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Forms of Migration: Global Perspectives on Im/migrant Art and Literature

Rita Sakr^a

BOOK REVIEW

Stefan Maneval and Jennifer A. Reimer (Eds). *Forms of Migration: Global Perspectives on Im/migrant Art and Literature*. Falschrum Books, 2022, 275 pp. ISBN: 9783982077987 (hardcover).

HISTORY Published 2024-11-14

Experimental turns and interdisciplinary crossings in the arts and humanities have been moving the field of forced migration studies in stimulating, groundbreaking directions. In this respect, the study of (im)mobilities in the twenty-first century has been marked by a necessary, transformative proliferation of innovative representational spaces opened up by, with, and in relation to the transcultural imaginaries of the seekers of refuge. This plurality in creative openings is taking place in historical and geopolitical contexts where increasing numbers of people are forcibly displaced.

Patterns of conflict, persecution, and environmental disaster in the past two decades, especially throughout what is known as the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) and South Asia, have given rise to an important body of literary and artistic production that has emerged alongside forced migrations from and across these regions. The intermedial and transmedial works of Hassan Blasim, Behrouz Boochani, and Thi Bui unset-

tle genre distinctions and stretch the boundaries of realism into more-than-realist forms that defamiliarize and expose the border-scape while exploring more-than-human possibilities of connection. The films of Waad al-Kateab and Hassan Fazili, as well as Boochani, reveal abundant creative resources amid repressive, life-threatening conditions and filmmaking restrictions. A sizeable proportion of this output draws on the writers' and filmmakers' personal journeys, and such experimentation with life narrative has marked much of the contemporary corpus of written and cinematic art approaching forced displacement.

Stefan Maneval and Jennifer A. Reimer's interdisciplinary and experimental **Forms of Migration: Global Perspectives on Im/migrant Art and Literature** is a scholarly and creative work that is deeply attuned to these new directions in forced migration studies and related literary and artistic production, and in this sense, it is similar in some ways to Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's **Refuge in a**

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Moving World (UCL Press, 2020). The major original contribution of this volume is its use of structure, design, and content to reinforce the argument that the scholarly and the creative can be deeply intertwined, especially in the study of displacements. Specifically, Maneval and Reimer's volume demonstrates that as much as there has been radical innovation in the creative literatures and visual arts engaging refuge, similar aesthetic and conceptual experimentation is possible in the scholarship addressing this work. The graphic designs of the Berlin-based studio Eps51 stunningly materialize this aesthetic-scholarly experiment. Each section begins with a title in large black lettering placed across two entirely black pages, and black background also recurs on the pages featuring visual material across the volume. The reader is thus subtly invited through the creative design to reflect on the materiality of crossings and the implications of making (in)visible, on whiteness inflecting non-white space with its discursive control, on black sites of harm along the journey of migration, and much more.

Crucially, Maneval and Reimer's formidable collection of essays (including photo essays), poetic fragments and interludes, visual art, life writing, and conversations thoughtfully considers the "artists' and authors' own lived experiences of movement" (p. 12). The volume reflects the increasing recognition of the perspectives of displaced people in forced displacement studies and extends this emphasis to the larger framework of migration and transnational studies. It also contributes to various fields of study through its own unique aesthetic and scholarly forms that incorporate various experimental visual and textual material in addition to photos of musicians performing. Its contributions are relevant especially to comparative literary and cultural studies, Middle Eastern and

South Asian studies, translation studies, art history, media studies, and musicology.

Forms of Migration consists of five sections: "Longing, Belonging," "Periscope," "Europe Otherwise," "Xperial," and "Fringes." In the first section, James Nguyen's "East Hills Migrant Hostel" incorporates a personal essayistic reflection on the connection between the site where his father was processed as a refugee in Australia and the settler-colonial space in which it is embedded; screenshots from **Portion 53**, a three-channel video installation Nguyen made in collaboration with his parents and a friend—the title referencing the location of the migrant hostel; and finally his mother's poem to him in Vietnamese on a page facing its English translation. Nguyen's concluding reflection on being "ashamed" (p. 37) for not recognizing his mother's creativity earlier is extended in Karolina Golimowska's realization, in the following short piece, "Queen of Queens," that she can "strongly relate to the figure of the confused polyglot who often chooses silence" (p. 42). With intersecting decolonial, feminist, and cultural clothing research interests, Enaya Hammad Othman's "Diasporic Fashion: The Palestinian Dress as a Form of Gendered Activism" reveals the spectrum of political use of the "thob" across tradition, national representation, and transnational realities of continued forced displacement for Palestinians. The section ends with Wendy Shaw's piece, where a web of facts from the history of bird migrations and reflections on the violence of present-day dislocations come together as a conceptual displacement of the academic essay through "enchanted reason," thus communicating, in its accompanying prose elucidation, that "the changing of forms is also a migration" (p. 63). Together, these pieces aptly invite a consideration of longing and belonging as affectively and materially

interconnected states of being in historical contexts where movement may be at one and the same time a traumatizing experience of loss and an empowering discovery of openings and offerings.

