learned Arabic while you were in Germany?

Chaza: Yes, you could say that. I regained my language in Germany.

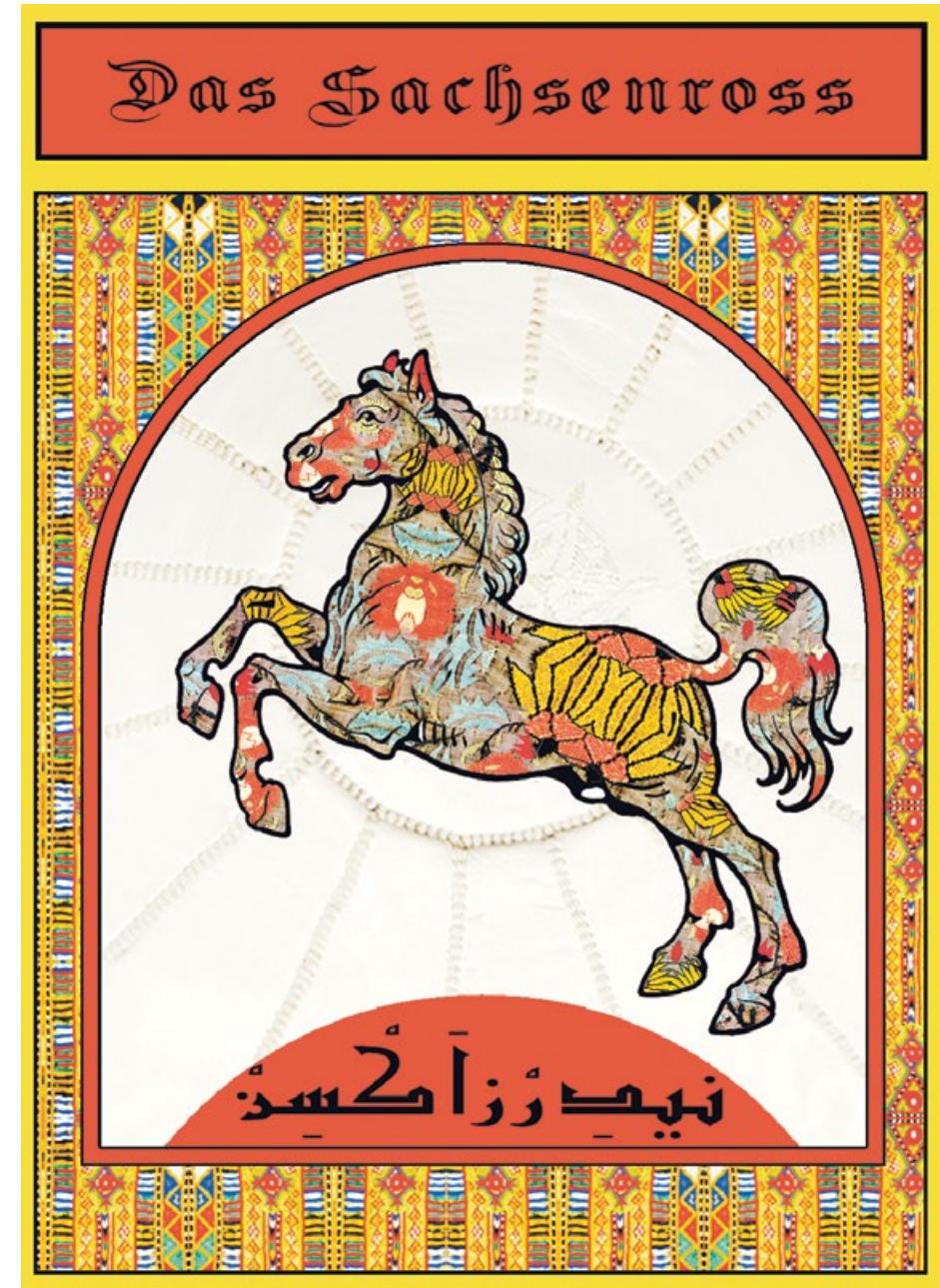
Stefan: Many thanks for your time and the interview, Chaza!

Hana Lielit as "Girl with a Pearl Earring," from the series "Maidames." Photo © Chaza Charafeddine, 2017–2018.





Berlin Bear with Polish embroidery, from the publication *Jetzt bin ich also Deutsch – Unter dem Himmel von Berlin*. Collage © Chaza Charafeddine, 2020.



The "Steed of Saxony" with Moroccan textile patterns, from the publication *Jetzt bin ich also Deutsch – Unter dem Himmel von Berlin*. Collage © Chaza Charafeddine, 2020.

ENCLOSURES OF GLASS AND STONE

تطویق متغلّل

Reine Chahine

رين شاهين

As a photographer in the humanitarian field and as a photography teacher, I meet and work with many immigrants, among them Palestinians. The young Palestinians to whom I teach photography are the grandchildren of the generation who fled to Lebanon in the late 1940s, searching for a place to live after being expelled from their home country. They were born and are living in Lebanon, yet they are not granted Lebanese nationality, nor can they go back to Palestine. It is as if they are surrounded by invisible boundaries separating them from their place of origin while simultaneously preventing them from integration into their adopted country. Yet, the lives of many Palestinians in Lebanon are also bound by real borders and walls. Many live in so-called camps – enclosed, densely populated neighborhoods which have evolved out of refugee camps. The concrete walls surrounding the camps represent, to me, the many boundaries Palestinians are confronted with every day.

How do such walls, sometimes in plain view and sometimes hidden behind the houses of neighbors, affect the lives of those living and growing up in the camps? In this photo essay, three young women, between ages 17 and 24, portray the consequences of life behind walls through their own photography.

Each woman is or has been a student of mine. As someone who has also faced the challenges of being a female photographer, my purpose was not only to teach them technical skills and creativity, but also to encourage them to operate a camera, even if this means attracting attention and marking their presence in a male-dominated environment. I wanted these young women to take the initiative to capture moments that cannot be repeated.

Ranin and Fatmeh Youssef are from the camp of Burj al-Barajneh in Beirut. Ranin participated in many of my photography workshops, and I also trained her to run a photo and video studio in Burj al-Barajneh as a part-time job. When I approached her with the idea of the present photo essay, she introduced me to Fatmeh, who was also interested in photography and wanted to learn more. After only a few training sessions, Fatmeh was ready to start shooting her own story.

Hiba Yassin lives in Ain al-Hilweh camp in Saida, South Lebanon. She studied journalism and wanted to learn photography to illustrate her own articles. This is how she became my student. After attending my workshops, we stayed in touch and Hiba often asked me for advice. She currently works as a journalist for an online news platform dedicated to stories from Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.

After brainstorming the overall theme of walls and boundaries, we agreed on the topic of each woman's photo story. Then, each took pictures in her own respective neighborhood. The process of taking photos, viewing and discussing them together, and giving instructions for further shoots, was long. After all, the three young women were still learning to express their thoughts and feelings through photographs. I selected and edited the final photos and edited the statements which they wrote to accompany their photographs. Now, as this process is completed, I find myself just as proud of these beautiful photographs as Hiba, Ranin and Fatmeh are of themselves.

كوني مصورة في المجال الإنساني وكمدرية تصوير، ألتقي وأعمل مع العديد من المهاجرين، من بينهم فلسطينيون. الشباب الفلسطينيون الذين أذسهم التصوير الفوتوغرافي هم من أحفاد الجيل الذي انتقل إلى لبنان أواخر الأربعينيات من القرن الماضي، بحثاً عن مكان للعيش، بعد تشردتهم من وطنهم. لقد ولدوا ويعيشون في لبنان، لكنهم لا يمنون الجنسية اللبنانية، ولا يمكنهم العودة إلى وطنهم فلسطين. يبدو الأمر كما لو أنهم محاطون بحدود غير مرئية تفصلهم عن موطنهم الأصلي، بينما تمنعهم في الوقت نفسه من الاندماج في مجتمع البلد الذي يأويهم. ومع ذلك، إن حياة العديد من الفلسطينيين في لبنان مقيّدة بحدود جدران حقيقة. يعيش معظمهم في المخيمات - أحياها مغلقة مكتظة بالسكان، تطورت من مخيمات اللاجئين. تمثل الجدران الخرسانية الحيطنة بالمخيمات، بالنسبة لي، جزءاً من الحدود الكثيرة التي يواجهها الفلسطينيون كل يوم.

كيف تؤثر هذه الجدران، التي تنظر أحياناً على مرأى من الجميع، وفي أحياناً أخرى مخفية خلف منازل الجيران، على حياة أولئك الذين يعيشون وينشأون في المخيمات؟ في هذا المقال المصوّر، تصورُ ثلاث شابات فلسطينيات، تراوح أعمارهن بين ١٧ و٤٢ عاماً، تداعيات الحياة خلف الجدران من خلال التصوير الفوتوغرافي الخاص بهن.

هؤلاء الشابات كنَّ أو ما زلن طالباتي. كوني إمراة مصورة، لقد واجهت أيضاً تحديات، لم يكن هدفي فقط تعليمهن المهارات الفنية والإبداع، إنما أيضاً تشجيعهن على استخدام الكاميرا، حتى لو كان هذا يعني لفت الانتباه وإبراز وجودهن في بيئة اجتماعية تهيمن عليها الذكورية. أردت أن تأخذ هؤلاء الشابات زمام المبادرة لالتقاط لحظات لا يمكن تكرارها.

زنين وفاطمة يوسف من مخيم برج البراجنة في بيروت. شاركت زنن في العديد من ورش العمل التدريبية على التصوير الفوتوغرافي، كما قمت بتدريبها على إدارة استوديو للصور والفيديو في برج البراجنة للعمل بدوام جزئي. عندما حدثتها عن فكرة المقال المصوّر الحالي، عزفتني بدورها على فاطمة، التي كانت أيضاً مهتمة بالتصوير، وأرادت معرفة المزيد. بعد بعض جلسات تدريبية فقط، كانت فاطمة مستعدة لبدء تصوير قصتها بنفسها.

هبة ياسين تعيش في مخيم عين الحلوة في صيدا، جنوب لبنان. درست الصحافة وأرادت تعلم التصوير، لتزويد مقالاتها بالصور. هكذا أصبحت طالبة عندي. بعد مشاركتها في ورش العمل التي أقامتها، بقينا على تواصل وكثيراً ما كانت هية تستشيرني في أمور العمل. إنها تعمل حالياً صحفية في منصة إخبارية على الإنترنت، مخصصة لقصص من مخيمات اللاجئين الفلسطينيين في لبنان.

بعد العصف الذهني للموضوع العام للجدران والحدود، اتفقنا على موضوع القصة المصورة لكل شابة. بعد ذلك، التقطت كل واحدة منها صوراً في محيطها داخل المخيم. كانت عملية التقاط الصور، عرضها ومناقشتها سوية والتوجيه لمزيد من اللقطات، طويلة. بعد كل شيء، كانت الشابات الثلاث ما زلن يتعلمن التعبير عن أفكارهن ومشاعرهم من خلال الصور. قمت باختيار الصور النهائية وتحريرها وتحرير البيانات التي كتبناها لإرفاقها بصورهن. الآن وبعد اكمال هذه العملية، أجد نفسي فخورة بهذه الصور الجميلة، مثل هبة وزنين وفاطمة.





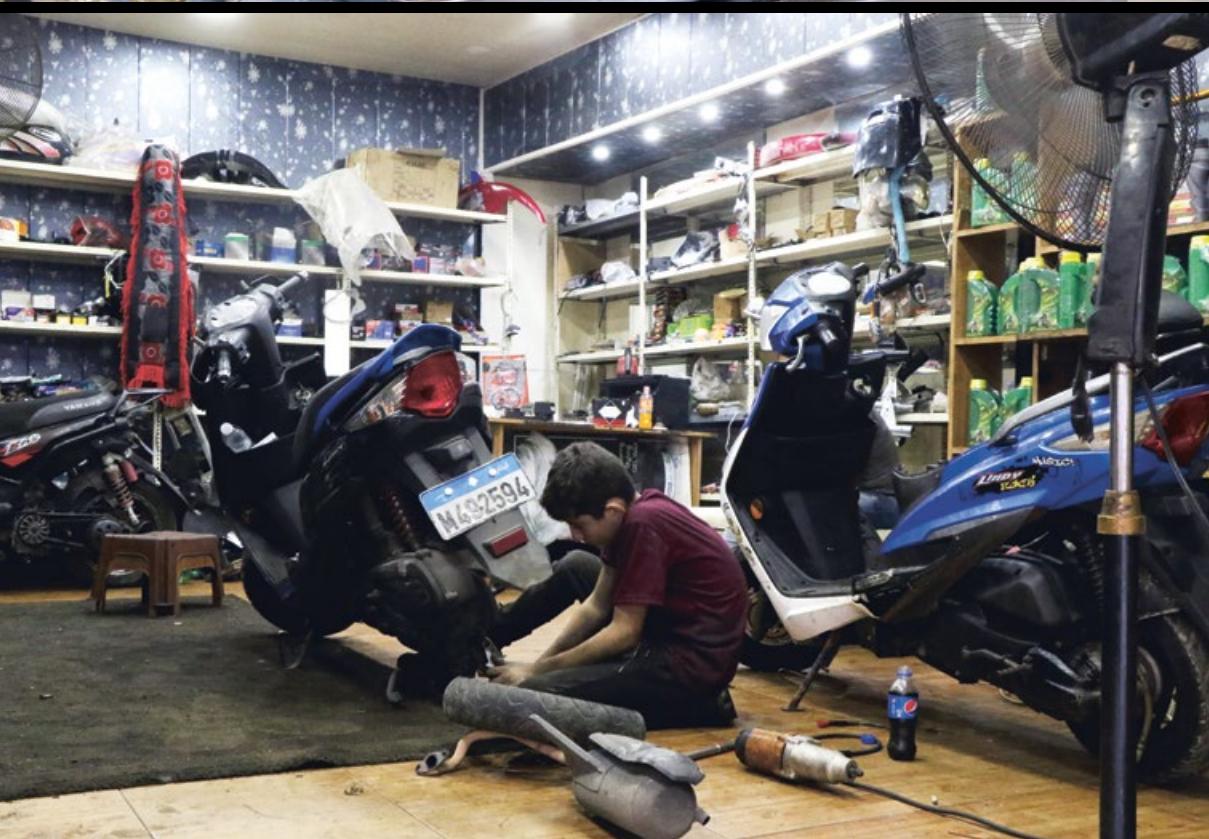
Fatmeh Youssef, 17

These photos present the grandchildren of Palestinian refugees from the camp of Burj al-Barajneh in Lebanon. Many children in the camp need to work, in order to help their families make ends meet. Although they are confined by the walls of the camp, I see hope in their small hands, weak bodies, bronzed foreheads, and smiling faces...

فاطمة يوسف، ١٧ عاماً

في أيديهم الصغيرة، في أجسادهم النحيلة، على جيابهم السمراء وأقدامهم المتعبة، في عيونهم الشاحصة وضحاكتهم البريئة لطفولة مسرورة، بين حيطان زواريب المخيم، هناك أمل ... أمل بلا حدود
مجموعة الصور هذه لأطفال فلسطينيين لاجئين في مخيم برج البراجنة. كل صورة تروي حكاية طفل في زواريب المخيم. كان من المفترض أن يكون هؤلاء الشبان على مقاعد الدراسة، يلهون في بيته أنظف أو متعمقين سلام في أوطانهم. لكنهم على العكس من ذلك كله، إنهم سجناء بين حيطان هذا المخيم، الحيطان التي خلقت من كل الجوانب لتكون حدوداً لجميع من هم في الداخل ، وتنبع هؤلاء الأطفال من أبسط حقوقهم.









Ranin Youssef, 24

Our dreams aren't always limited by the sky; sometimes our limits are much closer. They may take the shape of electrical wires entangled with water pipes which span the streets and alleyways all over the Palestinian camp of Burj al-Barajneh, Lebanon. While providing basic services such as electricity and water, and connecting the camp with the world around, these tubes and wires prevent sunlight from getting in and imprison us. The chaotic arrangement of the wires is dangerous. In fact, many people have lost their lives in accidents caused by informally assembled infrastructure.

رنين يوسف، ٢٤ عاماً

ليست السماء دائماً حدود أحلامنا... أحياناً تكون الحدود أقرب لنا من السماء بكثير، تكون على مرمى البصر أو الحجر، ولربما تمتد فوق رؤوسنا العارية، تهدد وجودنا كل يوم. فأحياناً تكون الحدود على هيئة سلك، مجرد سلك كهربائي يتشابك ليشبه قفصيán سجن يمنع عنا النور وفي بعض الأحيان يسلبنا الحياة. تعبر مجموعة الصور هذه عن اسلاك الكهرباء المتشاركة مع أنابيب المياه الموجودة في كل طرقات وزواريب المخيم، التي تهدد حياة البشر والحجر، تلك التي راح ضحيتها ٨٤ شخصاً من سكان المخيم.









Hiba Yassin, 24

Shot in Ain al-Hilweh in Saida, these photos portray people living in the crowded housing environment typical of Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Most of the houses are merely one meter away from each other, hindering people's privacy. The high density of houses is the result of a concrete wall which surrounds the camp. It is common to hear people from the camp say, "Our houses stick to each other." Over time, people transformed the chaos into a communal collaboration.

هبة ياسين، ٢٤ عاماً

مجموعة الصور تتناول موضوع الضيق وعشوائية السكن في مخيمات اللاجئين الفلسطينيين في لبنان. هذه الصور التقطت في مخيم عين الحلوة في مدينة صيدا، جنوب لبنان. قد لا تتعدي المسافة الفاصلة بين الكثيرون هذه البيوت المتر الواحد، مما يحدّ من خصوصية الأشخاص داخل بيوتهم. وتُعد هذه الحدود الصغيرة بين البيوت جزءاً ونتيجة لحدود أكبر. فالمخيم الذي تبلغ مساحته ٣ كيلومتر مربع تقريباً، يحاط بجدار خرساني من جميع الجهات، مما لا يسمح إلا بزيادة الاكتظاظ مع زيادة السكان عبر السنوات.

«الحيط ع الحيط» هذا ما نراه ونسمعه من الناس. لكن تأقلم الناس مع الحال مع مرور الزمن، كون لديهم نظرة مختلفة، إيجابية في بعض جوانبها. فباتوا يستفیدون من قرب البيوت، بمشاركة تفاصيل حياتهم اليومية.







STILLNESS: FORMS OF MIGRATION IN CONTEMPORARY ARAB DIASPORIC ART AND LITERATURE

Lisa Marchi

01
Salwa Mikdadi, "Arab American Artists: Transnationals Perched on the Divide." In *In/Visible: Contemporary Art by Arab American Artists*, ed. Salwa Mikdadi (Dearborn, MI: Arab American National Museum, 2005), 12.

02
Ibid.

03
Hisham Matar, *A Month in Siena* (New York: Random House, 2019)

04
Hisham Matar, *In the Country of Men* (London: Viking, 2006).

In 2005, the visual art exhibition *In/Visible: Contemporary Art by Arab American Artists* staged a selection of works by Arab American artists at the Arab American Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. As the curator Salwa Mikdadi writes in the exhibition catalogue, "Almost a century has passed since Gibran, the Arab American poet, philosopher and artist, aptly described the function of art as a way of seeing that transcends the visible to lay bare our common humanity and open up new ways of seeing."⁰¹ Drawing from Gibran's invitation to take "a step from what is obvious and well-known toward what is arcane and concealed,"⁰² in this essay, I explore artworks by five contemporary Arab diasporic artists which bring together the visual and the verbal and reveal unexpected and, at times, paradoxical forms of migration, fluctuating between the explicit and the enigmatic.

While migration studies tend to be marked by an emphasis on mobility, either forced or voluntary, the creative works I discuss – a novel, a slide show, a photograph, a cycle of paintings, and a multi-media installation – highlight stillness. To what extent, I ask, does stillness – both as silence and as immobility – alter common understandings of migration? What form do migration or mobility take in the selected artworks and why? Finally, what tales of desire and loss, attachment and estrangement, movement and fixity, do these art pieces narrate through stillness?

Originating from different regions of the Arab world, the five artists included in this essay experiment with distinctive media and develop intricate ideas of migration – both painfully sincere yet also voluntarily obscure – thus providing viewers and readers with original and antithetical angles on the same topic. My selection may look arbitrary, yet my intent is to inspire a set of intricate questions in place of the usual conclusions. I also hope to stir in readers a fascination for the manifold and often puzzling forms migration can take – both conceptually and concretely – in contemporary Arab diasporic art and, by extension, in our globalized world.

I. Hisham Matar, *A Month in Siena* (2019)

Eloquent prose and a sombre, pensive tone mark Matar's latest novel *A Month in Siena*.⁰³ Born in New York City in 1970 to Libyan parents, Matar returned to Tripoli, Libya, when he was three years old, thus growing up under the regime of Muammar el-Qaddafi as the son of a political dissident. His debut novel, *In the Country of Men*, chronicles his childhood years, narrating with intensity and deep lyricism the sense of absurdity and alienation experienced by nine-year-old Suleiman.⁰⁴ The fictional story, which won numerous international prizes, is based on Matar's real life experience: after having moved with his family to Egypt to escape political persecution, Matar's father – Jaballa Matar – was abducted from his home in Cairo in 1990, handed over to Libyan authorities, and presumably killed.

A Month in Siena condenses the thoughts, reflections, and feelings collected by the writer during a month-long stay in Siena as he attempts to simultaneously move away from and come to terms

with the traumatic loss of his father. The novel creatively interlocks past and present, verbal and visual languages, punctuating the narration with eight full-color reproductions of paintings and frescoes belonging to the Sienese School of painting (13th – 15th century) by artists such as Duccio di Buoninsegna, Ambrogio Lorenzetti, and Giovanni di Paolo. Oddly placed on the threshold separating Byzantine from Renaissance art and challenging the viewer with a highly coded Christian iconography, the paintings of the Sienese artists function as a magnet for Matar, irresistibly attracting him to Siena. As he explains: "The colours, delicate patterns and suspended drama of these pictures gradually became necessary to me."⁰⁵ He describes Siena itself as "a landing place" and an emotional anchor after years of relentless mobility.⁰⁶ In Matar's own words: "This is the end and the beginning, the location of the twin tides, declared in the open."⁰⁷

Siena and the paintings by the artists of the Sienese School represent for Matar a standstill, a place – both concrete and allegorical – where he feels finally in peace with himself, cured from the split provoked by exile and the emptiness caused by the loss of his father. In particular, Siena's main square – Il Campo – exemplifies the symbiotic relationship that the protagonist entertains with the urban landscape: "[Il Campo] was a space of mutual exposure. ... [T]o cross it is to take part in a centuries-old choreography, one meant to remind all solitary beings that it was neither good nor possible to exist entirely alone."⁰⁸ The square's easy accessibility and all-embracing design make the protagonist feel organically integrated in the city's intricate texture.

How are we to regard Matar's fascination with Siena? What facilitates his affective communion with the painters of the Sienese School and his commingling with the urban landscape? To what extent does this unexpected kinship and reciprocity alter habitual ways of seeing mobility and migration, feelings of inclusion and policies of integration?

Since the incidence of material deprivation in the EU in 2018 was approximately twice as high among non-EU citizens, we quickly understand that integration and well-being work differently for different categories of people.⁰⁹ The relationship between the migrant and the surrounding environment is rarely experienced as cordial and consonant, since migrants from different ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds often encounter economic and social barriers that hinder their full integration in the new social and political order. Individuals at risk of poverty and social exclusion, in particular, may find neither solace nor comfort in contemplating medieval paintings that hang in art galleries; likewise, access to and the freedom to roam the narrow and labyrinthine streets of a foreign medieval town may be restricted in their case. Matar's privileged background and his status as a free traveler and sightseer make his retreat into the aesthetic realm and his integration within the social fabric of Siena more practicable. Other, more destitute individuals may face greater challenges in adapting to their new surroundings. Locals may also be less willing to accept them.

Despite these weaknesses, *A Month in Siena* has the great merit of inviting a reflection on another pressing issue tightly related to

05
Matar, *A Month in Siena*, 6.

06
Ibid., 13.

07
Ibid., 11.

08
Ibid., 12.

09
Eurostat, "Migrant integration statistics – at risk of poverty and social exclusion," last modified February 27, 2020, accessed September 28, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migration_integration_statistics_-_at_risk_of_poverty_and_social_exclusion&oldid=374113.

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Matar, "Hisham Matar on how the Black Death changed art forever," *The Guardian*, June 6, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/jun/06/black-death-plague-pandemic-art-imagination-hisham-matar>, accessed Sept. 10, 2020.

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Immigration & emigration statistics, "Migration data relevant for the COVID-19 pandemic," Migration Data Portal, Oct. 22, 2020, <https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/migration-data-relevant-covid-19-pandemic>, accessed Oct. 25, 2020.

12
IOM, "Migration Factsheet No. 6 – The impact of COVID-19 on migrants," https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/ICP/MPP/migration_factsheet_6_covid-19_and_migrants.pdf, accessed Oct. 26, 2020.

13
Matar, *A Month in Siena*, 67.

14
For a detailed biography and comprehensive list of works, see Fouad Elkoury's website www.fouadelkoury.com.

15
The entire slideshow (80 pictures in chronological order) is available on Elkoury's website, www.fouadelkoury.com/installrespons.php?id=25, accessed July 15, 2020.

migration and concerned with our present reality: how global pandemics in ways similar to global flows change social attitudes, collective imaginaries, and affective atmospheres. As Matar writes: "The Sienese School, which sits between the waning influence of the Eastern church and the Renaissance, was dramatically changed by the 1348 plague, the Black Death. That pandemic was the most devastating incident in human history. It altered not only human society but the imagination itself."¹⁰ Surely, the global health emergency we are witnessing today, with its consequent border and travel restrictions and the increased vulnerability of all humans, has made the situation for migrants, refugees, and displaced people even more precarious. As the Migration Data Portal shows, drawing its statistics on the 2020 data provided by the International Migration Organization: "Between 11 March 2020, when the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic, and 1 September 2020, the total number of movement restrictions implemented around the world has increased to more than 86,000."¹¹ The global increase in travel bans and restrictions together with the growing anxiety and uncertainty felt by individuals worldwide have negatively affected not only global mobility but also international migrant flows and have concurred to reinforce the stigmatization of migrants and their sense of exclusion in the so-called host countries.¹² Not to mention the startling stillness – in terms of quietening but also of (self)-imposed isolation, emptiness, and desolation – that has spread around many cities under lockdowns.

In Matar's *A Month in Siena*, which was written before the pandemic, the town of Siena is still a protective and responsive urban space, vibrating with humanity and granting the restless protagonist – a "mourner without a grave"¹³ – a long-awaited peace; it is on a tucked away bench on top of a Sienese hill that his frantic search for his father's body is finally brought to a standstill.

II. Fouad Elkoury, *Atlantis* (2012)

While Matar's novel eventually ends with a long-desired and liberating halt, Elkoury's slide-show *Atlantis* (2012) explores the ambiguous – simultaneously tragic and surprising – forms that migration can take under extreme conditions, as in the case of a civil war. Born in 1952 in Paris, Elkoury is a Lebanese artist who has devoted almost his entire life to photography. His photo album *Beirut City Center*, completed in the years immediately following the Lebanese Civil War, represents a watershed in the history of Lebanese photography. As an itinerant photographer, Elkoury has wandered from place to place (Egypt, the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Territories, Turkey, and Ukraine, to name just a few examples) with his camera in hand, while also gradually experimenting with new media, such as video, multimedia installations, and documentary.¹⁴

Atlantis centers upon the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) leader Yasir Arafat, as he escapes the besieged city of Beirut in 1982, embarking on a ship sent by the late Greek President Giōrgos Andreas Papandreou to bring him in safety to Athens.¹⁵ As Elkoury



FIGURE 1: On Board the Atlantis. Photo © Fouad Elkoury, 1982, courtesy of the artist.

explains about his practice as a photographer during the Lebanese Civil War: "I let the images come to me without worrying about their relevance, postponing until quieter days the responsibility of putting them one after the other and understanding what they meant."¹⁶ Elkoury implies here that, in extreme situations, such as in the case of war and forced displacement, understanding may only take the form of a broken sequence of black and white impressions, rarely colored and often blurred. Making sense out of disorder is indeed a difficult task that one can perform only when a certain degree of safety and stillness have been reached.

Elkoury's snapshots – as I see them today, almost forty years after Beirut's dramatic siege – envelop Arafat's public persona with layers of subtle, intimate meanings, thus contributing to alter his consistent, public representation as a combatant and a tough political leader in a military-style uniform.

For Arafat, Beirut has never been a landing place or a safe haven. Yet, the Lebanese capital had hosted the PLO's headquarters for more than a decade, and most of the PLO's military activities had been conducted from there. Accordingly, Palestinians experienced the agreed evacuation of Arafat from the Lebanese capital in the summer of 1982 as a real calamity. Embarking on an improvised trip and travelling in disguise as a freedom fighter like the other travellers, Elkoury, with his camera in hand, immortalizes Arafat's dramatic escape from

16

"Je laissais les images venir à moi sans me soucier de leur pertinence, remettant à des jours plus calmes le soin de les mettre bout à bout et de comprendre ce qu'elles signifiaient," Fouad Elkoury, *La sagesse du photographe* (Paris: L'œil neuf, 2004), 9. This and the following translations from the French are mine.

17

"Que je photographie le réel ou que je compose une fiction, je cherche à libérer l'esprit de la réalité, suggérant des associations qui abolissent les frontières, laissant les objets se télescopier, bouleversant l'ordre des choses, pour transformer leur sens," Elkoury, *La sagesse du photographe*, 8.

18

"La relation qui unit un photographe à 'son sujet' est aussi intense qu'équivoque. Pendant le temps relativement court qu'il se donnent l'un à l'autre, chacun joue sa partie et tente d'apprivoiser l'autre. Le photographe doit capturer cet instant d'abandon qu'il peut provoquer chez la personne photographiée pour que se révèle, non pas son 'naturel' mais sa complexité, et que se reflète dans l'image le mystère qui l'entoure," Elkoury, *La sagesse du photographe*, 14 – 15.

a previously glorious, now-sinking kingdom with a series of quick, apparently fortuitous snapshots.

Elkoury's intriguing photographs recreate the dream of Arafat's dominion, while simultaneously raising doubts about it. This inner tension between reality and chimera gives a unique touch to his poetic photography if compared to the more distanced and objective documentary form. Part of the allure that characterizes these images lies precisely in their being precariously located on the edge between calamity and ease, reality and fiction, conflict and rest. As Elkoury himself explains: "Whether I photograph the reality or compose a fiction, I seek to free the spirit of reality, suggesting some associations that abolish the usual borders, letting objects collide, disrupting the order of things, with the aim to transform their meaning."¹⁷ The journey that Elkoury captures with his camera is indeed a Mediterranean crossing of historical significance, yet delivered in an apparently casual and uncommitted way; it is an emergency escape route, cunningly disguised as a family cruise, given the intimacy and unusual closeness that the passengers seem to feel on board of this ship.

At first glance, the slides that compose *Atlantis* look unstudied and improvised; after a more careful look, however, they appear conscious and deeply concerned. What is particularly fascinating about Elkoury's installation is his capacity to reshape the monolithic portrait of Arafat as a tenacious freedom fighter and a robust political leader by skillfully merging his exceptionality and ordinariness, his inner force and human vulnerability, his apotheosis and downfall. Elkoury explains the complex relationship that links the photographer to his/her subject as follows:

The relationship that unites a photographer and "his subject" is as intense as it is equivocal. During the relatively short time they give each other, each one plays his part and attempts to tame the other. The photographer must capture this moment of abandonment that he can provoke in the photographed person, in order to reveal not so much his "naturalness" but rather his complexity, and in order for the mystery that surrounds him to be reflected in the image.¹⁸

Elkoury's snapshots catch Arafat in disparate moments: Greeting a group of journalists, instants before his departure, lazily lounging at the side of a swimming pool, looking thoughtfully at the wide horizon or at an unfolded map. Arafat's disregard for the camera appears natural, yet to a certain degree also calculated, in similar ways to the silence and stillness that surround him. Privately, he looks like a fugitive; publicly, he is portrayed as a laid-back holidaymaker. His keffiyah – a miniature in white and black fabric of a land that is nowhere to be found on the map – hits the viewer with its symbolic force. It is both extremely light and extremely potent – a land made of cloth, and without that garment, "the emperor has no clothes."

Enthralled by Elkoury's penetrating snapshots, let me echo his sharp gaze and ask in return: Are we witnessing in this slideshow a glorious king or – perhaps against the photographer's own will –

a saddening farce? To what extent do Elkoury's deeply humane and apparently unstudied slides facilitate the viewer's identification with an otherwise unattainable and out of the ordinary man? Finally, is this installation taking the viewer on board of a warship, a Mediterranean cruise, or a shipwreck? Elkoury's chronologically arranged yet broken slideshow leaves these questions open for the viewer to ponder.

Clearly no ordinary *sans-papiers* crossing the Mediterranean Sea in a desperate attempt to reach his dreamland, the charismatic leader captured in *Atlantis* is the focal point around which the story unfolds. A contemporary reincarnation of the legendary Greek king of Ithaca, Arafat embodies the mythical Odysseus – the "storm-tossed visitor" forever displaced and unable to return home.¹⁹ An errant figure of exceptional status; a refugee of iconic grandeur.²⁰

By emphasizing both the extreme ordinariness and exceptionality of this historical event, Elkoury's enigmatic slideshow brings into view the conflicting and often paradoxical forms that migration can take in the contemporary age. This discreet and introverted slideshow has an additional quality, if compared to today's largely sensationalistic and spectacular coverage of the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean Sea: it is poised, nuanced, and dignifying. Arafat's unexpected and coerced "stand still" on deck of a ship takes the form of a golden imprisonment. Elkoury's subjective and delicate snapshots envelop Arafat in a halo of dramatic intensity; accordingly, viewers themselves are almost compelled to feel the depth of his loss and the breadth of his estrangement.

III. Doris Bittar, *Kul Shay/All Things* (2005 – 2006)

Dignity and composure also characterize Doris Bittar's photo cycle *Kul Shay/All Things* (2005–2006), which offers a refreshing, down-to-earth perspective on migration from the standpoint of a female photographer. Bittar's photograph *Horj Vegetable Cart* employs a Spartan wheeled vehicle, parked at the margins of an anonymous road and packed with fragrant homegrown vegetables, to hint at the great variety of ethnic, religious, and kinship groups that make up Lebanon and at the precarious equilibrium that allowed them to historically exist side by side and even to flourish.

Born in Baghdad to Lebanese parents, Bittar spent her childhood in Lebanon before migrating with her family to the United States. She is an interdisciplinary and international artist with broad connections across the Arab world and well beyond it, whose work and collaborations span across multiple media, e.g. music, visual art, and poetry.²¹

Like Elkoury's *Atlantis*, Bittar's photographic experiments combine spontaneity with implied meanings and embedded narratives. The cycle *Kul Shay/All Things*, in particular, reveals Bittar's deep interest in the everyday, her taste for neat design patterns, and her affective attunement to the subjects portrayed. The pigmented archival

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Miriam Cooke, Erdag Gokner and Grant Parker, eds., *Mediterranean Passages: Readings from Dido to Derrida* (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina UP, 2008), 24.

20

Among others, Natalia Ribas-Mateos has compared the current refugee crisis in the Mediterranean to the exodus of Odysseus. See Natalia Ribas-Mateos, *The Mediterranean in the Age of Globalization: Migration, Welfare and Borders* (London: Transaction Publishing, 2005), 1.

21

An overview of Bittar's work is provided on her website, www.dorisbittar.com.

22

The *Horsh* has been historically subjected to abuse of its trees and, in more recent times, a theatre of conflict between the civil society and the city administration. See on this point Fadi Shaya, "From Woods to Park: A Historical and Ethnographic Investigation of Programming the Landscape of the Horsh," <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309913667>, accessed Oct. 7, 2020. A part of the *Horsh* was turned in 1982 into a Palestinian refugee camp, while its current status is threatened not by migratory flows but by construction projects, cf. the *Environmental Justice Atlas*, <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/horsh-beirut>, accessed Oct. 7, 2020.

23

Doris Bittar, "Layered, Erased, and Embedded Narratives," in *Etching Out Our Own Image: Voices from Within the Arab American Art Movement*, eds. Anan Ameri and Holly Arida (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 157 – 58.

24

Bittar, "Layered, Erased, and Embedded Narratives," 175.

25

Franco Cassano, "Southern Thought," *Thesis Eleven* 67, no.1 (2001): 1–10.

print *Horj (Beirut Forest) Vegetable Cart* (2005–2006), for instance, reproduces a street cart loaded with colorful vegetables methodically but also creatively displayed for sell. The first impression is of a photo taken casually on the spot. Bittar's double celebration of a usually overlooked means of transport, used by Lebanese and migrant vendors alike to sell agricultural products, and of a largely ignored and at risk of disappearing area of Beirut – the *Horsh* or woodland,²² an area that in 1982 offered shelter to Palestinian refugees – inspires a strange query: What forms does migration take if we listen to tales that are porous to the sounds and stories circulating in the streets of the global South? Bittar's work suggests that we may end up with different, autonomous, and multi-layered tales. In her own words:

The environment that my works describe are often framed within a historical context that stems from the experiences of immigration, exile, and being in the minority, both ethnically and cognitively. I use myriad references, and at the same time question these references, as I develop the formal structure of each piece. ... I mix, merge, and layer these components to form hybrid visual phrases or realms that balance ideas with sensations of color and texture.²³

Horj (Beirut Forest) Vegetable Cart strikes the viewer with its simplicity and austerity. As Bittar herself explains: "Unlike my paintings, the straightforward and unmanipulated photographs exude a sense of verity."²⁴ Her craft magically transforms an ordinary object into a vibrant, animate storyteller. The viewer senses that, under its surface, this uncanonical still life hides an embedded narrative about Lebanon's close-knit yet also highly diversified and periodically jeopardized social milieu.

Bittar's telling of Lebanon's social stratification is frank, yet slant. It is precisely this unique perspective, capable of containing both a stern composition and a happy jumble, flamboyant colors and regular forms, that allows the global South to "re-conquer its own outlook," using Franco Cassano's apt formulation, and to communicate in elusive ways an intricate and painful story about belonging.²⁵ Adorned with the dazzling colors of fresh local products, this rather out-of-the-ordinary still life – both animated and moving – asks a question and tells a tale from the bottom-up about a very common, yet arduous, task: how to make room for others in a fair and balanced way.

IV. Etel Adnan, *The Weight of the World* (2016)

Etel Adnan's cycle, *The Weight of the World*, first exhibited at the Serpentine Gallery in London in 2016, also approaches migration with some lightness, thus changing its widespread dark representation as a burdening experience. Born in Beirut in 1925, a few years after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Adnan is the daughter of a Syrian

Muslim man – a high-ranking official in the Turkish army – and a Greek Christian woman, a native of the cosmopolitan port of Smyrna, in the Anatolian peninsula. A world-renowned poet and painter with linkages spanning from the Middle East to Europe and the US, Adnan has experimented with mixed media – painting, poetry, tapestry, film, ceramics, watercolors – to name just a few – while also combining visual and verbal languages.

