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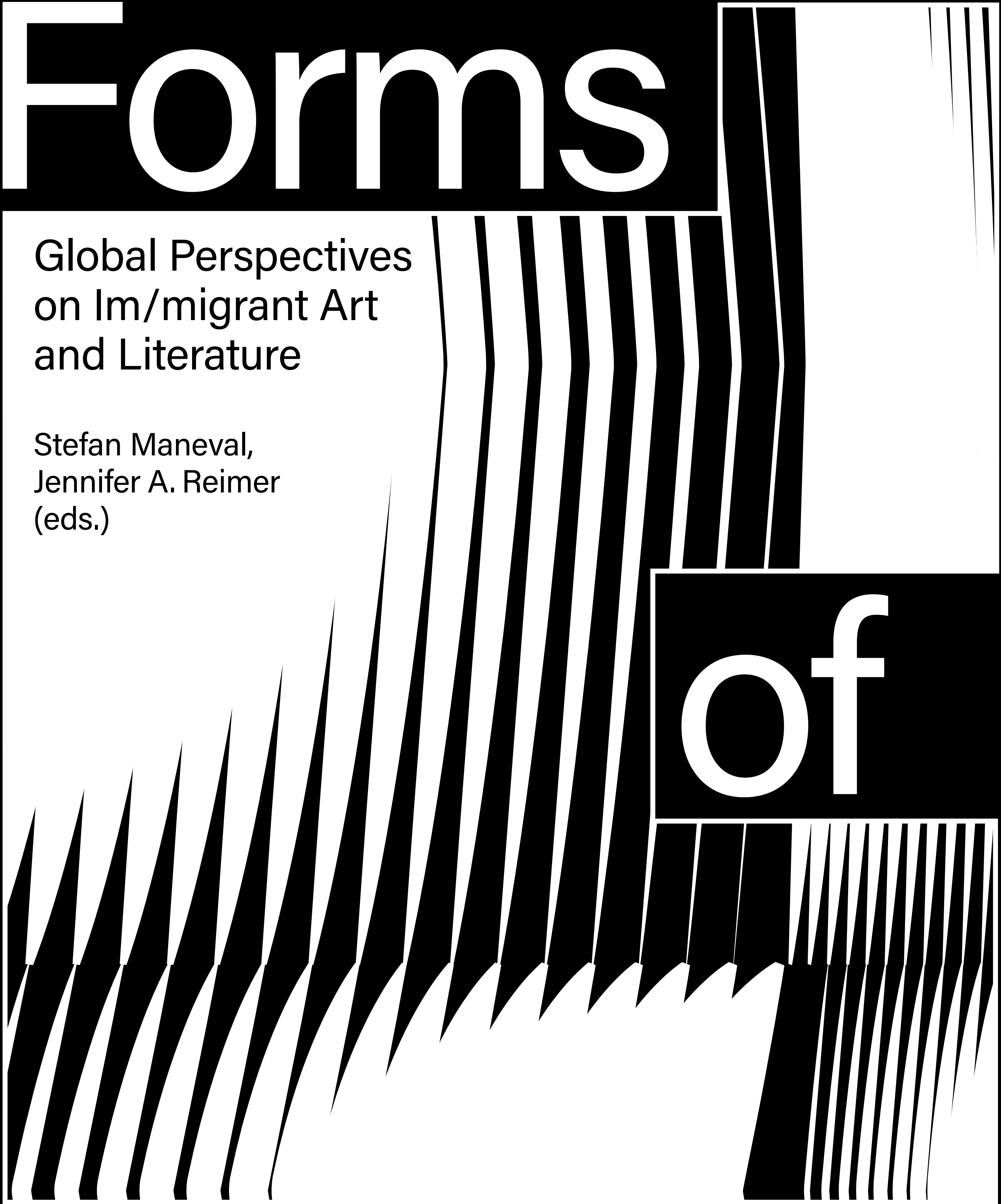
Forms of Migration

Global Perspectives on Im/migrant Art and Literature

Stefan Maneval,
Jennifer A. Reimer
(eds.)



