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# Narratives of Forced Mobility and Displacement in Contemporary Literature and Culture

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**BOOK REVIEW**

## **Narratives of Forced Mobility and Displacement in Contemporary Literature and Culture**

Authored by Roger Bromley  
Palgrave Macmillan, 2021  
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Roger Bromley's *Narratives of Forced Mobility and Displacement in Contemporary Literature and Culture* studies different narrative modalities in order to assess different perspectives of those displaced. Multiple gazes from the Global South are examined through different narratives: novel, film, memoir/testimonial and graphic novels, some of which were written by or produced with the collaboration of the displaced persons. The selection of the primary texts and the choice of the theoretical lens are aimed at redirecting the current anti-refugee rhetoric that has been over-represented within Euro-centric discourse. Divided into six chapters, the book seeks to unlearn the discourse and offer a number of alternative views narrated from the perspective of the subaltern of the Global South.

The introductory chapter provides a literature review on forced mobility studies and the niche that the book claims to occupy. The basic concept the book offers is to reconceptualise the meaning of refugee as found in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, which refers to political refugees. Bromley critiques this definition as too limited and insufficient for the present-day discourse of refugee and offers a new meaning to include those fleeing poverty, material, and environmental degradation. The meaning of forced migration is therefore expanded to include those who voluntarily migrate in search of a better life due to the unjust wealth redistribution between the Global North and the Global South. This area forms a *terra incognita* that the book intends to elaborate by using decolonial thinking: that the European paradigm of refugee is rooted in colonial prejudice of non-European race as sub-human. Refugees have been viewed as less than human and hence dispensable. They have become, in Judith Butler's words, "the un-grievable." This legacy of colonialism in reproducing the idea

of race as a means of domination has metamorphosed into some modern refugee laws that have helped European states deal with the migration from the Global South.

This chapter also provides some theoretical framework on which the analysis of the subsequent chapters is based. Particularly important is the insight of John Urry's im/mobilities paradigm that this book employs as its major theoretical orientation for the analysis. Urry's immobility paradigm is mobilised to criticise the European paradigm of refugees in this book. Large scale migration from the Global South to the Global North, as Urry argues, has been responded by the Global North with a culture of securitisation and "sophisticated technologies to delay, thwart, or criminalize this movement" (Bromley 11). Equally important in this book is Urry's concept of the immobilities paradigm, a paradigm rooted in the refusal of any means of mobilities to the refugees. Theoretically speaking, they are denied any features of mobilities due to their status as displaced persons, yet this book shows that they are not always in a deficit of agency or choice. In some cases, they show their resourcefulness and initiative within the constraints of refugee status.

Chapter two elaborates on the hazardous journey of the people smuggling and outlines the documentaries made in collaboration with the refugees. The idea is to provide an epistemology of refugee beyond the European violent epistemological construction of it. This book reconstructs this new episteme through the analysis of narratives in the films with the assumption that fiction enables human to reimagine and reconceptualise realities beyond the present, "enabling the transaction between the imaginary and the empirical" (Bromley 29). Together, the films question the existing negative discourse on displacement and offer alternative narratives from the inside. The refugees participating in the project and the film makers see this as an ethical responsibility to disclose what is happening inside the refugee camps to the outside world.

The ethical responsibility to narrate how the same borders that for European Union and the UK are seen as protection and securitisation are actually a space of immobility for the refugees. The borders are a modern manifestation of colonial map making and capital expansion that is borderless. When the capital exploited from the Global South flows, it is borderless, but when its people intend to follow the same trajectory, they are immobilised along the borders. This definitely calls for an ethical response through the documentary and artistic works, as evidenced in Bromley's analysis.

Chapter three deals with issues of detainment and incarceration experienced by refugees. This chapter, among others, problematises the so-called liberal dilemma, a dilemma caused by liberal policy to welcome immigrants carrying different and sometimes contradictory cultural and religious baggage. Several European states have transformed liberalism to illiberal policies in order to contain perceived threats on European identity and to control the influx of new immigrants. The phenomenon of hardening identitarianism or far-right movement reflected in their refugee policy is to be found not only in Europe but also Australia and the US. This chapter interrogates the paradox that while globalisation has freed

the movement of goods, capital, services, and the privileged elite, it “has left people in the Global South, upon whom this movement has impacted most, profoundly disconnected from this mobility unless they are prepared to imperil their lives” (Bromley 67).