Adnan's artistic oeuvre, which spans three continents and many decades, expresses attachment to place – particularly to three cities (Paris, Sausalito, and Beirut) and a Californian mountain (Mount Tamalpais) – while also celebrating a cosmopolitan consciousness. It is precisely this tension between motion and stillness, physical and affective connection to a specific place and to the cosmos at large that makes her art particularly captivating. Writer and translator Eric Sellin considers her as a "cosmic poet,"²⁶ while she sees herself as an "alchemical product,"²⁷ suggesting that the vastness of her look comes from being well-travelled and from having learnt to synthesize antagonistic energies.

In the cycle *The Weight of the World*, Adnan takes the world apart piece by piece and re-composes it in a miniaturized, integrated form, making physical and metaphysical ends converge. A thick, circular mass, static in form yet vibrating in color, is the fulcrum of Adnan's cycle, and the place where the viewer's eye lands. The cycle is composed of twenty small-sized paintings, each one representing the stillness of planet Earth – its suspension in space and its equilibrium produced by the gravitational pull – while also hinting at its perpetual movement, suggested through the slight changes in the position of the circular form at the center of the different canvases. Adnan's brilliant colors and sober compositions generate a sense of wonder and vitality in the viewer, inspiring also care to preserve the beauty and harmonious order of the universe.

The perfectly balanced, yet constantly transient globe at the center of each single canvas, suggests that mobility and migration are natural phenomena, pertaining not only to humanity but to the cosmos as well – one may only think of the rotation of the planets and stars that compose our galaxy but also of the movement of other living creatures, such as salmons and migratory birds, navigating rivers and skies, migrating to distant oceans and to warm places, and finally returning to their home stream or original "homeland."

The flatness of Adnan's geometric forms, reminiscent of Eastern religious icons and the Lebanese tradition of abstract landscape painting, as exemplified by the works of Georges Daoud Corm (1896-1971) and Saliba Douaihy (1912-1994), bestows upon each single canvas an ascetic look. Indeed, as Simone Fattal explains: "Adnan's paintings are austere, almost severe. No facile efforts, no adornments, no concession to the viewer: a simple statement about a proposed moment."²⁸

Adnan's original interpretation of migration as an essential, built-in feature of the cosmos transcends the usual borders separating the human vs. the nonhuman, the material vs. the spiritual, the natural

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Eric Sellin, "Etel Adnan: A Cosmic Poet," in *Etel Adnan: Critical Essays on the Arab-American Writer and Artist*, eds. Lisa Suhair Majaj and Amal Amireh (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002), 27.

27

Klaudia Ruschkowski, "The Many Worlds of Etel Adnan," *Performing Arts Journal*, 117 (2017): 77.

28

Simone Fattal, "Painting as Pure Energy," in *Etel Adnan: The Weight of the World*, eds. Julia Peyton-Jones and Hans Ulrich Obrist (Köln/New York: Koenig Books, 2016), 32.

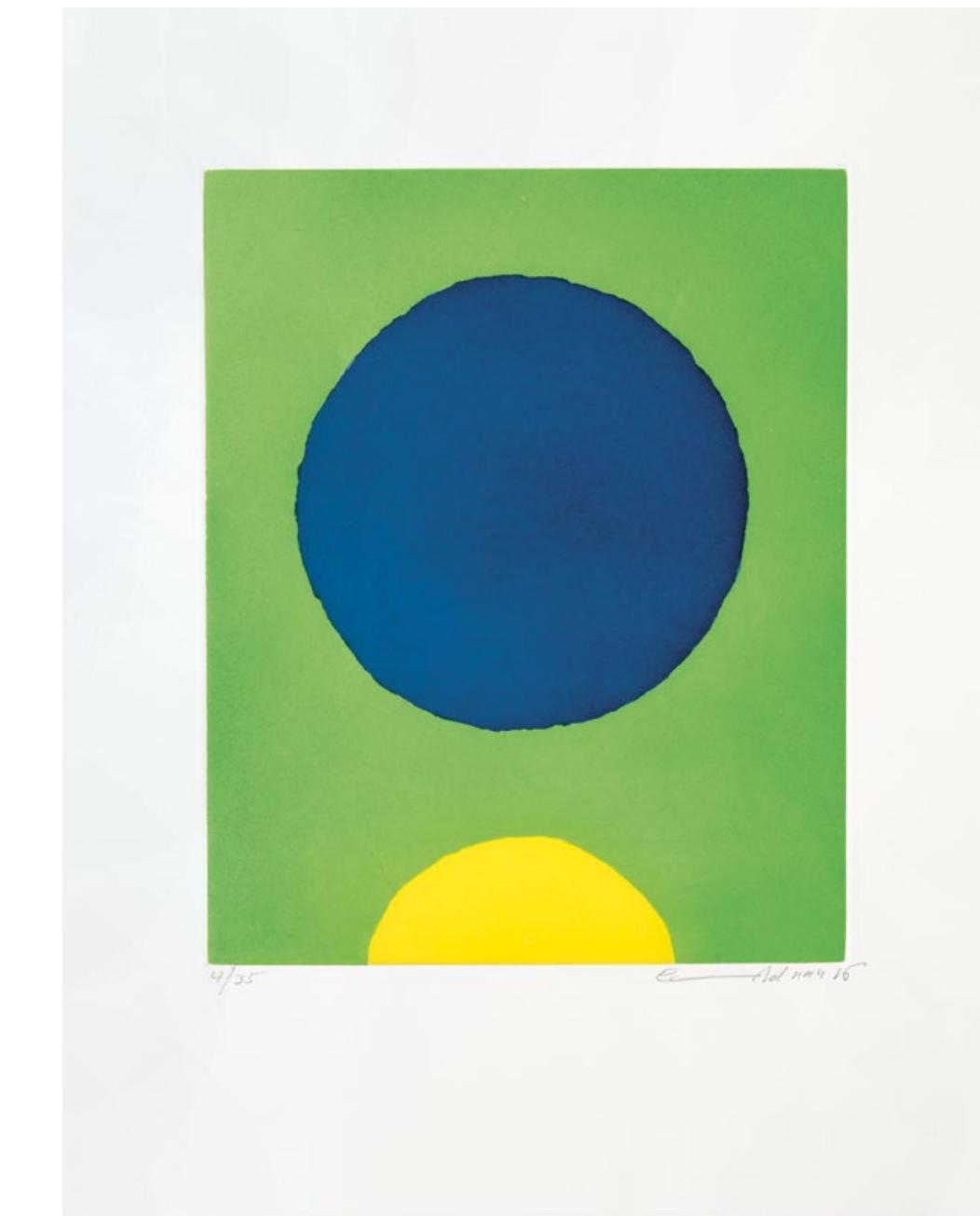


FIGURE 2: *Le poids du monde 1, 2016*. © Etel Adnan / Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co.

vs. the supernatural, prompting the following query: Can migration ever take the form – as in Adnan's case – of an electric, brightly colored tale, one that sees individual mobility as being in tune with the movement of other worldly creatures and of the universe as a whole? Undoubtedly, Adnan's privileged status in a group of intellectual expatriates has greatly affected the way she sees migration.

Observed from a cultivated, urbane, and wealthy location, migration may take an unexpected look: that of an awe-inspiring mechanism, an almost divine "engine" that moves everything.

V. Adel Abidin, *Cold Interrogation* (2006)

Whereas Adnan's cycle *The Weight of the World* discloses migration as a still, built-in mechanism that grants harmony and unity to the whole universe, from Adel Abidin's video/sound installation, *Cold Interrogation* (2006), the world emerges as an unwelcoming abode, cold and unyielding, with migration itself metamorphosing into a nightmarish experience. A visual artist born in Baghdad and living between Helsinki and Amman, Abidin offers a bitter, albeit ironic, perspective on the unlivable forms migration can take in today's highly securitized world.²⁹ Stressing the migrant's stillness as the automatic response to violent acts of silencing and immobilization, Abidin's work reproduces the psychic and affective trauma that migrants, travelling on less comfortable and safe routes, may face.

In *Cold Interrogation*, the viewer takes the physical standpoint of the migrant, as he/she watches through a peephole in the door of a white refrigerator, the solo performance of a border patrol agent executing inspection with meticulous care. Abidin's installation mobilizes affects such as fear and danger, hostility and repugnance, exposing the cold-blooded interrogator as an unresponsive, xenophobic vigilante, whose inquisition confines the immigrant/viewer to the category of the criminal, the potential terrorist, and the religious extremist. In particular, the agent's aggressive and stereotypical questions – "How did you end up in Finland? What do you think of Saddam Hussein? Do you think it's impolite to give something with a left hand? How do they treat women in Iraq?" – appear to have a performative quality.³⁰ They do not simply pretend to mirror reality; they even construct "the migrant" according to those simplifications. Migration in this case is all but silent: it takes a hoarse, raucous tone; the migrant himself is transfixed and petrified by the agent's hateful and imprisoning words.

Watching Abidin's installation, one wonders if there can possibly be any human connection between the locked-up agent and the viewer/migrant imprisoned by his racist gaze and cold interrogation. The performance looks bleak yet realistic in the way it represents how refugees and asylum seekers are often made to feel "like criminals" in interviews by officials working for immigration and security agencies.³¹ Through the image of a home appliance that looks terrifying and intimidating, the installation questions taken-for-granted conceptualizations of the home as a safe haven, raising doubts about the inclusive character of host societies and multicultural nations, equated here with cold refrigerators with sealed and isolated doors.

Writing on the proliferation of walls erected by nation-states to enclose and isolate a supposedly spotless and germ-free interior from external contaminations, Wendy Brown observes in *Walled States*: "The new walls thus dissimulate need and dependency as they resurrect myths of national autonomy and purity in a globalized world.

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For more details on Adel Abidin's life and work trajectory, see www.adelabidin.com.

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A recording of the full interrogation is available at <http://www.adelabidin.com/works/cold-interrogation>, accessed Aug. 20, 2020.

31

See, among others, May Bulman's article "'It Wasn't an Interview, It Was an Interrogation': How Asylum Seekers Are Made to Feel 'Like Criminals' During Home Office Questioning," *Independent*, June 28, 2020, www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/asylum-seekers-uk-home-office-interviews-interrogation-a9576301.html, accessed Oct. 5, 2020.

32

Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 103.

33

The author would like to thank the artist Fouad Elkoury for kindly authorizing the reproduction of "On Board the Atlantis" and the Galerie Lelong for the permission to reproduce Etel Adnan's artwork in this chapter.

Danger, disorder, and violence are projected outside, and sovereign power is figured as securing a homogeneous, orderly and safe national interior."³² According to Brown, the farcical nature of these walled states expresses itself most clearly in their failed attempt to bring the pressures and tensions released by globalization to a standstill. Stopping migratory flows with blockades and barricades is only a short-sighted, foolish, and counterproductive action, which Abidin's installation exposes with great efficacy. Since it flips the position of the viewer from interior to exterior, and from the role of spectator to that of involved performer, Abidin's installation represents the agent's isolation behind the waterproof doors of the refrigerator as foolishness, while also increasing the viewer's sense of discomfort and frustration regarding the often muscular and tactless ways through which the so-called "civilized West" often manages migration flows. Watching Abidin's disturbing performance, an upsetting truth may gradually insinuate itself into the viewer: that democracy, not only abroad, but also at home, is cracked.

Conclusion

The artists included in this essay remind us that, while migration is often framed in terms of movement, restlessness, and being uprooted, it can also take an alternative form: stillness. By privileging elusive aesthetic forms, conflicting angles, and intricate tales and patterns, the artists discussed in this essay complicate the largely oversimplified and teleological version of the migrant's trajectory either from rags to riches or out of the frying pan into the fire. The stories these artists tell ingeniously blend historical reality and fictional reconstruction, personal feelings and objective facts, straightforward accounts and implied meanings, without any pretense of being accurate or truthful but rather in the attempt to stimulate a deep reflection on a complex topic that requires careful consideration. The merit of these artworks lies precisely in their capacity not just to induce questions and doubts in the reader/viewer but also in their ability to mobilize affects, such as indignation, wonder, and poise, in place of the usual fear, distrust, and hatred. These alternative affects facilitate, rather than hinder, the reader/viewer's awareness, propelling a much-needed transition from emotional detachment and political disinvestment to personal involvement and public engagement.³³

**EUROPE
OTHERWISE**

TALES FROM A DUFFLE BAG: ON GETTING EMOTIONAL BY DOING MIGRA- TION STUDIES AS A GERMAN SCHOLAR

Matthias Pasdzierny

Is there a place for emotions in academic writing? I'm not talking about doing research on emotions, but whether or not emotions are allowed to affect and intrude in research. Perhaps they simply don't ask for permission? But if so, am I allowed to write, for example in an academic paper about the Nazi exile of musicians, about the feelings that this particular research triggers in me? How it touches, fascinates, irritates, or perhaps even bores, repels or disgusts me? Is this interesting for anyone other than myself? Are feelings part of methodology? Are they allowed to influence my findings? I am quite sure they do. Why is this very rarely talked about, especially within the field of history? And how would that work, writing about it?



FIGURE 1: Brigitte Schiffer and Hans Hickmann as a young couple in Berlin, ca. 1932. Unknown photographer, with kind permission of Rolf Hickmann.

This is the story of Hans and Brigitte (figure 1) – and, at the same time, the story of how doing migration studies changed my perspective on my discipline and my self-understanding as a music historian. Because, in the end, historians are nothing else but storytellers and presentation alone is already part of the method, I'll tell it to you a bit like a photo-love story from the magazine BRAVO, which I always stole from my big sister's bedroom when I was a teenager. Maybe writing a telenovela is sometimes the best historical method anyway...⁰¹

In Germany, migration is a strange thing. Half of my family, for example, are Polish immigrants from about 150 years ago. The other half – my mother's side of the family – fled from northern East Germany (GDR) via Berlin to the Federal Republic (BRD), shortly before the wall was built. I myself grew up in Hildesheim, a small town in Lower Saxony close to Hannover. Nobody in my family ever had anything to do with this region before, and my parents had moved there simply for work reasons. So, you could definitely call me a person of "Migrationshintergrund," with a migration background, a highly political term in Germany. But nobody here would think of me as such; on the contrary, most people would call me a "Kartoffel" or "Bio-German," a strange vocabulary born during the months of the "refugee crisis" in 2015/16.

Only sometimes were these migrations and journeys a topic of discussion in my childhood, and always behind closed doors. For example, it was told that my grandfather from the formerly Polish side had no problems in proving that he was "Aryan" under Hitler. Not unimportant for him, because he was a primary school teacher and because he wanted to join the NSDAP on his own initiative in 1933. In my mother's family, on the other hand, there was a couple that had to emigrate to Uruguay into exile during the Nazi era. "Aunt Hedi" had married a Jew, much to the annoyance of parts of her family back then. After 1945, they returned to Germany with their two sons, Butzi and Carlos. Their temporary migration history remained recognisable in the first name of their second son. At family gatherings, some stories were told about these backgrounds, but always only vaguely and usually not by the people affected themselves. As kids, of course, my siblings and I didn't ask for details... As perhaps most kids, I just loved my grandfather (he died when I was ten years old) as much as I loved re-emigrated aunt Hedi (who was actually a great-aunt). Both were funny and warm-hearted, and you could tell – without me being able to name it as a kid – that both of them had been through a lot already. I guess that in thousands of German post-war families, it was a quite similar situation: both former Nazis and Nazi victims were sitting on the same tables, rarely talking about what happened to them or what they did between 1933 and 1945. This, so it seems, was left to the next generations, especially the question of how their stories should be judged in a moral way.

01

For information about Brigitte and Hans see Brigitte Schiffer:
https://www.lexm.uni-hamburg.de/object/lexm_lexperson_00003245; Hans Hickmann: https://www.lexm.uni-hamburg.de/object/lexm_lexperson_00002009, both accessed January 21, 2021.



FIGURE 2: Brigitte Schiffer and friends at a party, Berlin ca. 1932. Unknown photographer (perhaps Hans Hickmann), with kind permission of Rolf Hickmann.



FIGURE 3: Brigitte Schiffer recording musicians at the Siwa Oasis, 1932 or 1933. Photo: Hans Hickmann, with kind permission of Rolf Hickmann.



FIGURE 4: Brigitte Schiffer, Hans Hickmann and unknown companions. Unknown photographer, reproduced with kind permission of Rolf Hickmann.

Brigitte is born in Berlin into a Jewish-German family, but she grows up in Alexandria because her stepfather has a company that sells looms and professional sewing machines in Egypt. As a young woman, she decides to become a composer and moves back to Berlin. She gets to know Hans; both are interested in old music, in the music of distant countries, and in having parties with their fellow students in Hans's apartment (figure 2). Brigitte writes a PhD in ethnomusicology about the Siwa Oasis in the Sahara and how the people there sing, dance, and shout. Twice she goes there with Hans for field research, phonographic recordings with wax cylinders (figure 3) – and because she likes to drive through the desert in a jeep (figure 4). With a melody from Siwa, Brigitte composes a movement for her string quartet and makes the viola sing Siwanese (figure 5). When Brigitte wants to introduce her quartet to her composition class in Berlin in 1934, the concert is cancelled because of threats from Nazi students.

FIGURE 5: The beginning of the second movement of Brigitte Schiffer's string quartet, based on a melody from the Siwa Oasis. The National Library of Israel, Jerusalem (IL-J), Archive Brigitte Schiffer, MUS 0059 B 01.1.

In Germany, migration is a strange thing. I guess, since 1945, the whole topic is, and for a long time will continue to be, inevitably linked to the country's Nazi history. When I started to do research about the return of exiled musicians to Western Germany after the end of World War II, I realised that, in Germany, the field of exile studies – which is explicitly called so, in order to distinguish it from "regular" migration studies – was obviously more than just an ordinary research area. I also realized that the whole concept of "exile studies" always seemed to depend on the fact that this type of migration, the refugees of the Nazi period, was considered to be something very special, not to be compared with all the other migration movements of the 20th century, be it the so-called "guest workers," tens of thousands of whom came to work in the factories of the "economic wonderland" Federal Republic of Germany, or the millions of displaced persons and refugees who moved across the European continent after the end of World War II. However, comparisons of this kind were frowned upon, if not completely unwanted, because although exile studies had to do with the emigrants of the Nazi era, above all it had to do with post-war Germany and how it came to terms with its own past.⁰²

In this area of research, scholars seemed to be looking for historical figures to identify with, and a guilty conscience resonated everywhere. The German exile scholars intended research to function as idealistic compensation or "Wiedergutmachung," a highly problematic German term which means, literally translated, to make up for something, or to make something "good again." But how to make up for the Shoah, and how could the Germans themselves claim to do so? The papers of these scholars were about telling the narratives of victims in order to overcome their own family traumas and complexes, as well as those of their academic disciplines, which had also been driving forces of Nazi thinking and acting.

Following the expulsion and persecution of German-Jewish scholars after 1933, a large number of brilliant minds had left Germany, not only in musicology; entire fields of research had indeed been lost, such as music ethnology. At the same time, many of those who remained had made careers under, or as, Nazis. It was precisely these people who dominated the discipline of musicology until the 1980s, at least in West Germany, and who had been the teachers and PhD supervisors of my older colleagues from musicology who had specialised in exile studies. For a long time, even longer than in other disciplines, hardly anyone had spoken publicly about the Nazi history of German musicology, perhaps because of the cliché that music is universal and per se "apolitical"?

In the meantime a lot of controversial and inspiring literature has been published about this particular question, for example Alaida Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur: Eine Intervention* (München: C.H. Beck, 2013), 123–41; Johanna Frohnhofer, "Pluralisierte Erinnerungsmuster in der deutschen Einwanderungsgesellschaft" in *Soziale Gedächtnisse: Selektivitäten in Erinnerungen an die Zeit des Nationalsozialismus*, edited by Gerd Sebald, René Lehmann, Monika Malinowska, Florian Öchsner, Christian Brunner, and Johanna Frohnhofer (Bielefeld: transcript, 2011), 131–60.



FIGURE 6: Brigitte Schiffer and Hans Hickmann playing baroque music in Egypt, ca. 1935. Unknown photographer, reproduced with kind permission of Rolf Hickmann.



FIGURE 7: Page from the guest book of Brigitte Schiffer's salon in Cairo. Private collection Rolf Hickmann, reproduced with kind permission of the owner.

Together, Hans and Brigitte flee the Nazis to Egypt. They get married – in Cyprus, because in Egypt “mixed marriages” are forbidden by the German consulate. They start up a musical life in Cairo. They found a conservatory, appear on radio shows, play old music under palm trees (figure 6) and run a cultural salon in a house on the Nile (figure 7). They divorce. Hans marries again, converts to Islam, calls himself Hassan, and has two children. Brigitte makes a career; she leads an Egyptian music high school and works in the Ministry of Culture in Cairo. Her idea: tell the people that contemporary Western art music and Arabic music have a lot in common, they just don’t know anything about each other yet. She doesn’t have time to compose anymore. Hans still has time to compose, and he writes a piece called “Les Pyramides” using the lyrics of Jean Moscatelli (figure 8), a member of the Egyptian surrealists movement, founded in 1938 with a manifesto called “long live degenerate art.”⁰³



FIGURE 8: Page from Hans Hickmann’s composition “Les Pyramides.” Archive of the University of the Arts Berlin, Hans Hickmann collection.

Once I became aware that exile and migration studies were so much a part of Germany’s compensation efforts, generally, but also on a personal level for the scholars involved, I tried to avoid any kind of affection for my research topic. I did not want to fall into this trap – as this is how it appeared to me: an emotional as well as an intellectual trap. I would be the objective scholar who was, of course, passionate about his field of research, but who would analyze his material from a distance that I thought was necessary. I was forewarned by articles written by colleagues who criticised previous exile research for repeating certain patterns (such as focusing exclusively on victim narratives or interesting avantgarde artists that had to flee, while ignoring cases that were considered as unsuitable).⁰⁴

03

Sam Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016).

04

See Horst Weber, “Betroffenheit und Aufklärung: Gedanken zur Exilforschung,” in *Musik in der Emigration 1933–1945: Verfolgung, Vertreibung, Rückwirkung*, ed. Horst Weber (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1994), 1–9; Kathrin Massar, *Exil und innere Biographie: Der Komponist Erich Itor Kahn in seinen Briefen* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), 19–25; Florian Scheding, “The Splinter in Your Eye: Uncomfortable Legacies and German Exile Studies,” in *Music and Displacement: Diasporas, Mobilities and Dislocations in Europe and Beyond*, edited by Erik Levi and Florian Scheding (Lanham/MD: Scarecrow, 2010), 119–34.

05

Wolfgang Frei, José Brunner and Constantin Goschler, eds., *Die Praxis der Wiedergutmachung: Geschichte, Erfahrung und Wirkung in Israel* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009).

06

Matthias Pasdzierny, “Ein sonderbares Gefühl [...] eine abgebrochene Karriere in DM ausgedrückt zu sehen: Entschädigungs- und VdN-Akten als musikgeschichtliche Quellen,” in *Archive zur Musikkultur nach 1945: Verzeichnis und Texte*, edited by Antje Kalcher and Dietmar Schenk (München: text + kritik, 2016), 196–204.

Soon, my endeavors bore fruits. For example, together with colleagues I discovered, in a former Nazi-building at Fehrbelliner Platz in Berlin, hundreds of “Entschädigungsakten” (compensation files) of German-Jewish musicians who had to flee from Germany after 1933. The dusty files documented West Germany’s very bureaucratic efforts to financially compensate some of the victim groups of the Nazi period, from the early 1950s on.⁰⁵ They are filled with hair-raising details of the biographies of these people, as well as with physical objects, because victims had to prove their persecution individually. Worn yellow stars fell into my hands, as well as fake IDs from people who fought for the French resistance, auction catalogues from people who were forced to sell their belongings, pictures of lost furniture, dogs and cars, former concert programs and artists’ brochures, lists of instruments, and even scores.⁰⁶ I read endless reports about the misery and suffering of the pogroms, the exile, the concentration camps, people who had been artists and now worked as domestic help or dishwashers, former singers who had to end their career because they couldn’t afford artificial teeth. I saw the photos of these people, even their EEGs, and read psychiatric opinions written by German post-war doctors.

Aus erster Hand



Zu den Quellen!

FIGURE 9: Interview with Hans Hickmann, the artistic director of the label Archiv Produktion. Private collection Matthias Pasdzierny.

A few years later, by the end of the 1950s, Hans divorces again, leaves his family and returns to Germany. He becomes a professor for ethnomusicology in Hamburg and directs hundreds of old music recordings for a German record company (figure 9). His divorced second wife goes to Paris with their children. She has so little money that she has to give them to an orphanage for some time. Hans marries Ellen, one of his students in Hamburg, and they publish many books and do other projects together. They have two children. Suddenly Hans dies from a heart attack during an organ recording in Scotland.

A little later, Brigitte also leaves Egypt, as she doesn't feel comfortable in Cairo anymore. By 1964, she settles in London and becomes a music journalist. She writes hundreds of letters in five languages to her many friends all over the world. Some of her friends are famous composers. Brigitte herself never becomes famous, but she makes an appearance in a Peter Greenaway movie, together with John Cage (figure 10).

I collected the cases of exiled musicians who tried to get support for their return to Germany. They were surprisingly numerous considering that, for a long time, scholars of exile studies had thought that almost no one had returned. All this was extremely interesting for my research, but did it leave me untouched? Did my plan not to let myself get emotionally affected by my research topic work out? Did I actually still want this? At that moment, in the middle of hundreds of compensation files, and in the middle of my PhD, I did not really know. I mostly felt ashamed. Not because I did this research as a German. I did not feel guilty in that sense. Rather, I felt that I was intruding into all these people's private lives. Of course, they all had died a long time ago, but now I was rummaging around in extremely personal things that were definitely none of my business. I found myself thinking very unpleasant thoughts. Perhaps some of these people did not want their victim stories, which had been hidden in these files for decades, to be found and told. Especially not by a German exile researcher like me, a descendant of those who stayed in Germany after 1933 and who had been Nazis themselves to a large extent (like my Nazi grandfather).

At that time, my feelings about my own research were very confusing and contradictory. This was exacerbated by the fact that very different people gathered in the small reading room of the compensation office at Fehrbelliner Platz every day. School classes were being taught Nazi history there (figure 11); family members, some of them very old, who sometimes burst into tears while reading the files of their persecuted relatives; amateur researchers who set up their cameras on tripods, as soon as they had entered, or carried with them scanners and printers in order to load the contents of the files onto their hard drives like fishermen pulling their catch on board.

In the middle of all this, I continued to try to adopt as objective an attitude as possible. The approach as a professional scholar at least seemed to offer me a somewhat secure orientation path that enabled me to sustain the weight of the heavy stuff in these files.



FIGURE 10: John Cage and Brigitte Schiffer on the balcony of her flat in London, ca.1982. Filmstill from Peter Greenaway's "Four American Composers: John Cage" (UK 1983).

FIGURE 11: Panel painting as a remnant of a school excursion to the Amt für Wiedergutmachung at Fehrbelliner Platz, Berlin ca. 2010. Photo © Matthias Pasdzierny.

About 25 years later, a PhD student of music history writes about the return of exiled musicians to Germany after 1945. His supervisor makes him aware of some of Brigitte's letters she had found in an archive, because she was thinking about a possible future book edition. At the same time, the music historian moves to Berlin and gets a job at the university where Hans and Brigitte had studied. He likes Brigitte's letters very much; he can almost hear her voice when reading them. He tries to find out who she was, but because she never really became famous, he finds almost nothing. Only that she was once married to Hans. On the Internet, he comes across an address in London, where one of Hans's relatives might live. It turns out to be the address of Hans's first son, Rolf, the one who was in the orphanage in Paris. It also turns out that Hans's son was Brigitte's beloved godson and her neighbor during her late years in London. Rolf invites the PhD student to London and drives him through his neighborhood in his cabriolet, showing him Elton John's and Robbie Williams's villas – and Brigitte's former apartment. He talks about his sister, who still lives in Paris and has become a renowned psycholinguist. She has more "old stuff" from Hans and Brigitte in her garage, he says.

Sometimes my research led to the return of emigrants' personal archives. This was the case with the archives of some former students of the Universität der Künste in Berlin (UdK), where I work today. Their concerts had been disrupted by Nazi students; they had not been able to finish their studies; they were banned and expelled; and they had no career prospects in Germany because of their Jewish origins. So, they fled from Germany, settled elsewhere, made a living, often took jobs different from what they had planned, though often as part of a musical culture. I brought their stories and work back to Germany and made my own students play the work of these former students. This was not part of a compensation policy; we were just interested in how their music would sound. Would these emigrant students have wanted to let their artistic legacy become a part of the archive of their former university? I couldn't ask them anymore. I realized that trying not to be affected couldn't protect me from getting involved. My engagement with the archival material of the persecuted and displaced Jewish composers and musicians thus confronted me with unexpected ethical questions that I didn't find easy to answer. But it was not only the archival material that started to talk to me in unpredicted ways.

So I (the PhD student) decide to travel to Paris. Hans's daughter Maya is very ill. She shows me her garage. In the garage there is an old, military-style duffle bag (figure 12). She has never opened it; she got it from her mother shortly before she died. Now Maya herself knows that she will die soon and would be very happy to get rid of the duffle bag. She has never truly met her father and has no, or at least no good, memories of him. After my return to Berlin, I bring the bag to the university



FIGURE 12: Opening Hans Hickmann's duffle bag from the Paris archive, 2017. Photo © Matthias Pasdzierny.

archive. Together with the archivist, we empty the bag (figure 13, 14). We salvage the fragile objects, among them numerous glass negatives of photos, but also compositions by Hans and his certificate of conversion to Islam. On the ground, the duffle bag is padded with children's clothes, which must have been those of his two kids from the age shortly before they left Egypt together with their mother. It's in this particular moment that my façade of the professional and objective researcher cracks. Of course, it is because children's lives and stories are involved here; also because at that time my own son would be young enough to wear some of these clothes. But what really shakes me up is to realize that migration stories like the ones I am exploring have at least as many layers – in terms of time, emotions, identification etc. – as the content of this duffle bag. The same people, who, as kids, had worn the clothes on the ground of the bag, gave it to me more than fifty years later. They gave me items that belonged to their own father, whom they barely knew, whom they may have hated, because he had let them down as kids, when he decided to return to Germany. In turn, he was an émigré of the Nazi era, had left behind interesting works and writings and was important for my research because he had decided to return to Germany.

In the end, my own biography as a scholar of exile studies seems to me like a circular movement. At first, I had to distance myself from the generations of researchers before me, something all scholars must do, regardless of their discipline. For a while, this was a fruitful approach for me. At some point, however, my research objects became researched subjects; they began to speak to me. They spoke to me in letters, in personal encounters, in the compositions performed by an even younger generation, my students, who had no problem approaching these works in an emotional way. I do not know exactly what follows from all this. However, it seems to me that, from time to time, it is worthwhile for scholars to ask why they have chosen certain topics. Perhaps it would also be instructive to work on exactly the same research questions with the same material two or three times every twenty or thirty years. Because that's what I feel (as a German with a migration background that is difficult to evaluate): no matter how seemingly objective you work on a topic, you always find yourself breathing down your own neck, with all the memories, feelings, disappointments, expectations, career aspirations, etc. Perhaps it would be good to develop, learn and teach strategies and techniques for each individual, as well as for the humanities as a whole, to disclose this, to make it transparent and in this way a fruitful part of your own research and writing.



FIGURE 13 & 14: Sorting the content of the duffle bag at the archive of the University of the Arts, Berlin 2017. Photo © Matthias Pasdzierny.

"A MODICUM OF HUMANITY": AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHEL GASCO AND PARISA DELSHAD, DIRECTORS OF THE SOUNDS OF HOSPITALITY: MIGRANT MUSICIANS IN EUROPE

Susanne Rieser & Silvia Schultermandl

01

The Sounds of Hospitality: Migrant Musicians in Europe can be watched online at: <https://hostfilm.usales/index.php/music-documentary/>.

Any discussion of the cinematic representation of migration must take into consideration the specifics of the medium. In general, migration documentaries rely on imagery of violent displacements, desperate journeys, and the suffering of millions of people as evidence of an escalating geopolitical, macro-economic, and humanitarian catastrophe. In classic examples such as Gianfranco Rosi's *Fire at Sea* or Ai Weiwei's *Human Flow*, the representation of migrants ranges from emphatic portrayals to exquisite picture book agonies, shot with dazzling drone photography, parading endless streams of stateless and faceless figures for our visual consumption. In this essay, we ask: How can cinematic representation, which is so centrally based on an arrangement where some *watch* and others are *watched*, be combined with the humanitarian aim of overcoming power hierarchies? What aesthetic and narrative devices do films have to bridge the gap between "them" and "us"? In Parisa Delshad and Michel Gasco's *The Sounds of Hospitality*, the film's aesthetics offer a compelling response to the power-of-the-gaze by putting *migration subjectivities* at its center.

The Sounds of Hospitality (2020) grew out of the ERASMUS+ project "HostFilm: Hospitality in European Film." The project applies theories of hospitality (ancient and modern) to contemporary migration film in an effort to better understand film's potential to challenge and counter prevalent discourses about migration. Its three "academic products," the documentary *The Sounds of Hospitality*, a MOOC on Hospitality as a Critical Idiom, and an archive of film analyses, are open-access resources designed to facilitate critical conversations about contemporary phenomena of migration in Europe.⁰¹

The film portrays six musicians in five individual chapters: Jawa Manla from Syria, now in Amsterdam, Nizar Rohana from Palestine, now in Utrecht, Sulaiman Haqpana and Ajmair Nikzad both from Afghanistan, now in London, Babak Kamgar from Iran, now in Madrid, and Linda al-Ahmad from Syria, also now in Madrid. We listen to the perspectives of the migrant musicians and witness their complex, creative, and cosmopolitan lifestyles.

The musicians are framed in two settings: as individuals, speaking from the interior of their homes, and as professionals, practicing and performing. The filmmakers do not have us "follow" their whereabouts or watch them "from above" or "from behind," nor do they frame and extend their stories in voice-over mode. Instead, the camera work "grounds them in space" by having them fill the frame and talk "to us" at eye level. Early childhood flashbacks to the musicians' places of origin reveal their various levels of professional training – honing their craft in conservatories with master musicians – or, in one case, as an autodidact, secretly practicing her voice by singing into the soundscape of an empty washing machine. The filmmakers present the musical performances in a way that allows us to perceive how cultural production in Europe has become enriched through immigrants' contributions.

A striking quality of the film is the usage of the metaphorical effects of motion and stillness. In the interview scenes, the film portrays the musicians in their homes in a composed, almost meditative

style. However, the transitions between the chapters bustle with the motion of the musicians' adopted cities: buses, metros, and streetcars cut across busy streets and stations. This imagery of motion and transportation evokes the movement of migration; images of tourist boats on water alleys connote sea passage. Yet, when the film cuts to one of the musicians, this restlessness comes to a halt, and we feel they have found their space: they are here to stay, if only/not only in the film.

Silvia: In Europe, we are currently witnessing, among other crises, the proliferation of narratives that connect migration to crime and the overloading of the social. Such narratives paint a very monolithic and biased picture of migration. Your documentary challenges these existing narratives. How did the concept of hospitality become a central theme in your film?

Parisa: *The Sounds of Hospitality* responds to something that we experience every day. Even though it may come out like a personal experience, a personal concern as an immigrant. Michel and I are migrant musicians, too. Also, we suddenly started receiving all these friends he had made out there in Syria and at our home in Spain.

Michel: I lived in Syria for two years. After the war broke out, I also lived in Iran and in Turkey. All these countries are famous for their hospitality. The Bedouins have this song that we recorded about two conflicting tribes and the story of a man who gets lost and has to ask for shelter from his worst enemy. And this person must follow the ancient laws, according to which he has to host and take care of the other for a maximum period of one year.

Parisa: And finally, back in Europe, we started this project and we had a chance to reciprocate hospitality.

Susanne: As documentarians, you did not choose to make the film from an outsider or from some superior position, but from an insider position. *The Sounds of Hospitality* is not documenting "aliens" but fellow musicians, partner musicians.

Michel: Exactly. Parisa is Iranian and she's no outsider. It was a main concern for us to portray these musicians in a way that they feel comfortable with, as they are tired of being represented by a kind of sensationalist journalism that you often come across in Europe since the war has broken out. So, when they learn about Parisa being Iranian and me having been an immigrant myself – but in the Middle East – working, studying and playing their music and studying their language, they can relate.

Silvia: The various musicians you interviewed represent a wide range of migration narratives in terms of where they are from and where they are now. What was your thinking behind that?

Parisa: We recently received this question from an audience member at a webinar. "Why these people and not those other people;" why talk only about immigrants from Syria and Afghanistan? Of course, we are aware of other immigrants, especially in my country of origin, Iran. But we have built these contacts: Michel has been studying Afghan and Arabic music and we have those personal connections. It reflects a personal experience.

Michel: And musically speaking, it is now Middle Eastern music that is shaping and changing the musicscape in Europe. With Latin America, I, as a Spaniard, feel we have such a similar musical culture and we have been listening to Latin American music for such a long time, and everyone in Europe has been familiar with Latin Jazz, Cuban music, or Tango for at least forty years. All these migrants from Latin America keep bringing wonderful things, but they are not new, and by now their music is considered Western even if it comes straight from Peru!

Parisa: We have influences also from African countries – music has traveled with the slave ships from Africa to the US. There at the plantations, the blues was born, and it has traveled from there to rock music and has become "Western." Although it is all connected to migration and forced migration from Africa, it is absolutely familiar to the ears of European people.

Michel: From the 1970s onwards, big names of African music were living in Paris or in London, and we have become accustomed to it for half a century now. In theory of music, African music is very close to European music in terms of music scales and rhythms whereas Middle Eastern music is something very different and not as easy to understand for European audiences. But because of migration from the Middle East, we have this lively new mixture so it's very interesting from a music and from a hospitality point of view. Still, there are very few names of Arab musicians that are as well-known as African or Latin American migrant musicians in Europe.

Susanne: Some recent migration films focus a lot on aestheticizing migration. For instance, Chinese artist Ai Weiwei uses endless supplies of refugees as geometric or color "pattern" in his highly stylized mise-en-scène: they seem to come from everywhere, their migration seem so pointless, it's just about the artist's

aesthetics. Your camerawork, when you portray these highly competent and radically individual people, is entirely different – each of them comes across as set as a gemstone.

Parisa: Film is representation, and the politics of representation matter. I can imagine that immigrants or refugees often are assigned the role of the informant, about their country of origin, its political situation, their cultural difference. It was therefore important to us to emphasize the communalities and the shared human experience, a modicum of humanity. For instance, we decided against asking them about their immigration history. Or, we remain largely silent throughout the film so as to privilege their stories. Of course, we moderated and choreographed the interviews, but we remain in the background and the focus is on them, without the typical interviewer-interviewee set-up.

Susanne: Staying on the topic of social media: your documentary can be accessed through YouTube. Is YouTube the main channel of distribution for your film? Where else is it being shown?

Michel: Because this is academic research, it cannot be distributed on or sold to a TV station. Besides, on YouTube, everyone can see it for free. We also shared it with groups who would be interested in music and migration, especially research groups in ethnomusicology. In addition, Casa Árabe in Madrid put the link on their website for refugee week. Other institutions as well: for instance, the Library of Arabic Studies in Granada, and Centro de Estudios de Asia y África de Mexico.