Journal of Transnational American Studies 13.2 (2022)

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EDITORS' NOTE: GHOSTS & CATS & OTHER HAUNTING THINGS

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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 *Çeşırlık* 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 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

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INTRO-DUCTION

Stefan Maneval & Jennifer A. Reimer

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.

---

[01] Hans Belting, *Florenz und Bagdad: Eine weströstliche 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.

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."[04] 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."[05] 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."[06] 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."[07] 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."[08]

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.[09] "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.[10] According to the UNHCR, the vast majority of refugees, 73%, had escaped to neighbouring countries of the Global South, often living 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]

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[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/.

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 redisribution 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

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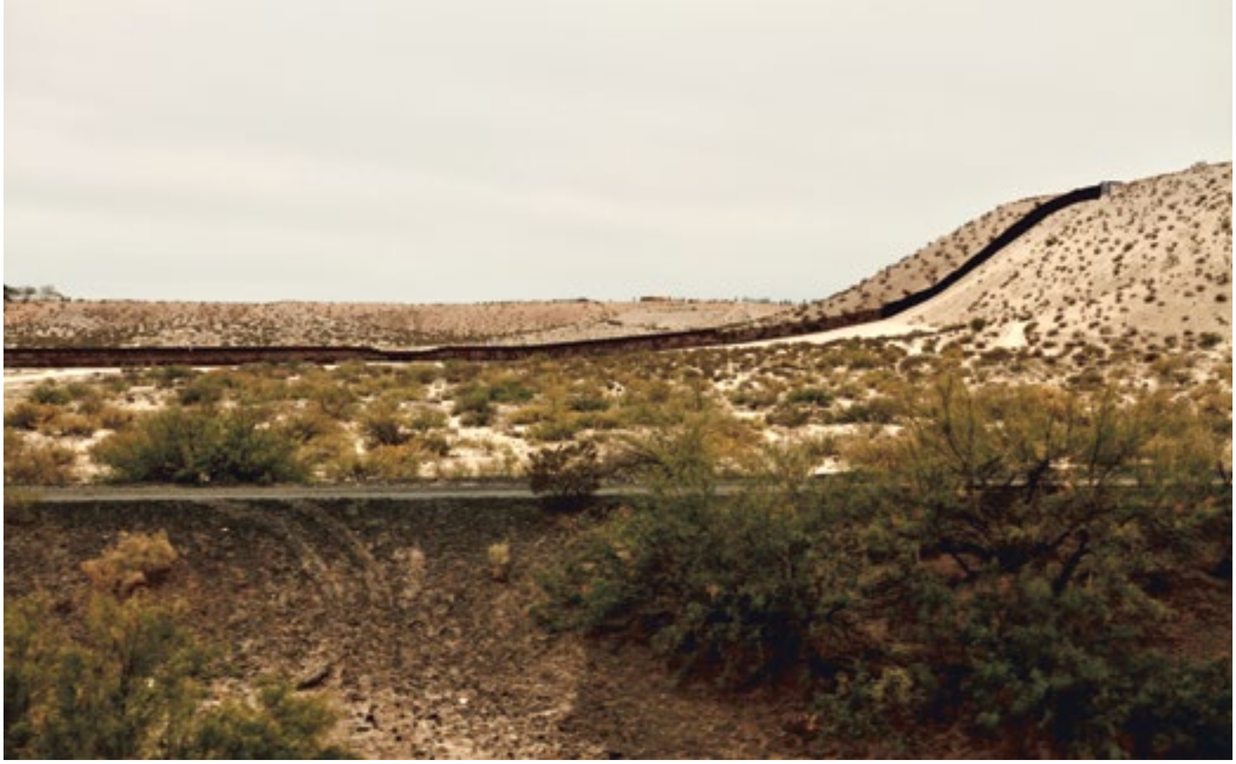
[11] Ibid.