The fourth chapter analyses two graphic texts detailing the experience of a refugee entering a new state and a documentary film produced in a collaboration with asylum seekers. Anxieties, uncertainties, and humiliation as an asylum seeker are depicted through graphic manipulations in both comics: *The Arrival* and *Petite Manuel*, and a graphic report, “The Long Wait: Filling Data Gaps Relating to Refugees and Displaced People in the Calais Camp.” Through the different narratives, this chapter argues that the current meaning of refugee that is always related to political persecution is insufficient since, in many cases, forced mobilities are conditioned by the exploitation of the Global South’s resources by the Global North. In response to the Foucauldian biopolitics policy of the EU, the politics negating biological welfare of non-citizens, this chapter offers the rights of the migrants in what Anthony Richmond calls “reactive migration.” The analysis on this chapter, therefore, focusses on such aspects as migration, asylum seeking, and encampment.

Chapter five studies the works of former refugees, two of which depicts how the EU/Moroccan enclave of Melilla signifies the great divide between the Global North and the Global South. Melilla signifies the border separating the Global South from the Global North with the refugees continually patrolled by border guards to make sure they do not jump the high fence and get access to European land. After surviving the life-threatening escape from different corners of turbulent Africa, they have to end waiting in this camp without certainty of the outcome of their forced migration. Re-staging colonial encounter, this book sees the Melilla border re-enacting colonial relation in modern setting where, having been drained of their natural resources and marginalised by globalisation, the people of the Global South are forced to stay put in their homeland and denied their access to the Global North. Migration from the Global South is viewed as a threat towards what the far-right white nationalists call white genocide. Bromley argues that the migration due to poverty or war is just a metaphorical threat to the existence of the white people. Within the narrative of white genocide is the desire to re-claim what the far-right frames as the taking over of Europe by the non-European. Responding to this imagined threat, Bromley employs decolonial thinking as a strategy to unmask the white genocide rhetoric. Three texts are used to counter the narrative elaborating physical and psychological displacement of the people of color vis-à-vis the imagined white genocide. This chapter posits the Southern gaze that is represented in the film *Those Who Jump* and the novels: *The Gurugu Pledge* and *The African Titanics*. In these texts, the silenced and demonised Southern migrants are given a voice to articulate the real impact of modern colonialism from their own lived experience. In order to achieve this, *Those Who Jump* used a refugee who had stayed in the camp, Melilla, for fourteen months as the cameraman with a hidden cam. The purpose of making the refugee a cameraman is to gain an insider’s view of the experience. The film “reverses the European gaze and presents the active point of view of those held in time by the proximity of the

fence and the desire to jump it" (Bromley 154). This way, the refugees are given a voice to represent themselves from their perspective. The usually muted subaltern is given a chance to reveal the issue as an insider, a living human being not disposable or a mere statistic number.

The last chapter, as the title indicates, seeks to restore the absence of story in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), areas covering the West Bank and Gaza strip. Through the narratives under study, Bromley underlines how the Palestinian controlled and limited mobility is because of the Israeli technologies of power and control. Unpredictability of power and control is deliberately utilised to control the population, making them prisoners in their own land. Surveillance and the deployment of Israeli forces, as Bromley sees them, seem rooted in what Gayatri Spivak calls "the epistemic violence" defining the Palestinians as less human. Bromley analyses Adania Shibli's novella, *Minor Detail*, metonymically as part of a larger unequal historical power contestations by means of post-memory analysis. Bromley views the novella not only as a reconstruction of Israeli rape war culture and military masculinity but also "a metaphor of dispossession and displacement of Palestinians by Israeli invasion" (207). The female narrator at the same time reflects the exteriority of the colonising power and the interiority of a subalternised Bedouin girl who was gangraped and killed by a group of Israeli soldiers. Revisiting the tragic event from the perspective of the victim through post-memory evidences the difficulty of narrating since the inventory of existing narratives have been deeply manipulated by the victors.

In general, this book has been able to put forth the under-studied areas of im/mobilities by excavating textual and visual representations of displaced persons from the Global South. For this purpose, Bromley strategically synthesises an array of critical theories and the main frame of Urry's im/mobilities paradigm as a framework to critically read them. I agree with Bromley's argument that the exploration of a different gaze contradicting the European one shall, at least, stimulate re-thinking of well-accepted vocabularies, and the paradigm of mobility in general and refugees in particular. Exploring the voice of the silenced others within mobility studies will do justice to the discipline, because an academic discipline is always situated in certain historical and political conjunctures. Although the general atmosphere of the book when dealing with the immobility of the Global South looks gloomy and the coverage of the vast materials is rather demanding to read, it nonetheless identifies one important aspect of the struggle: hope, as the book quotes in the post-script:

But we have an incurable malady: hope. Hope in liberation and independence. Hope in a normal life where we are neither heroes nor victims. Hope that our children will go safely to their schools. Hope that a pregnant woman will give birth to a living baby, at the hospital, and not a dead child in front of a military checkpoint; hope that our poets will see the beauty of the color red in roses rather than in blood; hope that this land will take up its original name: the land of love and peace. Thank you for carrying with us the burden of this hope. (Darwish qtd. in Bromley 227)

## Competing Interests

The author(s) reported that no competing interests exist.

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