Silvia: Besides the positive feedback you have received, I wonder if there are also less favorable audiences. Have you received comments that challenge the notion of hospitality you portray?

Michel: The responses have been mostly positive...

Parisa: ...but there are occasional comments from the far-right. We have the feeling that this is from people who feel challenged by the fact that our musicians shatter their stereotypes. And that they probably realize their ignorance about Syrian, Palestinian, or Afghan culture. And people don't like finding out that they are ignorant.

Susanne: Did you have a particular audience in mind or did you intend to make a film for a maximum audience?

Michel: We actually have somewhat different ideas about this: For me, it was maximum audience.



Top: Sulaiman Haqpana and Ajmair Nikzad. Film still from *The Sounds of Hospitality*, with the friendly permission of Parisa Delshad and Michel Gasco.

Bottom: Nizar Rohana. Film still from *The Sounds of Hospitality*, with the friendly permission of Parisa Delshad and Michel Gasco.

Parisa: For me, it was the musicians we interviewed and whether they would feel comfortable with the film.

Michel: But we both wanted to make sure to avoid Orientalist stereotypes or turn them into spectacles.

Parisa: We are therefore really happy with the feedback we received from the musicians themselves, especially Linda and Nizar. When we talked to them, we also touched on the difficult subject that they have to be careful about their reputation back home as well. They were a bit hesitant in the beginning. And we agreed that they would get to see the film before its release. We have an ethics of responsibility, and that also determined our selection of their statements we showed in the film. So overall, our focus was on them.

Susanne: I have a question about the visual iconography of your film: instead of showing images of famous sites from the different cities in which the musicians live (Madrid, Amsterdam, Utrecht, and London), you show streets, and all those modes of transportation. And waterways, boats and bridges. This foregrounds the aspect of mobility. Mobility is the leitmotif of migration! Similarly, you show pharmacies and the green cross flashing, sometimes even with the ticker "services provided" for emphasis. Could you comment on that?

Michel: We are all moving, even if people don't actively think about it. And with mobility also comes the necessity to check in on loved ones, to connect to one's roots.

Parisa: And related to what you were saying before about Ai Weiwei: we wanted to show people who are, of course, musician refugees doing other things besides being refugees, in an attempt to counter negative images that circulate. For instance, we did not want to show images of refugee camps because the musicians we have selected are professionals. As far as their instruments, even though they are all traditional musicians playing traditional instruments typical for the Middle East, many of them play Western music on Western instruments. The musicians we portray are not stuck in history; they play traditional music but in a contemporary way. They are living in the moment, they're composing, they are transforming these experiences. Like what Nizar from Palestine was saying – that he was looking for new experiences, playing with different people, and using all these elements to make his own music. These musicians have overcome some hardships and they know what they want to say. For instance, Jawa lived in refugee camps for a period of time, but the interview focuses on her music and how she is living her music. The past is the past, but what is the now? And what are the expectations towards migrant

musicians? Like Nizar says, audiences often expect something more "exotic," not traditional music played on modern instruments, or modern music altogether. We wanted to overcome this very Orientalist trope which suggests that images can be fixed in time.

Susanne: I'd like to address gender aspects in *The Sounds of Hospitality*. You portray two male musicians from Afghanistan living in London, who report on travelling back to Afghanistan and how they felt a sense of belonging to their place of origin – belonging to the countryside because they can touch a tree, any tree, even if it belongs to someone else – and they could not do that in the UK. This particular sense of belonging and being part of a country as experienced by Sulaiman and Ajmair is actually very different from what Linda, the singer from Syria, recounts – she, too, talks about her place of origin in a very similar manner, about experiencing warmth and generosity, but in the opposite setting: not in public, but inside the house, preparing coffee for guests in the privacy of her family's home. And when we learn that, as a child, she sang into the drum of the washing machine, with its particular echo soundscape, because she was supposed to be modest and not make her voice heard, her experience is very different from that of the male musicians. But then the film has her voice – which is a very impressive and powerful voice – thundering over this public square in Madrid – what was your intention there?

Parisa: When it comes to hospitality and space, we think it is quite a universal problem that the public space is, in general, less hospitable towards women, and, therefore, women are thought of as belonging to the home rather than outside. However, there are two issues here: the first one is that, yes, it is true that in the case of Afghanistan, this dichotomy between outside and inside marks the feminine/masculine spaces; but in Syria, a great number of government employees, for example, were women, and therefore a bigger space is carved out by women and for women in Syria, which makes the comparison a bit difficult.

Silvia: Talking to you has been such a rich and beautiful experience for us. Is there something that you would have expected us to ask you that we didn't?

Michel: We have this expression: Music is the international language. This is so true – when we were working on this film about music in Syria, music opened doors that

would have never opened if I was just a normal tourist or working in a company. I was able to enter the homes of all the different ethnic and religious groups and there was this respect that I was not there to judge anybody. I was there to learn their music, so they felt respected, and I didn't come across like some European tourist. Instead, there were these wonderful moments with all of them just playing music in Iran, or the same with the Afghan musicians. Music creates this space that is really pure and really open to connect us, because I may not understand the lyrics, but I can feel the meaning of the music and they can feel me responding. And this is more than a slogan, really. It is something that all these doors opened for me.

Parisa: It is absolutely inclusive because music is the universal language, whereas human language in its very nature is exclusive. It needs a speaker and a receiver and if you don't understand the language, there is no communication. But with music – everybody can relate to it – and even though I don't speak the language, I just take up my instrument and respond to what someone is offering...

Michel: So, yeah, music is the answer... to all of our problems.

Susanne: Filmmaking doesn't open doors that easily; cameras are often perceived as intrusive and "one way." Is that why, in *The Sounds of Hospitality*, film follows music?

Michel: Yes! No doubt, as musicians, we knew each other before we went there with the camera. Sometimes, the main purpose was not making a film, but learning the music. So, when I took the camera, the camera was not a problem anymore. Because it would take quite some time to break the ice, but after playing music with them for some time, we were not being foreign to each other; we became kin.



Top: Jawa Manla. Film still from *The Sounds of Hospitality*, with the friendly permission of Parisa Delshad and Michel Gasco.

Bottom: Babak Kamgar. Film still from *The Sounds of Hospitality*, with the friendly permission of Parisa Delshad and Michel Gasco.

FIGURATIONS OF HOMECOMING: THINKING MIGRATION THROUGH 1970s YEŞİLÇAM CINEMA



FIGURE 1: The remigration to the protagonist's home village is shown via shots of different means of transportation. *Öfkenin Bedeli* (*The Price of Anger*, 1975).

For Turkish migrant workers in the 20th century, migration was not a uni-directional movement from country of origin to receiving country. Migration patterns involved multiple movements between villages and urban centers, Turkey, and European nations. So-called "guest workers" from Turkey migrated to Germany from the 1960s onwards, returning only a few years later. Some would return again to Germany for another two years. Migration itself was nothing unusual in Turkey: in the course of industrial developments and movements from the countryside to the cities, internal migration has been a driving force in social demographics since the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. While it took 28 years after the labor recruitment agreement between Turkey and Germany for the very first social-realist film on migration to be released (Şerif Gören's *Almanya Aci Vatan/Germany Bitter Home*, 1979), the subject appeared frequently in the popular Yeşilçam films of the 1960s and 1970s.

The Turkish Yeşilçam cinema owes its name to Yeşilçam Caddesi (Street), where most of the film producers were based at that time. The films, with their subgenres of melodrama, action, thrillers, superhero films and comedies, were popular, and they have an enduring legacy in Turkish popular culture. Many of the films are still broadcast on Turkish television and enjoy cult status. Some film scholars argue that Turkish television series, which are currently distributed all over the world, owe their success to Yeşilçam cinema, and share many similarities with the Yeşilçam phase.⁰¹ In this essay, I argue that the Yeşilçam films offer insight into the process of transnational migration between Turkey and Germany, particularly from the point of view of those who stayed at home. I contend that the Yeşilçam films demand a critical lens that considers both the outgoing process of emigration and the incoming process of immigration.

My essay focuses on Yeşilçam films in which the figure of the emigrant plays a major role in scenes of homecoming.⁰² In the first section, I refer to scenes which visually contribute to a process of othering of the migrant; the second section considers scenes that emphasize the role of those left behind in the emigrant's home community. In scenes of homecoming, the films depict the moment of (re-)encounter between the ones who stayed at home and the ones who left as a crisis in which the figuration of absence creates a mutual estrangement.

An/other Migrant

Once emigrants have left their communities of origin, they disrupt the ordering systems of the nation state and the field of the sensorial – they are no longer visible to their community. Yet their traces linger in the places where they are no longer. The result is a dialectic of presence and absence, of visibility and invisibility, and the oscillation between these poles. Presence and visibility are as precarious as absence and invisibility – the emigrant can always reappear and disappear again. To some extent, however, the films of the Yeşilçam cinema seem to work against the disruption and instability of the migrant by presenting a coherent narration, making movements visible and less ambiguous.

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Savaş Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey: A New Critical History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Melis Behlil, "Close Encounters? Contemporary Turkish Television and Cinema," *Wide Screen* 2, no.2 (2010): 1-14. <http://widescreenjournal.org/index.php/journal/article/download/25/28>, accessed December 19, 2020.

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For a comprehensive analysis of the figure of the migrant in the Yeşilçam cinema, see Ömer Alkin, *Die visuelle Kultur der Migration: Geschichte, Ästhetik und Polyvalenzierung des Migrationskinos* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2019).

In *Öfkenin Bedeli* (*The Price of Anger*, 1975), director Mehmet Aslan shows us an emigrant's minute-long journey to his village through images of transport, from the train to the ship, to the bus and on foot (figure 1). The audience thus participates in the protagonist's journey as a migrant. Several other films use similar strategies to make migration visible. In the beginning of *Kara Toprak* (*Black Earth*, dir. Mehmet Dinler, 1973) and *Baldız* (*Sister-in-Law*, dir. Temel Gürsu, 1975), for example, scenes in which the migrant's parents talk about their son are parallelized with shots in which he can be seen driving home to his village.

The scenes emphasize the gap between the home community's expectations around the returnee and the reality of his return. Dialogue between characters back home reveals their assumption that he will return unchanged by his time overseas. Meanwhile, close-ups of the protagonist driving home feature symbols of a socio-economic rise, for example a wristwatch, a modern hat, fancy clothes and, of course, a car. While the close-ups speak to a process of change that has already occurred and thus lies in the past, the camera's zooming back to capture the car moving through the landscape conversely symbolizes a present and ongoing sense of travelling and permanent movement. Indeed, our gaze remains on the landscape while the migrant in his car disappears into it.

In *Baldız*, a close-up shows the protagonist's hand pushing a cassette into the tape deck. The Turkish pop song "İkimiz bir Fidanız /We Are Both a Seedling" sung by Tüley Özer, starts to play. The camera then zooms out and we watch the yellow BMW from the outside. We have moved from the internal perspective of the migrant, happily driving his gaudy car, to an external perspective (figure 2). All of the mentioned films play with this configuration of being close and far away (the panorama shot of the landscape where the vehicle of the migrant disappears in the landscape). Why do the films need this marking of the emigrant as someone whose transformation can be seen via his outward appearance? Why is it necessary to show the ride to the village? Why do we need this tension between closeness and distance?

By focusing on what is visible, the films also hint to what is *not* visible and, more interestingly, how someone or something becomes invisible. When we see how the car of the migrant disappears in the landscape, or when we observe as a distant viewer some means of transportation (trains, ships, cars), we are positioned in such a way that our gaze becomes impersonal, as if we were a neutral observer. Such a distant view separates us from the view of the person within these vehicles. What remains hidden to viewers is whether or not the migrant's inner self has changed. Has he internalized a Western way of life and abandoned the traditions of the village? Has he dedicated himself to a sinful lifestyle with "blonde women," a concern often expressed by the parents or fiancées back home? Each film answers this question differently. Sometimes, the migrant returns as a casanova (*Baldız*), or as a strong man who resisted the seductions of the West and fights an evil feudal lord (*Öfkenin Bedeli*; *Vahşi Arzu/Wild Desire*, dir. Yavuz Figenli, 1972).

What the films discussed here have in common is the attempt to fix the migrant as someone who has become other because he was in *another* place (migration), and, thus, to make us believe that migrating means becoming someone different. As migration studies have argued, the figure of the migrant is always based on the attribution of an otherness that is informed by constructions of ethno-national cultural differences.⁶³ The construction of ethno-national cultural difference relies on the assumption of an existing set of stable ethno-national cultural traits that belong to stable nation-states. Of course, such stability is imaginary. By exposing the false spatio-temporal stability of the nation, migration creates a "crisis" for those who rely on fixed national reference systems. From this point of view, a migrant is an agent of unwelcome disruption, misconfigured to the culture, space and time of the nation – he appears to be the wrong person in the wrong place. Seen from a different point of view, a migrant embodies and enacts hybridity by intermingling local practices of the space they used to inhabit with the given cultural context in which they now live. By trying to stabilize the instable process of migration, these films refer to two strategies: marking the migrant via his outward appearance and representing the act of travelling, especially showing the car ride and the migrant's homecoming as someone who has changed, as the main process of migration.

Absence and Homecoming: The Crises of Alienation

Many Yeşilçam films essentialize migration, suggesting that the emigrant's spatial absence has changed them totally as a person. Thus, they depict the moment of re-encounter between the migrant and his community as a crisis – the experiences and expectations of the emigrants and the home group do not seem to correspond, creating a sense of strangeness and/or extended absence. Not only is the person who returns no longer the same, but the social dynamics within the home community have also changed over time. In terms of camera technology, Yeşilçam cinema celebrates, almost fetishistically, the crisis resulting from this alienation. Often, zooming in and out, as well as panning shots, accentuate the external changes to the homecomer's appearance.

Recounting the story of a woman left alone in an Anatolian village, the film *Dönüş* (*The Return*, 1972) by Türkan Şoray (a popular actress, who also played the lead role in the film) is one of the first Turkish films to deal substantively with the theme of emigration. The film follows the story of Gülcen, who discovers that her husband İbrahim, a migrant worker, has married in Germany and had a child with a German woman. *Dönüş* shows how Gülcen sets herself up for tragedy by building up expectations around her husband's return and projecting her own romanticized version of İbrahim, crafted out of loneliness, onto the actual, flawed man. At the same time she suffers from the brutality of the feudal lord who tortures her by burning the land

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Maria do Mar Castro Varela and Paul Mecheril, "Grenze und Bewegung: Migrationswissenschaftliche Klärungen," in *Bachelor/Master: Migrationspädagogik*, ed. Paul Mecheril et al. (Weinheim, Basel: Beltz, 2010), 23–53.

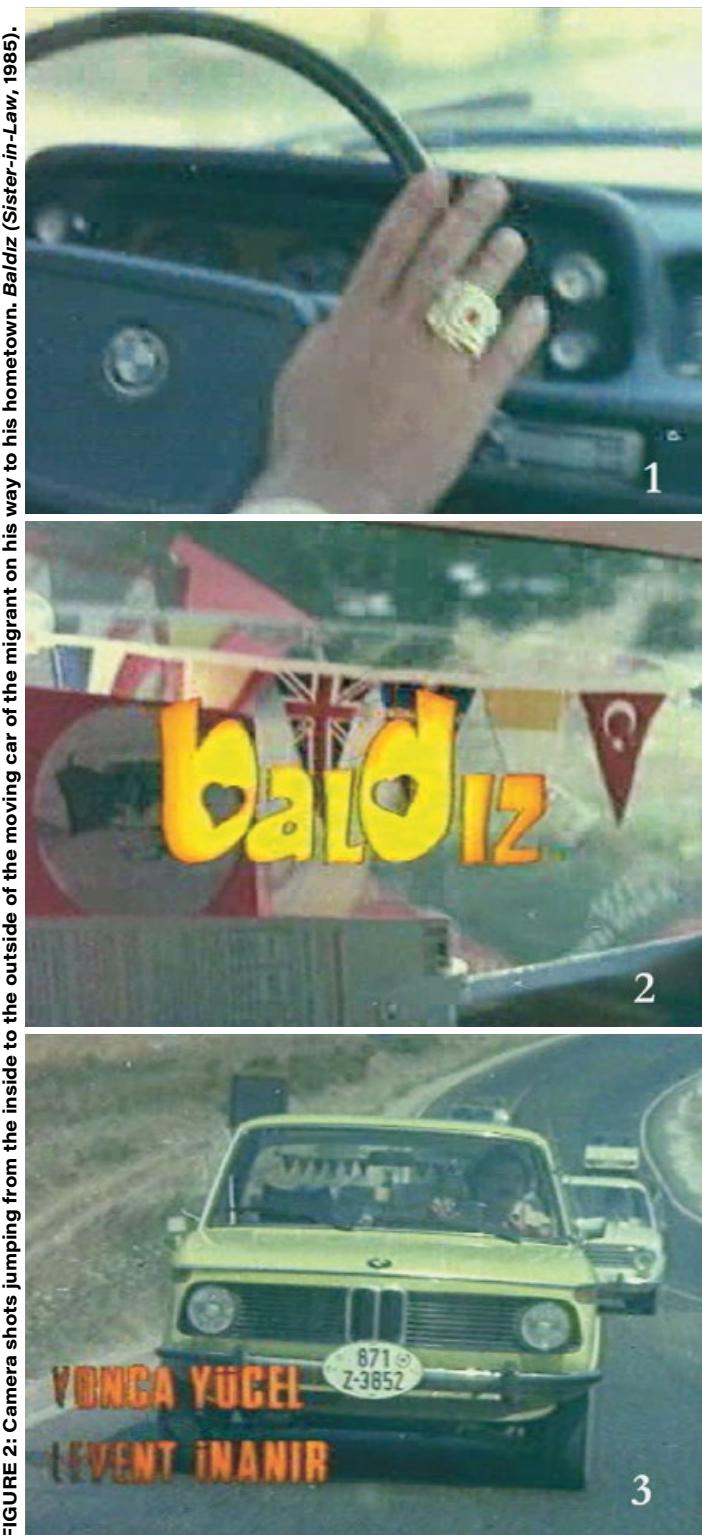


FIGURE 2: Camera shots jumping from the inside to the outside of the moving car of the migrant on his way to his hometown. *Baldız* (Sister-in-Law, 1985).

and killing her baby, so that she ends up losing her husband, the land that she owned, and her baby. The melodramatic plot is emblematic of the genre, which builds its emotional intensity around the expectations of those left behind in Anatolian villages.

By dramatizing the tragedy of *Gülcan*, the film shows how the processes of migration and return can burst social structures at home. *Gülcan* does not at first recognize her husband İbrahim when he surprisingly returns. When *Gülcan* sees him, she wants to hug him and throws away the baskets she was carrying, but then is somehow confused by the outward appearance of the man standing in front of her. She walks around him while we see İbrahim with outstretched arms from an over-the-shoulder shot perspective. The camera follows *Gülcan* until she has walked completely around him. She screams and lays her hands on her face to cover it from İbrahim's gaze; he seems to have become a stranger to her. The camera merges with *Gülcan*'s gaze – we, too, are viewing İbrahim from behind partially covered eyes. Shot from between her fingers, we are aligned not only with *Gülcan*'s gaze, but also her sense of shame as she tries to unsee the details of his appearance that mark her husband as different from whom he used to be (figure 3). These are modern objects coming from the West – a Fedora, a wristwatch, a garish tie, a portable camera. By presenting the objects on the body of the migrant that make him different from the people in the village, the film contributes to the *Deutschländer* stereotype, a pejorative term still used today by Turkish people to describe migrants to Germany.

Dönüş is but one of several subsequent *Yeşilçam* films in which the homecoming plot turns on the dissonance between expectation and reality. Other examples include *Öfkenin Bedeli*, *Almanya'da Bir Türk Kızı* (*A Turkish Girl in Germany*, 1974) by Oksal Pekmezoğlu, the classical comedy *Davaro* (1981) by Kartal Tibet with the iconic comedian Kemal Sunal in the lead role,⁰⁴ and the literary adaptation of *Mercedes Mon Amour* (1992) by Tunç Okan. *Mercedes Mon Amour* is a road trip movie about a garbage collector called Bayram, who wants to visit his home village with his brand-new yellow Mercedes (he calls the car *bal kızı*, "honey girl"). He wants the villagers to celebrate his economic success. At the end of the film it turns out that his village became an archaeological site. There is no one left. His former love Kezban married and went away with her children, too.

In the romantic melodrama *Almanya'da Bir Türk Kızı*, the moment when the returnee gets off the bus is staged with about 50 shots and about 15 zoom-ins and -outs: as soon as the bus with the German tourists arrives, our gaze is permanently thrown between the entrance of the bus where Murat, the migrant, steps out, and the faces of the family waiting for him, his mother, his father, and his wife Zeynep. Murat's red shirt and his red cap shock those at home, whose gaze is constantly thrown back onto the bus. Having moved socially up, he seems to have incorporated Western "liberal" values.

In other *Yeşilçam* films, the films portray the tensions between expectations and the actual return by changes in how the village understands the relationship between the returnee and the commu-

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Kemal Sunal (1944–2000) was the most prominent actor in Turkey. His films have cult status. With regard to their social and popular status, his films can be compared to the films of Louis de Funès, or the movies of Bud Spencer and Terence Hill.

nity. In films such as *Kara Toprak*, or *Baldız*, the villagers often imagine the returnee as a savior who is supposed to rescue the village from an evil feudal lord by using the economic power acquired abroad to pay the villagers' debts. Although life abroad has allowed them to accrue some (relative) wealth, the psycho-emotional strain of strangeness and the severity of the work to be done create obstacles for these would-be saviors.

In *Davaro*, for example, a satiric comedy about the archaic tradition of blood feud, the villagers gather at the entrance of the village in order to welcome the returning migrant. As Memo, the migrant, had previously sent a photograph to his fiancée showing him in front of a Mercedes, the whole village expects him to arrive with such a car. As the crowd is waiting for Memo to arrive, he returns in a dilapidated horse-drawn carriage instead of a Mercedes. He tries to explain to them that he was employed illegally and that he could hardly collect the bride price for his fiancée, Cano. However, his future father-in-law is very disappointed in him, as are the other villagers, who leave the scene disillusioned and deflated.

Öfkenin Bedeli is one of the few examples from the early 1970s which shows a broken figure of the emigrant for the sake of presenting a harsh melodrama and challenging the audience's sense of justice. When Ali returns from Germany, he recognizes that his friend Yusuf has stolen his flock of sheep while he was in Germany. Yusuf also became the *ağa* (feudal lord). The film shows at an early stage that Yusuf has also destroyed the lives of other villagers who owe the brutal landlord money and, thus, their lives. Ali is left with nothing more than the little amount of money he saved in Germany, and Yusuf's attempts to even take Ali's fiancée add insult to injury. Yusuf uses his financial and institutional power, i.e. his connection to the police, to destroy Ali's life.

Conclusion

Depicting migration as involving both departure and homecoming, *Yeşilçam* cinema effectively portrays how these movements affect the people who stay behind in their village or hometown. By focusing on the point of view of the home community, some of the mentioned films from the *Yeşilçam* era have effectively harnessed the emotional ripple effects of migration. They highlight that migration always affects a non-migrating social network and must be understood as involving a complex and dynamic socio-spatial and spatio-temporal network, rather than simply as the movement of individuals or groups from one place to another. At the same time, the films remind us that homecoming is a very specific form of migration and, indeed, a fundamental social event. While showing the different implications this may have, the examples discussed here emphasize the contrast between expectations and reality that surface in moments of homecoming.

FIGURE 3: Gülcen cannot recognize her returning husband because he has changed too much. After identifying the things on his body that make him different, she recognizes and hugs him. *Dönuş* (*The Return*, 1972).



BILINGUAL FEELINGS

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Maybe today you will do "something slightly unusual"? Take a walk by a lake, unearth a mastodon tusk, get trapped in an elevator, have your card swallowed by an ATM, open the door and discover your lost son (who happens to be your age), stare in the eye of a whale, befriend a Poe impersonator on the airport shuttle, see a clown riding a unicycle through the campus?

Favorite color? Blue (green). Favorite season? Autumn (spring). Wrote poems since the age of nine. Avoided crowds. Hated trees, their pathetic cries. Hated language. Sought obscurity in the same way other people seek fame. (*Her name misspelled on her tombstone . . .*)

Ideas came to him easily, like pieces of luggage on the conveyor belt. You could recognize him from a distance by his stooping shoulders. "It's to the other man, to Borges, that things happen." Lost a 5,000-page manuscript while changing trains (planes) . . . Poured his entire life into that little book!

"The element of surprise is what I look for when I'm writing" (Naipaul). But how to satisfy the clicking public?

Bilingual feelings . . . It's never about the right word; it's about the next word. (His accent suddenly thickened.)

It's about being at home in neither language. (It's never about language; read Nicanor Parra's "Último Poema.")

Slips of the tongue. Speech overheard. The ineffability *topos*.

A shower or two a day.

My body demands that I do something with it (start tweeting condolences). I open the curtains to a heavy-lidded morning ("Nice knowing you!"). I sit down to my last meal (a chicken that, like me, has had a good life).

Please do not come to my funeral. Please donate my organs to the person who has been patiently waiting for them.

In his diary, every line neatly blacked out.

In those years, I'd always carry with me a copy of Badiou's *The Century*. Also Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*, Hardt and Negri's *Empire* and *Multitude*, Agamben's *State of Exception*, Mouffe's *The Democratic Paradox*. Also books by Harvey ("unreconstructed Marxist") and Arrighi ("never looked too healthy"). Also *The Essential Žižek*.

158 With stacks of political theory under each arm, I felt like a superhero in a body armor.

Blood and soil. Language and soil. The most expressive part of you is your face, followed by your thumbs with opposable joints. The driest part of you are the tips of your elbows. A common side effect of crying is feeling a lump in the throat, otherwise known as "globus sensation."

Tears and laughter. *Weird English*. Air Malaysia. Oh yes, and "my constant compulsion to read and write" (*Austerlitz*). I'm sorry I'm such a poor correspondent . . . From the window, I see a plane flying perpendicular to mine. I'm a citizen of the country in which I'll die.

Something lives in my house. As soon as I open my eyes, the beast leaps at me. As soon as I close them, I confront a potential trauma. "If I don't recognize the number, I don't answer my phone." In my neighborhood, even a baseball bat can serve as a weapon.

If you see something, say something. During a trip to the dunes, a young couple asked me to take a picture of them. At the movie theater, I spotted a man with a fake beard and video-recording sunglasses. At the airport, a stranger handed me a small package.

My left hand grasps my right hand in a sudden fit of sympathy. Lyricism in spite of itself!

Words to no one in particular: a hand wave, a gesture. "Unseen reality apprehended by consciousness." The return of the forgotten. Daydreaming. The mysterious blue (glaucous?) light you never see at four o'clock in the morning.

But inspiration is just a matter of chemical imbalances in your brain! After all, "I" is just a grammatical convention.

The first sentence of Mairéad Byrne's bio in *The Best of (What's Left of) Heaven* (Publishing Genius, 2010): "Mairéad Byrne emigrated from Ireland to the United States in 1994, for poetry."

Anne lives in Warsaw. Mark lives in New York City. Another Mark lives just outside of New York City. Dawn lives in Chicago. Richard lives in Baltimore. Sean lives in Venezuela, modestly. My parents live in Connecticut suburbs. (Genes and culture.)

Wallace Stevens found Hartford ordinary, left it poetic. Peter lives in Florida. John Travolta also lives in Florida. For the last two years, I've been spending a lot of time in hotel rooms. Justin wants to retire in Marfa (and he's only thirty-five!)

The old man sleeps in his car. The cab driver is from Ukraine, not Russia. Joe, with an eye tattoo on his neck, lives in the park. Chelsea suffers from a degenerative disease that completely disables the body while leaving the mind intact.

Shame lives on the eyelids. The future lives in the present. Dorothy A. Murphy currently resides at Cedar Grove Cemetery in Williamsburg, Virginia. (*Virginia is for Lovers*.) The blind Chinese activist lives in Washington, D.C.

Bobby lives inside another person's body. Animals live in the moment. (Harry hides in the closet.) Americans live in the future. Philosophers live in the clouds. Cosmopolitans, as the name indicates, live in the cosmos.

As soon as she entered the plane, she switched to a different language.

XPERIAL

CROSSING FORMATIONS

Salma Ahmad Caller

About Crossing Formations

CROSSING FORMATIONS

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*crossings ~ places that lead to detractions, erasures, additions, multiplications, intensifications, conflict, dialogue, confusion, departures, crossing over, moving past, crossed, star-crossed, cross-eyed, at the sign of the cross, crossroads ...

In 2020 following the death of my mother Jean Jameela Ghorab, during the first Covid lockdown, I spent the summer months sorting and clearing my parents' home, including all my father's possessions there since his death in 1996. As part of this process I began to collect and curate old photo-graphs, books and objects that seemed to be auratic, embodying the journeys of my parents across East and West – Egyptian father and English/British mother, from Cairo to Oxford and from Oxford to Cairo, and my own journeys with them, from Mosul in Iraq, to Kano in Nigeria, and from there to Jeddah and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, finally landing in the UK in 1990. The oddest of things survive. Buttons, marbles, feathers, newspaper cuttings, lace doilies, beads ... all amulets of a kind, inscribed within their materiality the energies and residues of their owners, mingling with my grief and sense of loss, and my joy of rediscovery.

I am fascinated by what happens when cultures/cultural-political-familial hierarchies cross borders within the private space of family, home, parents and selfhood. The interactions of power/powerlessness that go unnoticed, manifest in the quotidian. In those intangible personal spaces of memory, trauma, bodily senses, the imaginary, the fictional, the emotional and psychological is where the objects that I photographed really live.

Crossing Formations is a performative text/image work structured to create movement. I wanted to create a piece that involved more than reading a text and looking at images. One requiring effort and play, a somewhat mind-blowing enigmatic identity game, where what is or was 'real' and physical has dissolved into the body of memory. A bewildering network of correspondences and juxtapositions, where the viewer/reader/performer is compelled to dance about back and forth, matching image tales to objects, wholes to parts, where all wholes are in fact still parts.

As part of trying to break everything up and create the desired movement/fragmentation, Jennifer Reimer and I worked closely together over intense summer weeks, rearranging the way texts flowed or interacted with images and each other. The texts and images are fragmented fragments that are part of a cyclical whole, an ouroboros, that must keep falling apart, dissolving and reforming, creating crossings and new formations of meanings and connections that are always flowing. Never still, complete or solid. Porous and multiple. Text and image merge. The work consists of Prologue: On Memory-body, edited and arranged as lyric prose by Jennifer Reimer, an Epilogue: On Cross-generational Memory, that is a short prose text, and ten composite images that are The Crossing Tales: The Lady & the Moor; Mirror Flower, Water Moon; The Pink Slipper; Wheel of Becoming; Hemimetabolys: The Nymph; Smoke & Mirrors; Golden Snare; Tear in the Gap;

Legend of Feathershell; De Musica Mundana: the Fifth Element. And finally at the end you can find the complete The Crossing Inventory (of the things and their stories).

From Jennifer: I worked intuitively with Salma's language, guided by the conceptual frames of collage, crossings, networks, catalogues, distances across space & time, confluences and disruptions ~ In "aerating" the Prologue, I looked for ways to connect meaning to material – the space of the page ~ But I also looked for ways to open multiple meanings by splitting syntax that facilitated recombinations/ altered distributions of words/phrases ~ became a typographical equivalent for a kind of poetic spacetime ~ flow and wave across space(s), a pause that is also a tricky, writhing connection across time ~ In the same way that Salma works collage against catalogue, the decolonising dynamic and hybrid against the static colonial inventory and accounting of/for, I stacked and boxed words alongside a diasporic dispersal across white space ~ caught between the urgency to tell and the limits of narrative like Shahrazad, we broke the story ~ we drew it out ~ into the Tales, story-spell enchantment woven from shimmering threads of body, memory, and language.

GOLD HEART-SHAPED LOCKET ~ It belonged to my mother, given to her by my father. It holds a tiny photograph of my father's face. Worn in the early days of her marriage and my birth in Mosul. On the back of a portrait photograph of her wearing it she had written: 'Taken in Egypt in 1966. It was a pale blue dress with navy stitches and the locket Daddy gave me! As a child, I would ask her why she was not also in the locket. She would say 'I fell out' and we would laugh, and then repeat the game. On the back of the locket are indentations from my baby teeth. My mother told me that the Kurdish in Mosul often drove around firing rifles in the air for weddings and celebrations. Did she or did she not say that on the day of my birth on Wednesday the 26th of February 1969 the Kurdish fired rifles in the air? I like to imagine that they did. 1.

PROLOGUE: ON MEMORY-BODY

I am a crossing place,
a bridge. Crossing
over, meeting, splitting and reforming
happen
here
inside my body
Things balloon into one space
from another, leak, melt, intrude, fragment, recombine
become
sealed off
in a compartment for protection. These changes
happen
deep in the flesh, creating
the figure of wood, or the patterns in the nacre of shell.

The movement of substances from one place into
a new place where
they do not belong
creates
responses, adjustments, reactions, resistance and acceptance,
new
kinds of bodies ~

FROM THE CROSSING INVENTORY (OF THE THINGS AND THEIR STORIES)

MY FATHER'S MINIATURE REPLICA OIL LAMP
~ It reminded him of his student days in Cairo, of studying late into the night with the old circle of golden light from the lamp falling on his books, cutting them out of the darkness. 34.

OLD POSTCARD OF THE GREAT PYRAMID OF GIZA ~ With camels. 35.

THE MOOR AND PRINCESS BADOURA CUT FROM THE ROYAL DOULTON CATALOGUE
MY MOTHER KEPT ~ The Moor is dark, hooded and muscular. Princess Badoura is white with Chinese features dressed in a pink cascade of rose petals, sitting upon an elephant. The most expensive and prestigious Royal Doulton figure ever made. Tales of Empire hidden in nineteenth century lavishly illustrated stories and figurines. Orientalist opium dreams. 54.

SMALL WHITE SHELL LIKE A DROP OF MILK. 57.

HAND-BLOWN EGYPTIAN GLASS PERFUME BOTTLE AND STOPPER ~ It has a tip like a ripple of water, it belonged to my mother. She loved glass with all its fragility, flaws and transformation from sand. Glass is neither solid nor liquid. It is an amorphous solid existing between two other states of matter. The atoms of glass move around so slowly that it would take an eternity of time to see the effect of that movement. 6.

OTTOMAN CALLIGRAPHY ~ With the Royal Seal or tughra of a Sultan on a Royal Decree or firman. Discovered recently, richly dancing on the reverse side of a calendar image of Quranic verses from Surat Yusuf. Austere verses that hung over our dining table in Nigeria for many years. We had these same verses engraved on Father's gravestone. 50.

FOUR PIECES OF MY COLLAGE ART EXPLORING IDENTITY ACROSS THE SO-CALLED 'EAST' AND 'WEST' ~ One collage uses an image taken by the Dutch explorer Alexine Tinne of a lady on a camel, labelled 'The Dutch Crown in Africa' and another uses the white hand of a Lady, painted by Ingres.

My mother was once awoken by a white hand, in time to save my sister. Two are contrasting collages, a 'Western' woman's face housed in lace, her mouth stopped by a shell, an 'Eastern' woman behind a mashrabiyya. 25.

PORTRAITS OF MUMTAZ MAHAL AND SHAH JAHAN - 1628 ~ I found these old photographs in my mother's writing case in an envelope marked Taj Mahal. Mughal emperors and their spouses. Also Bahadur Shah and Zeenat Mahal. Jahangir and his 12th wife Nur Jahan. Akbar the third Mughal emperor and Jodha Bai (Mariam-uz-Zamani), mother of Jahangir. Bahadur Shah was the last Mughal emperor, who died in a British prison in Burma in 1862 following the Indian Mutiny of 1857 against the rule of the British East India Company that ruled on behalf of the Crown. Direct British rule followed the formal ending of the Mughal Empire. 51.

WHITE PORCELAIN FIGURINE ~ wearing an 18th century style dress, holding out a rose. In the image I have taken, she has become a Darwishi-like blur hurrying along a pathway to the golden knot of the sacred Ottoman seal and a mesmerising garden of golden flowers and ferns. Notions of whiteness embedded in Turkish and Egyptian ideas of beauty. 49.



THE LADY & THE MOOR

from Addendum ~ A Key to the Ten Crossing Tales

The Lady & the Moor = Miniature oil lamp of Father's + Pyramid + Moor + Framed Father, White hand of lady from Ingres painting + Shell like a drop of milk + Egyptian glass + Islamic calligraphy + universe, Alexine Tinne collage of lady on camel + Egyptian glass globe, Portraits of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan + Princess Badoura + Moor, Porcelain Lady + Ottoman calligraphy.

~ Experiences quickly
 turn
 memories
 live on in the body,
 more than just a sequence of images
 thrown
 onto the silver screen. Memories
 where the animate and the inanimate
 converge.
 The biological, the physical and the intangible
 melded,
 cannot be separated. Textures, smells, sounds and images
 one within memories
 flow and melt into each other,
 one with what ever feelings or
 understandings of
 the world that happened
 at the time
 of
 formation those memories.
 A matrix forms,
 of
 the events of our lives,
 some parts

more rigid, others more fluid, light or airy,
 some concrete and opaque, partially felt as
 if
 through darkened glass.
 Could we say
 our entire bodies
 the substances, territories, materials
 this matrix of memory,
 recollection, imagination
 myth-making creates
 who we think we are, how we
 feel and act ~

FROM THE CROSSING INVENTORY (OF THE THINGS AND THEIR STORIES)

OLD BOX BROWNIE PHOTOGRAPH OF MAR BEHNAM MONASTERY ~ My mother took this image of the location of the graves of the Martyrs Mar Behnam and Marth Sarah seen through the main arch. A Syriac Catholic monastery in a village in northern Iraq, not far from Mosul, near Nimrud, that was destroyed by ISIS in 2015. It was over 1,500 years old, blending Islamic and Christian architecture in one body, with a rare example of Uighur writing inscribed over the graves of the two saints. 3.

OLD BOX BROWNIE PHOTOGRAPH OF THE GREAT PAGODA AT KEW GARDENS ~ This photograph that my mother took somehow became a double exposure, enigmatically incorporating her body into the body of the pagoda. You can see her young face smiling out of the centre of the body of the pagoda, and her arm has now become the pagoda's arm. On the back of the photograph she has written 'Me in the Pagoda! It was built in 1762, a gift for the founder of the gardens, Princess Augusta. A 'Chinese' building designed by Sir William Chambers who travelled to study the architecture of East Asia. An Orientalist structure of ten storeys/ies. 10.

ORNAMENTAL BUTTON ~ Found among my mother's things. It seemed so familiar but I cannot place it. A lost button floating in memory. It once held something together. She kept it for a reason I will never know or for no reason at all. The raised gold twisting lines looked like Arabic calligraphy in the distortions of the photographs that I took of it. 17.

BLACK AND WHITE STUDIO PHOTOGRAPH OF MY PARENTS ON THEIR WEDDING DAY IN CAIRO IN 1966 ~ They are smiling, he has his arm around her and his hand on her shoulder, they look forward into their future. 11.

LARGE DARK GLASS MARBLE ~ Found in my mother's things, it is almost black with a white feather-like swirl, a dark planet with a weather system passing over. 12.