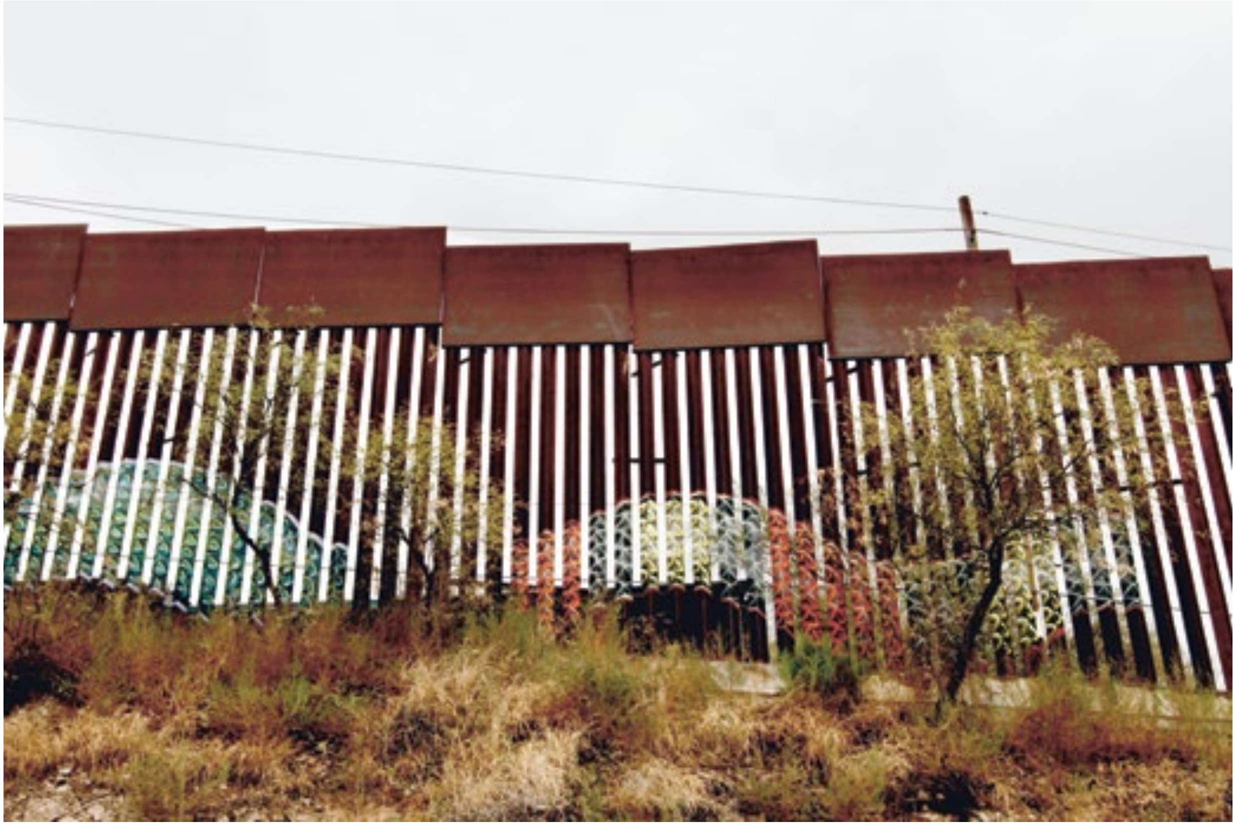
[12] Ibid.

[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.

