

Editorial

Feminist Encounters
**General Issue: with Theme of Gender and Embodiment in Narratives of
Displacement**

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The eleventh issue of *Feminist Encounters* comes in two parts: Part 1 consists of a selection of General Articles that have been submitted to the journal, and Part 2 consists of a selection of articles that have been selected on the basis of a theme, that of ‘Gender and Embodiment in Narratives of Displacement.’ We will go on to introduce the two halves of the issue separately.

PART 1

Our first article in Part 1 is a beautiful, clever and moving video essay by Mary Harrod. In ‘Heightened Genre and Women’s Filmmaking in Hollywood: Twilight (Catherine Hardwicke, 2008) as Teen Gothic’, Harrod shows how women filmmakers have used cultural knowledge cinematically to simultaneously engage both the viewer’s intellect and emotions. This creates a specific type of heightened sensory experience that challenges dualistic understandings of mind and body as separate. In her commentary that accompanies the video essay, Harrod describes the creation of this experience as a feminist gesture as it offers an alternative way of reading the world to the more common dualistic way of excluding women and other ‘minority’ groups. The video essay itself is a sensory and aesthetic delight. It is a cinematic rendition of the theories that Harrod discusses in her commentary—and as such, a feminist gesture of its own.

Next, in ‘The Rise and Normalisation of Blessee/Blesser Relationships in South Africa: A Post-Colonial Feminist Analysis’ Ruvimbo Zawu explores a South African phenomenon, that of the blesser/blessee. Some young women in contemporary South Africa enter into transactional sexual relationships with older men. Zawu uses Stoebenau *et al.*’s three paradigms of transactional sex to analyse what may motivate such relationship if the ‘blessee’ is not living in deprived circumstances. She uses a continuum of deprivation, agency, and instrumentality to challenge some preconceptions about such relationships where often women are seen as non-agentic.

In the third article, “[I]f I am Alone I Feel Like a Target Sometimes”: The Making and Unmaking of the Vulnerable White Woman in Strange Encounters with the Black Man in the South African (Post)Colony’, Azille Coetzee shows how the gender logic of the colony/apartheid regime perpetuates the regime’s racial logic in current day South Africa through choices of women. Coetzee traces the causes and effects of the seemingly small and often largely unconscious choices through a discussion with a white woman who describes her life in a small town. Through this Coetzee links the individual’s actions in her own space to larger actions in the spaces of broader society.

The final article for this section is ‘A Discussion of *Mr. Housewife* in Relation to the Social Construction of Masculinity in South Korean Society’ by Beste Alpay Jeong. Jeong introduces the reader to Yoo Sun-Dong’s film, *Mr. Housewife* (*Miseuteo Jubu Kwizenwang*, 2005). This film addresses Korean masculinity in subversive ways that allow the audience to see possibilities beyond the gender binary hegemony and thereby question how masculinity is in fact constructed in Korea.

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PART 2

In Part 2 of this issue, we present eight articles that each in their own way is concerned with forced migration, displacement, and the experiences of embodiment/disembodiment that bear the marks and scars of those journeys.