PEACOCK FEATHER ~ From my mother's display of 'exotic' peacock and ostrich feathers that she collected on our travels. The collection is punctuated by pheasant feathers with their striking golden brown and black stripes. Peacocks of English fields. The blue peacock is a sacred bird of Hindu mythology, a symbol of repeating cycles of eternal time. At the Catholic missionary secondary school, St. Louis, in Kano, there was often the distant mournful cry of a peacock in the grounds, heard but never seen. I heard it close by when I found the gravestone of a European woman in a grove of trees. 13

RUBAIYAT OF OMAR KHAYYAM ~ The version as recreated by Edward Fitzgerald, that my mother found in the house of an elderly lady scholar who had many books, in her village of Tetsworth. When I discovered this same book as a child in Kano I became fixated upon it. How it looked strangely 'Eastern' yet not. With its stained faded blue cloth cover ornamented in gold. The extent of the Victorian obsession with this book meant that dead WWI soldiers were found in trenches with copies in their pockets. An emblem of obsession, fate and longing for the other and eternity? 16.



MIRROR FLOWER, WATER MOON

from Addendum ~ A Key to the Ten Crossing Tales

Mirror Flower, Water Moon = Gold Locket with Father + Mother's photograph of Mar Behnam, Mother in the Great Pagoda Kew + Lost Button + Mother's black lace shawl + my contour lines painting, Mother in the Great Pagoda + Mother's photograph of Mar Behnam + Gold Locket with Father + Lost Button, Photograph of Mother&Father on Wedding Day in Cairo + Dark Weather marble + Peacock feather, Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam fate obsession illusion illustration.

~ These photographs,
shells,
feathers,
glass,
and objects

features
of The Crossing Tales a
way
to convey and explore that
more
physical
understanding
complex formations,
body
memory-
and cross-
cultural meetings,

collisions.
Micro-transformations
over time
happen
deeply

within the flesh.
The flesh is in the mind and the mind is in the flesh
The processes of formation
glass, the nacre of shell, the workings of
atomic structures behind
iridescence, all
embodied metaphors
to explore memory and experience
alter the flesh ~

FROM THE CROSSING INVENTORY (OF THE THINGS AND THEIR STORIES)

OLD BOX BROWNIE PHOTOGRAPH OF THE NERGAL GATE, NINEVEH ~ My mother took this image in the late sixties, of a two thousand year old Assyrian gate of Nineveh, near Mosul. Probably the Nergal Gate. Built by King Sennacherib, see a tall winged genie on the outside. Within the archway, colossal lamassu sentinels, human/bull/bird, stood guard. Excavated in 1849, Sir Layard the 'excavator' for thieves said, 'their breasts and bodies were profusely adorned with curled hair.' My own curled hair was lost, power is held in the spring of curly hair. Left lamassu's top half cut off in 1892 for an Ottoman official, right lamassu's face destroyed in 2015 by an ISIS man with a jackhammer. The British Tenth Army appropriated the image of the lamassu whilst protecting their oil concessions, Iraq, 1941. The reconstructed Mashqi Gate and Adad Gate were blown up by ISIS in 2016. 2.

QUARTZ CRYSTAL FROM SPITALFIELDS MARKET ~ It looks like a faceted vial. A crystal grows two centimetres in ten million years. A shard of eternal time. 4.

SILVER ARABIAN NIGHTS SLIPPER CHARM ~ From my teenage years in Jeddah. It floats at a crossing between being an actual Middle Eastern slipper and the slipper of the Orientalist fairy tales I read as child, illustrated by Edmund Dulac. 5.

SMALL PINKISH ORANGE SHELL ~ With a delicate frilling at the aperture. The ornament of shell bodies are residues of life, movement, indicators pointing to entry and exit points, edges and boundaries. 8.

QUEEN OF THE NIGHT RELIEF ~ An image of the so-called Burney relief showing the Assyrian or Babylonian winged goddess of the night with her bird talon feet, with staring owls and lions. Is she Lilitu, Inanna/Ishtar or Ereshkigal? Taken from her place and now in the British Museum somehow, well we know how these things happen, 'fairly traded' and 'sold'? Her true place is unknown, where she was found exactly and her context a mystery, somewhere in Iraq. 9.

POSTCARD OF A EUROPEAN MODEL POSING NAKED AS IF AT THE BATHS IN AN ORIENTALIST FANTASY OF A HAREM ~ She is looking at herself in the mirror, she is very pale like the marble of a classical sculpture nearby and she is sitting on a leopard skin. The head of the 'exotic' animal is snarling beneath her feet. 56.

COWRIE SHELL FROM NIGERIA ~ A currency to communicate with in the supernatural realm, for trading in the mundane world, a shell for fertility spells, a symbolic and elegant vagina, a gateway, a form of resistance against the White Man, protective, sacred, a fee to cross the River of Death, scattered by Egyptian fortune tellers and used by Yoruba to speak to the Orisha, the slit of an eye, a little pregnant belly. 42.

PINK WHITE RABBIT ~ A fragment of gold falling out of its eye. Prey or hunter looking for minerals among minarets? 7.

PASSPORT PHOTOGRAPH OF MY MOTHER FROM 1966 ~ 59.

COLONIAL POSTCARDS ~ Of Middle Eastern women dressed up to look like what they are not, in settings in which they do not belong, doing things that they have never done. Representations matter as powerful tools of misinformation, stereotyping and disseminating racial hierarchies. 55.

FROM PROLOGUE: ON MEMORY-BODY

~ of
the body and the structure
of
the mind, that identity
like iridescence
illusion and reality,
a shimmering surface inseparable
from
a physical body ~



THE PINK SLIPPER

from Addendum ~ A Key to the Ten Crossing Tales

The Pink Slipper = Photograph of Nergal Gate + Crystal + Pink satin ruffles + Aladdin slipper + mirrors, Photograph of Mar Behnam + Orange pink shell with frill + Pink satin ruffles + Image of the Queen of the Night + mirror, Nude European woman's legs + Cowrie shell, Pink white rabbit with gold fragment + Egyptian glass perfume bottle stopper + Small passport photograph of Mother + Colonial postcard of Harem woman with Shisha, Pink white rabbit + Mother's lace doily + Colonial postcard of palm trees and 'Arabs' on donkeys.

FROM THE CROSSING INVENTORY (OF THE THINGS AND THEIR STORIES)

YORUBA THORN CARVING OF A MAN'S HEAD

~ From Southern Nigeria, Edo or Delta state, or from South-East Nigeria. Bought from a motor-bike trader who came to our villa in Kano. Made from the huge thorns of the Egungun or Silk-cotton tree, also called the Kapok tree. Thorns can be cream, rose or brown. Small, potent, dignified, as any Renaissance portrait, filled with memories of 1970s Nigeria. Kapok is so luxurious, exploding silkily from pods. 43.

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPH OF ME AS A CHILD IN OUR GARDEN IN NIGERIA ~ The 'garden boy' stands behind watering trees and plants. I look up at my mother. My sister is nearby. The garden of spirits and felt presences, of mango, tamarind, flame, grapefruit, guava, the tree with the great termite nest. My maternal grandfather was a landscape gardener. My father planted hundreds of trees. 45.

MY MOTHER'S SILVER THIMBLE AND FELT NEEDLE CASE SHAPED LIKE A LITTLE HOUSE ~ Cosy and safe, with red roof, blue door and little flowers. I think my mother lives in there now. She stitched many dolls clothes for us, and made dresses with an old Singer sewing machine. Metonymy – the thimble has become all of her fingers and the touch of her hand. Now she has gone it is in a little box behind glass. 44.

MILKY BLUE GLASS MARY ~ An uncanny light effect allowed a visitation by a spirit of a dark lady, looking out from within glass Mary. An obsession about Mary because of the statue of her at St. Louis secondary school in Kano. She stood in the school compound, blue and white, and full of grace, stepping upon a green snake calmly. 33.



WHEEL OF BECOMING

from Addendum ~ A Key to the Ten Crossing Tales

Wheel of Becoming = Photograph of Mother wearing Gold Locket in Cairo + Nigerian Thorn carving head, Photograph of me in the garden in Nigeria + Mother's silver thimble + mirrors and crystal + A hand, Father in the Wheel, Nigerian Thorn carving head + Naira, Glass Mary + Pyramid + Dried Rose that was from Mother's garden.

FROM PROLOGUE: ON MEMORY-BODY

~ The photograph of a photograph ~
significant in the imagination
and
our family history. 1989 :
a photograph cut in half
by my father,
reformed, later
by my mother.

I started to take
photographs of other photographs,

postcards, and objects belonging to my parents or that are part of
my significant memories of childhood and teenage years, gathered in
assemblages and collages, using old glass to distort and merge. After a
time patterns and sets began to emerge. Things

crossed over with
each other, between
photographs
between
sets of photographs,
the photographs themselves, multiple
like DNA. Webs
networks of connections
slowly
unfurl as
they do in
our memories ~

and things,
and within
recombinations
and
began to

FROM THE CROSSING INVENTORY (OF THE THINGS AND THEIR STORIES)

FALLEN WINGS OF THE PEACOCK BUTTERFLY

~ The wings have eyespots to confuse and startle predators, found fallen in my garden. My mother gave me a butterfly identification chart. Fallen as if the butterfly had shed them and then moved on, that it did not die but entered a new phase of metamorphosis. 14.

TWO TURKISH EVIL EYE CHARMS WITH PIERCING GAZES ~ One with a black pupil swimming in intense blue glass set in silver that my father brought back for my mother from Istanbul. The other with multiple eyes, to catch the evil gaze from all sides. 53.

ARABIC CHILDREN'S BOOK FROM THE GREEN LIBRARY CALLED BRIDE OF THE SEA ~ a translation of the little mermaid story. This book that I studied as a child in Kano, as part of learning Arabic, had a profound effect on the formation of my identity and idea of myself as a hybrid creature of incomplete transformation, permanently in between states. A book with Arabic on the inside, and the face of a fair-haired blue-eyed mermaid on the cover. My eyes are green. I look very much like my mother and maternal grandmother, but when I visited Tunisia a carpet seller told me I had North African features. This made me happy. Is the search for identity all smoke and mirrors? The saying 'it is all smoke and mirrors' is not the same as saying 'Flower Mirror, Water Moon'. 30.

BLUEST EYE GLASS MARBLE ~ A mermaid is looking through from the other side of another world. 60.



HEMIMETABOLY: THE NYMPH

from Addendum ~ A Key to the Ten Crossing Tales

Hemimetabol: The Nymph = Fake scene of Turkish woman looking in mirror in the woods + Nude European woman in constructed harem bath scene with leopard + Butterfly collage, Floating Egyptian girl on colonial postcard + Ottoman calligraphy + Fallen Peacock butterfly wings, Egyptian glass + Turkish multiple-sided Evil eye charm, Pitt Rivers Museum box with Fallen Peacock butterfly wings + Clay pipe from Thames, Bride of the Sea storybook cover seen through Egyptian glass, Bluest eye marble with me as a mermaid looking through from the other side of another world.

FROM PROLOGUE: ON MEMORY-BODY

~ Disruptive, unexpected

cultures
crossing and meeting,
harmonies of relationships, analogous
forms,
synergies and odd
uncanny
happenings
emerged. Once I
had formed these sets, into ten 'tales,' I began to write a simple inventory
of all the elements contained in each photograph, but then this itself
turned into a complex web of interactions stories and voices
tumbling
from each element.

Elements of a strange Periodic Table ~

FROM THE CROSSING INVENTORY (OF THE THINGS AND THEIR STORIES)

PHOTOGRAPH OF MY SISTER AND I ~ In the desert near Jeddah wearing abayas. We are shadows with shadows. 24.

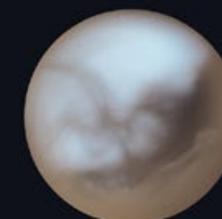
SKEIN OF VINTAGE GOLDEN THREAD. 26.

COLONIAL POSTCARD OF A VEILED OTTOMAN WOMAN ~ My father's grandmother was Turkish. She was often cited as an explanation for my dark golden hair. I failed to meet his expectations, the expectations of what an Egyptian girl was meant to look like and be like. I never felt like an English girl either. 27.

PHOTOGRAPH OF MYSELF IN OUR GARDEN IN KANO ~ With my hair up, catching the sunlight and looking like gold. I recall my father was not happy when he saw this photograph. 28.

Photograph of myself as a teenager with long mermaid hair. 29.

SMALL TURQUOISE GLASS MARBLE ~ From my mother's solitaire board, containing a green wave caught curling over silently inside. 31.



SMOKE & MIRRORS

from Addendum ~ A Key to the Ten Crossing Tales

Smoke & Mirrors = Collage of 'Western' woman with lace + Photograph of me in lace + Abalone shell, Collage of 'Eastern' woman behind Mashrabiyya + Desert photograph in Jeddah, Bride of the Sea Arabic book + Small green planet marble with frozen wave + photograph of myself with mermaid hair in England, Photograph of myself with golden hair in Kano + Skein of golden thread + Colonial Postcard of Ottoman Woman, Smoke of my hair in a mirror.

FROM PROLOGUE: ON MEMORY-BODY

~ Stark contrasts
between cultures, religions, geographical locations, becoming blurred, syncretic within my body.
Arid watery sharp blurry elements:
earth fire air water combine, create
a multitude of possible planets worlds to exist within, invisible to those who have not been crossed.
hybrid syncretic crossings often seen as 'fakes' and we must choose which 'world'
to be a part of or create our own ~

Those of us

FROM THE CROSSING INVENTORY (OF THE THINGS AND THEIR STORIES)

AN OLD POSTCARD OF KING TUTANKHAMUN
~ old postcards of monuments in the Middle East are not innocent. 36.

TINY MATRYOSHKA DOLL THAT HAS LOST HER FAMILY. 48.

MY MOTHER'S SILVER THIMBLE AND FELT NEEDLE CASE SHAPED LIKE A LITTLE HOUSE
~ Cosy and safe, with red roof, blue door and little flowers. I think my mother lives in there now. She stitched many dolls clothes for us, and made dresses with an old Singer sewing machine. Metonymy – the thimble has become all of her fingers and the touch of her hand. Now she has gone it is in a little box behind glass. 44.

SKEIN OF VINTAGE GOLDEN THREAD. 26.

TINY PLASTIC TURQUOISE AND GOLDEN ANGEL PLAYING A CELLO ~ My mother kept tiny magical things. 52.

SUBVERTING ISLAM: THE ROLE OF ORIENTALIST CENTRES ~ written by my father, Dr. Ahmad Ghorab. 47.

DARK BLUE ROUND BEAD TIN ~ Full of thousands of the tiniest beads like grains of sand. Our mother made us bracelets. The tin has a gold Egyptomania Art Deco style lion on the lid. Jacob & Co's Biscuits. British Empire Exhibition Wembley 1924. The British Empire is the story behind everything. On a tin of beads. My father told us about the incident at Dinshaway, of the violence of British soldiers towards villagers in Egypt. We inherited a sadness and an anger. A thousand and one beads. 46.



GOLDEN SNARE

from Addendum ~ A Key to the Ten Crossing Tales

Golden Snare = Porcelain lady + Ottoman tughra, Father&Mother on Wedding day in Cairo + Peacock feather + King Tutankhamun postcard, Father + Matroyshka who lost her family + Mother's needle case and needle + Golden thread + Tiny turquoise and gold angel, Subverting Islam book + Evil eye charm, British Empire tin of beads + Nigerian thorn carving of head + Peacock feather + golden thread + the Moor + the Lost Button.

FROM PROLOGUE: ON MEMORY-BODY

~ I work with those small intimate things,
possessions, photographs, odds and ends
collected somehow
survived
years of travelling from place to place,
my life,
my parents lives, become auratic.

They all point to bigger movements, ideologies inextricable from the particular travels of my family ~

the microcosm, a reflection of a macrocosm.
things labelled
'ornaments' or 'ornamental' -
belies
the power of ornament
to convey
embodied
meaning ~

FROM THE CROSSING INVENTORY (OF THE THINGS AND THEIR STORIES)

HALF OF THE PHOTOGRAPH OF OUR FAMILY SITTING ON THE SOFA WITH MUHAMMAD ALI IN 1989 IN RIYADH ~ The half with my father and Muhammad Ali. My mother, sister and I sit on the other half of the sofa in another place. 32.

PHOTOGRAPH OF MY FATHER IN HIS CAP AND GOWN AT OXFORD. 37.

CLEOPATRA LADYBIRD BOOK THAT MY SISTER AND I LOVED ~ We were especially fascinated with the page where Cleopatra allows the deadly asp, sent in a basket of fruit, to bite her. A reminder of Kano days, the many snakes encountered in our house and garden. My father would look under our beds at night for snakes and scorpions and then sit in the dark reciting Quran, using the fingers of his hands as a misbaha rosary to repeat protective phrases until we drifted off to sleep. 40.

PHOTOGRAPH OF MY MOTHER AS A YOUNG FLORIST ~ Wearing her blue overdress, a satiny dark indigo, holding a spray of roses, surrounded by flowers, as she always was. She gave this photograph to my father and near her delicate foot in a black slipper-like shoe, she wrote 'Ahmad. With all my love, Jean. Dec. 1965'. 39.

PHOTOGRAPH OF MY PARENTS ON THE STEPS OF AN OXFORD COLLEGE ON THE DAY OF MY FATHER'S VIVA ~ For the completion of his doctorate in Islamic Philosophy and Comparative Religion. On the back my mother has written 'Ahmad & Jean 27th September. Viva. 1965' He holds his black mortar board and wears a red rose and a white bow tie. She holds her black handbag and wears a royal blue suit. Her short wavy brown hair has fallen slightly over her forehead. The scholar and the adventurer. 38.

HALF-BROWN HALF-BLUE FEATHER FROM A CROW OR A MAGPIE? 41.



TEAR IN THE GAP

from Addendum ~ A Key to the Ten Crossing Tales

Tear in the Gap = Fragment of photo with Father and Muhammad Ali in Riyadh + Mini oil lamp + Postcard of Pyramid, Milky Blue Glass Mary visitation, Father in Oxford Cap&Gown + Cleopatra and the asp, Alexine Tinne desert collage + My mother as a young florist in Oxford photograph + Egyptian glass, Mother and Father on Viva day + half brown half blue feather.

~ The presence of the British in Egypt is inseparable from my father's desire to study at Oxford, and marry an English woman. The marginalisation of non-Western scholars of Islam by Orientalists at Oxford meant my father could not find work there, and we moved to Kano, Nigeria in 1971, not long after the end of the Biafran war. A place where colonial British interference, the Sokoto Caliphate, the history of the Emirate of Kano, the Battle of Kano – part of the 'pacification' of Northern Nigeria by the British, all led to the city of Kano and Bayero University where my father taught, becoming a draw for Islamic scholars.

It was also a place for those willing to take a risk and build a new life that was not possible in their previous location, even if they had called it home. The journey to Saudi Arabia, where we stayed for seven years, and our return to England were also driven by my father's relationship to the political histories of the Middle East. The brief time my parents lived in Mosul where I was born and the photographs my mother took of monuments she visited using her box Brownie are now made resonant and prophetic of more recent wars, invasions and destruction ~

FROM THE CROSSING INVENTORY (OF THE THINGS AND THEIR STORIES)

MUTE WHITE SWAN FEATHER ~ Found while walking through Kew gardens. A lady swan, with her cygnets gathered about her, on the bank by the water. She preened and shed several perfect white feathers. The Mute white swan is a rare visitor to North Africa. She has uniquely shaped feathers that create sound as air passes over them, a distinctive humming throb that carries over long distances. An instrument, this feather, for making a note of sound that is a touch from afar. A sound-feather. A feather remains long after the body has gone, like hair and nails. She leaves her feathers humming and throbbing in her wake. 15.

DELICATE FADED PRESSED PANSY FLOWER ~ A remnant of what was once a vibrant purple flower with a yellow centre, velvety and voluptuous, now pale papery fragile yet enduring with fine veins that once carried a life force. 20.

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Colours created by microscopic structures that interfere with visible light are found on the feathers of birds, in the scales on the wings of butterflies. Peacock feathers are really brown. Inanimate and animate substances are intimately inseparable.

Photonic mechanisms: selective mirrors, diffraction gratings, photonic crystals, crystal fibres, nanochannels with proteins in a matrix that can vary their configuration. A photonic crystal is a periodic optical nanostructure affecting the motion of photons. They are found in animal reflectors (mirrors) as well, like the scales of silvery fish, the tapetum lucidum (bright tapestry) eye tissue that creates eyeshine – a retroreflector, reflecting light back to the retina.

While reading about these mechanisms I began to imagine light photons being transmitted from the things of my past being caught in my camera and reflected back into my present, as if from stars in a lost universe. As if the small objects and photographs were creating a kind of interference as they crossed and encountered each other, constructively enhancing or destructively cancelling out certain feelings, effects and memories. 21

PASSPORT PHOTOGRAPH OF MY MOTHER FROM 1966. 59.

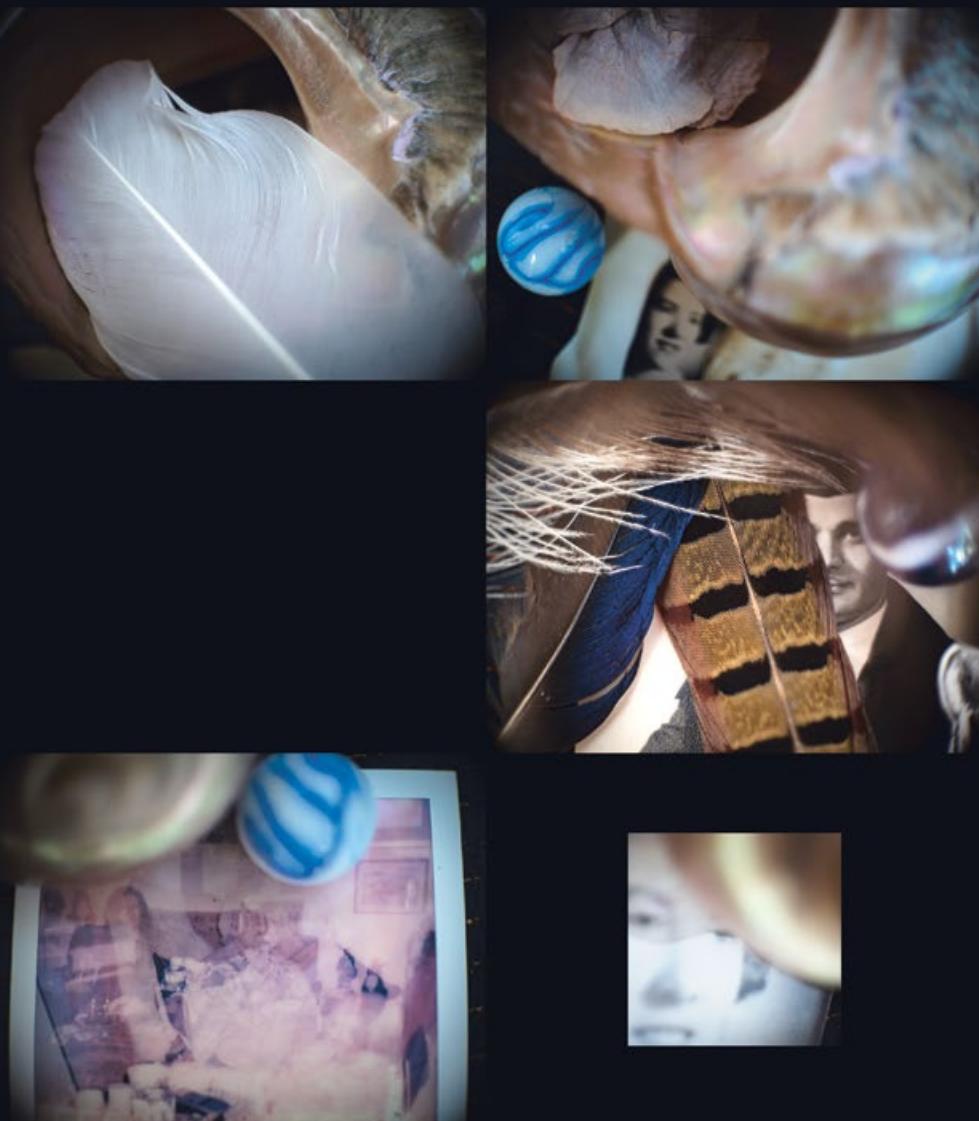
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MULTIPLE-EXPOSURE POLAROID CAMERA PHOTOGRAPH ~ Taken very recently in the last weeks of my mother's life. The vintage restored camera became stuck. When we finally released the photographs we found this one, with multiple images of my mother on it. This photograph is sadness. The surface of the Polaroid film has a sheen that made the purples and greys of my mother and her clothing look like a kind of shell or substance secreted. An indexical trace of her movements captured in a matrix of chemicals on the surface of the photograph, light energy from her body held captive, like iridescence in the whorl of the shell. 22.



THE LEGEND OF FEATHERSHELL

from Addendum ~ A Key to the Ten Crossing Tales

Legend of Feathershell = Mute swan feather + Large white polished shell, Dried Pansy + Large white polished shell + Small passport photograph of Mother + White and blue Allah marble, Photograph of Father in Oxford Cap&Gown + Bastet's ear + Ostrich feather + Half blue half brown feather + Pheasant feather + Dark Weather marble, Large white polished shell + Allah marble + Multiple exposure Polaroid, Small passport photograph of Mother + Large white polished shell.

from Prologue: On Memory-body

~ The reasons for the long-term dislocations that my father and mother experienced, away from their respective 'homes' of Egypt and England, for their multiple and complex crossings, would seem to be voluntary ones. But underlying every decision made by each of them to move across the planet are deep currents - the emotions and psychologies of desires, notions of economic and cultural progress, exploration, adventure and escape from marginalisation. The currents and movements are those created by colonialism, Orientalism, hierarchies of being, racial hierarchies, wars, geopolitical carving up of territories, and unequal power structures. These outside forces irreversibly shape and scar the domestic and personal.

They leak into the deepest psychological and emotional spaces of our bodies and beings, triggering our behaviours, responses and actions, constructing our desires, our hopes, the alignments in our lives and intruding upon our most intimate privacies. But counter-currents, resistance and the emergence of contradictory and disruptive forms help to erode and counteract. I try to create such disruptive forms that blur boundaries and upset conventions. My crossed body itself is a disruptive form. ~

FROM THE CROSSING INVENTORY (OF THE THINGS AND THEIR STORIES)

PEACOCK FEATHER ~ From my mother's display of 'exotic' peacock and ostrich feathers that she collected on our travels. The collection is punctuated by pheasant feathers with their striking golden brown and black stripes. Peacocks of English fields. The blue peacock is a sacred bird of Hindu mythology, a symbol of repeating cycles of eternal time. At the Catholic missionary secondary school, St. Louis, in Kano, there was often the distant mournful cry of a peacock in the grounds, heard but never seen. I heard it close by when I found the grave-stone of a European woman in a grove of trees. The white ostrich feather. Feather of Truth? Symbol of Goddess Ma'at, who weighs the hearts of the dead, deciding who dies the second death and who will become immortal. Ma'at, regulator of star movements, cycles and seasons, the actions of humans, bringing harmony, justice, and order to chaos at the moment of creation. Ostriches dance in circles when they are happy, and when they are afraid. 13.



DE MUSICA MUNDANA

from Addendum ~ A Key to the Ten Crossing Tales

De Musica Mundana: the Fifth Element = Mother sitting near classical columns in London
+ Pyramid + Mirrors, Silver moon of her thimble, Golden sun of my gold dust palette, Mirror +
Turquoise Frozen Wave marble, Father in Oxford Cap&Gown, Empire bead tin + Ostrich
feather + Dark blue marble with white swirl, Mother in the Great Pagoda Kew + Blue and white
Willow Pattern china + Allah marble.

Epilogue: On Cross-generational Memory

The cambium tissue of the tree makes gums and resins consisting of volatile organic compounds that are toxic to moulds and insects. Medullary rays transport these substances to the stem and into living parenchyma cells. Parenchyma cells balloon into the xylem tissue (the balloons are called tyloses) in response to injury or intrusion, and disgorge their volatile organic compounds into spaces around the heartwood and then die. The pathways of protection can be seen in the flesh of the wood. Medullary rays create the figure of wood – the beautiful patterns that are revealed when the surface of cut wood is waxed and polished – ambrosia, angel step, bear claw, bird's eye, bee's wing, blister, burl, curl, ribbon curl, dimple, fiddleback, flame, wide flame, blue stain, ghost, pin stripe, quilted, spalted and tiger stripe...pippy, pecky, quilted, rays... indented, fluted, ray flecks, crotch, cat's paw, blister. Ornaments inside the flesh of the wood are traces of transformations, growth, resistance and movement. Our bodies record. We cannot see what traces there are on our organs, tissues, cells, DNA. Is the cross-generational transfer of traumas, hopes and desires a mysterious code, hieroglyphics chiselled scratched and carved into the interior of the body? What burls, stains, blisters and curls mark and embroider us? Under the mute surface of everything is the ornament of its experience.



**THE CROSSING INVENTORY
(OF THE THINGS AND THEIR STORIES, USED
IN CREATING THE CROSSING TALES)**

GOLD HEART-SHAPED LOCKET ~ It belonged to my mother, given to her by my father. It holds a tiny photograph of my father's face. Worn in the early days of her marriage and my birth in Mosul. On the back of a portrait photograph of her wearing it she had written: 'Taken in Egypt in 1966. It was a pale blue dress with navy stitches and the locket Daddy gave me.' As a child, I would ask her why she was not also in the locket. She would say 'I fell out' and we would laugh, and then repeat the game. On the back of the locket are indentations from my baby teeth. My mother told me that the Kurdish in Mosul often drove around firing rifles in the air for weddings and celebrations. Did she or did she not say that on the day of my birth on Wednesday the 26th of February 1969 the Kurdish fired rifles in the air? I like to imagine that they did. 1.

OLD BOX BROWNIE PHOTOGRAPH OF THE NERGAL GATE, NINEVEH ~ My mother took this image in the late sixties, of a two thousand year old Assyrian gate of Nineveh, near Mosul. Probably the Nergal Gate. Built by King Sennacherib, see a tall winged genie on the outside. Within the archway, colossal lamassu sentinels, human / bull / bird, stood guard. Excavated in 1849, Sir Layard the 'excavator' for thieves said, 'their breasts and bodies were profusely adorned with curled hair.' My own curled hair was lost, power is held in the spring of curly hair. Left lamassu's top half cut off in 1892 for an Ottoman official, right lamassu's face destroyed in 2015 by an ISIS man with a jack-hammer. The British Tenth Army appropriated the image of the lamassu whilst protecting their oil concessions, Iraq, 1941. The reconstructed Mashqi Gate and Adad Gate were blown up by ISIS in 2016. 2.

OLD BOX BROWNIE PHOTOGRAPH OF MAR BEHNAM MONASTERY ~ My mother took this image of the location of the graves of the Martyrs Mar Behnam and Marth Sarah seen through the main arch. A Syriac Catholic monastery in a village in northern Iraq, not far from Mosul, near Nimrud, that was destroyed by ISIS in 2015. It was over 1,500 years old, blending Islamic and Christian architecture in one body, with a rare example of Uighur writing inscribed over the graves of the two saints. 3.

QUARTZ CRYSTAL FROM SPITALFIELDS MARKET ~ It looks like a faceted vial. A crystal grows two centimetres in ten million years. A shard of eternal time. 4.

SILVER ARABIAN NIGHTS SLIPPER CHARM ~ From my teenage years in Jeddah. It floats at a crossing between being an actual Middle Eastern slipper and the slipper of the Orientalist fairy tales I read as child, illustrated by Edmund Dulac. 5.

HAND-BLOWN EGYPTIAN GLASS PERFUME BOTTLE AND STOPPER ~ It has a tip like a ripple of water, it belonged to my mother. She loved glass with all its fragility, flaws and transformation from sand. Glass is neither solid nor liquid. It is an amorphous solid existing between two other states of matter. The atoms of glass move around so slowly that it would take an eternity of time to see the effect of that movement. 6.

PINK WHITE RABBIT ~ A fragment of gold falling out of its eye. Prey or hunter looking for minerals among minarets? 7.

SMALL PINKISH ORANGE SHELL ~ With a delicate frilling at the aperture. The ornament of shell bodies are residues of life, movement, indicators pointing to entry and exit points, edges and boundaries. 8.

QUEEN OF THE NIGHT RELIEF ~ An image of the so-called Burney relief showing the Assyrian or Babylonian winged goddess of the night with her bird talon feet, with staring owls and lions. Is she Lilitu, Inanna/Ishtar or Ereshkigal? Taken from her place and now in the British Museum somehow...well, we know how these things happen, 'fairly traded' and 'sold.' Her true place is unknown, where she was found exactly and her context a mystery, somewhere in Iraq. 9.

OLD BOX BROWNIE PHOTOGRAPH OF THE GREAT PAGODA AT KEW GARDENS ~ This photograph that my mother took somehow became a double exposure, enigmatically incorporating her body into the body of the pagoda. You can see her young face smiling out of the centre of the body of the pagoda, and her arm has now become the pagoda's arm. On the back of the photograph she has written 'Me in the Pagoda! It was built in 1762, a gift for the founder of the gardens, Princess Augusta. A 'Chinese' building designed by Sir William Chambers who travelled to study the architecture of East Asia. An Orientalist structure of ten storeys/ies. 10.

BLACK AND WHITE STUDIO PHOTOGRAPH OF MY PARENTS ON THEIR WEDDING DAY IN CAIRO IN 1966 ~ They are smiling, he has his arm around her and his hand on her shoulder, they look forward into their future. 11.

LARGE DARK GLASS MARBLE ~ Found in my mother's things, it is almost black with a white feather-like swirl, a dark planet with a weather system passing over. 12.

PEACOCK FEATHER ~ From my mother's display of 'exotic' peacock and ostrich feathers that she collected on our travels. The collection is punctuated by pheasant feathers with their striking golden brown and black stripes. Peacocks of English fields. The blue peacock is a sacred bird of Hindu mythology, a symbol of repeating cycles of eternal time. At the Catholic missionary secondary school, St. Louis, in

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RUBAIYAT OF OMAR KHAYYAM ~ The version as recreated by Edward Fitzgerald, that my mother found in the house of an elderly lady scholar who had many books, in her village of Tetsworth. When I discovered this same book as a child in Kano I became fixated upon it. How it looked strangely 'Eastern' yet not. With its stained faded blue cloth cover ornamented in gold. The extent of the Victorian obsession with this book meant that dead WWI soldiers were found in trenches with copies in their pockets. An emblem of obsession, fate and longing for the other and eternity? 16.

ORNAMENTAL BUTTON ~ Found among my mother's things. It seemed so familiar but I cannot place it. A lost button floating in memory. It once held something together. She kept it for a reason I will never know or for no reason at all. The raised gold twisting lines looked like Arabic calligraphy in the distortions of the photographs that I took of it. 17.

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While reading about these mechanisms I began to imagine light photons being transmitted from the things of my past being caught in my camera and reflected back into my present, as if from stars in a lost universe. As if the small objects and photographs were creating a kind of interference as they crossed and encountered each other, constructively enhancing or destructively cancelling out certain feelings, effects and memories. 21

MULTIPLE-EXPOSURE POLAROID CAMERA PHOTOGRAPH ~ Taken very recently in the last weeks of my mother's life. The vintage restored camera became stuck. When we finally released the photographs we found this one, with multiple images of my mother on it. This photograph is sadness. The surface of the Polaroid film has a sheen that made the purples and greys of my mother and her clothing look like a kind of shell or substance secreted. An indexical trace of her movements captured in a matrix of chemicals on the surface of the photograph, light energy from her body, held captive, like iridescence in the whorl of the shell. 22.

PHOTOGRAPH OF MYSELF AS A TEENAGER ON A VISIT TO ENGLAND ~ Wearing a lacy knitted jumper, a necklace of tiny pearls like a piece of lace, looking at my mother. I have taken off my hair covering. 23.

PHOTOGRAPH OF MY SISTER AND I ~ In the desert near Jeddah wearing abayas. We are shadows with shadows. 24.

FOUR PIECES OF MY COLLAGE ART EXPLORING IDENTITY ACROSS THE SO-CALLED 'EAST' AND 'WEST' ~ One collage uses an image taken by the Dutch explorer Alexine Tinne of a lady on a camel, labelled 'The Dutch Crown in Africa' and another uses the white hand of a Lady, painted by Ingres.

My mother was once awoken by a white hand, in time to save my sister. Two are contrasting collages, a 'Western' woman's face housed in lace, her mouth stopped by a shell, an 'Eastern' woman behind a mashrabiyya. 25.

SKEIN OF VINTAGE GOLDEN THREAD. 26.

COLONIAL POSTCARD OF A VEILED OTTOMAN WOMAN ~ My father's grandmother was Turkish. She was often cited as an explanation for my dark golden hair. I failed to meet his expectations, the expectations of what an Egyptian girl was meant to look like and be like. I never felt like an English girl either. 27.

PHOTOGRAPH OF MYSELF IN OUR GARDEN IN KANO ~ With my hair up, catching the sunlight and looking like gold. I recall my father was not happy when he saw this photograph. 28.

PHOTOGRAPH OF MYSELF AS A TEENAGER WITH LONG MERMAID HAIR. 29.

ARABIC CHILDREN'S BOOK FROM THE GREEN LIBRARY CALLED BRIDE OF THE SEA ~ a translation of the little mermaid story. This book that I studied as a child in Kano, as part of learning Arabic, had a profound effect on the formation of my identity and idea of myself as a hybrid creature of incomplete transformation, permanently in between states. My eyes are green.

I look very much like my mother and maternal grandmother, but when I visited Tunisia a carpet seller told me I had North African features. This made me happy. Is the search for identity all smoke and mirrors? The saying 'it is all smoke and mirrors' is not the same as saying 'Flower Mirror, Water Moon'. 30.

SMALL TURQUOISE GLASS MARBLE ~ From my mother's solitaire board, containing a green wave caught curling over silently inside. 31.

HALF OF THE PHOTOGRAPH OF OUR FAMILY SITTING ON THE SOFA WITH MUHAMMAD ALI IN 1989 IN RIYADH ~ The half with my father and Muhammad Ali. My mother, sister and I sit on the other half of the sofa in another place. 32.

MILKY BLUE GLASS MARY ~ An uncanny light effect allowed a visitation by a spirit of a dark lady, looking out from within glass Mary. An obsession about Mary because of the statue of her at St. Louis secondary school in Kano. She stood in the school compound,

blue and white, and full of grace, stepping upon a green snake calmly. 33.

MY FATHER'S MINIATURE REPLICA OIL LAMP ~ It reminded him of his student days in Cairo, of studying late into the night with the old circle of golden light from the lamp falling on his books, cutting them out of the darkness. 34.

OLD POSTCARD OF THE GREAT PYRAMID OF GIZA ~ With camels. 35.

AN OLD POSTCARD OF KING TUTANKHAMUN ~ old postcards of monuments in the Middle East are not innocent. 36.

PHOTOGRAPH OF MY FATHER IN HIS CAP AND GOWN AT OXFORD. 37.

PHOTOGRAPH OF MY PARENTS ON THE STEPS OF AN OXFORD COLLEGE ON THE DAY OF MY FATHER'S VIVA ~ For the completion of his doctorate in Islamic philosophy and Comparative religion. On the back my mother has written 'Ahmad & Jean 27th September, Viva. 1965' He holds his black mortar board and wears a red rose and a white bow tie. She holds her black handbag and wears a royal blue suit. Her short wavy brown hair has fallen slightly over her forehead. The scholar and the adventurer. 38.