"Periscope" begins with Stefan Maneval's interview with the artist and author Chaza Charafeddine, who left Lebanon to live in Switzerland and Germany during the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990). Among other related topics, the conversation touches on her photo series "Maidames"—a play on "maid" and "madame" (p. 71)—in which she presents female migrant workers in Lebanon in recognizable painterly and fashion photography roles to unsettle the gaze of the Lebanese woman when she looks at a "poor black girl" (p. 75). The following piece continues with photography and Lebanon, as Reine Chahine's collaborative photo essay, "Enclosures of Glass and Stone," presents the photographic work of young Palestinian women: Ranin Youssef, Fatmeh Youssef, Hiba Yassin. The three women live in disenfranchised camps in Saida and Beirut; these are "enclosed, densely populated neighbourhoods which have evolved out of refugee camps" (85) since the forced displacement of over 700,000 Palestinians to neighbouring countries at the time of the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948. Chahine brainstormed with them the theme of "walls and boundaries" before selecting and editing their photos and accompanying statements. Shifting across Lebanon and the MENA region, Lisa Marchi's essay on contemporary Arab diasporic art and literature recovers the importance of stillness in the experimental mediation of various journeys of refuge, as represented in Hisham Matar's art-historical personal mediation **A Month in Siena**, Fouad Elkoury's slide-show **Atlantis**, Doris Bittar's photo cycle **Kul Shay/All Things**, Etel Adnan's painting cycle **The Weight of the World**,

and Adel Abidin's video/sound installation **Cold Interrogation**.

"Europe Otherwise" opens with the striking question "Is there a place for emotions in academic writing?" (121), with which Matthias Pasdzierny's piece, "told in the style of a photo-love story" (122), begins as it explores the life of the Jewish composer Brigitte Schiffer, who escaped the Nazis by fleeing to Egypt. While Pasdzierny's essay affectively reformulates "exile studies," Susanne Rieser and Silvia Schultermandl's interview with the directors of the open-access documentary film **The Sounds of Hospitality: Migrant Musicians in Europe**, which again formally plays on the dynamics of "motion and stillness" (137), explores the formal "differen[ce]" of Middle Eastern music (139) as a way of rethinking hospitality through collaborative practice between the displaced musicians and the filmmakers. This is followed by Ömer Alkin's examination of the representation of "homecoming" in the Turkish Yeşilçam cinema, where the displacement of focus to the "point of view of the home community" and "the figuration of absence" formally translate "mutual estrangement" (148). Contrapuntally echoing the ending of "Longing, Belonging," this section ends poetically with Piotr Gwiazda's "Bilingual Feelings."

The aptly named section "Xperial" starts with the masterful "Crossing Formations," a "performative text-image" (163) that the British Egyptian artist Salma Ahmad Caller produced specifically for **Forms of Migration** and that exemplifies the rationale of the book. It brings together photo collages or "composite images" of objects in her family archive tracing personal migrations across Mosul, Kano, and Jeddah/Riyadh, prefaced by a "lyrical prose" text, produced with Jennifer Reimer, who created "a typographical equivalent for a kind of poetic


spacetime" (164), and completed by a decolonial anti-inventory inventory. Reimer explains that working against the "static colonial inventory and accounting of/for," she "stacked and boxed words alongside a diasporic dispersal across white space" (164). A decolonizing approach to the relationship of body and object re-emerges in Stephanie Misa's illustrated essay in which she communicates the framework of her performative devouring of a cookie, offensively named "Filipino," as a radical revisioning of interconnected dislocating colonial language policies and the racialization of the colonized. Continuing the engagement with body and language use, the final essay here brings remarkably new insights as Don E. Walicek considers the lives of detainees in Guantanamo Bay in the specific terms of forced displacement, and the creative contributions of Mohammed Al-Hamiri and Mohamedou Ould Slahi in the context of Caribbean history as "embattled humanism" (224–225).

The final section, "Fringes," opens with Anna Quéma's essay, the densest in the volume, on Oana Avasilichioaei's **Limbinal**, which is "both text and audiovisual performance" working through "the biopoetic ellipse, the translational ellipse, the citational ellipse, and the intermedial ellipse" (231) to radically rethink border crossing and reciprocity. **Forms of Migration** ends with two necessary pieces to complete its

contribution to the field. First, Ikram Hili and Jennifer Reimer revisit a distinction that tends to be insufficiently researched: migrant literature in relation to travel writing. Second, Karen Tei Yamashita's experimental illustrated story "Invisible Planets" brings us back to the significance of more-than-realist forms to the narrativity of displacements.

Maneval and Reimer aptly describe their volume's arrangement as "a mixtape, letting the affective quality of the various contributions determine their order" (21). This lends their project both its stimulating difficulty and liberating appeal to the reader while articulating the possible and necessary futures of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary collaborative, experimental initiatives in the study of (im)mobilities and refuge.

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