In the twenty-first century, migration has become a key obsession for growing right-wing populisms across the globe, as they seek to mobilise popular *ressentiment* against ‘invasion’ in feelings of justice and revenge. Polls that were conducted following the Brexit vote in the UK in 2017 cited sovereignty and ‘control of immigration’ as the chief reason for voting Leave. Notoriously, 2016 saw the election of Donald Trump in the USA by the Electoral College (although as we know, Clinton won the popular vote by nearly 3 million). Trump, once in office, immediately whipped up a frenzy concerning a supposed existential threat facing America, that of a migrant caravan from Central America that crudely exploited racist and nationalist fears in order to bolster his image as a Strong Man/White Saviour. The miserable and discredited French fascist theory of the *Grand Remplacement* (Great Replacement) (of white Europeans, by Muslims) has gained ideological traction across several western democracies during the past decade, seeping into general discourse, and the routine Islamophobia it stirred has in part resulted in the fascist politician Marie Le Pen gaining 89 seats in the 2022 French Parliament. In Hungary, in Brazil, in Myanmar, in India, and in many other countries - right-wing governments have galvanised mass fear, martialised their publics, and created a festering outrage about immigration. Social conservatism and economic nationalism have resulted in a nativist protectionism, which is especially obsessed with ‘external threat’. Even in usually stable, liberal countries such as Sweden, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia or Canada, neo-fascism has gained political hold. In countries like Pakistan, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan, right-wing populism has come in a wave, and with that wave is a concomitant suspicion of minorities, especially those perceived to be ‘incomers’. In some nations, notably the USA, this has led to mass shootings and a more geographically diffused but noticeable rise in racist violence. These are powerful movements fuelled by social media that rise up in petty outrage against the persistent myth of the dark stranger coming to steal and pollute the national imaginary, it mobilises nostalgic sentiment for a mythical, eugenical purity in the body politic that has of course, never existed.

‘Anti-elitism’ claims to speak for ordinary people who feel (rightfully) cheated by neoliberalism and the subsequent escalation in the polarisation of wealth, since the 1980s. In a discursively clever initiative, right-wing populists have linked anti-elitism to liberalism in their rhetoric. Ironically of course – as most right-wing populist leaders have emerged from out of the international ultra-rich elite. Nevertheless, these mendacious charlatans have pronounced themselves to be ‘protectors of traditional values’; all too often this is doublespeak for fomenting civic revulsion against those persons who are seen to be planning a vanguard of dissolution, spearheaded conspiratorially by those phantasmagorically powerful migrants, together with fifth columnist snowflakes who are perceived to be the ‘enemy within’. Racist fears of immigration are mobilised cynically by all kinds of governments, to detract and displace internal political dissent and frustration, in order to redirect this energy against what is perceived to be an external/internal existential threat.

In the West such paranoid fears have been historically directed at the brown body, or at othered white ethnicities who are collapsible into the category of non-white, or perhaps the dirty-white (the Irish, Jews, Travellers); these phantasmagorical projections are suffused by illusions of disease, suspected of undifferentiated contagion, and are met by nested state dehumanisation. The imagery of racism deployed against migrants is full of the bodily imagery of penetration, and dissolution, of a kind of virginal national purity being threatened and subsequently lost. Fears of miscegenation also invoke a kind of theft, a deception that something pure and unsullied is being spoiled and destroyed, ‘taken from us.’ The imagery used is somatised and expresses fears of uncontrolled movement – of a nimble fluidity that is threatening precisely because a weak national body seems unable to see it, control it, and expel it. Those undifferentiated, anonymous, black-robed would-be terrorists that pierce the nation’s boundaries in cheap plastic inflatable boats, in order to enter and pollute the ‘safe space’ of the nation, are identifying the supposed porosity of the national body. It is a quintessentially paranoid fear of infiltration – a terror that the fragile national body has been breached. Anti-immigration racism is suffused by a fear of rape. Public attitudes to migration have been manipulated to reject multiculturalism as ‘political correctness’ or ‘cancel culture’, epitomised in the social media memes that reoccur with grim predictability every winter that maintain that schools are ‘cancelling Christmas’, that Easter eggs will be banned, or women on the beach will be made to wear burkhas. These memes speak to a fragile cultural consensus that is easily pitched back into nostalgia, and then backlash.