PHOTOGRAPH OF MY MOTHER AS A YOUNG FLORIST ~ Wearing her blue overdress, a satiny dark indigo, holding a spray of roses, surrounded by flowers, as she always was. She gave this photograph to my father and near her delicate foot in a black slipper-like shoe, she wrote 'Ahmad. With all my love, Jean. Dec. 1965'. 39.

CLEOPATRA LADYBIRD BOOK THAT MY SISTER AND I LOVED ~ We were especially fascinated with the page where Cleopatra allows the deadly asp, sent in a basket of fruit, to bite her. A reminder of Kano days, the many snakes encountered in our house and garden. My father would look under our beds at night for snakes and scorpions and then sit in the dark reciting Quran, using the fingers of his hands as a misbaha rosary to repeat protective phrases until we drifted off to sleep. 40.

HALF-BROWN HALF-BLUE FEATHER FROM A CROW OR A MAGPIE. 41.

COWRIE SHELL FROM NIGERIA ~ A currency to communicate with in the supernatural realm, for trading in the mundane world, a shell for fertility spells, a symbolic and elegant vagina, a gateway, a form of resistance against the White Man, protective, sacred, a fee to cross the River of Death, scattered by Egyptian fortune tellers and used by Yoruba to speak to the Orisha, the slit of an eye, a little pregnant belly. 42.

YORUBA THORN CARVING OF A MAN'S HEAD ~ From Southern Nigeria, Edo or Delta state, or from South-East Nigeria. Bought

from a motorbike trader who came to our villa in Kano. Made from the huge thorns of the Egungun or Silk-cotton tree, also called the Kapok tree. Thorns can be cream, rose or brown. Small, potent, dignified, as any Renaissance portrait, filled with memories of 1970s Nigeria. Kapok is so luxurious, exploding silkily from pods. 43.

MY MOTHER'S SILVER THIMBLE AND FELT NEEDLE CASE SHAPED LIKE A LITTLE HOUSE ~ Cosy and safe, with red roof, blue door and little flowers. I think my mother lives in there now. She stitched many dolls clothes for us, and made dresses with an old Singer sewing machine. Metonymy – the thimble has become all of her fingers and the touch of her hand. Now she has gone it is in a little box behind glass. 44.

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPH OF ME AS A CHILD IN OUR GARDEN IN NIGERIA ~ The 'garden boy' stands behind watering trees and plants. I look up at my mother. My sister is nearby. The garden of spirits and felt presences, of mango, tamarind, flame, grapefruit, guava, the tree with the great termite nest. My maternal grandfather was a landscape gardener. My father planted hundreds of trees. 45.

DARK BLUE ROUND BEAD TIN ~ Full of thousands of the tiniest beads like grains of sand. Our mother made us bracelets. The tin has a gold Egyptomania Art Deco style lion on the lid. Jacob & Co's Biscuits. British Empire Exhibition Wembley 1924. The British Empire is the story behind everything. On a tin of beads. My father told us about the incident at Dinshtway, of the violence of British soldiers towards villagers in Egypt. We inherited a sadness and an anger. A thousand and one beads. 46.

SUBVERTING ISLAM: THE ROLE OF ORIENTALIST CENTRES ~ written by my father, Dr. Ahmad Ghorab. 47.

TINY MATRYOSHKA DOLL THAT HAS LOST HER FAMILY. 48.

WHITE PORCELAIN FIGURINE ~ wearing an 18th century style dress, holding out a rose. In the image I have taken, she has become a Darwishi-like blur hurrying along a pathway to the golden knot of the sacred Ottoman seal and a mesmerising garden of golden flowers and ferns. Notions of whiteness embedded in Turkish and Egyptian ideas of beauty. 49.

OTTOMAN CALLIGRAPHY ~ With the Royal Seal or tughra of a Sultan on a Royal Decree or firman. Discovered recently, richly dancing on the reverse side of a calendar image of Quranic verses from Surat Yusuf. Austere verses that hung over our dining table in Nigeria for many years. We had these same verses engraved on Father's gravestone. 50.

PORTRAITS OF MUMTAZ MAHAL AND SHAH JAHAN - 1628 ~ I found these old photographs in my mother's writing case in an envelope marked Taj Mahal. Mughal emperors and their spouses. Also Bahadur Shah and Zeenat Mahal. Jahangir and his 12th wife Nur Jahan. Akbar the third Mughal emperor and Jodha Bai (Mariam-uz-Zamani), mother of Jahangir. Bahadur Shah was the last Mughal emperor, who died in a British prison in Burma in 1862 following the Indian Mutiny of 1857 against the rule of the British East India Company that ruled on behalf of the Crown. Direct British rule followed the formal ending of the Mughal Empire. 51.

TINY PLASTIC TURQUOISE AND GOLDEN ANGEL PLAYING A CELLO ~ My mother kept tiny magical things. 52.

TWO TURKISH EVIL EYE CHARMS WITH PIERCING GAZES ~ One with a black pupil swimming in intense blue glass set in silver that my father brought back for my mother from Istanbul. The other with multiple eyes, to catch the evil gaze from all sides. 53.

THE MOOR AND PRINCESS BADOURA CUT FROM THE ROYAL DOULTON CATALOGUE MY MOTHER KEPT ~ The Moor is dark, hooded and muscular. Princess Badoura is white with Chinese features dressed in a pink cascade of rose petals, sitting upon an elephant. The most expensive and prestigious Royal Doulton figure ever made. Tales of Empire hidden in nineteenth century lavishly illustrated stories and figurines. Orientalist opium dreams. 54.

COLONIAL POSTCARDS ~ Of Middle Eastern women dressed up to look like what they are not, in settings in which they do not belong, doing things that they have never done. Representations matter as powerful tools of misinformation, stereotyping and disseminating racial hierarchies. 55.

POSTCARD OF A EUROPEAN MODEL POSING NAKED AS IF AT THE BATHS IN AN ORIENTALIST FANTASY OF A HAREM ~ She is looking at herself in the mirror, she is very pale like the marble of a classical sculpture nearby and she is sitting on a leopard skin. The head of the 'exotic' animal is snarling beneath her feet. 56.

SMALL WHITE SHELL LIKE A DROP OF MILK. 57.

PAUA SHELL. 58.

PASSPORT PHOTOGRAPH OF MY MOTHER FROM 1966. 59.

BLUEST EYE GLASS MARBLE ~ A mermaid is looking through from the other side of another world. 60.

BLUE AND WHITE WILLOW PATTERN GINGER JAR ~ Chinoiserie, Silk Road, what they kept and what they threw away. 61.

FILIPINOS, CANNIBALISM, AND MOTHERS DANCING ON TONGUES

Stephanie Misa

"Filipinos, Cannibalism, and Mothers Dancing on Tongues" is a performance. One that, if done right, will have you eating out of my hand (literally); but in this format, it meanders a little, like a trail of crumbs. This performance is on orality, on bodies and tongues, and eating, on eating one's words until they are but bits of wafer stuck on the roof of your mouth.

I look at the "mother tongue," my own included, and the complication this notion implies in contexts where the mother tongue is a purely spoken language outside of institutional (read-write) frameworks, and for them I use the term "orality." What would it be to examine the activation of an orality outside the usual educational modes of instruction: its evolution, cannibalism, appropriation, and production of pidginized and creole words? Is the pervasiveness of a spoken language, in fact, a form of resistance?

- I am telling you a story -

The Cookie

Aside from the name given to the people of the Philippines (a country named after King Philip II of Spain: *Las Islas Filipinas*), Filipinos (plural) is also a cookie, whereas Filipino (in singular) is the official national language of the Republic of the Philippines. A lot of confusion can result from this: are we referring to the people, a cookie, or the language? Such is the ambivalent nature of the name Filipino.

Filipino as a language did not exist until 1937. In that year, an executive order by the Republic of the Philippines' President Manuel Quezon, signed in 1937, decreed "Filipino" a national language. The Philippines, an archipelagic nation, is home to around seven main languages and 175 variations of those languages spoken in different island groups. Under the recommendation of the Institute of National Language (a task force formed to survey the existing languages of the Philippines), Tagalog, the language of Manila, was declared the foundation of the new Filipino language on the basis of its "rich" literary tradition. Conveniently, Manila was also the economic center of the Philippines through both Spanish and American colonial eras and is currently still the capital. Through telenovelas, noontime shows, print media, newscasts, and education (produced in the capital and circulated across the archipelago?) the Philippines centralized its power, identity and culture, and made Tagalog ubiquitous.

This made my own language, Cebuano, a "bastard tongue" – illegitimate chitchat done during school recess and not inside the classroom, illicit gossip whispered in halls. Cebuano was a language learned through community, family, and friends, a language that finds its agency in a more performative presence rather than a written or read one. The difficulty in most colonized, multi-linguistic nations is that more often than not, non-dominant regional languages or island-specific dialects are "demoted" to a purely oral level. "Filipino" became the term for Tagalog given a more nationalistic bent. Filipino and English were given priority in terms of literacy and inculcation, creating a rigid mono-structure where once there was multiplicity. This linguis-

tic nationalism ironically adheres to a colonial ideology, mapping a linguistic hierarchy onto a social hierarchy, eliminating that deemed inefficient, chunky, or too different. In effect, the Philippines, despite its geographic character as an *archipelago*, is discursively (and metaphorically) rendered a mere *island*.⁰¹

So imagine my surprise when, on my first ever trip to Spain, I run into package of cookies with "Filipinos" emblazoned on its packet. Filipinos are chocolate-covered cookies shaped like a ring, or a mini-doughnut (with a hole in the middle). These cookies, unnervingly named after my ethnic identity, were introduced in 1907 by Artiach, a family bakeshop formerly based in Bilbao and now a cookie-making conglomerate with a 100-year history of baking "Filipinos." Was the creation of "Filipinos" in 1907 an act of reminiscence and nostalgia in the wake of the Spanish withdrawal from the Philippines in 1890?

It comes from the company ARTIACH or, as they say on the packet, Galletas Artiach SAU, in Orozco España. They are the creators of the Filipino.

The Filipino is defined as "a biscuit covered in chocolate" and is made of wheat flour (not gluten-free), milk chocolate (40%), sugar, cocoa butter, cocoa mass, dried skim milk, lactose, milk fat, emulsifier, sunflower lecithin, flavoring, palm oil, more sugar, wheat starch, milk powder, raising agents, glucose-fructose syrup, salt, anti-oxidants, flavor, may contain soya, and eggs.

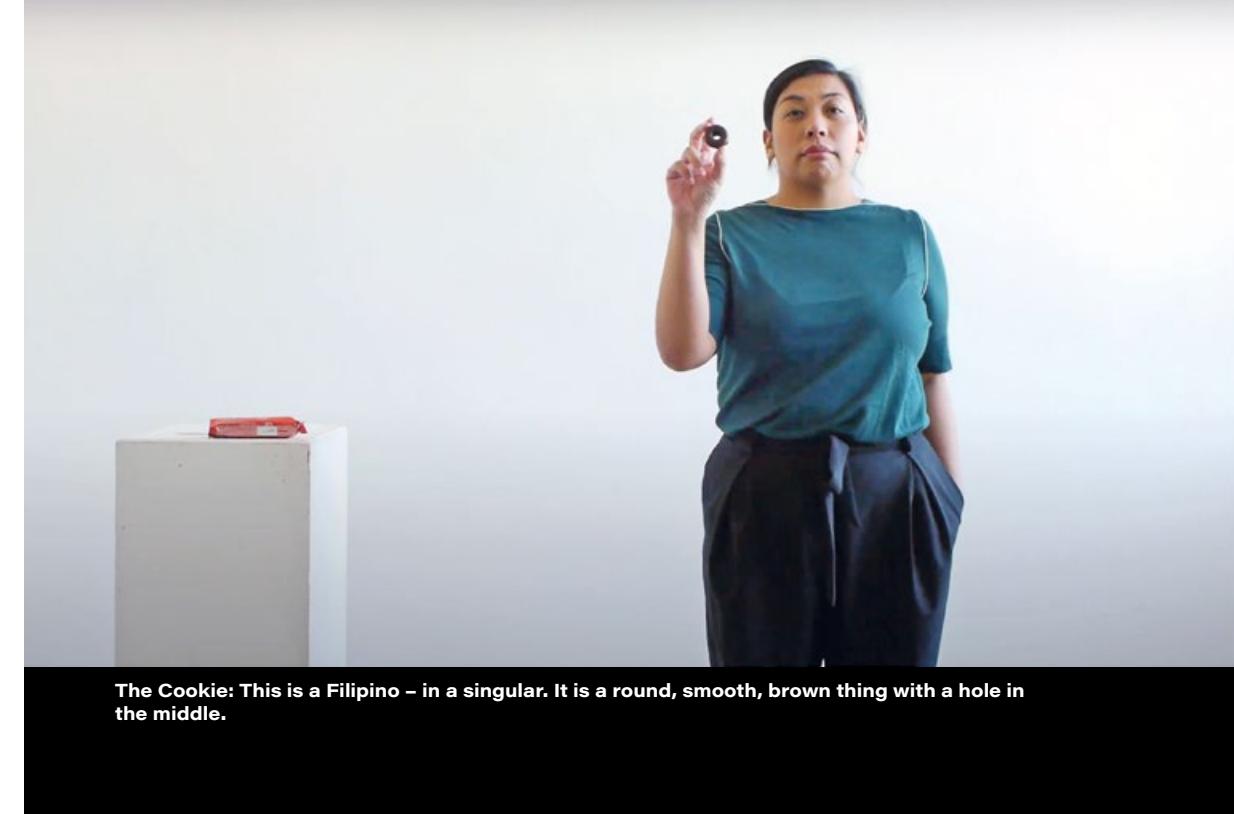
I had, at that point, never met food that personally offended me. Sure, there was the Danish, and the Vienna sausage, and frankfurter, and hamburger. But these were foods pointing to places of origin – like the much-debated French fry (or "freedom fry" at one point in recent American history). This was not food commentary on the outward appearance of a people by its former colonizer. Diminutive in size, the Filipino cookie could be a fat ring on a child's finger, its brown chocolate glaze a reference to my skin, its caramel-colored crunchy *galletas* in the center perhaps a swing at our cultural civilization under the hands of both the Catholic Church and Spanish governance, an ownership of mind, body and soul. We were compelled to partake in the sanctity of communion and ingest the body of Christ, as "the word made flesh and dwelt amongst us," and like good Catholics, we did. Amen. Perhaps it was we who were made into disposable, docile snack food, broken into bite-sized pieces, ready to nourish the Spanish colonial body.

Now – truth or fiction? (dramatic pause)

The government of the Philippines filed a diplomatic protest with the government of Spain, the European Commission and the then manufacturer Nabisco Iberia in 1999. The protest objected to the use of the name "Filipinos," a term which can refer to the people of the Philippines, to market cookies and pretzel snacks and demanded that Nabisco stop selling the product until the brand name was changed. The resolution's author, the Philippine Congressman Heherson Alvarez, claimed that the name of the cookie was offensive due to the apparent reference to their color, "dark outside and white inside." His resolution stated "These food items could be appropriately called by any other label, but the manufacturers have chosen our racial identity, and they

01

Marco Cuevas-Hewitt, "Sketches of an Archipelagic Poetics of a Postcolonial Belonging," *Budhi: A Journal of Culture and Ideas* 11 (2007).



The Cookie: This is a Filipino – in a singular. It is a round, smooth, brown thing with a hole in the middle.



The Package: The Filipinos – in plural – is in a red package – its name also in red – primary colors like "Red, White and, Blue, stars over you..."



The Paper: Hold up paper with notes, tear into small pieces. Start stuffing pieces into your mouth until nothing but muffled sounds start to emerge. Speak slowly.

02
"Filipinos (snack food)," Wikipedia, accessed April 15, 2018, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filipinos_\(snack_food\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filipinos_(snack_food)).

03
The *Harana* is a traditional form of courtship music which a man woos a woman by singing underneath her window at night. The harana has a distinctive style, the rhythm in musical terms is *habanera* (also called *danza*) which is in 2/4 time. It first gained popularity in the early part of the Spanish period. Its influence comes from folk music of Spain and the mariachi sounds of Mexico. The *Kundiman* is another genre of traditional Filipino love songs. The kundiman is in 3/4 time. The formula is verse one on minor key, followed by verse two on a parallel major key. Its precise regional origin is under debate.

are now making money out of these food items." On August 26, 1999, the Philippine president Joseph Estrada called the brand "an insult." The protest was filed despite Foreign Secretary Domingo Siazon's initial reluctance on the matter. Siazon had reportedly said he saw nothing wrong with the use of "Filipinos" as a brand name, noting Austrians do not complain that small sausages are called "Vienna sausages."⁰²

Whatever the cookies' original intent, I took perverse pleasure in eating it.

Tongues

What is a "Mother Tongue," or even a first language? Does this term even hold true for many trans-national, multi-language speaking identities, or even those raised by two mothers, if we're to take the term literally?

I am arguing that the embodiment of an orality, its containment in a colonized, disenfranchised, diasporic body, is exactly what gives it power. I see orality as a way to access an intersectionality, one that ruptures the idea of bound cultures, and instead proposes that culture – and by extension, language – is in perpetual flux, and one that's marked by creative becomings.

What I am after, in this proposition, is to pose the question, what is the embodied agency of an orality? Of a language that lives only in its oral form within a community of speakers? What does it mean to be in this body, making these sounds, to still *know* these sounds?

Aaaaaaaa (Ah)
Eeeeeeee (Eh)
Iiiiiiiiii (Ey)
OOOO (Oh)
Uuuuu (Ow)
Perlas na bilog, huwag patulog-tulog.
Bâbâ
Mata
Dung-gan

Perhaps this is what it means to have a living language: one that is tied to people rather than structure, one that can viscerally mirror contemporary concerns and is in itself its own contemporaneity. This also means acknowledging that the language of enculturation can come from many different sites, and nine months in a mother's womb does not guaranty eloquence in her tongue. It opens to the idea that a "mother tongue" is not sustained by the single starting point it implies.

The Dance

There was to be dancing and singing, too, in the performance. A few songs perhaps, accompanied by a guitar, a *harana*, a *kundiman*, songs filled with longing and a tinge of sadness that would suddenly morph into the *Blue Danube*, a mash-up, a cultural transgression of the highest (dis)order.⁰³ This would have been the grand ending, but perhaps next time.

So, while a lot has been written about language – syntax, accent, etymologies, origins, appropriations, stringing together a sentence – I'm less concerned about the language itself. What interests me does not lay in phonetics or grammar. I am engaged in the body that expresses it, and how it expresses it. I am especially wrapped in the body caught in the middle – the body that molds the words and sounds out this in-between-ness. It is the being that is caught in the process of assimilation and refusal and can't quite catch up to the present, because its past is still its present, and its future is... (pause)

and realizes that each utterance is a rebirth
and each movement is a becoming
and the endless waltz and its –

one-two-three, one-two-three (step with the count)

is the back and forth
of remembrance
and emergence.
A dance

rhythmed by many mothers.



The Offering: Chew. Offer bits of the paper to the audience.

REWRITING HUMANISM FROM GUANTANAMO BAY: MOHAMMED AL-HAMIRI, MOHAMEDOU OULD SLAHI, AND THE CARIBBEAN PAST

Don E. Walicek

It is the natives, all the wretched of the earth, who, breaking out of their reservation, are now called upon to reinvent the very concept of the human, through a restructuring of the world system created by the discovery and conquest of the New World by the West.

– Sylvia Wynter, “Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World”

“Your first stop on this tour is gonna be the detainee library, and due to adjustments in the schedule ya’ll gonna be free to spend some extra time there. You’ll get to speak to the librarian and be able to ask him questions.” These are some of the first words I heard from the young American Public Affairs Officer from South Carolina who led part of my two-day tour of the detention facilities at the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. It was the summer of 2016. Since then, I’ve continued to think about our visit to the library and the two books that were missing from its shelves.

We had less than forty-eight hours on the base, quite a bit of time allocated for meals, and a limited number of stops. For these reasons, I initially wasn’t that interested in visiting the library. I thought that we could learn more if we spent our time someplace else. Also, I’d already learned quite a bit about it by studying journalists’ writings and by visiting a Tumblr site where lawyers post photos of book covers from the library. But most of the small group of journalists and photographers with whom I had traveled from Miami seemed genuinely interested in the place. Their willingness to go along with what had been planned for us proved contagious.

From the base’s small airport, our group rode in a vehicle that took us to a simple pier at the bay’s shore. A slow-moving Black woman stood a few feet away, wading in shallow water as she washed a pair of plastic boots. Her forehead was sweaty, and her plump arms glistened next to the old t-shirt that she wore over a dress. No one acknowledged her, and she paid little attention to us, never making eye contact with anyone in our group. I imagined her as one of the thousands of Jamaican nationals who have migrated to the base, where they earn wages that fall below the U.S. government’s minimum wage.

We crossed the bay in a motorboat, floating by pristine mangroves so well formed that they looked like they had been removed from a painting. As we approached the eastern shore, several buildings came into view. Scattered upon a hillside turned brown by the heat and a record-setting drought, they flanked a large U.S. flag flapping in the wind. It flew at half-staff to commemorate the lives of five police officers that the U.S. Army Reserve Afghan War veteran Micah Xavier Johnson had killed in Dallas, Texas. Johnson was assassinated by a police robot, the first such homicide in the history of U.S. law enforcement. An investigation later revealed that he was angry about the killings of Black men by the police.

As I boarded the van that transported us to the small portable building housing the library, one of the officers began his official history of the base, which he referred to as “the island.” He told a story

of freedom, service, and sacrifice. His narrative left out events like the seizure of the space in the Spanish-American War of 1898, the invasion of numerous Caribbean countries from the base, the detention of tens of thousands of Haitian and Cuban refugees in the 1990s, and the abuse and torture of many, if not all, of the roughly 780 Muslim detainees incarcerated there in the wake of 9/11. The office continued to reinvent the place, as if it were one where fairness, good faith, and a belief in equality had consistently prevailed.

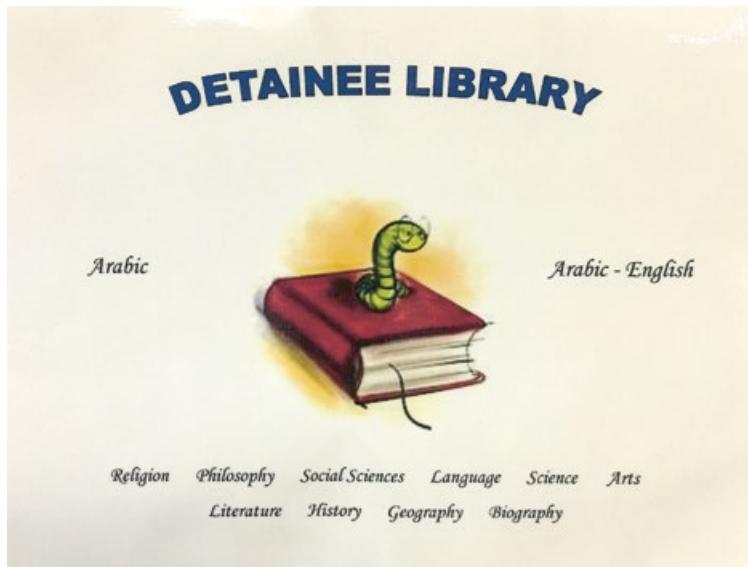


FIGURE 1: Sign on Library Wall. Photo © Don E. Walicek, 2016, cleared for release by JTF 160.

The Detainee Library

Dressed in fatigues, a young soldier-librarian described the collection and rules related to borrowing privileges. Like most of the members of Joint Task Force 160 that I met at the base, he came across as friendly and approachable. He spoke proudly, as if working in a small town with typical patrons. Upbeat and professional, he never mentioned the problems, controversies, or reports of abuse that have made "Guantánamo" a metaphor for danger and lawlessness to people all over the world.

The soldier-librarian explained that borrowing privileges differed across three categories of prisoners: highly compliant, compliant, and non-compliant. The highly compliant were allowed to check out a mixture of reading materials and electronics that included up to ten books, four CDs, four DVDs, a DVD player, and a PlayStation 3 console. The compliant and non-compliant were prohibited from having any electronics and allowed to check out a maximum of seven and two books, respectively. No mention was made of whether the handful of men in Camp 7, those whom the U.S. government still suspects of involvement with 9/11 or other acts of terrorism, used the library.

Prior to the authorization of our visit, we were required to sign an official document in which we agreed not to ask questions about them.

As the tour unfolded, officials shared details about the point system that determines who could borrow what. The men begin each month as "highly compliant." We were told that they are downgraded for misbehavior in a point system that punishes them for things like refusing to eat, talking back, covering their cell windows, not following orders, and dousing guards with water or bodily fluids. The system was infantilizing, like the one back in elementary school that awarded me gold and silver stars for being quiet, doing my homework, and raising my hand before asking a question.

Quiet is appreciated in libraries the world over, but the official silence of the detainee library feels daunting. My questions about whether reading helped the men deal with suffering, depression, or loneliness were met with awkward pauses that led officials to share anecdotes about the challenges that U.S. guards faced in their deployment. I commented that several detainees who were released from the prison had written about library resources that changed for the better how they experienced their captivity. It also gave some resources to improve their Arabic, which emerged as a *lingua franca* and symbol of solidarity. "But that's not really significant given that we have linguists and interpreters," a soldier told me.

Yet, it was significant for the prisoners. These men in the base learning Arabic to speak to their fellow prisoners reminds us that the base's population has been made up of individuals from a diverse set of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. They have never been just detainees or enemy combatants. All of them have been Muslim and all can be considered forced migrants, but they come from 49 different countries, urban and rural backgrounds, and they have different levels of education. The prison population has included men who were migrants well before the U.S. military captured and transported them to Guantánamo Bay. Their movements have, at times, been misrepresented in accusations suggesting that Muslim men crossing international borders must be equated with support for violent interpretations of jihad. A common language helped them to form a community, to develop a common code and to share knowledge about their journeys and what they had learned behind bars.

Library materials also provided detainees opportunities to learn English, the language of their captors. Some of the men used their new knowledge to read about American law, literature, history, and religion. This helped them to see themselves outside of Cuba, and to imagine themselves through the eyes of their guards, interrogators, and wardens. Library materials contributed to the formation of numerous prisoners as writers, cultural translators, and thinkers. Most prominent in my memory were the cases of two men: the Yemeni prisoner Mohammed Al-Hamiri, inmate #00249, and Mohamedou Ould Slahi from Mauritania, inmate #760.



FIGURE 2: Media Room, Guantánamo Detention Center. Photo © Don Walicek, 2016.

"Good Moral Choices"

Al-Hamiri read the work of the late Palestinian-American literary theorist Edward Said, one of the founders of postcolonial studies, during his incarceration. Imprisoned at Guantánamo Bay from 2002 to 2016, he learned of Said's work while confined to a small media room with satellite television (figure 2). Al-Hamiri had been permitted to use the space as a reward for good behavior. Watching TV with his wrists cuffed and his ankles shackled to the floor, he came across a documentary that profiled the academic's work as a literary scholar and his influence as a public intellectual. The documentary also taught him about Said's final publication, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*.⁰¹ Eager to learn more, Al-Hamiri asked his lawyers to go through the procedures necessary to have the 144-page book transferred to the library. His request was honored.

In an article published during the last year of his incarceration, Al-Hamiri refers to Said's book as a message sent to him "from heaven" and to a heightened awareness that he had come to feel behind bars.⁰² He contrasted his perspective with that of people who take freedom for granted in their busy daily lives. Al-Hamiri writes, "in this prison every whisper I hear and every breeze I feel mean a lot to me."⁰³ Reading appears to have lessened his feelings of despair and motivated him to write and to share with his lawyers what he created. They, in turn, made his work available to the journalist Murtaza Hussain, who presented it to the broader public in articles for the online news publication *The Intercept*.

Like other prisoners, Al-Hamiri had neither been charged with a crime nor issued a sentence. Accusations of terrorism associated with his incarceration were the result of flawed intelligence and

01
See Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

02
Quoted in Murtaza Hussain, "Prisoner's Letters Document Tragedy and Hope Inside Guantánamo," *The Intercept*, April 18, 2016, <https://theintercept.com/2016/04/18/trapped-guantanamo-letters-mohammed-al-hamiri/>, accessed December 4, 2020.

03
Ibid.

04
David Potorti (with Peaceful Tomorrows), *September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows: Turning Our Grief into Action for Peace* (New York: RDV/Akashic Books, 2003).

05
Mohamedou Ould Slahi, *Guantánamo Diary*, edited by Larry Siems (New York: Hachette, 2015).

numerous blunders of the largest and most well-funded military in the history of the planet. Al-Hamiri had been released to Saudi Arabia in April 2016, a few months before my visit.

Once the soldier-librarian had finished his presentation, I knew that I wanted to hold in my hands the very copy of Said's book that Al-Hamiri had read. Maybe something had been left behind: a dog-eared page, a highlighted passage, or notes in the margin. I had read it a few months before receiving permission to participate in the tour of the detention facilities. That led me to ask precisely how the book might have impacted Al-Hamiri. What made this scholarly book so appealing to him? What was its significance within the context of indefinite detention at one of the planet's most infamously violent prisons?

It took just a minute for me to locate the spot where the volume belonged. When it wasn't there, I asked the friendly soldier-librarian about the book, explaining its links to Al-Hamiri, while recording our dialogue on my iPhone. He walked me over to a laminated list of holdings that was fastened to a metal shelf, but it was not included.

"Oh... the book was probably a special request that was later removed rather than added to the collection." He continued: "Remember our positive selection criteria. As I said before, no gore, no blood, no sex. We focus on important American classics, positive topics, anything from politics to current events. Our goal is to promote good moral choices, like a good school library."

I laughed politely, but awkwardly, and told him that Said was "all about morality."

The soldier-librarian responded, "We can't be too careful."

The book's absence was, of course, not a total surprise. The detainee library had even banned *September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows: Turning Our Grief into Action for Peace* after a prisoner's lawyer requested it.⁰⁴ The book tells the story of families and loved ones of people who died in 9/11, arguing that their losses should never be used as a justification for further violence. They responded to the terrorist attacks by engaging writing, art, music, and dialogue to oppose war. Their book tells the story of their travels to Afghanistan. They funded education for children who lost limbs and homes to U.S. bombs and lead numerous projects aimed at cultivating cross-cultural understanding.

I decided to push my luck and ask about a more well-known book, Mohamedou Ould Slahi's *Guantánamo Diary*.⁰⁵ First published in 2015 as an edition that was heavily redacted by U.S. government censors, it is the only Gitmo prison memoir written behind bars to date, a *New York Times* bestseller, and a work that has been translated into more than a dozen languages. Prior to my visit, dozens of major newspapers and magazines had published pieces about Slahi, the history of his manuscript, and the U.S. government's decision to redact its contents.

"Never heard of that one, sir. Guess it doesn't meet our standards," the soldier-librarian said.

"Really? Come on. You musta heard of it. It was declassified

212 by the government and then released in redacted form," I replied. "Slahi is sort of a star prisoner."

He shot back, "Sounds like something from *another world!*"

His response shocked me. I told him that I teach the book in an undergraduate course at the University of Puerto Rico, and then asked again, hoping he would at least acknowledge its existence. His facial expressions communicated sincerity, but he just repeated his response. Verbatim. His words hit hard given that Slahi was still incarcerated nearby, probably just a few minutes from where we stood.

The proposal that the soldier-librarian and I inhabit different worlds sometimes returns to haunt me. It previews a future scenario deplete of prisoners' voices, a chasm in which a common ethics and solutions to urgent problems are impossible to achieve.

A Larger Memory

The writings of Mohammed Al-Hamiri and Mohamedou Ould Slahi situate their perspectives, U.S. military operations, and attempts to better understand detainee operations in a dialogic space. These works reveal a troubling continuity between the dehumanization of Indigenous people and enslaved Africans on the one hand, and the litany of abuses that have become normalized in the context of the Global War on Terror on the other. The latter include solitary confinement, forced feeding, the elimination of due process, the denial of attorney-client privilege and habeas corpus, and long-term detention without trial. Within this long history, patterns of human trafficking interweave past and present. Navigating these to construct a larger memory that recalls the integrity and strength of those subjected to dislocation and misrepresentation is both necessary and possible. It assists in assessing how humanism can assist in displacing pernicious traditions of violence.

The writings of these two men relate to migration and incarceration in different ways. Rich in metaphor and imagery, Al-Hamiri's short texts are probably best understood as semi-autobiographical. The work of the intellectual Edward Said motivated his perseverance and his desire to escape suffering by moving into another realm, one free of conflict where dialogue can finally take place. I suggest that Said affirmed Al-Hamiri's personal integrity at a critical time in his detention and transported him to a place where writing became a vehicle that allowed his voice to finally be heard.

For Slahi, the more prolific writer of the two, the experience of forced migration and incarceration is more extensively documented. His writing is clearly a memoir. It directly responds to some of the historic problems that cluster around the history of the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay, among them anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, and the U.S. government's dissemination of false narratives about those it has held there. Slahi even compares his subjugation to that experienced by other Africans who suffered as slaves centuries before he spent fourteen years in Guantánamo Bay's maximum-security prison.

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George W. Bush, "Address to Joint Session of Congress Following 9/11 Attacks," delivered September 20, 2001, American Rhetoric, www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush911jointsessionspeech.htm, accessed December 4, 2020.

07

Hillary Beckles, "The Genocide Policy in English-Karifuna Relations in the Seventeenth Century," in *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600-1850*, edited by M. Daunton and Rick Halpern (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 285.

08

David Vine et al., "Creating Refugees: Displacement Caused by the United States' Post-9/11 Wars," *Costs of War*, Brown University, September 21, 2020, https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2020/Displacement_Vine%20et%20al_Costs%20of%20War%202020%2009%2008.pdf, 1, accessed December 4, 2020.

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Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 169, 235.

In fact, striking similarities link the circumstances of Guantánamo detainees' incarceration and those in which vulnerable groups were immersed under colonial rule. First, there is the very history of the island itself. Cuba was an important early site of Indigenous resistance to Spanish imperialism. Spanish colonizers massacred thousands of its Native peoples to fulfill Cristóbal Colón's promise to reaffirm the "civilization and nobility of all Christians" through conquest. Like U.S. President George W. Bush in the aftermath of 9/11, they took pride in demonstrating the superiority of their weapons, to transform society by "freeing it from evil" and taking control of its economic and political structure. These early encounters include the torture and demise of the chieftain Hatuey after he sought safety in the vicinity of Guantánamo Bay.

Another way that the Spanish colonizers tied their epic battle against "evil" with control over the autochthonous population is by portraying themselves as the only true messengers of God. Since the time of the Crusades, the Catholic Church had sanctified theological rationale justifying "just war" against non-Christian peoples. These doctrines shaped Spaniards' ideas about Indigenous people in sixteenth-century Cuba and helped to propagate anti-Muslim discourse in the U.S. five centuries later. Both the Spanish colonizers and the administration of George W. Bush argued that those who condemned their pronouncements and military actions were "opponents of freedom and progress."⁰⁶

The pursuit of imperial aims led to mass migration of the Indigenous population. Survivors in Cuba fled to remote mountain areas, the Bahamas, and other nearby islands, while those who faced violence on other islands relocated to the Eastern Caribbean.⁰⁷ Contemporary conflicts extend over large swaths of the planet, and they have increased the number of migrants immensely. In fact, by 2020 the post-9/11 wars led by the U.S. had displaced 37 million people.⁰⁸

Mass migration is, of course, also a condition of the Atlantic slave trade. At least one million Africans were forcibly relocated to Cuba under Spanish colonialism. In addition, Cuba was a major importer of enslaved Africans and one of the last places in Latin America to pass a law abolishing slavery. Also compelling is Guantánamo Bay's status as a major site for the illegal importation of thousands of Africans following the prohibition of the slave trade by Britain and the U.S. in 1808. Following the ban, government officials and an international network of agents and ship owners conspired to utilize the features of Guantánamo Bay, which in terms of geographical formation is one of the deepest bays in the Americas, for the clandestine illegal entry of ships.

The illegal importation of enslaved Africans to Cuba continued for decades. Scholars estimate that approximately 500,000 Africans reached Cuba between 1817 and 1865.⁰⁹ In 1857, a correspondent for New York's *Weekly Herald* described Guantánamo Bay as "a favorite harbor for the off landing of cargoes of negroes from Africa, as [its] numerous bays and inlets surrounded and separated from each other by high hills enable the slavers to discharge their cargoes

in perfect security."¹⁰ Local officials and North American merchants condoned this trafficking of human bodies, and for private companies and their investors, the trade remained extremely lucrative.

Beyond the shared geographical space that links slavery and the indefinite detention of men whom the U.S. government labeled suspected terrorists, both African slaves and Muslim men captured in the Global War on Terror were subjected to kidnapping, sale, purchase, and transfer between buyers. Their subjugation included a common subset of technologies of control and psychological terror. These include caging, hooding, shackling, chaining, silencing, sensory deprivation, and torture.

Material culture also connects slavery and detainee operations. For example, the shackles used on Al-Hamiri, Slahi, and hundreds of other prisoners were made by Hiatt and Company, a U.K. firm with long ties to the institution of slavery. The company's products, which have since been rebranded by a firm called Safariland, included gang chains and collars for use on enslaved Africans who were shipped to the Caribbean.¹¹ Hiatt and Company continued making and distributing these items to the U.S. and other parts of the world well after the British government outlawed slavery.¹²

I knelt down on the floor to get a good look at these shackles in the media room that I visited during my tour of the detention facilities. Each had a soft padded interior and a strap to be tightened, fastened, and then locked in place. They were attached to a chain that was bolted into the cement floor so that guards could easily fasten them around the ankles of "highly compliant" prisoners. The well-behaved men with access to this small room have never been charged with a crime, yet they sit inside a prison that is surrounded by fences and barbed wire inside a controversial military base outlined by giant cacti and landmines. They sit in a large, plush recliner as soldiers armed with automatic weapons monitor them from the other side of a one-way mirror. Shackles fetter their limbs with straps, locks, and chain, simultaneously threatening their self-respect and the distant, but still important, possibilities of justice.

Shackles sustain the long tradition of dehumanizing forced migrants who are held captive by powerful countries. They link criminality to racial and cultural stereotypes that portray the Muslim prisoners as untrustworthy and dangerous, godless barbarians with guest-like status at best, people who cannot belong to "civilized societies." The U.S. military system of detention is just one component of a larger epistemological system that has long represented members of some groups as if they were subhuman and inherently guilty. The relevance of these tropes was confirmed in 2003 by the U.S. legal scholar Viet D. Dinh, one of the chief authors of the Patriot Act, who stated: "When you adopt a way of terror you've excused yourself from the community of human beings."¹³ Following this logic, the U.S. government extracted Muslims from their homelands, confined them in a far-away place, defined them as "enemy combatants," and passed laws eliminating their rights.

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Jonathan M. Hansen, *Guantánamo: An American History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 66.