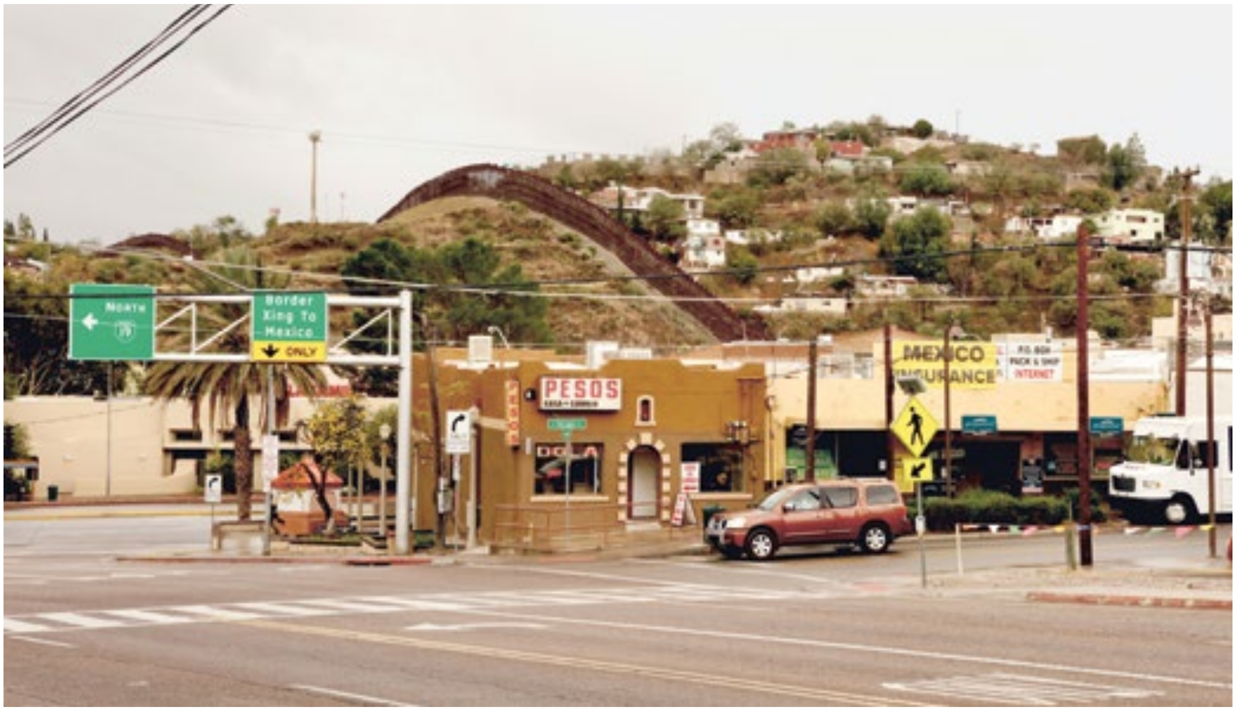
[15] Jagdish Bhabwati, "U.S. Immigration Policy: What Next?" in *Essays on Legal and Illegal Immigration*, ed. Susan Pozo (Kalamazoo, Mich.: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1986), 