The illogicality of these fears, and the vicious social backlash they provoke, is because there is a palimpsest in our unconscious: that the national body is somehow ‘our’ body, and it is vulnerable to attack. This mechanism of psychic projection, in which the national body is transposed onto my body, is instilled from childhood by invoking the imagined community of nation (Anderson, 1983), an identification that is also a projection and introjection. Primitive fears are mobilised by racist governments intent on deflecting social unrest, inequality, and perceived injury. Tapping into such fears and galvanising them is a contemporary evil which destroys compassion and the common understanding of human collective responsibility. This neoliberal denial of identification with others has

become a feature of 'late' capitalism. And by using 'late' we are also suggesting its other, older meaning: death. Capitalism has become the proverbial snake eating its own head, as it relentlessly denies and defers the reality of death standing before us all – that of the climate emergency and the knowledge that fossil fuels (the engine of capitalism), are burning the planet and all of its creatures, to death. In the next few decades, the destruction of the earth will mean ever spiralling human migration, as people flee from extreme hunger from land that is either burnt, thirsty and barren, or swamped, choked and drowned. Global migration is about to dramatically increase. Let us challenge the idea that this is somehow an individualistic 'economic migration' which is characterised by a selfish lust for improved living conditions – labour migration is of course also the market in human trafficking. Governments in the global north are able to deny sanctuary and dismiss the claims of asylum made by refugees on the basis that those seeking asylum 'are just seeking a better life.' Well... yes, but... Recently the Conservative Government in the UK has evidently briefed politicians when talking on broadcast media to prefix the term 'asylum seeker' with the adjective 'illegal'. In doing so, politicians infer that asylum seekers are criminals, deviants, security risks that pose a threat to the sanctity of British culture; criminals of course being a group of people that have been long denied their human rights. These days, economic migration is largely the result of climate migration: people are leaving their land because they have no water, or are starving.

Thinking more about embodiment, one of the co-editors of this issue has worked for 8+ years with refugees and asylum seekers, by providing complex trauma treatment using Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapy (CBT), Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET), and Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) – which are the recommended clinical methods in the UK National Health Service (NHS) protocol for treating Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Munt is the Clinical Director for the Brighton Exiled/Refugee Trauma Service, a charity which works with the NHS to provide treatment for asylum seekers and refugees with serious mental illness. Years of work in this field has reinforced to our therapists the enduring and inevitably long-suffering connection between trauma and embodiment. Following the pioneering work of Bessel van der Kolk (2014) in *The Body Keeps the Score*, Munt has encountered in clinical practice many of the diverse ways in which trauma becomes somatised; there is of course a cultural dimension to how pain – both emotional and physical – is manifested in the body. So, migrants forced into relocating often express the physical trauma they have experienced before fleeing (often from torture), and during the privation of their refugee journey, typically characterised by hunger, injury, terror, and violence, in order to articulate their mental distress. In many cultures, emotional pain is traditionally expressed through physical discomfort; western doctors can sometimes be dismissive of this physical pain when articulated by refugees, and explain it away as somatisation, implying it isn't 'real'. Disclosure of torture history and being pressured to explain the long-term injuries and wounds caused, can cause acute shame - and feared consequences including reprisals - in the patient. We frequently get patient referrals to our service which parenthetically express: 'we have done loads of medical tests that have come back with negative results so we think this is a mental problem'. Such clinical work is complicated because asylum seekers can also externalise their torturer and 'hear voices' in order to expel their unbearable histories of psychic and physical damage. Trauma-induced psychosis presents fairly commonly in serious mental illness, and can represent a kind of splitting off of such unbearable histories. The embodiment endured by forced migration can produce many kinds of brokenness.

Perhaps those of us on the feminist Left have a duty to think about migration more urgently. Migration Studies has existed for less than 30 years, and draws on an interdisciplinary framework which varies from institution to institution. Migration Studies has emerged as a humanitarian project that seeks to engage with the growing awareness of the social crisis that forced migration, refugee and asylum seeker movement provokes. Studies on migration have focussed on issues such as empire, colonisation and diaspora and have been informed by critical frameworks drawing from Orientalism, Postcolonialism, and Black Studies. There are evidently many sympathies between feminism and Migration Studies, both are relatively young, ethically-driven disciplines working across intellectual traditions, and whereas there is evidence of a lot of feminist research on gender and migration, perhaps there is less evidence in Gender Studies/Women's Studies/Queer Studies/Trans Studies of research on forced migration, refugees, and projects on asylum (although largely based in the USA there is a growing subdiscipline of Queer Migration Studies, which we are glad to support).