11

Helen Holmes, "4 Artists Want to Pull Their Work From Whitney Biennial After Renewed Criticism," *Observer*, July 19, 2019, observer.com/2019/07/whitney-biennial-protests-karakrit-arunanondchai-meriem-bennani-nicole-eisenman-and-nicholas-galanin-safariland-criticism/; Robin Pogrebin, "Warren Kanders Says He Is Getting Out of the Tear Gas Business," *New York Times*, June 9, 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/06/09/arts/design/tear-gas-warren-kanders.html, accessed December 5, 2020.

12

Joseph Yannielli and Christine Whyte, "Shackles and Handcuffs: The 'Special Relationship' of Racist Policing," *Histories of the Present*, History Workshop, July 9, 2020, www.historyworkshop.org.uk/shackles-and-handcuffs/, accessed December 5, 2020. In 2019, the U.S. military used Safariland tear gas on migrants trying to enter its southern border. Then in 2020, law enforcement officials used it against Black Lives Matter marchers who were protesting the killing of George P. Floyd, Jr. by police.

13

Quoted in Daphne Eviatar, "Foreigners' Rights In the Post-9/11 Era: A Matter of Justice," *New York Times*, October 4, 2003, www.nytimes.com/2003/10/04/arts/foreigners-rights-in-the-post-9-11-era-a-matter-of-justice.html, accessed December 4, 2020.



FIGURE 3: Sniper Cloth Under Caribbean Sky. Photo © Don E. Walicek, 2016, cleared for release by JTF 160.

The Bush administration's description of the prisoners as an evil, monolithic block, "the worst of the worst," reinforced these negative images. Such accusations have continued for years, even after U.S. military authorities recognized that the overwhelming majority of the men it had imprisoned at Guantánamo Bay have no connection to terrorism. Lawyer and academic Marc Falkoff reported that the review of military documents from 2004 showed only five percent of the hundreds of prisoners at Guantánamo were apprehended on the battlefield, and only eight percent have even been accused of having links to al-Qaeda.¹⁴ Nevertheless, U.S. government leaders and large numbers of ordinary people still associate the prisoners with the images instilled by former U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's 2002 statement that these men are "among the most dangerous, best-trained, vicious killers on the face of the earth."¹⁵

The U.S. military's standard operating procedures (SOPs in official military lingo) function like projects that early philanthropic societies established for enslaved people in the Caribbean. Both aimed to resocialize people held in bondage by providing only a subset of them special privileges. SOPs associated with the detainee library assume that borrowing books and access to life skills courses in which prisoners study a language or learn computer skills are special privileges. They link them to acculturation and types of knowledge that are subsequently used to define the model prisoner. In eighteenth-century England, societies set up by the clergy and members of a wealthy class of elite aimed to teach a portion of the enslaved population the doctrines, principles, and ethics of "Holy religion" and to instill "the fear of God" in them. Assembling a sort of mobile library, they sent trunks packed with thousands of books and manuals across the Atlantic for distribution in more than a dozen colonies.

Some of the books that the philanthropic societies sent to the Caribbean – titles such as *Rules for the Conversion of Negroes* and *Christian Directions and Instructions for Negroes* – include guidelines for convincing the enslaved to obey their superiors and to reject the religious traditions of their homelands. They were accompanied by grammar books used to teach some of the enslaved to read and write the language of their masters. These books were directed to slaveowners, local officials, and church leaders. A 1785 report from one of these societies explains that its goal was not to convert all of the enslaved to Christianity, but to identify a group to be "saved" and offered formal education. The same report indicates that those Africans who were "good" would be happy, and that those who were "bad," a group that included those who were superstitious and practitioners of Obeah, an Afro-Caribbean belief system, would be "constantly subjected to punishments."¹⁶ People who demanded their freedom by running away and those who practiced activities such as drumming and dancing, or who lived in familial unions not sanctioned by the church, were usually denied access to classes, literacy, and books. In the years that followed, ideas in these books informed how members of the dominant classes described "model slaves," the path to legal emancipation, and norms that they hoped would guide social change.

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Marc Falkoff, "Conspiracy to Commit Poetry," *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 6, no. 1 (2007): 5.

15

Quoted in Katharine Seelye, "Detainees Are Not P.O.W.s, Cheney and Rumsfeld Declare," *New York Times*, January 28, 2002, www.nytimes.com/2002/01/28/world/a-nation-challenged-captives-detainees-are-not-pow-s-cheney-and-rumsfeld-declare.html, accessed December 6, 2020.

16

"Letter from Mr. Ball," quoted in *Abstract of the Proceeding of the Associates of Dr. Bray* (London: n.p., 1785), 13–15.

17

Quoted in Randall Mikkelsen, "National Geographic Film Goes 'Inside Guantánamo,'" *Reuters*, April 3, 2009, <https://es.reuters.com/article/uk-guantanamo-film/national-geographic-film-goes-inside-guantanamo-idUKTRE5321GK20090403>, accessed December 4, 2020.

Like English church officials and slaveowners who punished Africans for practicing their own religion, employees of the U.S. military have mistreated prisoners for practicing Islam. According to numerous newspaper reports and human rights organizations (e.g., American Civil Liberties Union and the International Red Cross), guards and interrogators alike have deliberately desecrated the Qur'an, and insulted worshippers during their daily prayers (*salāh*). Similar attitudes appear to have characterized early Spanish missionaries' destruction of amulets known as *cemí*, and the idols, rattles, and other objects that the Native peoples identified as Carib, Taíno, and Arawak used in public rituals. In each of these instances, religions other than Christianity were rejected as illegitimate.

Resonance

Resonance between events in Caribbean history and the staggering problems at the Guantánamo military prison assists in understanding why Edward Said's *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* doesn't have a place in the detainee library. In this publication, Said is primarily interested in the cultivation of a more democratic form of American humanism. Just perusing the volume's index would probably lead military censors to identify keywords that make the book suspect. Words like "emancipation," "freedom," and "co-existence" are likely to stand out as red flags. These same concepts inspired resistance, rebellion, and dreams of a better future among enslaved Africans, colonized peoples demanding political autonomy, and minorities struggling for civil rights. It is no coincidence that they are questioned within the U.S. military prison at Guantánamo Bay, given the parallels between the systematic dehumanization of enslaved Africans and Muslims identified above. The former U.S. Navy officer Charles Swift underscored what he considered this place's opposition to justice and humanism when he called it "the legal equivalent of outer space."¹⁷ Rejecting Said's scholarly work as a library holding, or dismissing it as of questionable moral value, echoes the logic of an older colonial order. According to this order, a powerful group claiming to promote "the greater good" attempts to control what those who are held captive can read, learn, and believe.

Perhaps the appeal of *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* lies in Said's indirect recognition of the humanity of the prisoners. Discovering that a highly respected intellectual had published a book about improving the world that included a critique of the U.S. response to 9/11 must have been informative and reassuring for Al-Hamiri. It might have even saved his life. However, the writings that Al-Hamiri completed in prison suggest that the abuses he suffered seriously challenged the solace offered by Said's work.

The examination of U.S. law indicates that the prisoners who remain at Guantánamo Bay today have been recreated as subhuman by "official" state narratives; they do not matter. They are unrecognizable as real people. In her book *Precarious Lives*, the philosopher

American Medical Association and numerous international health organizations argue that Guantánamo prisoners have the right to reject food, even if their actions result in death, but the U.S. government subjects hunger strikers to painful forced feedings. The official procedure involves strapping a prisoner to a special "restraint chair," then a tube is forced up the nose, down the back of the throat, and into the stomach before pumping in a nutritional supplement.

Reflecting on his experience as a writer, Al-Hamiri expresses that prison had provided "no voice other than this pen with which to write a painful memory from the pages of my life."²¹ A text of his that the organization Witness Against Torture presented in a dramatic reading similarly represents the world from the point of view of a narrator who has been abandoned by one of the most essential forces known to humankind, the sun:

So I'm left alone with nothing but the moon and the moonlight shining on me, as everyone and everything on earth has gone to sleep.

I became even more worried when I saw that the moon was carrying a letter, and I saw the stars around looking at it, and looking at me as if they felt sorry for what I was about to hear: I realized that he was saying, "hope was dead."

But I kept whispering to the stars and I still do, so that they could be witnesses to my truthfulness.

My last breath will show my loyalty to them, and when they walk along my path, my soul will float with their shadow.²²

This passage underscores faith in truthfulness, but this faith unfolds in a solitary space, a context void of dialogue with humans.

The sentences that Al-Hamiri shares wander in the open air, in a space beneath an open sky where he confirms an alliance with the stars. His images are clear and the actions that he communicates are direct. He communicates patient endurance in a hushed voice, never making reference to captivity, torture, or the fact that a young, innocent Yemeni from Saudi Arabia has been locked up and not allowed to see the night sky for years on end. The reader is likely to anticipate a turn for the better in the digressions leading up to the next chapter of his journey – the opening of a letter, the exchange of glances, quiet voices – but these lead the narrator to the afterlife, to an existence in which hope and justice are no longer needed.

The narrator is left with worry and the vision that a final demise is inevitable; however, he does not cry out in desperation. There is no exchange with captors and no system of justice. Instead, he turns to

Judith Butler considers the precarious position of the detainees, arguing that the creation of their non-personhood is:

different from producing a subject who is compliant with the law; and it is different from the subject who takes the norm of humanness to be its constitutive principle. The subject who is no subject is neither alive nor dead, neither fully constituted as a subject nor fully deconstituted in death.¹⁸

To be recognized as fully human by the country detaining them would have come as a relief to Al-Hamiri, Slahi, and the hundreds of other Muslim men who have been detained in the detention facilities since 2002.

Al-Hamiri's Vision of Freedom

Al-Hamiri's forced extradition to Guantánamo Bay was a life-changing event in a long sequence of migrations. His family resided in Saudi Arabia at the time of his capture, which is reflective of the periodic population flow between the country and Al-Hamiri's native Yemen. As a boy, he suffered an accident that left him with a serious cranial fracture, and doctors inserted pieces of metal into his skull to reconstruct it. He later needed follow-up medical treatment, but when the cost of the procedure proved prohibitive, it was put off. Al-Hamiri told U.S. military interrogators that he left the city of Jeddah for Pakistan in 2001 in search of affordable healthcare, but was tricked into visiting Afghanistan.¹⁹ Next, local police apprehended him, then handed him over to Pakistani authorities who, in turn, transferred him to U.S. authorities.

Omar Farah, his lawyer, points out that he was neither captured on the battlefield, nor caught in some act of terrorism.²⁰ Instead, he was sold to the U.S. military through a bounty system that allowed authorities to exchange individuals for monetary payments. Apparently, a young male with a Yemeni background was suspect due to his migrant status and his movement across borders.

Al-Hamiri reached the U.S. prison at Guantánamo Bay as a hooded and shackled nineteen-year-old. One of at least nine juveniles that have been held there, he arrived still suffering from headaches caused by his childhood injury. The U.S. government identified him as one of the "worst of the worst" and a "high-risk" individual to be subjected to enhanced interrogation techniques. Even though his release was authorized in 2009, he was held in captivity for six more years. This delay was caused by restrictions on transfers of detainees imposed by the U.S. Congress, influential public discourse insisting that any release was problematic, and policies establishing that no Yemeni could be released because they were likely to be recruited by terrorists.

Al-Hamiri's lawyers report that he was tortured and subjected to numerous forms of psychological and physical abuse while at Guantánamo Bay. Like dozens of other prisoners at the base, he responded to his abuse by repeatedly going on hunger strikes. In some instances, he protested abuse that he had experienced personally; in other moments, he acted in solidarity with his fellow prisoners. The

18 Judith Butler, *Precarious Lives: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2006), 98.

19 Andrew Worthington, "Who Are the Remaining Prisoners in Guantánamo? Part Four: Captured Crossing from Afghanistan into Pakistan (2 of 2)" *Close Guantánamo*, September 24, 2010, <http://www.andyworthington.co.uk/2010/09/24/who-are-the-remaining-prisoners-in-guantanamo-part-four-captured-crossing-from-afghanistan-into-pakistan-2-of-2/>, accessed December 4, 2020.

20 Omar Farah, "From Guantánamo: An Innocent Man Pleads for Release," *Close Guantánamo*, January 28, 2013, <https://www.closeguantanamo.org/Articles/78-From-Guantanamo-An-Innocent-Man-Pleads-for-Release>, accessed December 6, 2020.

21 Quoted in Hussain, "Prisoner's Letters."

22 "Mohammed Al-Hamiri: In His Own Words," Witness Against Torture, In Their Own Words: Detainees Speak, produced August 2016, video, 2:23, <http://witnessagainsttorture.com/video/mohammed-al-hamiri-in-his-own-words/>.

220 the distant stars for acknowledgement. Beckoning the celestial bodies as potential witnesses, the narrator pledges his solidarity to them. He does not hold out for an act of intervention that might save him.

The declaration that hope is dead confirms that Al-Hamiri's captors will neither recognize nor honor his humanity. In addition, it brings to mind the struggles of the Caribbean *cacique* Hatuey, as his story deals with similar themes of loss, desperation, and the afterlife in the midst of war. The legendary leader resisted dehumanization by condemning the acts of genocide against the Indigenous people of the Caribbean.

Hatuey and 400 others fled westward in canoes, moving across the Windward Passage until they reached the same space that made Al-Hamiri a writer, Guantánamo Bay. A Spanish colonizer named Diego Velázquez Cuéllar pursued Hatuey, torturing his supporters and burning local villages until he found him. Hatuey had warned the Indigenous people of eastern Cuba about the Spaniards, insisting that they were "innately cruel and evil" as well as intent on conquering and killing them. When a Franciscan friar accompanying Velázquez Cuellar proposed to baptize him and let him live, Hatuey inquired about the fate of the baptized. Upon learning that the rite meant that he would spend eternity in heaven with his tormenters, his hope died. He opted for death. The Spaniards responded by burning him at the stake.

In another text that he wrote about a year before he was finally released, Al-Hamiri situates his own desperate journey on a celestial map in which freedom is on the brink of death. In Al-Hamiri's words, "Freedom is hurt and I cannot do anything to save it. I'm still bandaging its wounds while tears are dripping on its cheeks, as it smiles at me and says, 'I will hold you in my arms again someday. Don't forget, I am freedom.'"²³ In this passage, the circumstances of his captivity force him to imagine a future realm in which his integrity will be restored and his suffering will end. Al-Hamiri's pathway leads to an afterlife in which he will have memory. He will recall efforts of self-preservation, expressions of solidarity, and his pursuit of an escape.

Slahi's Experience of Freedom

Mohamedou Ould Slahi's movements as a migrant have also played a role in his incarceration and, indirectly, in his emergence as a published author. A native of the Northwest African country of Mauritania, Slahi moved to Germany to study electrical engineering after winning a competitive scholarship. He later traveled to Afghanistan to support its people in their fight against communism, a struggle that the U.S. supported. Years later, when he was back in his home country, authorities questioned him about his ongoing links to terrorism. That experience was so unsettling that it motivated his move to Canada. But when Canadian police mistakenly linked him to the planning of large-scale attacks and subjected him to surveillance, Slahi returned to Mauritania. U.S. officials later identified him as a possible key member of al-Qaida and transferred him to Jordan, where he was tortured and interrogated for eight months. They then shipped him to Bagram Air Force base

23 Aliya Hana Hussain, "'I Never Lost Hope': Mohammed Al-Hamiri's Homecoming," Center for Constitutional Rights, April 17, 2016, <https://ccrjustice.org/home/blog/2016/04/17/i-never-lost-hope-mohammed-al-hamiri-s-homecoming>, accessed December 8, 2020.

24 Mohamedou Ould Slahi, *Guantánamo Diary*, restored edition, edited by Larry Siems (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 2017), xxix.

25 Ibid., 232.

in Afghanistan for an additional two weeks, and finally to a secret part of Guantánamo Bay's Camp Echo that was built for men who were believed to be high-value detainees. However, U.S. military documents indicate that by the time he reached Cuba in 2002, he was no longer considered a terrorist suspect. Slahi was never charged with a crime, but he was subjected to countless hours of interrogation and multiple forms of abuse. He recounts these movements and their significance in *Guantánamo Diary*, which is the only prisoner memoir to have been published while its author was still incarcerated.

At the heart of his story is a candid counter-narrative, one that aims to inform readers about his experiences of migration, capture, and incarceration. Especially important for Slahi was documenting his own experience as a prisoner and contesting the lies disseminated by the U.S. government. His memoir is filled with humor, honest reflection, and details about daily life as a captive of the U.S. government.

The base's detainee library materials shaped how he composed the numerous personal narratives that serve as the foundation of his memoir. He used these as resources to improve his English, acquainting himself with contemporary U.S. culture, and learning more about the country's response to 9/11. Slahi directed his early writings to his lawyers. But as he enhanced his knowledge and language skills and transferred the events of his life to narrative form, he shifted to write for a more general audience made up of all sorts of readers, including those whom he imagined as typical Americans.

Slahi put his story to the page in English with the intention of having an impact on his readers, believing that the public at large did not have access to the information needed to understand the gravely violent situation in the prison. He hoped that what he created would change perspectives on topics like indefinite detention at Guantánamo Bay, the use of torture to extract "intelligence," and relations between people of different racial and religious backgrounds. Consider these comments from his introduction to the text:

I wasn't sure if the pages I wrote and gave to lawyers would ever become a book. But I believed in books, and in the people who read them; I always had, since I held my first book as a child. I thought of what it would mean if someone outside the prison was holding a book I had written.²⁴

In numerous parts of the memoir, Slahi addresses the reader directly. He uses this technique, for example, when explaining that torture led him to claim that he committed acts which were not actually of his doing. He writes:

You, Dear Reader, could never understand the extent of the physical, and much more the psychological pain people in my situation suffered, no matter how hard you try to put yourself in another's shoes. Had I done what they accused me of, I would have relieved myself on day one. But the problem is that you cannot just admit to something you haven't done: you need

222 to deliver the details, which you can't when you hadn't done anything. [...] One of the hardest things to do is to tell an untruthful story and maintain it, and that is exactly where I was stuck.²⁵

In the context of these interrogation sessions – which went on for years – Slahi was starved, sexually harassed, humiliated, subjected to extremely loud music for long periods, and prevented from sleeping and praying. Offering a nuanced analysis of his abuse, he recognizes that the dehumanization of prisoners did not come easy to all of the military employees and affiliates in his "prison family." In his words: "Human beings naturally hate to torture other human beings, and Americans are no different. Many of the soldiers were doing the job reluctantly, and were very happy when they were ordered to stop."²⁶ Passages such as this one set the stage for the memoir's culmination in a call for reconciliation.

Slahi created a space in which his audiences, everyday people, could listen to him as the Other. Readers of his memoir can participate in a dialogue in which he shares a deeply personal story and develops a sense of trust, one that fosters understanding of his journey and the many predicaments that he navigated while in custody. It contests the dominant narratives responsible for his dehumanization from a first-person point of view. He writes from "the belly of the beast," from a place where law enforces injustice, and directly engages ideas that undermine the nurturing of humanistic perspectives in the contemporary world. It is a space of encounter and learning, yet openly agonistic, one that enables Slahi to present the trafficking of human bodies across international borders as a longstanding component of U.S. imperial power.

Indeed, Slahi studied the history of the Atlantic slave trade while in the base, probably making use of information he found in books in the detainee library. He compares himself to the Africans who were taken by force to the region:

Slaves were taken forcibly from Africa, and so was I. Slaves were sold a couple of times on their way to their final destination, and so was I. Slaves suddenly were assigned to somebody they didn't choose, and so was I. And when I looked up the history of slaves, I noticed that slaves sometimes ended up an integral part of the master's house.²⁷

His transition from freedom to bondage is a migration punctuated by physical extraction, economic exchange, limitations on personal agency, and his self-realization that enslaved people are essential to a larger system that is sustained by their dehumanization.

One morning when Slahi was taking one of the classes offered within the prison, he unexpectedly saw his published memoir featured on a lengthy RT television program. Prior to that moment, he had no idea his book had been released. He recalls:

26 Ibid., 370.

27 Ibid., 314.

28 Ibid., xliv.

29 Ibid., li.

30 Ibid., l.

For the first time, I felt what it's like to be free inside a prison, that moment of total freedom that comes when you take back some of your lost dignity. I thought of Tim Robbins in *The Shawshank Redemption*, and the smile on his face when he offers his fellow prisoners drinks, the drinks he earned for doing his guards' tax returns. My cell expanded, the lights became brighter, colors more colorful, the sun shone warmer and gentler, and everyone around looked friendlier [...]. Now my family and the whole world would know my side of the story. That was liberation.²⁸

The publication of Slahi's memoir by an international press meant that his story was permanently documented and part of the public record. Readers finally had access to his words, thoughts, and reflections. Ordinary Americans could gain a new understanding of what their government does in the name of anti-terrorism and security. Slahi's story gives readers the chance to learn about the machinery of imperialism, war, torture, racism, and international relations from the point of view of a victim of these systems. He is a sensible and generous narrator, but will his readers confront these phenomena? Will rethinking take place?

Even after reading Slahi's compelling and moving memoir, the majority of ordinary Americans are unlikely to completely condemn their government's actions as unjust or its rhetoric about Guantánamo Bay's prisoners as hollow and deliberately misleading. After almost two decades of detention operations, millions find themselves unable to reject the Guantánamo Bay detention center's motto "safe, humane, legal" as fraudulent.

Slahi's work as an author continued after his long overdue return to Mauritania in October 2016. The first writing project that he pursued focused on using information from his memory to replace the many bars of redaction found in the first edition of his memoir to create a "restored version." This process involved rethinking and rebuilding "a broken text." Slahi writes of the challenges of rewriting: "[It] has been about seeing things that someone wanted hidden. The result, like the original uncensored manuscript, is as close as I can come to the truth as I experienced it and understand it, in the best form I can express it."²⁹ But the goal of "fixing the text" ended up being about more than just figuring out what had been blacked out. Slahi explains:

I found myself writing and remembering beyond the boundaries of what I was supposed to be filling in. But it was by doing this, and not trying to confine myself to the government's prescribed blacked-out spaces, that I felt myself recovering the feeling of the original pages.³⁰

The form of Slahi's restored memoir, which was published in 2017, is loyal to the insights of this process. Everywhere that the censored version had been made illegible, the restored version features black graphemes imposed on a shaded background of light grey to identify

precisely what was previously hidden. The shaded portions of the text vary in size and length, sometimes containing just a single word, and in other instances extending over entire pages. They contain everything from easily decipherable words to long passages that Slahi re-created after returning to Mauritania. Thus, the reader can simultaneously experience elements of both versions of the memoir while also absorbing visual patterns that reveal information that the U.S. government did not want the public to know. Slahi suggests that remembering is crucial to transforming the forces that have led to the proliferation of unjust laws and human suffering at Guantánamo Bay.

Closure and Embattled Humanism

When positioned in terms of the Caribbean past, the writings and experiences of Mohammed Al-Hamiri and Mohamedou Ould Slahi demand that humanism be rewritten. They signal the need for citizens and non-citizens alike to energetically counter the notion that migrants are expendable, the idea that Muslims are enemies of the U.S. and its allies, and the insistence that laws violating basic human rights should be respected.

Slahi's conceptualization of restoration – an intentional response that recovers what was taken away and exceeds the limits of pre-established spaces – serves as a useful model for the work that lies ahead. It charts a path that requires, first and foremost, rethinking humanism in ways that make it inclusive. This is crucial because humanism, as he narrates it, breaks with the longitudinal cycles of oppression, suffering, and silencing that systematically subject the colonized, the displaced, migrants, and the trafficked, to unspeakable forms of abuse. These cycles persist, even though the U.S. government and a large number of countries have condemned genocide, abolished slavery, and prohibited human trafficking. They continue despite advances in the arts and humanities, science and technology, social and economic development, decolonization and national independence – in many cases in the midst of inter-cultural dialogue, regional cooperation, and a shared commitment to formal education, human rights, and international law. This list of developments demands our attention, but it should be recognized as a "broken text." A broken text relies on a censored reality and the dehumanization of members of the human community as a central element of its collective social structure and form.

Ending the violence that connects contemporary crimes against prisoners at Guantánamo Bay to events of the Caribbean past also requires recreating beyond the prescribed spaces. It requires remembering episodes of exploitation and violence that make large numbers of people uncomfortable. It requires envisioning ideological changes that empower and liberate the marginalized. These moves suggest that literature can contribute to the formation of what the anthropologist David Scott terms "embattled humanism," an outlook or system of thought that stands in a profoundly strained and combative relationship with the status quo.³¹ Scott defines this concept in

31

David Scott, "The Re-enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter," *Small Axe* 8 (September 2000): 153.

32

Ibid., 159, 168.

dialogue with the Jamaican novelist, philosopher, and cultural critic Sylvia Wynter. Wynter holds that embodying such a stance prompts us to pause, ponder, and respond to the premises underlying the present order of things, in combatting what she calls epistemological imperialism. She defines the latter as a set of forces that allows the "ruling ideas" behind dehumanization to be "cast in sanitized terms" and to reinforce "the parameters of our ultimately system-maintaining behaviors."³²

Embattled humanism wakes humanism from its still restful sleep. It continues the work of healing freedom that Al-Hamiri began, insisting that his tortured body belongs in a healthy, safe, and just realm, where heightened awareness and community can flourish. It assists us in rewriting how we see the challenges of the present through dialogue with Slahi, moving us to believe in books and the former prisoners who wrote them because we know that restoration can cultivate change. Embattled humanism encourages us to critically recreate ourselves while transforming the present episteme.

FRIENDS

OANA AVASILICHOAEI'S *LIMINAL*: PHONOTOPIA OF MIGRATION

Anne Quéma

01
Oana Avasilichioaei. BOUND, 2016.
Voice, theremin, and video performance. VFX and video editing by Jessie Altura, 20 minutes, <https://www.oanalab.com/sound#3>, accessed September 24, 2020.

02
UNHCR, "Figures at a Glance," <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>, accessed December 9, 2020.

03
See UNHCR, "Statement by Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, on the COVID-19 crisis," March 19, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/3/5e7395f84/statement-filippo-grandi-un-high-commissioner-refugees-covid-19-crisis.html>, accessed December 9, 2020.



FIGURE 1: Oana Avasilichioaei. From a performance of **BOUND** at Apollo 111 Theatre, Bucharest, Romania, June 1, 2018. Photo © Jumătatea plină.⁰¹

The reliance on territorial and maritime borders to control and legitimize migration is not a new mode of governance, as the act of establishing power through demarcation has been synonymous with political and social organization for centuries. Today, what is singular in border governance is the scale of "persons forcibly displaced" across frontiers, which according to the UN, involves close to 79.5 million people worldwide.⁰² Before the outbreak of COVID-19, globalizing modes of circulation dominated social and economic organization such as planetary flights, international trade, digital communication, and transnational hedge funds, while simultaneously humans were moving on foot, by boat, hidden in trucks, or nestled in the wheel wells of airplanes to defy physical borders and political walls. With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, movement within and between borders has seized up, but the search for safety from war and persecutions has not ceased. In March 2020, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi alerted the international community to the disastrous effects of the pandemic on asylum seekers when borders became sealed.⁰³ Today's refugee crisis is spectral to the extent that it points to a rehearsal of displacements in human history. One need only read Primo Levi's *The Truce* (1963) to be reminded of the massive displacement of Jewish people before, through, and after WWII when concentration camps were filled then evacuated, and survivors as well as refugees began to trek back home across borders.

In an act of resistance, Oana Avasilichioaei's *Liminal* personifies and animates the concept of border and addresses it so as to hold power accountable:

Border, you terrify. Border, you must dictate your own dismantling or we will perish. Purge. Border, are you listening?

Are you empire? ... Border, are you watching? Your scope tuned towards an obscure gesture, your gaze indifferent.⁰⁴

Turning the tables on territorial laws and sovereign injunctions, the poem *Limbinal* – which consists of ten sections of poems – faces and talks back to border. This apostrophe ushers in a beautiful and performative work that assembles people through the use of intermediality. The collection of poems can certainly be read on its own, but once you have attended her aural, visual, and embodied performance, you cannot think of one without recalling the other. Neither text, nor sound, nor gesture, nor visual art, Avasilichioaei's work is all four at the same time. Both text and audiovisual performance, the work is located between resistance and testimony. On the one hand, *Limbinal* stems from the desire to cross linguistic and generic boundaries in defiance of regulation whose omnipotence aims to silence alterity. On the other, it bears witness to past and present acts of exclusion that have caused people to cross borders. *Limbinal* not only voices resistance to acts of injury that current politics of sovereignty inflict on those who endure borders, but it also pays heed to a history of planetary violence. While alert to contextual differences, the poems point to the troubling repetition of patterns of genocidal exclusion and political eviction. Thus, *Limbinal* reads like a process of recollection, or poetic anamnesis, that recognizes in the present the reemergence of past practices of oppression and injustice.

Limbinal offers us the opportunity to reflect on the media we use to tell history. Western historiography tends to be thought of as scholarly texts produced by experts, but there are alternative practices of writing history, or of sharing historical knowledge. The imparting of historical knowledge will depend on what type of medium is used, and the legitimacy of historical accounts will depend on the privileging of certain media at the expense of others. A major question underlying *Limbinal* is how to use media so as to bear witness to past and present acts of violence. In his much debated "On the Concept of History," Walter Benjamin argues that the task of the historian is not only to catch the flitting images of the past in order to do justice to the casualties of political and economic violence, but also to counter their disavowal in the name of progress. For him, the redemption of the past can only occur if the historian strives "to blast open the continuum of history"⁰⁵ in defiance of predictable patterns of historiography.

In Avasilichioaei's case, the labour of recognizing interrelations between past and present violence revolves around resistance to the dominant use of media and recreation through media. Modelled by practices of writing that seek to disrupt and refashion the power of words, *Limbinal* recalls Caroline Bergvall's discussion of what she calls the midden of English, that is to say, a conception of renewal through linguistic compost: "language is its own midden ground."⁰⁶ The strategy is to make linguistic trouble by meddling with language whenever it acts as a means of stabilizing political, military, institutional, and economic power structures. *Limbinal* meddles with English

04
Oana Avasilichioaei, *Limbinal with Translations of Paul Celan* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2015), 3 and 4.

05
Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, vol. 4, 1938–1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 396.

06
Caroline Bergvall, *Meddle English* (Brooklyn & Callicoon, NY: Nightboat Books, 2011), 6.

07
Phonotopia or "place of sound." See Erín Moure, "Limbinal and its Performances: An Interview with Oana Avasilichioaei," *The Puritan* 30 (2015).

and other languages by generating lines of flight to break territorialized social practices. In her public intermedial performances, these procedures of disturbance engender a civic space where historical memory and resistance to political violence materialize sensorially. The shifts among aural, textual, and visual media, and the flows within each medium enact the experience of the liminal whereby the boundaries between sounds, signs, and images are crossed for the sake of a civic space as a phonotopia in the making.⁰⁷

Thus the poems turn border on its head by crossing boundaries to open up a space and a time for a relational polis with a historical memory. Drawing on the recurring trope of the ellipse in the collection, I propose to explore *Limbinal* as a conjunction of four ellipses mobilizing readers/viewers/listeners into the historical space of a relational agora whose architecture is sonic, temporal, and therefore renewable. The phonotopia of *Limbinal* thrives on the biopoetic ellipse, the translational ellipse, the citational ellipse, and the intermedial ellipse.



FIGURE 2: Oana Avasilichioaei. Still from *BOUND*, 2016.

The biopoetic ellipse of phonotopia: questioning sovereignty

The biopoetic ellipse draws on the synergy between sensorial life (bio) and the poetic use of media to question rampant practices of mastery that aim to divide. In everyday life as well as in institutional settings, we can decide to use language to master one another, or to accommodate one another. So questioning the use of language is key to questioning sovereignty. At stake is not so much whether you and I share the same language as whether I can host a language that I do not recognize upon first hearing or reading. Sovereignty runs through our use of language not only when we address each other, but also

when we give historical accounts. In telling a history of border injuries, *Limbinal* must also challenge territorial approaches to writing in hopes of thwarting patterns of sovereignty. The text undercuts sovereignty by using grafting procedures that Avasilichioaei names "hybrood." These procedures revolve around an embodied writing practice that meddles with social and linguistic boundaries by queering languages with the sensorial as the basis for a new writing.

Hybrood generates a mode of creativity that does not rest on the conflation of heteronormativity and authorship. There is no page blanche, no virgin land to discover, and no stylus of mastery in *Limbinal*. Instead, reciprocity undoes forms of oppression that underwrite territorial practices of expulsion and erasure: "To cross the island of the self to the island of another. Because she shows me how. Border, does this incite you? Does your shore lust for another's shore? When the other encroaches and thus smalls the self. When the other inspires and thus expands the self. Land of transpresence. Awake."¹⁰⁸ To queer borders is to call into question the fences that institutional mots d'ordre raise in the name of security and homonationalism.

Hybrood generates biopoetic lines of flight, as in "Skin bears a melodious scent,"¹⁰⁹ in which the haptic (touch), the aural, and the olfactive combine to create a trans-sensorium. Hybrood also creates translingual puns such as "I as polyphonic composition or polygamous sound key,"¹¹⁰ in which the English word "polygamous" echoes the French word "gamme" in reference to a music scale. A sonorous chain of neighbouring sounds organizes the words, lines, and blanks on the page and thrives on phonic ambiguity as in "BOUND" or "PARTITIONS." Citing another refugee from Egypt, Avasilichioaei writes, "my written mouths the book and follows the book (à la Jabès)."¹¹¹

The creative challenge is to transform the poetic page into a space of accommodation where language is not intended to participate in reproducing borders – political or poetic. As Lyn Hejinian writes, "A poem based on the line bears in it a high degree of semantic mutability. Lines, which may be rigid or relaxed, increasing or decreasing, long or short, ascending (questioning) or descending (decisive), predisposed (necessary) or evolving (speculative), representative of sequence of clusters, redistribute meaning continuously within the work."¹¹² *Limbinal* enacts this mutability of meaning by appropriating nationalistic markers to turn them into processes of hybridization and regeneration:

**In defecting from the I's island, its shored nationhood, my I still
rations I to I. Hybrid as a space of doubt. Or manufactured
hope for future. Resistance in being. Being in resistance. In these
words, histories unfold. Impossible to utter without attachments
clamouring at the mouth. No word is a virgin. Hybrood.
Nationmood. Or is it? Immigraftion. Immiration.¹³**

08
Avasilichioaei, *Limbinal*, 5.

09
Ibid., 9.

10
Ibid., 10.

11
Ibid., 26.

12
Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 134.

13
Avasilichioaei, *Limbinal*, 5.

14
Ibid., 12.

15
Ibid., 25.

16
Ibid., 71.

17
James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber and Faber, [1939] 1975), 3.

The generative process of hybrooding through sound and sight originates in the child who is evoked in the first section of the book when her body encounters English not as a language but as a "wall of sound," and as a looming of images that display "revelatory entrances into the new idiom."¹⁴ Avasilichioaei's biopoetic writing is in keeping with a conception of subjectivity that is beyond measure and in constant motion. It is incommensurate and kinesthetic: "in turning, the face faces with its innumerable subjects / in subjecting the turn with its faces, an i facets."¹⁵ This multiple faceting of subjectivity is in turn fashioned by facing others in the flesh. It is as facetting and embodied subjects that we address each other. The address is both political and ethical and is voiced as many times as there are languages in embodied spaces.

In the section entitled "BORNE," neither the Romanian phrases nor their English translation take precedence; instead, they participate in a neighbouring of tongues beyond borders and hybridize to question homonationalism where "home" and "homme" conspire:

Moi, limite, native d'aucune place, d'aucune langue, d'aucun sol natal to call my soul (ce suflet ar putea sufla în mine?), néanmoins les êtres m'utilisent incessamment à travers des ères, me soumettent pour donner forme aux terres, aux espaces, aux idées qu'ils veulent nommer leurs. Dans cette langue que j'emprunte, la notion d'home ne se manifeste pas.¹⁶

Limbinal is replete with a historical legacy of Romanian, French, and English languages which it mobilizes to address the other across idioms. This mode of address is not so much multilingual as translingual, as if the genesis of a community took place on the page with the shibboleth (the accent that betrays you) as a cypher of hybrooding and interaction instead of exclusion. This polyglottal approach is consistent with a practice of language that is aware of the fact that exchange between tongues undermines any notion of purity, isolationism, or propriety.

The flux of languages beyond frontiers is central to the section "RIVERINE" and its language of water (Overpass, Coursing Vernaculars, Current, Overflow, and Suspension/Sediment) in which readers may hear echoes of the French word "riverain" (in its legal sense of residency rights) but also of the first sentence of *Finnegans Wake*, "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to."¹⁷ Flirting with fluidity, hybrooding dismantles binaries, including the persisting nature-culture, animal-human, and mind-body dualisms:

Boats on the river marking stresses of linguistic fluency. Pauses and vowelings, intoned, tuned, striated. Hawked, caught in the throat. The girl, truant, watches the river. Populated. Mouths herself into an allegory of the river's markings.¹⁸

The last sentence of the above passage meddles with the traditional boundary between language and matter. Indeed, the lines offer a threshold or limen of affect through sound as the girl mouths herself into an allegory of the river's markings: sounds, marking, and water are conjoined into an ecology that troubles naming and conceptual precedence over the world of phenomena.

The translational ellipse of phonotopia: responding to the past

In *Limbinal*, translation contributes to the process of telling history by injecting life into words from the past. The translational ellipse is one of animacy when the polyglottal use of languages travels through time to enact a response to the historical presence of another body under duress. *Limbinal* pivots on Avasilichioaei's translation of the poems that Paul Celan wrote in Romanian between 1945 and 1947, after his parents died in concentration camps and before he crossed borders to Vienna, and eventually Paris. Referring to her video *THRESHOLDS*, she explains that her work "crosses the boundaries of [her] translations of Paul Celan's Romanian poems, looking at them as a 'territory' of vocabulary, to compose new lines and phrases, imagining various definitions of political, linguistic and bodily borders."¹⁹ Words translated from Celan's poems are set adrift, floating like elements loosened from their originary sites so that a new political midden can be envisioned.



FIGURE 3: Oana Avasilichioaei. Still from *THRESHOLDS*, 2015.

In translating and lending an ear to Celan's poems, Avasilichioaei turns translation into a means of acknowledging the commonality of a his-

18 Avasilichioaei, *Limbinal*, 119.

19 Oana Avasilichioaei, *THRESHOLDS*, electronics, voice, theremin, and video performance, VFX and video editing by Jessie Altura, 19:11 minutes (2015), <https://www.oanalab.com/sound#5>, accessed December 9, 2020.

torical trauma that both he and present refugees share. Avasilichioaei's English translation of Paul Celan's Romanian poems of exile and trauma is located in the section entitled "ANCILLARY." The word "ancillary" recalls Celan's other signature as Paul Ancel. The section begins with the conventional bipartite organization of pages whereby the translation faces the text of origin:

Regăsire

Pe dunele verzi de calcar va ploua astănoapte,
Vinul păstrat până azi într-o gură de mort
Trezi-va ținutul cu punți, strămutat într-un clopot.
O limbă de om va suna într-un coif cutezanță.

Și-așa vor veni într-un pas mai grăbit și copaci,
s-aștepte o frunză cu glas, adusă-ntr-o urnă,
solia coastei de somn trimisă mareei de steaguri.
Scăldată în ochii-ți să fie, să cred că murim împreună.