124, quoted in Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 93.





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.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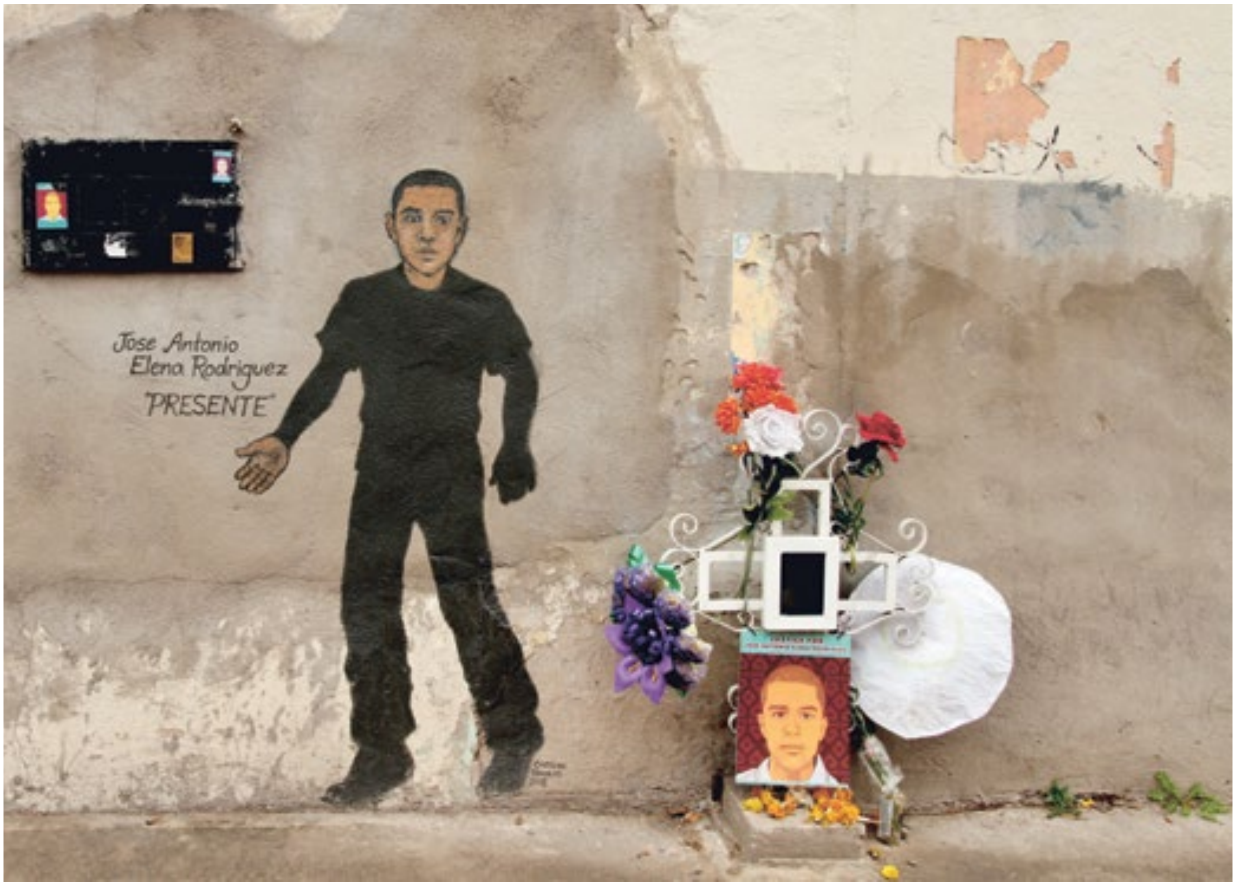

