

Narratives of Displacement

edited by Miriam Sette

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Introduction

This volume gathers papers presented at the International Online Conference held on November 6-8 2020 organized by the London Centre for Interdisciplinary Research (London, UK) and The British and Comparative Cultural Studies Research Group (BRICCS), University of the Balearic Islands (Spain) in collaboration with Research Project RTI2018-097186-B-I00 and RED2018-102678-T (MCI/AEI/ERDF, EU).

The Conference theme *Narratives of Displacement* suggests transitional spaces (temporal, geographical, and mental) that are crossroads, cross-cultural areas, points of interchange on the intricate connective tissue of communications between cultures and that in a profound way connects people across personal and gender, as well as national and ethnic boundaries.

Maria Piqueras Perez's investigation of John Akomfrah's documentary *A Touch of the Tar Brush* dissects a small segment of English culture located in Liverpool since the 1930s onwards. In this documentary Piqueras Perez investigates the meaning of the term 'English', scrutinizing binary oppositions such as those between home and exile, Englishness and foreignness, in which English identity is

constructed. At the same time, Akomfrah's text describes the moment in which its narrator, an avatar of the author, leaves his land and goes to England. The narrator of this documentary is an observer whose relationship to England changes over the course of the year described in the text. Initially, as a colonial subject migrating from the British settler colony in Southern Rhodesia, he is both an insider and an outsider, at once English and foreign. His observation is rendered from this double vantage point. Eventually, unlike most ethnographers, travel writers and documentarians who return to and write from their places of origin, he settles in England and into an English identity.

The debate about identity is also highlighted in Sarah Victor's article, which analyzes the concepts of home and homelessness in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. The exile of Piya (one of the main characters of the novel) from her native land is both physical and a metaphor for other displacements in her life. She seems to experience life at a remove, perhaps to soothe a painful sense of homelessness. Unfettered by boundaries, Piya's restless imagination suggests the exile's wanderings, but finally she is able to find her truest home. According to Victor, the use of architectural imagery to describe people argues that space can become a political instrument used by its designers to establish conformity, assert power, and give form to the aspirations of social classes. Victor's discussion of the novel examines narrative as a literary structure, and the political control of social space, resulting in an interesting look at literary criticism, architecture, and the history of ideas.

Zjana Muraro's article is sensitive to cultural variation in boundary construction in post-modern life. In illustrat-

ing Foucault's concept of *heterotopia*, Muraro signals changing concepts of the corporeal-self and personal identity in the age of digital platform and invokes the value of the humanities as a repository for critical and holistic thinking about culture and society for a world in decline. This aesthetics offers an experiential collage of heightened senses, synchronized layers of affect experience, a temporary space for healing the mind-body that has become fragmented by technocratic environments.

The Conference theme *Narratives of Displacement* suggesting also uncertainty and division between two cultural dimensions explores the nature of loneliness, exploitation, and victimization. Sara Arroja-Schürmann's article exposes the devastating effects of Spain's Inquisition and denounces its obscure methods and xenophobia. The main subject of this essay is a singularly uncomfortable and unfamiliar identity of Spain's Inquisition and, in doing so, it offers a narrative of Sephardic culture across centuries and differences of class and gender. Intrusive, inquisitive, and restrictive Catholic church represents the uneasy background of the persecution of the Jewish populations.

The main objective of Cherifa Benzidane's research paper is to illustrate misogyny and the cultural ambiguities in Pakistan, Yemen, Afghanistan, and in some African countries concerning the freedom of women to act and think independently even in courtship and marriage. A political article that calls into question the culture in which women are called upon to affirm a kind of feudal submission to their husbands' will and exposes the devastating effects and the deformation of men and women alike by misogyny in particular and by the ideological hegemony of patriarchy in general.

Avwerosuoghene Hope Golah-Ebue's article describes the conditions of life of Nigerian women and, in doing so, offers a narrative of identity across differences of class and gender. These women, like Lewis Carroll's Alice, are passive – things happen to them – but they are also assertive. Their assertiveness results in meaningful actions in response to a life scarred by violence and unemployment. A life so frightful and so arresting that they are obliged, as it were, to come to terms with it. Family for these Nigerian women, we may add tellingly, is seldom 'a good place to be in' and yet these women adulate the easy completeness, the perfect symmetry of a working-class interior with the mother and father on each side of the fire and the children and the dog in the middle.

Seda Bahar Pancaroglu concentrates on the growth of Indian women's mind and their psychological acculturation, challenging received ideas of social decorum to act out the ordering dilemma of the professional. The process of acculturation moves Indian women forward from being the passive feeler, hearer, and observer to being the doer, reader, writer, and maker. Pancaroglu expresses the process of Indian women's adolescent exploration of their personality and the flexibility of their mind. Above all, Pancaroglu describes the literary heroines of Indian Diaspora trying out the poses of the would-be intellectual before finally unfolding them as the potential free women who prepare themselves for flight.

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