Părul tău scurs din oglinzi va așterne văzduhul,
în care cu-o mâna de ger voi aprinde o toamnă.
Din ape băute de orbi va sui pe o scară târzie
laurul meu scund, ca să-ți muște din frunte.

Regain

Tonight it will rain on the green dunes of limestone.
Wine preserved until now in a dead man's mouth
will awaken the realm of footbridges, displaced in a bell.
A human tongue will clang courage inside a helmet.

And so trees will come at a quickened pace,
to wait for a voiced leaf, brought in an urn,
herald of sleep's coast sent off to a tide of flags.
Let it soak in your eyes, so I think we're dying together.

Your hair streaming from mirrors will blanket the sky
in which, with a frigid hand, I'll flame an autumn.
From waters drunk by the blind, my stunted laurel
will climb a belated ladder to bite from your brow.

FIGURE 4: From "ANCILLARY," *Limbinal*, 76–77.

The remainder of the section unmoors itself from this convention and takes the reader on a translational expedition without the reproduction of the Romanian texts.

Historicity lies at the heart of translation, as the act of translating is always predetermined by a relationship of the present to the past: the present of translating a text that precedes, or the present of reading a text that has been translated from a text written in the past. Translation thus contributes to the telling of history by establishing a relation between past and present. It energizes and reconfigures the past that was made of present moments and, in doing so, it opens our present moments to the past. Drawing on Henri Meschonnic's conception of poetry as rhythm, Lisa Robertson refers to the intensities of a continuous present in poetry and to "the meaningful vitality of rhythm as a motivator of translation."²⁰ In translating Celan's Romanian poems, *Limbinal* mobilizes the present in acknowledgement of a necropolitical past marked by deportation and devastation. In other words, the historicity of translation is double, as it hinges on a text written in the past marked by a history of persecution and exile. The language of Celan's poems flows like Acheron, a river of genocidal woe running through the Riverine of *Limbinal*. His poems display the cataclysmic style that is his signature, and while it is customary to ascribe a Surrealist influence to his early writing, it is clear that Celan's disruptive syntax wrestles with the catastrophe affecting a language necrotized by the Holocaust.

In a new turn of breath, the polyphonic poems of *Limbinal* hinge on a translational address to Paul Celan also known as Paul Aurel, an absent person made present through the aural. In other words, the translation also works as personification (prosopopoeia) – bringing one who has perished back to life through sound and threnody. Celan's words act like a loam for regrowth, or like ashes to be softly rekindled. Through this elegiac process of grafting and regeneration, the lines turn Celan's poems into a live archive and inject historicity into poetry to voice resistance to the politics of walls and concentration of migrants in camps. In drawing upon Celan's translated words, the poems stir the transhistorical liman of genocide, marginalization, and on-going political partitions.

The telling of history through translation is also an ethical act of addressing others in their vulnerability across linguistic boundaries, and the rhythms of the collection are fundamental to a historicity of shared duress. The rhythms of *Limbinal* precisely derive from the proximity of tongues that neighbour one another. Ainsi, les mots partent à la dérive parce que les points de repère sont le son et le timbre: limb, liminal, limbă, plimba, limber, lumber, hunger, linger, lunge. Avasilichioaei's poems act as footbridges between the generations who perished in the Holocaust and the generations who are perishing in the Méditerranée. Her translation voices Celan's language, which echoes and reaches out to today's migrants whose voices are often muted: "Through the countries, tongues murmuring, / glimmering. Not silent, even when cut off."²¹ These soundscapes of translation recall Benjamin's question, "In the voices we hear, isn't there an echo of now silent ones?"²²

20

Jessica Pujol Duran, "Translating Lisa Robertson: An Interview," *Tripwire* 9 (2015): 69.

21

Avasilichioaei, *Limbinal*, 101.

22

Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 390.

23

Avasilichioaei, *Limbinal*, 13–18, 39–50.

24

Paul Celan, "Schwelle to Schwelle," in: *Poems of Paul Celan*, translated by Michael Hamburger (New York: Persea Books, 2002), 47–77.

25

Avasilichioaei, *Limbinal*, 41.

26

Ibid., 15.

The citational ellipse of phonotopia: grafting the past onto the present

As in the case of translation, citation ferries between past and present by evoking in the present a text written in the past. In *Limbinal*, the citational ellipse adds yet another level to processes of reiteration, as Avasilichioaei remixes her translations of Celan's poems through combination and détournement to bear witness to contemporary alienation at the borders. Thus, the page becomes a liminal space where writing and reading enact political anamnesis: language from the past is summoned and reactualized to inject historical memory into poetry and to floodlight power and violence, both past and present.

While Celan's translated poems appear two thirds into the sequence of poems, they actually resonate through most of the collection, especially in the sections "PARTITIONS" and "THRESHOLDS,"²³ the latter recalling Celan's *Schwelle zu Schwelle*.²⁴ Throughout *Limbinal*, translated words and lines are folded and refolded, and the sounds of languages swirl and resonate in a historical echo chamber. In "All Aboard!" the lines recombine Celan's language of displacement and alienation to convey the experience of refugees' perilous sailing across the Mediterranean Sea:

**One morning, I thought I saw the archipelago, lacy shores of those islands we were all longing for. I raised the alarm.
I wanted to be the messenger.**

In exchange for a moment of rest, beneath my bare feet the sand catches fire. In the balance of the posthumous flora, we are refused, forbidden from alighting.²⁵

In another instance, "Mouthtuned"²⁶ remixes another translated poem and riffs on Celan's use of the image of the mirror. The poem enacts specularity by assembling the same texts twice, as two (in)versions appear to mirror each other through the use of grey and black lines:



FIGURE 5: Avasilichioaei, "Mouthtuned," *Limbinal*, 15.

The texts face and facet each other, although not quite, as one line is not reiterated. The acts of translating and citing are thus reflected through a mirror effect that thrives on movement and bordering, as the grey and black lines progressively merge through the narrowing interstitial space that progressively reduces distance.

The act of facing one another across time, frontiers, and languages constitutes the major impetus of *Limbinal* and underwrites its citational approach. An adept in citational collage, Walter Benjamin wrote, "only a redeemed mankind is granted the fullness of its past – which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments."²⁷ For the time being, citing can only be piecemeal. So *Limbinal* proceeds judiciously, citing Elias Khoury, Suzanne Leblanc, Jeff Derksen, Stacy Doris, Carla Harryman, or Hélène Cixous, among others. In "Overpass," the first poem of "RIVERINE",

27
Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 390.

28
Nelly Sachs, *Flucht und Verwandlung* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1959).

29
Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs, *Correspondence* (Riverdale-on-Hudson, NY: Sheep Meadow Press, 1995).

30
Avasilichioaei, *Limbinal*, 102–3.

a triologue unfolds based on citations from the correspondence between Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs. The latter was in exile in Sweden where incidentally she wrote a text entitled *Flucht und Verwandlung*,²⁸ translated as *Flight and Metamorphosis*. In "Overpass," the left page reads like a citational collage of some of the words that Celan (referred to as PC) and Nelly Sachs (referred to as NS) exchanged,²⁹ while the right page reads like Oana Avasilichioaei's antiphonic response to the exilic exchange. If the poems offer a history of borders, it always does so by turning the act of bearing witness to past and present violence as a collective experience. The correspondence between PC and NS is not confined to archives; instead, through OA, a citational chorus arises borne by lyrical lines of transmission, recognition, and regeneration.

In joining the exchange between PC and NS, OA engages in ethical acts of reciprocity across time. This principle of reciprocity becomes a principle of creativity and takes the page for its proscenium where bridging occurs. In the second poem of "RIVERINE" entitled "Coursing Vernaculars,"³⁰ the narrow gutter between the pages creates a singular experience. Not only is the eye mobilized in sensing how lines rifted asunder nevertheless tend toward one another, but as the lines jump across the pages, the eye is also led to hear sounds before seeing words:

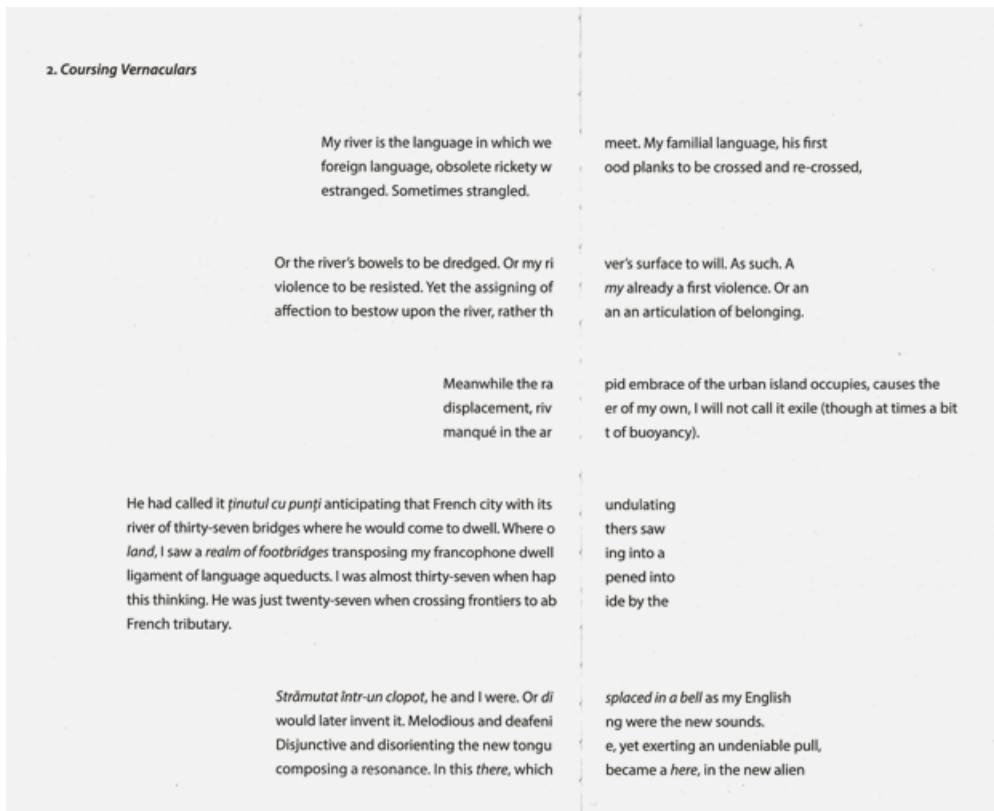


FIGURE 6: From Avasilichioaei, "Coursing Vernaculars," *Limbinal*, 102–3.

The lines and the gaps on the two pages invite readers to participate in a poetic process of tension and reciprocity. For this sensorium of being cannot materialize without the reading eye, ear, tongue, and hand. Readers co-animate the biotext, co-performing the transition from an absent body to its singular presence.

The intermedial ellipse of phonotopia: the creation of a relational polis

The intermedial ellipse arises in Avasilichioaei's polyphonic and polymorphic public performances in which rhythm, silence, and vocalizing challenge borders bodily. The first three ellipses are amplified through a riverine of sound, music, words, voice and video to create a civic space of resistance to partitions. Through her intonations, gestures of the hand on a theremin, and a drift of images, the performances materialize a time and a space of social intensities. Fundamentally, Avasilichioaei's public performances create an occasion for address and reciprocity across differences. As Hejinian states, address is an "act of reciprocal invocation... [that] activates a world in which the act makes sense. It invents."³¹ The ethical reach of *Limbinal* expands into a gesture of hospitality through the creation of a phonotopia as a theatre of sensorial citizenship that invokes/invites us into a commons.

The performances carve out an architecture to accommodate the singularity of the multitude running from traumatic violence, past and present. Words, sounds, and images made in the present invoke and reciprocate words, sounds, and images from the past, and in doing so, activate a world in which the act of reciprocating makes historical sense. In *Nilling*, Lisa Robertson writes,

In a vernacular, where poetics and politics circulate through one another to untie the gridded duality of ethics and aesthetics, a poetics of the citizen innovates time as a gestured co-improvisation, in deeply ingrained reference to the shared fact of embodiment, and historical continuity. The vernacular is the movement for which language is not the state, but the condition of emergence of the subject to and for others. It is grammarless rhythm, a mobile, patterned regime of compromise: Something infinitely vulnerable.³²

Avasilichioaei's aural architectures inaugurate occasions in this historical continuity when sensorial bodies are co-mobilized in the time and space of a performance.

Limbinal shares intermediality and public performance with *Drift* (2014) in which Caroline Bergvall pays homage to the sixty-three people who died aboard a zodiac boat while attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea from Libya to Italy.³³ In 2011, the migrants were set adrift for fifteen days and were left to die under the documented monitoring of NATO warships and European coastguards. Drawing

31
Hejinian, *Language of Inquiry*, 35.

32
Lisa Robertson, *Nilling* (Toronto: Book*hug, 2012), 82–83.

33
Caroline Bergvall, *Drift* (Brooklyn & Callicoon, NY: Nightboat Books, 2014). For a performance of Bergvall's *Drift*, see "Drift (percussion) and Thomas Koppel (digital text), November 8, 013, <https://vimeo.com/87724392>, accessed September 24, 2020.

34
Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 390, 395.

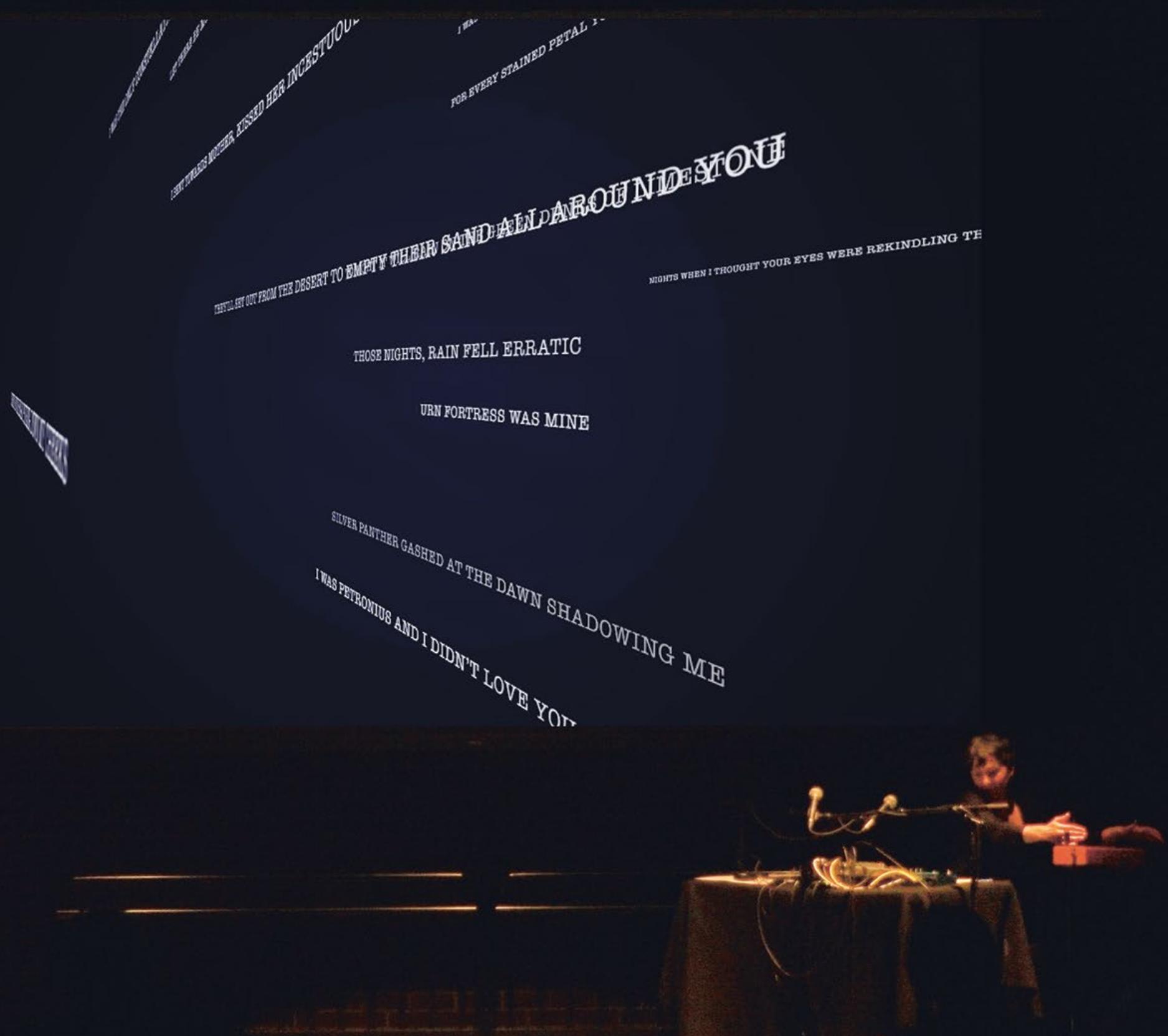
35
I wish to thank Oana Avasilichioaei for the permission to use the photographs that appear in this article.

on the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Seafarer* as a major source of composition, and on the thorn letter þ of the Runic alphabet in Icelandic sagas of navigation, Bergvall equally combines the gestural body with translation, citation, and intermediality to bear witness to the migratory churning of cultures, bodies, and languages.

Common to Bergvall's and Avasilichioaei's performances is the use of montage to generate rhythm and mobility. With the assistance of Jessie Altura, Avasilichioaei relied on digital techniques to create the videos *BOUND*, *THRESHOLDS*, and *MOUTHNOTES*. Mediated by an oneiric flow of images, visual textures counterpoint one another in a sensorial continuum. On the screen, Celan's translated and recomposed words turn into parallel lines swaying Calder-like back and forth between the surface of the present and the recesses of the past. Combining the visual with intonation and breath, the performances create the pneumatic experience of moving through and beyond language. This kinesthesia later revolves around liquidities conveyed by video images of elliptical rotations bursting into diamond beads of water, or of a cone in motion with parallel rings of beads revolving in opposite directions. In this context, experiencing the public performance of *Limbinal* is akin to experiencing the tension at the heart of historical memory upon which Benjamin elaborates: whereas "the past can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again," history is also "the subject of a construction whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled full by now-time [*Jetztzeit*]."³⁴

Avasilichioaei's public performances remain occasions to be experienced and not stockpiled: they offer the ground for the experience of history as a relational space filled by the presence of the now. The poet has remained steadfast in her resolve to not post recordings of her performances. Elusive and unconsumable, each event disrupts a temporality of predictability and regulation, and preserves the urgency of the ethical question of border-crossing, since the event always unfolds in the inaugural mode of addressing social bodies and their situated affects. This multisensorial phonotopia invites audiences to reimagine ethical forms of border-crossing and transfigured citizenship. In an age of exponential reproducibility, the performances do not even bother to leave a trace of aura à la Benjamin, since they only remain in the memories of those who attended. It is as if the act of recognizing the past were lodged at the very heart of the performance whose existence can only be redeemed by a collective act of memory.³⁵

FIGURE 7: Oana Avasilichioaei. From a performance of *THRESHOLDS* at the Djavad Mowafaghian Centre, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, January 24, 2018. Photo © Lara Amelie Abadir.



FORMS OF MEMOIR: FOUR CASE STUDIES IN MOVEMENT, MIGRATION, AND TRANSNATIONAL LIFE WRITING

Ikram Hili & Jennifer A. Reimer

01

Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 26.

02

Mourid Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*, trans. Ahfad Soueif (New York: Anchor Books, 2000).

03

Myung Mi Kim, *Under Flag* (Berkeley: Kelsey Street Press, 1991).

Some of the earliest forms of transnational writing – first-person accounts of and observations on travels, journeys, and cross-border movements – were also what we would recognize today as life writing, or memoir. From the Greeks to the Apostle Paul's letters and beyond, early examples of transnational literature could be found across a variety of genres (letters, journals, epic poetry, song, for example) and included recognizable generic traits such as authorial self-reflection, bildungsroman, and experience-based advice. The proliferation of the genre of transnational mobility-related literature has only continued to expand, its study often marked by conflicting approaches. It is into this conflict that our essay situates itself. Enacting a multidirectional, transnational collaboration between a Californian poet-scholar living in France by way of Austria and Turkey, and a Tunisian scholar and former U.S. resident always intrigued by traveling words through literature and translation, this essay is a conversation about the possibilities and limitations of transnational life-writing through four case studies.

We have chosen four texts that we feel illustrate both complimentary and distinct elements of transnational life writing, although each one also occupies their own position in various subgenres of transnational writing. In bringing together investigative journalism, travel-writing, poetry, and literature of exile, we point towards the genre's expansiveness while also digging into the material specificities and power relations that we believe inform writers' aesthetic choices. Our purpose in showcasing both the rough and smooth edges of transnational life writing is to explore a central research question: what are the forms of transnational literature? What possibilities and limitations does the designation offer, and how does life-writing, in particular, simultaneously unite and distinguish transnational texts? In this endeavor, we follow the tracks made by critic Caren Kaplan, whose *Questions of Travel* excavated Euro-American modernist and postmodernist writings on displacement to map the metaphorizing of terms such as displacement, sites, borders, maps, diasporas, exile, nomadism, and migrancy. Like Kaplan, we are wary: "What is at stake," she asks, "in feeling exiled or mobile when material conditions might suggest connections and placements in specific geographies, politics, and economic practices? Just as importantly, what is at stake in choosing location over dislocation when the conventions of locating identities and practices are shifting or destabilizing?"⁰¹

In the first half of this essay, we look to two memoirs of two very different travel/mobility experiences. Katherine Boo defines her work as investigative journalism while Elizabeth Gilbert's writing saddles both conventional memoir and conventional travel writing. The level of self-awareness around each author's socio-economic power and racial privilege in relation to the communities she's writing about distinguishes these two books. Such awareness reveals itself in aesthetic choices around perspective, point of view, style, and tone. The essay's second half considers diasporic memoir through Palestinian poet-novelist Mourid Barghouti *I Saw Ramallah*⁰² (1997) and Korean American poet Myung Mi Kim's poetry collection *Under Flag* (1991).⁰³ Barghouti's first-person narrative reads more like a traditional memoir

traps slum-dwellers in cycles of poverty while simultaneously offering their only way out.

Boo's choice of point of view and authorial voice reinforce her aims. She intentionally silences the first-person autobiography, the navel-gazing "I" of travel writing, in favor of the clean precision of a reporter's sharp eye, believing that its use might "[impede] the reader's ability to connect with people who might be more interesting than the writer, and whose stories are less familiar."⁰⁸ She told her book editor: "Long ago, I decided I didn't want to be one of those nonfiction writers who go on about themselves [...] When you get to the last pages of *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, I don't want you to think about me sitting beside Abdul in that little garbage truck. I want you to be thinking about Abdul."⁰⁹

– through the title – a sharp divide between beauty and ugliness. While much has been written about the dark underbelly of slums and the yawning gulf between the rich and the poor throughout the world, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* is unique in focusing not only on the dismal lives of the communities the author encounters, but also on the context in which they are fighting tenaciously for survival – egregious levels of corruption and the infighting that plague lives and stymie ambitions almost on a daily basis.

The people who populate the book's pages have grit; they do whatever it takes to climb the social and economic ladder or to simply gain a foothold onto it:

As every slumdweller knew, there were three main ways out of poverty: finding an entrepreneurial niche, as the Husains had found in garbage; politics and corruption, in which Asha placed her hopes; and education. Several dozen parents in the slum were getting by on roti and salt in order to pay private school tuition.¹⁰

And while the Annawadians most certainly express dreams and desires that would, in other hands, lapse into oozing sentimentality or cliché, Boo is careful to avoid language expressly purposed for arousing the reader's sympathy and/or empathy, or for making her characters pathetic. This quality of her writing makes it stand out from other writings on poverty. For example, when Abdul's father talks about his dreams for a better future, he imagines this future as a bus:

It's moving past and you think you're going to miss it but then you say, wait, maybe I won't miss it – I just have to run faster than I've ever run before. Only now we're all tired and damaged, so how fast can we really run? You have to try to catch it, even when you know you're not going to catch it, when maybe it's better just to let it go –¹¹

Here, the use of the bus as an extended metaphor, poetic as it reads, presents poverty as an irreversible reality – almost a fact with which

while Kim's experimental poetry dissects the very language diaspora can (or cannot) speak.

Travel Memoir: A Mobile Paradigm

For as long as the genre has existed (certainly since the Greeks), travel writing has been made possible by privilege and opportunity.⁰⁴ To this day, the most influential travel writers are often male.⁰⁵ Entangled with travel writing's problematic questions of gender is also its colonial-imperial heritage. As the Palestinian cultural critic Edward Said demonstrated throughout his career, in documenting encounters between self and other, Western travel writing channels a Euro-centric conceit, constructs and reinforces social hierarchies, and bears, in its recesses, white supremacist and racist thought.⁰⁶ Today, the genre works towards divesting itself of its gendered and imperial origins, embracing fresher themes, including writing authored by people who have traditionally been the "othered" subject.

In the 21st century, Katherine Boo and Elizabeth Gilbert have both contributed to this changing paradigm. Katherine Boo's *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity* strives to maintain a clear, documentary focus in service of raising awareness around conditions of global poverty by diminishing her narrative presence and addressing the systemic nature of inequality. Elizabeth Gilbert's first-person memoir, *Eat, Pray, Love*, performs a classic journey-to-the-self – one made possible through unexamined privilege.⁰⁷

Katherine Boo's form of transnational life writing combines travel writing and investigative journalism to tackle the social, economic, political, as well as ethical, aspects of defining the "other" while condemning the negative effects of capitalism in India. As an investigative journalist with a special interest in global poverty, she has embarked on journeys to difficult, often risky places, writing about her encounter with a social world that is hostile to its own dwellers and visitors alike. Boo seems equally driven by the need to experience extreme life situations and, above all, to explain them to her reading public.

Boo is known for documenting the different strategies deployed within poor communities to rise above hardship. In *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity*, Boo aims to expose and interrogate the complex socio-economic forces at work in an Indian slum in Mumbai, called Annawadi. To best report these Indian slum-dwellers' pursuit of a better life, Boo understood that she needed to live with them and among them. Thus, her "characters" are people she encountered on her four-year stay in their slum from November 2007 until March 2011. The resulting book focuses on lived experiences instead of statistics, documenting different strategies used by undercity dwellers to fight poverty. Instead of aestheticizing poverty, Boo's writing strives to remove herself from the narrative as much as possible in order to center on the lives of Annawadians and to critique the corrupt and contradictory capitalist system that

04 "[F]rom Sir Richard Francis Burton to Bruce Chatwin to Paul Theroux, the traveler is an essentially masculine force, driven by the need to conquer, to experience life at its extremes, but most of all to explain," writes Jessa Crispin in "How Not to Be Elizabeth Gilbert: Men, Women, and Travel Writing," *Boston Review*, 20 July 2015, <https://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/jessa-crispin-female-travel-writing>.

05 In spite of social pressures to remain put, women have, of course, long been challenging gendered immobility. In the 18th and 19th centuries in particular, it became fashionable for privileged women in Europe and the United States to publish travelogues from their Grand Tours or their accounts of the far-flung places they traveled to alongside their husbands. See Janet Schaw, *Journal of a Lady of Quality: Being the Narrative of a Journey From Scotland to the West Indies, North Carolina, and Portugal, in the Years 1774 – 1776* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1923); Alexander Falconbridge, *Anna Maria Falconbridge: Narrative of Two Voyages to the River Sierra Leone during the Years 1791-1792-1793*, ed. by Christopher Fyfe (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000); Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Elizabeth Bohls's and Ian Duncan's anthology, *Travel Writing 1700-1830*, provides a more comprehensive account of women travel writing in the 18th and 19th centuries. See therefore Elizabeth Bohls and Ian Duncan, eds., *Travel Travel Writing 1700-1830: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005).

06 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1978).

07 Katherine Boo, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity* (London: Portobello Books, 2012); Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love* (New York: Viking Press, 2006).

08 Kate Medina, "Q&A with Katherine," 2012, www.behindthebeautifulforevers.com/qa-with-katherine/.

09 Ibid.

10 Boo, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, 62.

11 Ibid., 241.

Annawadians have to co-exist. They seem to constantly desire a better future only to realize, later, that they had better "let it go."

In addition, ensuring that her characters occupy more narrative space than she, Boo also criticizes the ideological machinery that runs the system perpetuating the Annawadians poverty. Here, we will not recap the lengthy (and important) conversation on the links between Indian poverty and global capitalism (read Boo's book for that). Instead, what we want to note is Boo's own understanding of the relationships between capitalism, ideology, and daily life in Annawadi. She observes how capitalism rewards competition, not cooperation, in the race to succeed (or survive, in the case of the Annawadians): "In the age of global market capitalism, hopes and grievances were narrowly conceived, which blunted a sense of common predicament. Poor people didn't unite; they competed ferociously amongst themselves for gains as slender as they were provisional."¹² Indeed, in Annawadi, a person's progress is very often achieved at the expense of someone else's regress: "For every two people in Annawadi inching up, there was one in a catastrophic plunge."¹³ Asha's story epitomizes this aspect of life in Annawadi: "Instead of admitting that she was making little progress, she had invented new definitions of success. She had felt herself moving ahead, just a little, *every time other people failed*."¹⁴ Indeed, Asha trades on the predicaments of Annawadians, often taking advantage of their naivety and crassness in order to win herself any small advantage. In this sense, Annawadians' quest for social and economic progress is most competitive, fraught with clashes and conflicts instead of unity for the community's common good.

Boo well understands that the inequality produced by capitalism is not unique to India: "What was unfolding in Mumbai was unfolding elsewhere, too,"¹⁵ she tells us, encouraging her readers not to conflate poverty with India as part of Western-centric exceptionalism. Capitalism and poverty seem to work in tandem, impacting different parts of the world at the same time.

Katherine Boo's writing is certainly informed by the economic and racial privileges which grant her greater access to power and resources. We cannot forget that, unlike most Annawadians, Boo was free to come and go from slum life – and her very ability to choose to live as slum-dweller for four years exemplifies her privilege. However, her transnational life writing gestures towards a transformative potential. In focusing readers' attention on what she sees through her journalist's "eye" and in downplaying the memoiristic "I," Katherine Boo's writing creates space for true empathy. True empathy – unlike pity or colorblindness masquerading as multiculturalism – can be transformative. *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* is a story of an investigative reporter's outward facing journey that leads back inward, not to the self, but to a critique of the writer's own society and its complicity in creating conditions of inequality and poverty.

In contrast, *Eat, Pray, Love*, Elizabeth Gilbert's bestselling riches-to-rags-to-even-more-riches travel memoir generally apprehends the narrator's place in the world solely as the product of her own personal choices and circumstances. To shake off divorce and

12
Ibid., 237.

13
Ibid., 24.

14
Ibid., 223, emphasis added.

15
Ibid., 237.

16
Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*, 36.

17
Ibid., 22.

18
Need convincing that publishing payouts are as much about race and gender as they are about talent and hard work? Follow the conversation around #PublishingPaidMe, which asked authors to publicly compare their book advances. Spoiler alert: white authors not only get paid more than black authors; they get paid A LOT more. See Concepción de Leon and Elizabeth A. Harris, "#PublishingPaidMe and a Day of Action Reveal an Industry Reckoning." *The New York Times*, June 8, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/08/books/publishingpaidme-publishing-day-of-action.html>.

19
Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*, 117.

20
Ibid., 119.

a failed love affair, Gilbert decides to spend a year in Italy, India, and Indonesia, pursuing pleasure, devotion, and balance – via carbs, a stint at an ashram, and becoming the disciple of a native Balinese healer (in that order). She can "afford" the year of travel because of what she calls a "staggering personal miracle" – she's received an advance from her publisher for a book she *will* write based on her travels.¹⁶ But by explaining her good fortune as a "staggering personal miracle," Gilbert obscures the structural advantages of race and class that made this opportunity available to her.

It's not that Gilbert isn't upfront about her life circumstances, including her financial situation before taking off on her year of travel. She describes herself as a moderately well-off woman in her mid-30s, financially secure enough to charitably relinquish any claim on a house in the suburbs (while still paying the mortgage) and a Manhattan apartment (amongst other assets, as part of her divorce settlement), and still live comfortably in New York City. Although she frets over the cost, newly single Gilbert secures a one-bedroom Manhattan apartment because "it was vital to my survival to have a One Bedroom of my own."¹⁷

The truth is that Gilbert was part of a privileged demographic even before the publishing deal that launched her journey. Gilbert's false narrative of personal miracle perpetuates a common American myth – that hard work, talent, and a well-timed "staggering personal miracle" can make anyone's dreams come true. This simply is not true. The recent #PublishingPaidMe social media conversation, in which bestselling authors publicly shared the amounts they received in advances and royalties, revealed that men are still paid more than women, and white women are paid more than black women and women of color.¹⁸

Gilbert's failure to account for her own positionality within systems of power and privilege leads to cringe-worthy language throughout the book. In describing Sicily, Gilbert refers to it as: "the most third-world section of Italy, and therefore not a bad place to go if you need to prepare yourself to experience extreme poverty."¹⁹ She seems blissfully unaware of perpetuating problematic cultural hierarchies, Western-centric bias, or the insulting insinuation that "extreme poverty" is something you can warm-up for, like jogging or football. Gilbert's unexamined privilege is on full display in passages such as this one, which follows shortly after describing Sicily as "third world":

But is it such a bad thing to live like this for just a little while? Just for a few months of one's life, is it so awful to travel through time with no greater ambition than to find the next lovely meal? Or to learn how to speak a language for no higher purpose than that it pleases your ear to hear it? Or to nap in a garden, in a patch of sunlight, in the middle of the day, right next to your favorite fountain? And then to do it again the next day?²⁰

We do not object to Gilbert's pleasure (we do not want to cancel naps, fountains, or delicious food), nor do we demand that everyone's travel itinerary include social justice or humanitarian work. Yet, three sentences later, and without irony, Gilbert writes, "Here in Sicily, with its dreadful poverty, real life is never far from anyone's mind."²¹ Anyone's, except Elizabeth Gilbert's, apparently.

In other places, *Eat, Pray, Love* invokes the "other"/foreign as metaphor or colorful backdrop. She describes an ashram in upstate New York where "one row of high-strung New Yorkers at a time – became colonized by [a Vietnamese monk's] stillness."²² Her italics emphasize the word "colonized," yet there is no indication that she recognizes the awkward irony of calling the well-heeled Manhattanites "colonized." There is no reference to Vietnam's long history of devastating colonial traumas (from French colonization to US imperialism and the deadly costs such endeavors have wreaked on Vietnamese people). Such moments of narrative cluelessness sound tone-deaf or just oblivious.

The book is hardest to read during Gilbert's months at an Indian ashram. As part of her service work, she's assigned to scrub the floors:

[...] down on my knees on the cold marble with a brush and bucket, working away like a fairy tale step-sister. (By the way, I'm aware of the metaphor – the scrubbing clean of the temple that is my heart, the polishing of my soul, the everyday mundane effort that must be applied to spiritual practice in order to purify the self, etc., etc.)²³

While Gilbert eagerly embraces the metaphor of ritual cleansing, she's unable to connect her own labor-by-choice to the reality of the country she's living in. Her description comes off as a perversely uncritical and unreflecting appropriation of the conditions of poor, brown women. Unlike the women whose labor she parrots, the narrator has the privilege to quit the ashram. And yet, Gilbert knows that a world outside the ashram exists. Upon arrival to India, she notes: "Outside the walls of the Ashram, it is all dust and poverty."²⁴ Outside the walls of the ashram, people are scrubbing floors (and doing other labor), not because they are looking for spiritual transcendence, but because they have to. Outside the walls of the ashram, not everyone chooses deprivation and hard work in return for enlightenment. Outside of the ashram, some people are not even the fairy-tale stepsisters – they are simply not in the fairy tale.

In her failure to connect the conditions of her surroundings with her own privilege, Gilbert denies herself the opportunity for another kind of transformative self-work. When she befriends an Indian teenage girl who also scrubs floors at the ashram, she learns something of the limited opportunities for girls outside of an arranged marriage that is contingent upon horoscope, age, skin color, education and virtue. Gilbert's first reaction to learning how class, caste, gender expectations and colorism work to limit opportunities for girls and

21
Ibid., 119–20.

22
Ibid., 130.

23
Ibid., 137.

24
Ibid., 132.

25
Ibid., 190.

26
Neha Mishra, "India and Colorism: The Finer Nuances," *Washington University Global Studies Law Review* 15, no. 4 (2015), https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_globalstudies/vol14/iss4/14.

27
Lauren Frayer, "Black Lives Matter Gets Indians Talking About Skin Lightening and Colorism," *NPR Online*, 9 July 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/07/09/86091212/black-lives-matter-gets-indians-talking-about-skin-lightening-and-colorism>

28
Hannah Daniel, "Poverty & Colorism in India," *The Borgen Project Blog*, 6 October 2020, <https://borgenproject.org/colorism-in-india/>. See also Frayer, "Black Lives Matter."

29
Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*, 225–26.

30
See Margaret Wiener, "Breasts, (Un)dress, and Modernist Desires in the Balinese-Tourist Encounter," *Dirt, Undress, and Difference*, ed. Adeline Masquelier (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 61–95; Miguel Covarrubias and Clare Boothe Luce, *Island of Bali* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1937).

women in India? She runs the Indian marriageability algorithm on herself and jokes about her good fortune in having light skin:

I quickly ran through the list, trying to see how marriageable I would appear in Indian society. I don't know whether my horoscope is good or bad, but I'm definitely too old and I'm way too educated, and my morals have been publicly demonstrated to be quite tarnished... I'm not a very appealing prospect. At least my skin is fair. I have only this in my favor.²⁵

Here's why the joke falls flat: colorism, the practice of discrimination based on the relative lightness/darkness of one's skin, has a powerful and measurable impact on Indian women. Scholars have proved that colorism first emerged in India with British colonialism – colonial officials offered higher-ranking jobs to those Indians with fairer skin.²⁶ Today, colonialism's legacy of colorism lives on in India's \$500 million skin-whitening industry, which comprises half of all skin care products in the country, and whose products may contain mercury or bleach and have been linked to liver and kidney damage, according to the World Health Organization.²⁷ Nonetheless, advertisements and popular culture reinforce the message that the lighter (whiter) a woman's skin, the happier, more successful and more lucky in love she will be.

If whiter skin promises greater success, darker skin poses a barrier to it. The Borgen Project, a global nonprofit working to combat poverty, spells out the link between poverty and colorism in India: "Because the caste system still affects socioeconomic status, people with darker skin tend to be lower in socioeconomic status as well. Colorism makes social mobility harder for Indians in general."²⁸ Thus, colorism and the caste system work together to make darker-skinned people poorer, a blurring of skin tone and status reinforced by colonial cultural stereotypes and powerful advertising. In such a context, Gilbert's faux relief over her whiteness feels, at best, out of touch, and, at worst, racist.

Gilbert's delight in benefiting from colonialism's leftovers continues when she arrives in Bali. Upon arrival, Gilbert observes: "The whole place has arranged itself to help you, the Westerner with credit cards, to get around with ease. English is spoken here widely and happily. (Which makes me feel guiltily relieved [...])."²⁹ Her glib comment obscures the power dynamics of Indonesia's colonial history. Certainly, Bali has been arranging itself (willingly and otherwise) to "help" the Westerner since 1597, when the Dutch explorer Cornelis de Houtman arrived with 89 men (the Portuguese had made some tenuous contact before). Thanks to a profitable spice trade, by the 19th century, Bali and the rest of Indonesia were the world's richest colony. Like other European colonies, Dutch rule relied on strict racial hierarchies and exploitative labor practices, which benefitted Europeans at the expense of the indigenous Balinese. In the 1930s, Western anthropologists and writers, such as Margaret Mead and Miguel Covarrubias, ignited a renewed Western interest in Bali as a tourist destination for the adventurous.³⁰ As a result of such positive press (and following

WWII and independence from the Netherlands), Bali's popularity as a tourist destination steadily increased over the course of the 20th century. Today, tourism is the country's main industry and source of revenue.