So, our small contribution to this urgent research is presented in the current issue of *Feminist Encounters*. We start this section with a creative reflection on displacement: 'Boxed: Exploring Containment and Resilience in Times of Crisis' by Heaven Crawley and Laura Nyahuye. Crawley and Nyahuye's narrative, composed during the Covid 19 pandemic, uses poetry, story and images in a dialogic, feminist style that encourages the reader to participate in the growth of a friendship, and also to think more about our own strategies to manage displacement. 'Confined, Controlled and Violated: The Rohingya Women in Bangladesh Refugee Camps' by Ena Tripura is a classic and important piece of sociological research on the emplacement and restriction of Rohingya women in refugee camps in Bangladesh. The encampment of the Rohingyas in the camps in Bangladesh has become an entrapment, and reinforced the continuum of male dominance and violence carried out on women's bodies. By drawing from Judith Butler's concepts of precarious life and frames of recognition Tripura identifies three layers

of violence against Rohingya women: the humanitarian regime controlling their movement, Rohingya men expressing their anger and frustration, and local Bangladeshi men demonstrating their superiority over the Rohingya intruders into the national space, in her powerful analysis. We then move onto Asha Jeffers article, 'I Was Certain I Saw My Future in Him': Coming into Intergenerational Empathy and Escape in lê thi diem thúy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* (2003). This powerful literary analysis of a novel examines whether it is possible for second generation immigrants to escape their parents' trauma of forced migration, and critically examines the formation of that identity with its troubling heritages. Similarly turning to creative writing to explore such heritage, Lamiae Bouqentar's 'Homing and bodies: Arab queer encounters,' uses autoethnography in order to examine the researcher's embodied encounters with the other Arab migrants located in Montreal. Kristen Starkowski's article, 'The Body at the Borderlands: Applying a Feminist-of-Colour Disability Studies Lens to the USA-Mexico Refugee Crisis' examines both the voluntary migrant workers' and the involuntary refugees' forced migration, as it is experienced at the United States-Mexico border, by using an intersectional framework of disability, migration status, and gender. Soyeon Kim's analysis 'Reclaiming a Space in American History with the Collective Voices of the Japanese Picture Brides in Julie Otsuka's *The Buddha in the Attic*' follows Julie Otsuka's 2011 novel *The Buddha in the Attic* documents the history of 'picture brides' who were some of the earliest Japanese female immigrants to the USA and whose narratives remain unwritten, forgotten, and erased. This article argues that Otsuka uses a collective voice as a tool with which to inscribe the shared experience of loss, carving out narratives of the picture brides as a subversive alternative to mainstream versions of American history and further claims that such collectivity can become a significantly powerful means of occupying a narrative space. In 'Immigration Detention, the Patriarchal State and Politics of Disgust in the Hands of Street-Level Bureaucrats', Alethia Fernandez de la Reguera shares the results of her ethnographic research conducted in the southern border of Mexico from 2017 to 2019, at the *Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI* [XXI Century Immigration Station], located in Tapachula, Chiapas, which is one of the biggest and most important detention centres in Mexico. She analyses the functioning of an immigration detention centre as a 'total institution' where street-level bureaucrats enforce practices of biopolitics through daily deprivation of access to vital resources and the protection of the law. The article demonstrates the dehumanisation practices in immigration detention that are deployed as a deterrence policy through operational strategies. Finally, Catherine Evans' article 'Embodied Selves/Disembodied Subjects: Homing the Body in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*' is a new reading of the novel that focusses on the gendered aspects of displacement and home. The reading follows the central character, Darling, through her journey from Africa to the west and considers how her somatic disassociation is only relinquished once she comes to terms with her displacement, and her new home in the USA.

We commend this excellent issue to you.

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