Jose Antonio
Elena Rodriguez
"PRESENTE"

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.

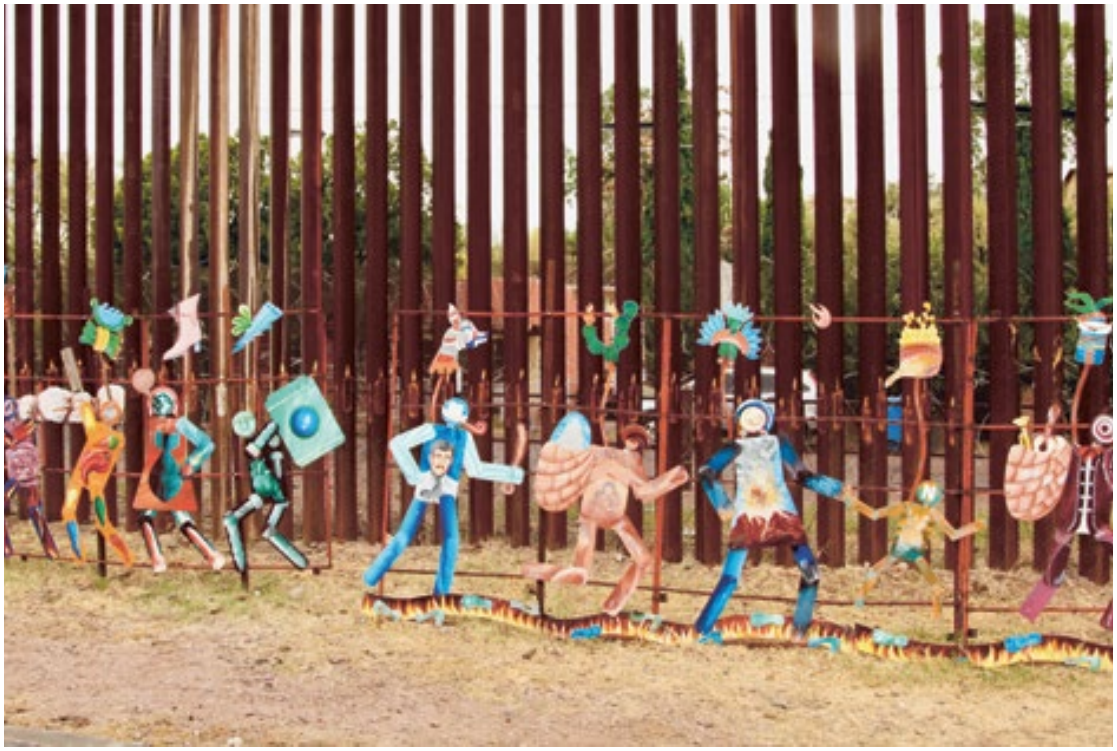
---

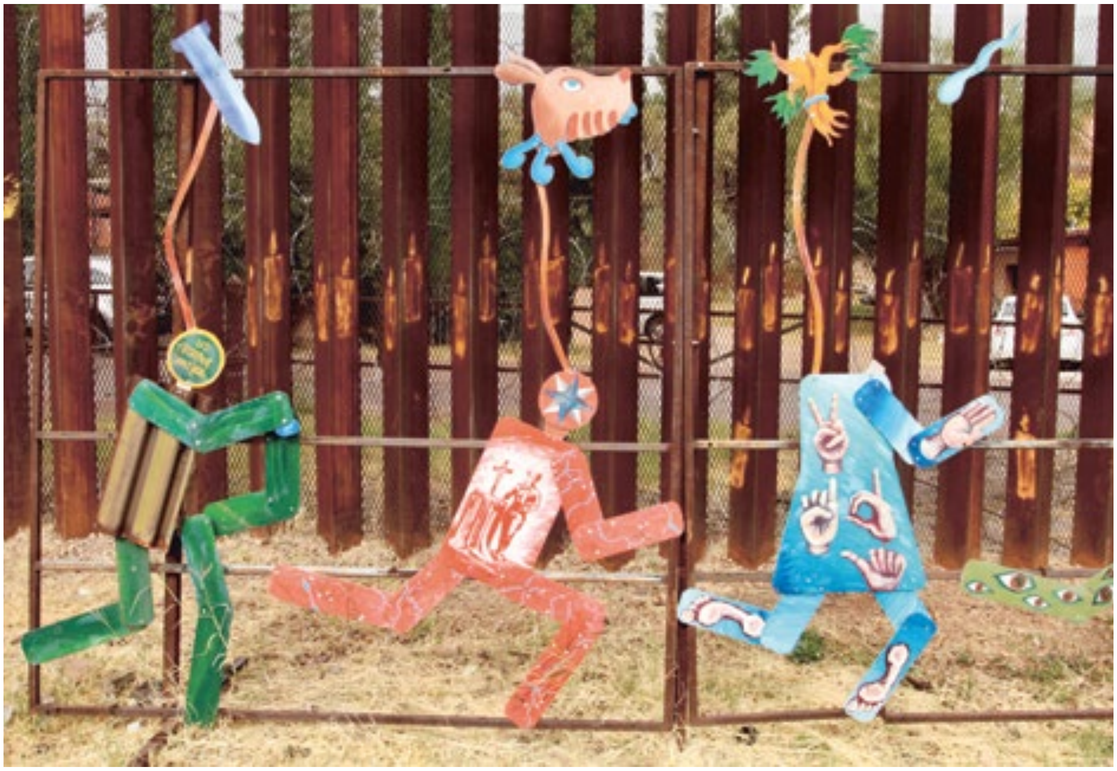
[16] As Wendy Brown writes about the wall constructed along the U.S.-Mexico border, "For would-be migrants, whether temporary or permanent, the effect of the spectacular new fortifications is to require a longer, more expansive, and harrowing journey – through mountains and deserts – than before the 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.

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

[18] Ibid., 11.