We can empathize with the relief that a traveler feels when she can speak her native language in a foreign place and don't fault Gilbert for acknowledging it. We believe, however, that a moment's pause to consider the greater context that makes such ease possible would go a long way in combatting the Western-centrism that obscures colonial and imperial violence, particularly the sexualizing of indigenous women out of which the Balinese tourism industry has profited immensely.

The final irony in *Eat, Pray, Love* is that it utterly fails as a record of meaningful self-reflection. Finally in Bali and on the brink of peace and love, Gilbert imagines spending her time "doing what nice divorced American women have been doing with their time ever since the invention of the YWCA – signing up for one class after another: batik, drumming, jewelry-making, pottery, traditional Indonesian dance and cooking..."³¹ Such a categorical description would no doubt come as a surprise to many "nice" divorced American women who do not have the privilege of filling up their days with hobbies – namely, divorced women with children and divorced women who have to work and/or can't afford childcare.³² But in Gilbert's case, we are meant (consciously or unconsciously) to read "nice" as upper/middle class and white. Even after months of living in or around worlds of "extreme poverty" (her words), Gilbert's writing seems incapable of making space for anyone outside her own sphere of privilege. Gilbert structures her memoir in 108 vignettes to mimic the number of beads in a prayer bead necklace. When an author has made an estimated \$10 million in royalties from book sales, plus \$1 million in the sale of movie rights, it's fair to ask just whose prayers are being heard.³³

It never seems to occur to Elizabeth Gilbert that others may experience the world differently than herself. As a result, *Eat, Pray, Love* fails to encourage her readers to imagine the world other than how she presents it – available, abundant, and accommodating. As Boo's *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* shows, memoirs of transnational movement have real altruistic potential – words can further enrich the dialogue between different cultures, depending on the reading public – but such transformative encounters are made possible through a recognition of and reckoning with privilege and difference that is the author's ethical responsibility to facilitate.

Memoir & the Poetics of Exile

As a counterpoint to the examples of Boo and Gilbert, whose memoirs depend on various levels of access to resources and privilege and which document travel undertaken voluntarily, we now switch our focus to two very different forms of memoir – those of diaspora and exile. Such literature often captures the affective dimensions of exile and displacement, including isolation, alienation, longing, and nos-

31 Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*, 226–27.

32 Black women and Indigenous women in the United States have higher divorce rates than white women and are more likely to earn less. See Ana Swanson, "Who gets divorced in America, in 7 charts," *The Washington Post*, April 6, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/04/06/who-gets-divorced-in-america-in-7-charts/>.

33 Lauren Streib, "Eat Pray Love: How Much Did It Make?" *Daily Beast*, August 16, 2010, updated July 14, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/eat-pray-love-how-much-did-it-make>.

34 Diaspora and memory are, in this respect, inextricably connected because collective memory is one of the essential components of a diasporic identity. A valuable source is Marie-Aude Baronian, Stephan Besser and Yolande Jansen, eds., *Diaspora and Memory: Figures of Displacement in Contemporary Literature, Arts and Politics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007).

35 Susan Stanford Friedman, "Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 23, no. 2 (2004): 207, original emphasis.

talgia.³⁴ Recording cultural memory and the experiences of exile and diaspora are central to both Mourid Barghouti and Myung Mi Kim's texts, yet one uses a conventional narrative form and foregrounds the experiences of the individual, while the other's experimental poetry operates on the level of the collective, offering an ambivalent grammar for collective experiences of war, exile, and assimilation.

I Saw Ramallah explores the author's sense of (be)longing to, and for, a place that is both familiar and foreign. Barghouti engages the poetics of the return to the homeland and examines the interplay between exile and memory in recapturing a bygone past. In Barghouti's memoir, "homeland" and "return" are poeticized in an attempt to make the return to the homeland possible, given that genuine return is only possible through writing. "Writing about the loss of home," as Susan S. Friedman argues, "brings one home again. You can't go home again – except in writing home. The rapture of writing rupture."³⁵ Poeticizing migration through a memoir of family and displacement, Barghouti falls back on memory, poetry and symbolism in his attempt to recapture a city that has changed beyond recognition – a city that has transformed into the busy, lively center of Jerusalem, having gone through a process of intense urbanization.

Indeed, the Ramallah that Barghouti once knew as a little boy and teenager is no longer the same city that he is now visiting after thirty years of displacement. Return is more aesthetic than physical, both because many things have changed, many identities have altered, and because displacement remains an irreversible fact. The title is very suggestive of the writer's mapping his hometown – a process that often takes place inside his mind and, each time, drives him back to a bygone past. The use of the past tense in "saw" is evocative of the writer's hope to recall the city of his childhood, to re-map it the way it used to be. His encounter with the city is, therefore, more aesthetic than spatial, for there is a difference, for instance, between *I Saw Ramallah* and *I Went Back to Ramallah*. When he writes *I Saw Ramallah*, it seems as though he could only see it, map it, and re-map it through memory and writing. In doing so, it is as though he were trying to reassemble the rubble of a "lost" homeland that he keeps cherishing.

At times, Barghouti gives us a minute account of the city, sometimes tinged with love and nostalgia, at other times laced with bitterness and regret. The first pages of *I Saw Ramallah* place the reader on the Jordanian bridge that Mourid himself wishes to cross in an attempt to reconnect with his homeland after so many years of absence and the ensuing sense of bitterness and sadness. The first lines of the memoir run thus:

It is very hot on the bridge. A drop of sweat slides from my forehead down to the frame of my spectacles, then the lens. A mist envelops what I see, what I expect, what I remember. The view here shimmers with scenes that span a lifetime; a lifetime spent trying to get here. Here I am, crossing the Jordan River. I hear the creak of the wood under my feet. On my left shoulder a small bag. I walk westward in a normal

manner – or rather, a manner that appears normal. *Behind me the world, ahead of me my world.*³⁶

It is a spatial as well as a temporal bridge on which Mourid goes down memory lane, trying to recapture a lost but much cherished past with his family and home community in Ramallah, to clear the “mist” shrouding what he could remember, as he puts it. The bridge symbolizes the narrator’s neither-nor position, thus creating skepticism about the nature of any possible return.

Far from being a diatribe against the occupiers or a harangue against those who gave away the land, he depicts the city of Ramallah and Deir Ghassaneh, in particular, through memory and poetic imagination:

Ramallah of the cypresses and the pine trees. The swinging slopes of the hills, the green that speaks in twenty languages of beauty, our first schools where each one of us sees the other children bigger and stronger. The Teachers’ College. The Hashemite. The Friends. Ramallah Secondary. Our guilty glances at the girls from the prep school swinging confidence in their right hands and confusion in their left and dazzling our minds when they look at us while pretending not to. Our small coffee-shops. Al-Manara Square. Abu Hazim told me that al-Manara was removed because of the new traffic system in the town center. They put traffic lights in its place. The graffiti. The flowers of the Intifada and its transparent steel, its traces clear as a lilac fingerprint.³⁷

Describing the guard that he met at the borders, Barghouti eloquently writes: “His gun took from us the land of the poem and left us with the poem of the land.”³⁸ In the eyes of Barghouti, Ramallah was once “the land of the poem,” while now it has become the poem itself – the place that he once knew and identified with only exists in the poem. Here, I am particularly alluding to Mourid’s son, Tamim Barghouti, when he equally talks about the city of Jerusalem as a poem: “In Jerusalem, if you shake hands with an old man or touch a building / you will find, engraved on your palm, my friend, a poem or two.”³⁹ But for Barghouti, the disappearance of “the land of the poem” into the poem itself is more catastrophic – reading Barghouti, one often feels as if so many things have changed, often beyond recognition, that Ramallah can only now exist in or as the poem.

Despite the heartwarming hospitality that he received upon his return to Ramallah, only inside the words and the hidden recesses of “Ramallah the poem” can he ensconce himself. His hometown, here, becomes an aesthetic refuge of the artist’s mind, if at all. He writes: “This window I am looking out of is some thirty years away; thirty years and nine volumes of verse.”⁴⁰

At some points in the narrative, we grow uncertain whether his account of the hometown is faithful to reality or whether it is, again, a poetic account of a city that is only painted deep inside him. Accord-

36
Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*, 1, emphasis added.

37
Ibid., 42.

38
Ibid., 21.

39
Tamim Barghouti, “In Jerusalem,” trans. Houssem ben Lazreg, *Transference* 5, no.1 (2017): 64.

40
Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*, 41.

41
Ibid., 33.

42
Xiaojing Zhou, *The Ethics and Poetics of Alterity in Asian American Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 234.

ingly, Barghouti’s return remains incomplete, not triumphant enough, as he himself seems to intimate:

I used to tell my Egyptian friends at university that Palestine was green and covered with trees and shrubs and wild flowers. What are these hills? Bare and chalky. Had I been lying to people, then? Or has Israel changed the route to the bridge and exchanged it for this dull road that I do not remember ever seeing in my childhood? Did I paint for strangers an ideal picture of Palestine because I had lost it? I said to myself, when Tamim comes here he will think I have been describing another country.⁴¹

Dwelling in the poem of the Ramallah, as it were, is difficult, as it intensifies his fraught feelings about his homeland and about his now scattered family, with members lost and others displaced. He wants to be reunited with the homeland of his imagination. Ramallah of his childhood, thus, is still alive, albeit aesthetically. In this way, *I Saw Ramallah* brings the city of Ramallah closer to the heart of the readers as well, who find themselves dwelling it without really dwelling it, drawing from the poetic memory that Barghouti shares with them.

I Saw Ramallah is a highly poetic form of memoir. Through the first person “I/eye,” Barghouti’s first-person voice emphasizes an individual’s experience of displacement, return, and the tragedy of a family whose members are scattered in different parts of the world. It dwells on the pain caused by displacement and loss and offers some consolation through art and nostalgia. It is the aesthetic outcome of a forced migration. Writing for Barghouti is more than a means to connect with the homeland; it becomes the *homeland* out of which he has been exiled. Writing becomes a means to re-construct, to re-write, a lost homeland out of fragmented and painful memories tainted. Writing from the position of the colonized, Barghouti is able to reclaim “home,” an imagined Ramallah.

If Barghouti’s memoir attempts to reconstruct a homeland out of fragments, Korean-American poet Myung Mi Kim embraces fragmentation and ambivalence, infusing elements of memoir into her poetry to craft a haunting poetics of diaspora. In *Under Flag*, Kim’s most autobiographical poetry collection, the Korean War, the Japanese invasion, and Korean resistance are the backdrops against which Kim explores the effect displacement and diaspora have on language. These same events were the catalyst for Kim’s migration to the United States at age nine, along with her family. Transnational in scope but localized through the collective point of view of evacuee and migrant, her poems thematize diaspora as subjunctive and fragmented. Diaspora cuts through questions of memory, personal and cultural, “intersected by national history and the history of colonialism and imperialism.”⁴² The home left behind and the new home are articulated visually through gap, fragmentation, and silence, and textually through a grammar of ambivalence that includes subjunctive and conditional tenses, parataxis and open-endedness.

"And Sing We" captures the subjunctive and conditional mood of diasporic longing:

**To span even yawning distance
And would we be near then**

What would the sea be, if we were near it

**It catches its underside and drags it back
What sound do we make, "n", "h", "g"
Speak and it is sound in time**

**Depletion replete with barraging
Slurred and taken over
Diaspora. "It is not the picture
That will save us."⁴³**

Voice

- 47 Ibid., 19.
- 48 Ibid., 17.
- 49 Ibid., 29.
- 50 Ibid., 30.

"Voice" floats alone in the vast whitespace on the page's right side, unassimilable. If there is speech, the poem suggests, it's dragged back, leaving the speaking subject at distance from one speaking collective, while the "we" point of view locates the subject in another collective. We see and read into a space of homesickness and longing, a longing complicated by the passage of time in which the adult Kim can access only degrading or fragmented memories. How do you speak of home, Kim asks, when you are left with only fragments of home's language? What happens when language itself is scattered and dispersed?

Negation, loss and absence are brought into poetic language. On the poem's second page, grilled sardines "is memory smell / elicited from nothing."⁴⁴ Here, time (as memory) comes not from a specific location, but from its absence. In the final stanza, repetition emphasizes the negation and fragmentation: "Not the one song to rivet us trundle rondo / Not a singular song trundle rondo [...] What once came to us whole."⁴⁵ The poem's uneasy ending echoes the recognition of something lost: "Mostly, we cross bridges we did not see being built."⁴⁶ Again, ambivalent grammar links time's unevenness ("mostly") to a space where bridges are crossed but invisible. Kim's image of the bridge is very reminiscent of the Jordanian bridge that Barghouti needs to cross in his way to Ramallah. In *I Saw Ramallah*, the bridge, too, intensifies the narrator's skepticism about his return to the homeland, placing him in an in-between, uncertain position.

In Kim's diasporic poetics, to speak one thing is to silence another. In "Under Flag," the act of language is always configured through loss:

**What must we call each other if we meet there
Brother sister neighbor lover go unsaid what we are
Tens of thousands of names
Go unsaid the family name⁴⁷**

The anxious lines consider how a shift from here/now to there/then might change the meaning of familiar and familial words. What might become unspeakable or untranslatable if there are no words for "it," no names to "span" the "yawning distance?" The silence of loss takes as its first victims the words that connect people to each other and to their communities, while war fills and accumulates in the spaces of language's dissipation. Catalogues of U.S. military helicopters and fighter jets perform a deadly accretion: "Grumman F9F / Bell H-130s / Shooting Stars / Flying Cheetahs" and "Lockheed F-04 Starfire / Lockheed F-809 / Bell H-13 Sioux / Bell H-13 Ds." Indeed, "More kept coming. More fell." In contrast, in "Chonui, a typical Korean town," evacuees flee with "Handful of millet, a pair of never worn shoes, one chicken / grabbed by the neck, ill-prepared for carrying, / carrying through."⁴⁸ Here, catalogue is presented not as a tight column of rapid abundance, but as a dissipated prose sentence composed of five clauses. The lines themselves are spread thinly across the page, performing their own dispersal.

The anxiety over language repeats again while the speaking subject of "Into Such Assembly" performs the speech acts necessary to become a U.S. citizen:

**Can you read and write English? Yes _____. No _____.
Write down the following sentences in English as I dictate them.
There is a dog in the road.
It is raining.
Do you renounce allegiance to any other country but this?
Now, tell me, who is the president of the United States?
You will all stand now. Raise your right hands.⁴⁹**

Kim juxtaposes the bureaucratic language of official citizenship with nostalgic descriptions of Korea ("Red lacquer chests in our slateblue house"), the Othering language of non-Koreans ("Do they have trees in Korea? Do the children eat out of garbage cans?"), as well fragments of Korean songs, instructions on English pronunciation and hauntingly lyrical images of diaspora.⁵⁰ Against the accumulation of different discourses, Kim uses gaps and spacing to emphasize unevenness – one thing cannot simply be "mapped" onto another.

In Kim's diasporic poetry, language's presence or absence is inextricable from the conditions that create access to language. These conditions are not only philosophical or rhetorical, but are also a form of poetic memoir, a poet's reckoning with diasporic memory in a racialized and gendered body positioned ambivalently within the national body.

alchemical process of intercultural understanding. Understanding, however, is not the same as cohesion or assimilation. Forms of transnational life writing, through their unique ways of textualizing our movements through world, self, and page, offer a visual grammar, not only for fluid transnational crossings and connectedness, but also for impasse, disruption and stillness.

Conclusion

In this essay's opening, we posed a series of questions: what *are* the forms of transnational writing? What possibilities and limitations does the designation offer, and how does life-writing, in particular, simultaneously unite and distinguish transnational texts? We approached these questions through four case studies in transnational life writing that reflect our own areas of interest and expertise as reader-scholars (another form of transnational writing). The four texts collected here reflect the expansive possibilities for transnational writing.

Memoir infuses these distinct texts in the form of the recording of memory and experience. Across space and time, genre and national identity, bringing these four texts together illustrates the powerful impact that global movement, both forced and involuntary, can have on our personal and collective memories. Likewise, personal and collective memory can be mobile, a form of figurative border-crossing. Each of the texts discussed here explores the mutually constitutive relationship between movement and memory – Boo and Gilbert's texts gesture towards the transformative possibilities of such work – Boo, on the level of social and systemic change, and Gilbert on the level of personal redemption and transformation. Barghouti and Kim offer more ambivalent responses. Barghouti's memoir speaks to the potential for memoir of exile to create mediated return to a homeland, although both the exile and the homeland are never quite the same as we remember them. Similarly, Kim's poetry asks (but does not answer directly), "Who is mother tongue, who is father country?"⁵¹ Diaspora is to be "slurred, taken over."⁵²

Indeed, transnational writing can help to weave socio-cultural threads between the place traveled to and the place traveled from, allowing for empathetic social and cultural connections and exchanges, tracing affinities and differences between worlds governed by different social and societal norms. Life writing, in particular, with its claims to represent a recognizable and verifiable form of reality – truthfulness – can generate powerful connections amongst its readership. And yet by bringing these four distinct texts together, we can also observe how the potential for sparking change (from raising the awareness of an individual to larger social change) depends on choices authors make in response to questions of global and local power relations. The ability of a writer to recognize and reflect in response on her own privilege and position can increase potential opportunities for intercultural understanding and cooperation through readers' empathy, while a refusal to engage in such work forecloses opportunities for transformation. Likewise, displacement under the conditions of occupation and war distinguish memoirs of diaspora from travel writing's (albeit fluid) forms of privilege.

When we travel with and through words, we create opportunities for awareness and empathy, those essential elements in the

⁵¹
Ibid., 29.

⁵²
Ibid., 13.

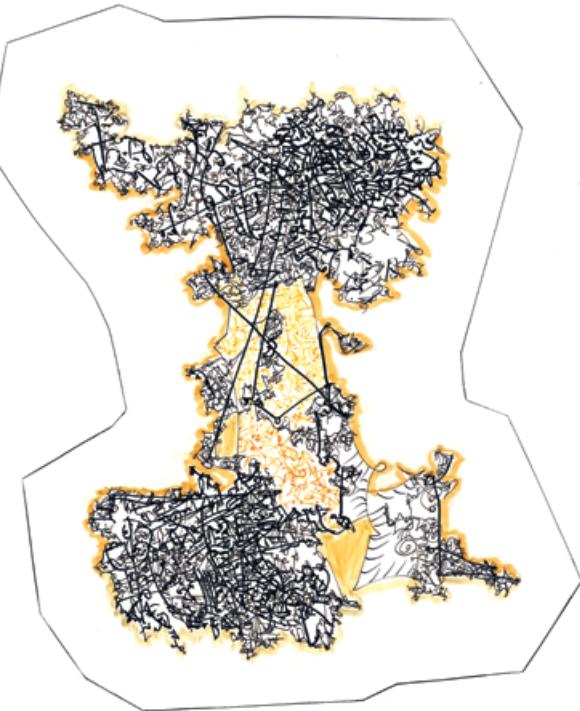
INVISIBLE PLANETS

Karen Tei Yamashita
Drawings by Ronaldo Lopes de Oliveira

As I lay dying, Gandhi came to visit me. He sat to one side, his bony buttocks hardly making a dent in the rubbery hospital mattress and patted my hand gently. I lifted up the other arm, heavy with plastic tubing and tape, and we both observed the drip, loosed from its stalactite presumably into my mite. I stared through one unglued eye, scrutinizing the Mahatma. Morphine, I nodded. Must be working.

Gandhi removed his spectacles and, taking the edge of my sheet, delicately rubbed each glass round. He rubbed his eyes and replaced his spectacles, spying through the now polished glass into a far distance, sighing as if his vision had cleared, but perhaps only momentarily. I closed my unglued eye, and he spoke:

One starlit year away, you set your course for the center of the Milky Way and land on Morticia. At first sight, it will appear barren, a vast desert of powdery sand and rubble, dotted occasionally with grease-wood and sage. As you walk across its flatness, no horizon but a flat line demarcating grey sky and grey land, you will find yourself stepping over crumbling concrete slabs, strewn with rusty nails, broken glass and pottery, eroding scraps of tar paper and splintered wood. Something about this place was makeshift, temporary, a refugee or prison camp, perhaps. Morticia's suns and moons are alternately harsh, scalding and freezing, churning this evidence to dust. The exiled inhabitants of these ruined structures disappeared long ago. You may traverse the entire planet, inch by inch, but its surface will appear to be an expansive wasteland that you will compare to other desert and deserted landscapes. What you cannot notice is that that wasteland is a living skin, stretched across an infinite labyrinth of tunnels that know no borders, through which creatures no larger than myself or perhaps you, a Vietnamese or Filipino, may crawl with freedom. The precise mapping of the labyrinth is known to spelunker bodies who, sightless, pass this intricate knowledge through the titillation of their hair softly or urgently caressing each passing body. This tunneling might be compared to the nourishing systems of plants and its occupants who are busy mobile cells, and it indeed operates as a vast organism of circulation, reaching countless leagues toward Morticia's core, where her heat replenishes, pulsing and repulsing life. The social organization that endlessly traverses the tunnels is perfect and utopian, every working unit specifically designed for the upkeep of its infrastructure, every member committed to the continuation of life.



After a long silence, I managed to pry open both eyes to make sure Gandhi was still there, his presence light and weightless, his bald head framed in the morning. What about reincarnation? I asked stupidly. Ah, indeed, he seemed to speculate the question.

At noon, I was awoken by Oswald, Oswald de Andrade, that is. He strode through the door barefoot, wearing paisley green and yellow boxers and a dress shirt, supporting a tray of hospital food on one palm and a banana in the other. Almoço! he announced. He set the tray down with its covered contents on the rolling table, shoved it over my tummy, then slung a hammock to one side of my bed and, swinging there with his bare legs splayed over the sides, peeled the banana. Ai que preguiça, he moaned.

What's for my last lunch? I quipped.

Oswald jumped forward and picked up the aluminum lid, standing waiter-like, and pronounced the menu: For appetizers, Francisco de Orellano's right ear, pickled with hints of lavender and café, and a French paté of Hans Staden's left toe. The soup is a hearty cabbage and manioc stew of Alexander von Humboldt for the main course, a coconut and palm oil muqueca of Theodor Koch-Grünberg with a savory side of Henry Walter Bates and fluffy rice seasoned with Percy

Harrison Fawcett. Ah, eu sei que é uma bocada, mas pelo amor de deus, it's fusion, and besides, I've been practicing my pro-nun-ciation.

Dessert? I queried.

Ah, he cooed. Something to look forward to. A crème brûlée de Claude Lévi-Strauss glazed with candied Michel Foucault. Finalmente, uma delicadeza française. And you thought hospital food would be boring. He lost his waiterly pose, slouched to one side and continued to chomp on the banana.

How tasty. I forced a weak smile.

Oh, he said. I mustn't forget. He produced two bottles.

Red or white?

Red, of course.

Good choice. Vintage Elizabeth Bishop. He poured a hefty goblet of the bloody liquid, took for himself a large gulp, tucked the napkin under my chin, and began:

You follow the yellow brick road to the planet Dorotheia where three tribes live and fail in a revolving dance of ascendance and descendancy. When one tribe is populated and prosperous, another is very small and impoverished, while a third is developing. Inevitably, the flourishing tribe is imperceptibly on the wane, and the developing tribe will wax into its new and affluent place, and the most impoverished tribe will eventually find itself waxing in growing strength, while the richest tribe will lose its place as top dog. Over time, this cycle repeats itself incessantly. Top dog, middle dog, bottom dog. Top dog, middle dog, bottom dog. Round and round. Every tribe getting a momentary chance to bask in one of those slots like clockwork.

But how does it work? The avatar of the lion tribe is, well, the lion, and he is very muscular and handsome and commands a position of power and strength, attracting a large harem of females. The avatar of the metal tribe is the car, very shiny and technically superior, but he can only grab as many females as fit in his car, and who wants to sit in the backseat? The avatar of the grass tribe is the supple bamboo, and to be honest he sways in both directions, attracting both males and females. It's all about sex and attraction and who can impregnate the most females. If you think the lions sit on the big hill like kings, don't forget that the cars are always doubled up like street racers, revving their motors in the valley, picking off the curious females. But don't also forget that tall grass can hide erotic desire and secret splendor.



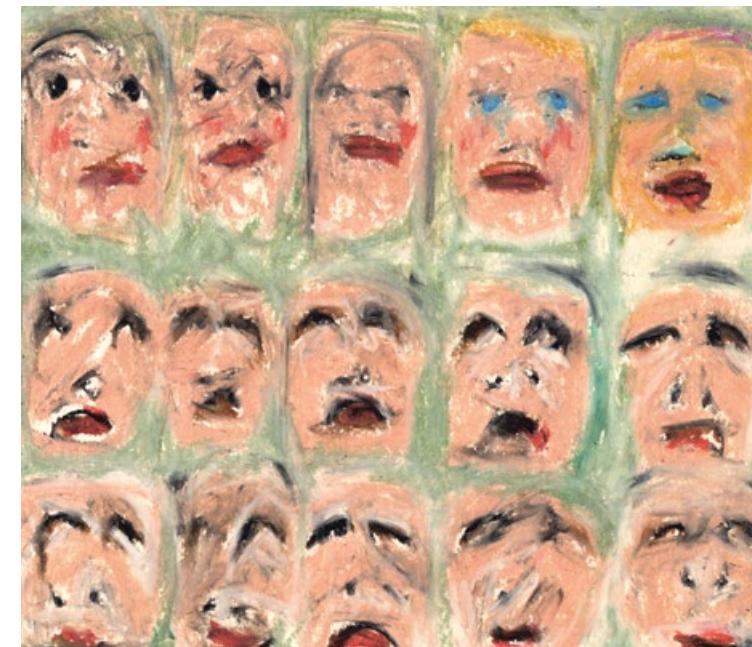
I sat up and managed to wipe my mouth, slimy with the neo-colonial cultural swill of the imperial world, and complained about Oswald's ridiculous storytelling: What has this got to do with anything?

He pulled down his trunks and mooned me. Tupi or not Tupi. I eat you. Chuchu, my peito do peru. I watched Oswald's hairy bottom sashay away with a final emphatic fart.

I slumped back and pushed the tray away. Ai que grosso.

Hours later, the nurse helped me to the potty to poop. I groaned miserably, but the nurse would not stoop to sympathy. What goes in must come out. Then I got propped up with pillows in a wheelchair next to my drip machine and faced fading daylight through a narrow window. Twilight was beautiful. Sky churning blue to green to gold to lavender to blushing rose. Happy hour? I thought no one was listening, but then Italo Calvino appeared with two martinis, pulled up a chair, and cracked his wry smile. I like mine dry, but I figured you would want it dirty. He handed me my cocktail and stared into the orange horizon. I kissed a green olive from the end of a festive toothpick, then pulled it into my mouth, sucking in the swirl of salt and sour and alcohol. I paused, that taste and the liminal light refreshing an old memory, but Calvino was already reminiscing:

When you happen on to Memoria, you will immediately recognize it as a planet you have already visited, though in fact you will have never been there before. You will experience your visit as if a tourist, and each sensation of *déjà vu* will be accompanied by a subtle sensory memory of smell, taste, sound, touch, or sight. The memory will be distant and vague but haunting, and you will whip around with your nose in soft tepid air or swipe at *it* as the whining sound of a pesky mosquito. These sensations will constantly torment you, sometimes from the corner of your eye, a speck of memory even as you cross a strange street or the sensation of a moist kiss as you stray from the confusing directions of GPS on your iPhone. You may sit in a quiet café, pressing your fork on crumbs of cake searching for that *je ne sais quoi* taste until you are frantically scraping the plate, or you will jump from your seat to the door to chase the faint melody whistled by a passerby. You will travel through every possible landscape of city or countryside, vast ocean or snow peak mountain, desert dunes or tropical forest, populated, civil or savage, banal or exotic, expecting to experience another unknown part of this planet, but everything reminds you of what you already have known, even as you cannot grasp how or when or what that knowing brings to mind. You will find yourself frantically snapping photos and recording everything, attempting to create new memories of all your unknown lost things. You fill the cloud with thousands of food pics and selfies where you are now everywhere on this planet, never intending to recuperate these images, after all unsatisfactory replicas of your amnesia. You will stumble disconsolately frustrated, grasping for your precious memories, and finally resolve to leave Memoria, all your sensations thrown into wild confusion, anxiety, and endless aching loss.



Calvino sat back, observing the blushing horizon darken, and popped the last green olive, the hand-stuffed pimento a bulls-eye between his teeth. He raised his glass and winked sardonically at me. Ciao bella ciao.

A while later, I got dumped back into bed, reattached to tubes and monitors, diapered, tucked in, and re-imprisoned between side bars. What did I care? I was thankfully drunk. The lights were dimmed to night lights, call button on the remote control highlighted in radiant red. The nightshift nurse checked in, slapping a high five into my dark room. Sleep tight. I began to doze into dreamscape when suddenly all the lights were turned on with violent energy like the stark center of an operating table, and Vilém Flusser trundled in, puffing his proverbial pipe and urgently yelling in his Czech accent, Wake up! Vé se accorda!

Blinded by the sudden light, I squinted with exasperation. Good grief, another crazy Brazilian. Please, I pleaded, no more conFusion food. I get it already.

Flusser stuffed a series of what appeared to be x-rays under metal clips on the light board and pointed with his pipe. Now, what do you see here?

Rorschach? I twisted my neck to one side. Not my pelvis.

Flusser rolled his eyes.

Okay, kanji.

Better, he shrugged. He pulled down the first set of slides, and shoved in another set.

Sumi ink art, I yawned. You should ask a real Japanese.

Flusser stepped back and puffed a small fragrant donut as if to demonstrate. Squid ink. Venom. Poisonous in the sense that it can paralyze you, a shapeshifting device to deceive and hide, but a pictorial language, nonetheless.

What does it say?

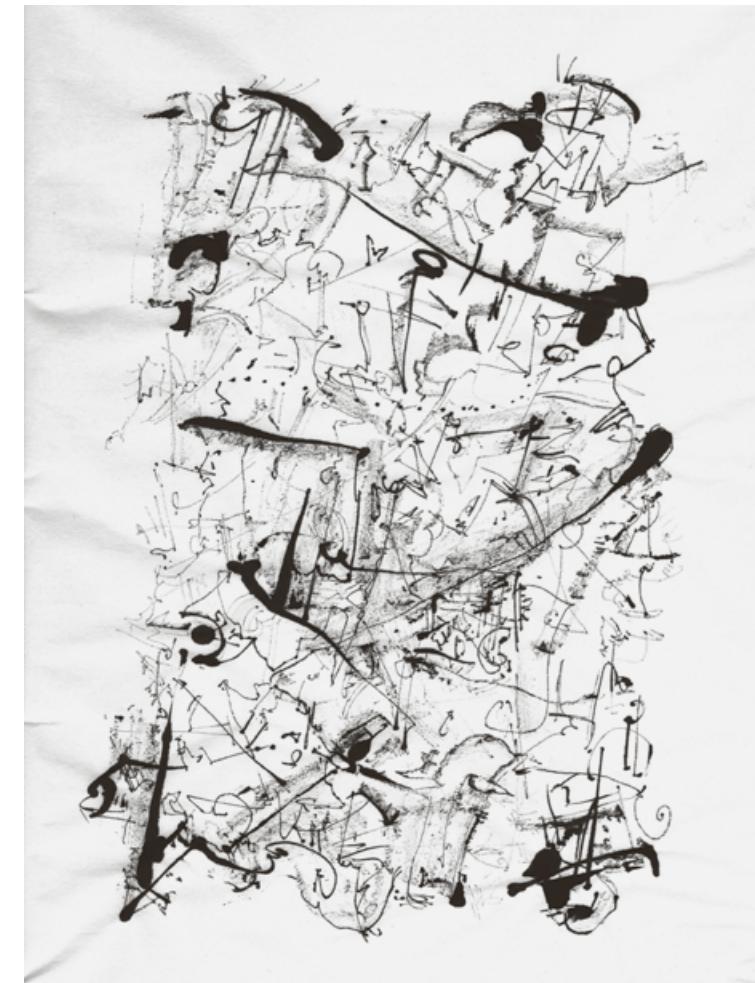
Flusser snatched a film and pressed my fingers to its image. Feel this, he commanded.

Braille?

Impressionism perhaps. Seeing is not always believing. He made himself comfortable in the visitor's chair, repacked and lit his pipe, and began:

The planet Laudomia is three ecosystems away. Its surface is a heavy ocean that descends thousands of leagues, each layer of its liquid mass supporting a changing multitude of life forms that support deeper and deeper layers, until finally you reach the very bottom, the abyss where no light penetrates but where Laudomia's highest life form reigns. When you arrive on Laudomia, however, you will probably spend your time fishing on its calm and fecund pellicula. Occasionally you may become aware of great monsters, whale-like, that also call it home, but even if you can harness the saddles of such Moby Dicks, you cannot reach the profound abyss, and you will not meet

your intellectual partner and soul mate, a form of what you will recognize as a giant tentacled vampire squid. Shall we call them Giovanni? In the future, it is possible that robots you have created may descend in submarines and make official contact with the Giovanni, communicating via complex displays of bioluminescence and inky secretions. A lively exchange may ensue: the difference of the homo sapien hand in coordination with eyesight and the octopod tentacle that grasps impressions in a dark world; human artificial memory stored in books and art compared with Giovanni's performance of rape and coitus literally injecting memory into others; diurnal clarity versus nocturnal dreaming; linear versus circular thinking; reason versus orgasm; freedom to love versus freedom to hate. But the danger will be that the cybernetic thinking you send to extract information relayed by Giovanni cannot discern lies and deceit and may return to you with the grotesque ability to finally destroy you.



Oh good news, I muttered.

Ah, mere fabula. Flusser yanked his inky encryptions from the light screen and stuffed them into his briefcase. Then he paused, fumbled in his coat pocket and drew out his iPhone. May I, he asked, pressing his bearded face, itchy on my wan cheek, infusing tobacco into the musty pillow, and stretching out his arm with the phone. Click. Then checking the result: Fabuloso.

Maybe Flusser or the nightshift nurse flicked the lights out. The difference between dying and my nightmares were hardly perceptible. I saw the severed heads of Arcimboldo's monstrous masterpieces, fruit and veggie portraits of human grotesquery, floating around my bed, all laughing. The Brazilians might call them the faces of gororoba. I was not going to be saved. I was going to gororoba hell. However, around midnight, a voice whispered into my ear. Taut muscular and tattooed arms dislodged me from my attachments, dressed me up in a jumpsuit and sneakers, and we slipped past the emergency room. Strapping on matching helmets, I sped away with Anthony Bourdain on a candy red 125cc Honda Airblade into the night air. Maybe I was going to have my last supper after all. It was a dream come true. National Geographic merged with the Iron Chef merged with Chez Panisse. Bourdain's helmet was miked into mine, and his familiar parts unknown voice merged like TV with traffic noise and appropriated foreign soundtracks:

You can find the planet Désirée only if you chase a naked brown woman gripping an apple and flying away on a golden goose, bits of chomped fruit spinning by, her massive expanse of hair trailing behind. You will chase her as a goddess across star systems, and she will change from woman to creature, at times nothing but the smell of cider and trailing threads of black to guide your pursuit, but if you do not lose the chase, you will arrive. Of course, upon arrival, there will be no naked woman, no apple, no golden goose, though perhaps evidence of those black tresses, but you will be too tired and hungry to care. An aging street vendor will offer you a foaming cup of thick chocolate ambrosia, and if you do not immediately forget your original desire, you will find that this is a pretty good replacement. This planet is divided into those who desire sex and those who desire food, and you are definitely on the side of food. On Désirée, the food/sex division used to be really intense, almost to the point of civil war, if you can imagine that, but that was in the old days when food and sex were pretty basic, appetites considerably more boring. In those days, the inhabitants ate to live and had sex to procreate. What changed all that was variety, endless variety, scattering everyone into an infinity of factions, predilections, taboos, from gourmandism to fasting, promiscuousness to celibacy. The planetary motto: Eat (or have sex with) everything before you die. Well, unless you've chosen fasting or celibacy. The thing about this planet is that its people eat almost everything; if they don't eat it,

it can't be eaten. This is because the planet has experienced dramatic swings in climate change; when there is nothing to eat, a lot of things quickly become edible. Luckily, you will arrive in a period of abundance and quickly explore the Yelp listings, but this is unnecessary because the entire planet is a culinary excursion, streets and alleys and waterways lined with restaurant after diner after café after street cart after barbecue pit. You follow your nose into every hole-in-the-wall or high-falutin Michelin-starred eatery, sniffing out the most mundane or exotically arcane, an iron chef with an iron stomach, an iron will to eat everything on this small planet before you die.



I whispered into Bourdain's ear, the one with the earring. You can't be serious.

The Honda Airblade wheeled up the emergency ramp. Back to hospital food.

Please, I whimpered.

Bourdain raked his fingers through greying hair, gave me a nod, then replaced his helmet.

See you around. I waved to the diminishing vision.

By then, it was dawn. A woman in white gloves and a stylish hat of my mother's era came to take my hand and carefully led me back to bed. She crinkled her nose. Honey, you smell like garlic. It was Zora Neale Hurston. By this time, I knew I was in some kind of personal Christmas Carol, but I was really relieved to finally see Zora. I waited for her story:

Six heavenly rivers and three galaxies away, the lovely blue planet of Zora appears in a soft mist of silver clouds, its grandiose glass and

steel structures exploding in light and shadow, manicured sculpture gardens and shimmering water fountains. You visit architectural marvels, each attempting to outdo the next, but wedged between, you also discover small houses or storefronts, repurposed banks, ruined churches, and obsolete factories. All of these structures have been created or reconfigured to keep the curious memories, personal collections, histories and cultural legacy of the inhabitants of Zora. And besides the collection of artifacts, you will also find arborets and greenhouses of plant life and zoos of sea and land animals, living and dead, stuffed and skeletal. You gaze at everything outside of yourself and understand that it is all collectible – inanimate, abstract, concrete, real, dead and alive, true and false, atrocity and innocence. And as soon as it is collected, it is carefully preserved as the past. Everything is carefully documented and curated. However, nothing that you see, hear, touch, or witness will you choose to comprehend fully, for Zora will show you a memory of the future that you will refuse to believe.

What does this mean?

Zora eyed me impassively though sweetly.

My head sank deeper into the pillow, but through the disintegrating foam, I could hear the distant voices of two kids. A five-year-old girl exclaimed to her brother with coy enthusiasm, Come on, let's go see the dinosaurs! Her brother, older but only by two years, turned pale, shook his head vehemently, stalled in fear. In my mind, I took his trembling hand, turning away from those giant menacing bones, and pointed to the museum store. Come on, let's go shopping.

I looked one last time at Zora and felt a momentary sense of the uncanny. Her eyes flickered inexplicably, mechanically. She turned her head slightly, the receiver in her ear fine tuning itself to detect my breathing.



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