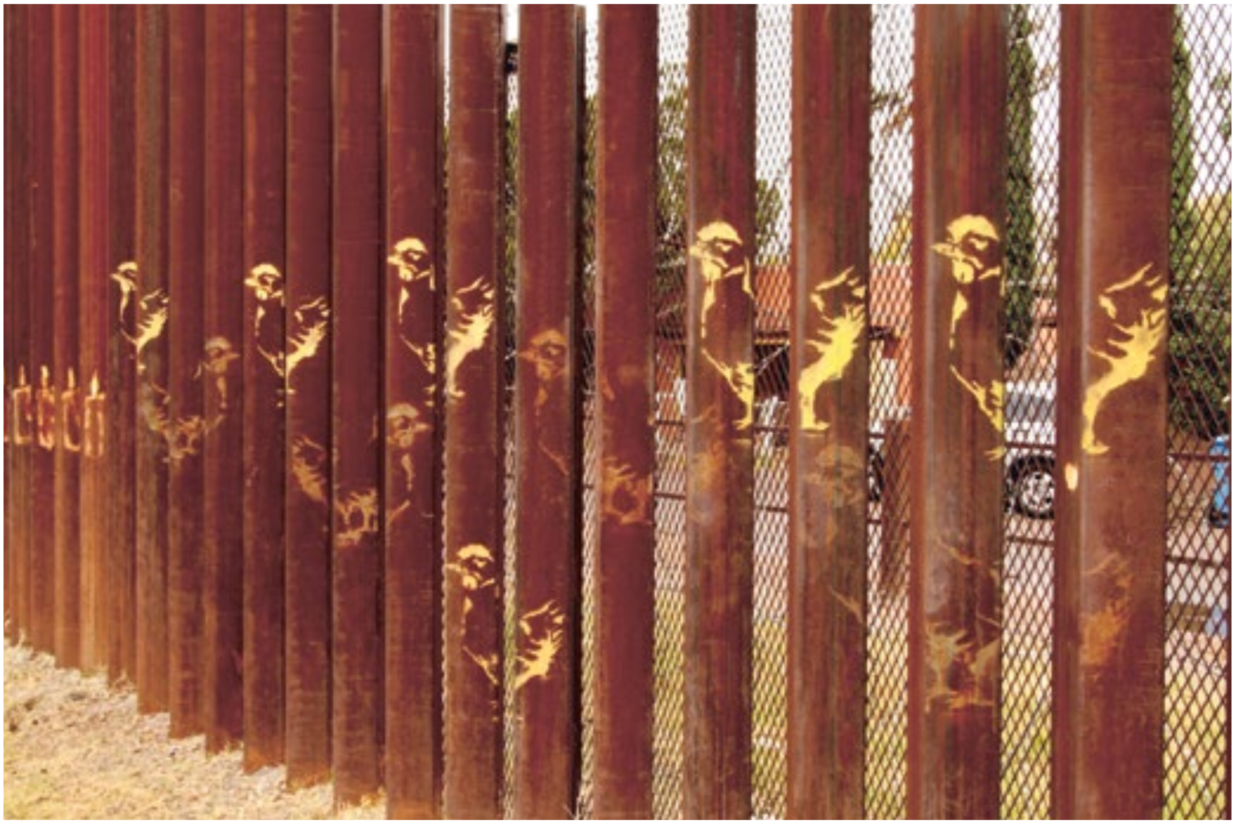
[19] Brown, *Walled States*, 103.

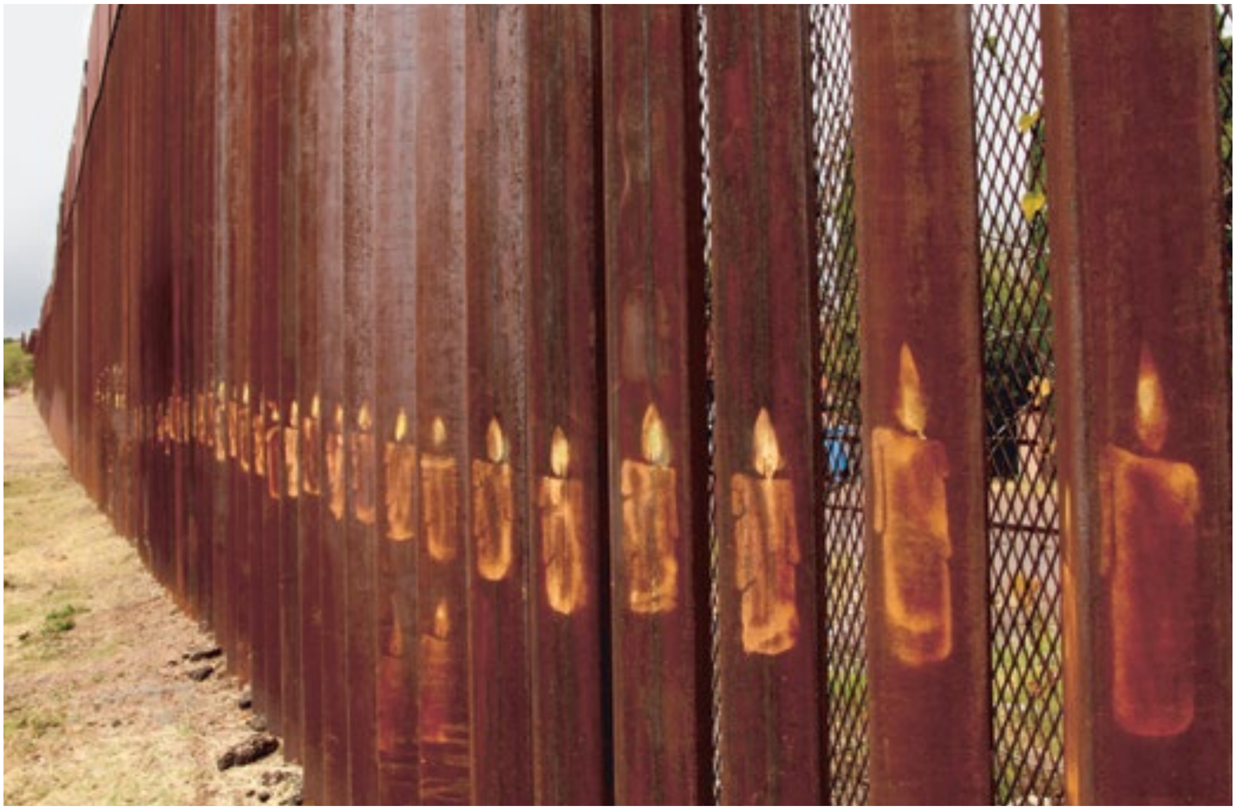




Top: Sculpture along the fence in Nogales, Mexico, depicting a caravan of migrants crossing the desert with a "coyote" wearing a white shirt and blue vest, smuggling them across the border. On the coyote's upper body is a portrait of the folk saint Jesús Malverde, patron of the poor, the handicapped, 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

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.

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[20] 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.12322227.0009.011.

[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

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 postcolonial 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

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imaginary collective identities, see Heike Delitz and Stefan Hizbullah'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.

'sheikhdom' [*al-mashāʾikhiyyah 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

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[30] Kādhim Jihād, *Adūnīs muntaḥilan* (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.

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 "enchanted 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

[31] UNHCR, "Global Trends."

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 Sienese 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.

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FORMS OF MEMOIR: FOUR CASE STUDIES IN MOVEMENT, MIGRATION, AND TRANSNATIONAL LIFE WRITING

Ikram Hili & Jennifer A. Reimer

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

[01] Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 26.

[02] Mourid Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*, trans. Ahdaf Soueif (New York: Anchor Books, 2000).

[03] Myung Mi Kim, *Under Flag* (Berkeley: Kelsey Street Press, 1991).

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-crisipin- 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).

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

[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 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.

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[12] Ibid., 237.

[13] Ibid., 24.

[14] Ibid., 223, emphasis added.

[15] Ibid., 237.

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]

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[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.

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 women in India? She runs the Indian marriageability algorithm on herself and jokes about her good fortune in having light skin:

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[21] Ibid., 119–20.

[22] Ibid., 130.

[23] Ibid., 137.

[24] Ibid., 132.

> 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

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[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/2020/07/09/860912124/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).

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 nostalgia.[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.

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[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.

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

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[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.

> 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. Accordingly, Barghouti's return remains incomplete, not triumphant enough, as he himself seems to intimate:

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[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.

> 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.

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[41] Ibid., 33.

[42] Xiaojing Zhou, *The Ethics and Poetics of Alterity in Asian American Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 234.

"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**
> **Voice**
>
> **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" 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:

[43] Kim, *Under Flag*, 13.

[44] Ibid., 14.

[45] Ibid., 15.

[46] Ibid., 14-15.

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 name[47]

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.

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[47] Ibid., 19.

[48] Ibid., 17.

[49] Ibid., 29.

[50] Ibid., 30.

Displaced and marginalized, the voices of these poems map the (dis) location between the impossibility of speaking and the urgency to voice.

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 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.

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[51] Ibid., 29.

[52] Ibid., 13.