II

DISPLACEMENT AND EMPLACEMENT

Introduction

The Dialectics of Displacement and Emplacement

Jesper Bjarnesen and Henrik Vigh

Wars unsettle our commonsense understandings of movement and mobility. Simultaneously entropic and inertial, they conjure up images of rampant disorder and chaos as well as strained and crippled formations locked in negative tension. On the one hand, detrimental movement; on the other, deadly stalemate. Both mobility and immobility are, as such, associated with the iconography of warfare and conflicts. They may be presented as out of time through pictures of empty streets, ruins, trenches, and dead bodies frozen in contorted positions, yet, conversely, some of the most archetypical images of war connote speed, flows, and movement, seen in images of troop advances or retreats, rows of traveling refugees, and hauls of humanitarian aid shipped or flown into airports and harbors from afar. In temporal terms, conflict and violence are often represented in the lethargy of decay or the entropy of aggression.

That wars evoke both movement and stagnation is, perhaps, not surprising as the very nature of attack and defense is centered on such different modalities as moving across and digging in. However, behind the more obvious (im)mobilities of warfare lies a more subtle movement of people, connecting people and places socially and spatially. When seen from afar the commotion of warfare may be iconically related to the friction of the frontlines or clashes of conflict. But in the shadows of spectacular conflictual shifts or standoffs emerges an alternative myriad of underlying movements, disruptions, and localizations. Conflict and warfare may disconnect and disrupt, but they also connect and realign, creating alternative orders and social formations in the process. They not only spur displacement but simultaneously facilitate emplacement.

Conflict and warfare may thus generate novel social positions, avenues of mobility, and worth in the process of dismantling old ones. They instantiate formations and relations that come to inform more socially oriented fears and desires and become frames of action and understanding related to concerns outside or beyond the warring order. The movement from peace to conflict may thus reconfigure social environments, change social positions, and create settings that people live in rather than merely through (Vigh 2008). The social sciences have been relatively inept at capturing the more social and everyday aspects of conflict and warfare. Considered the most exceptional of events, such situations have been seen as foundationally extraordinary to social life.

The reason for our relatively slow move toward examining the less remarkable and more nuanced dynamics of conflicts and warfare can be found in two related factors. First of all, understanding not just the displacement but also the emplacement generated by such situations

requires a view from within the actual social fields and formations in question, necessitating a commitment to a type of fieldwork that most researchers are, understandably, unwilling to undertake. Second, conflicts and wars typically impose a very different analytical agenda than one that readily captures the intricacies of social movement and mobility. Our analytical tendency is to take our point of departure in polarized understandings of victims and perpetrators, powerful and powerless, obscuring the coexistence of movements and motives. This is an analytical inclination that seems to cause us to accentuate the outer poles of the continuum between the willed or the involuntary, the stuck and the mobile, making us lose sight of the nuances and situatedness of social movement, and providing a poor point of departure for illuminating the social desires and disquiet at play in armed conflict.

Ethnographies of Wartime Mobility

In order to broaden our knowledge of some of these more foundational social practices and dynamics in situations of warfare and conflict and their aftermath, this section of *Conflict and Society* looks at ethnographies of displacement and emplacement in conflict and post-conflict conditions. The dialectics between emplacement and displacement is analytically fruitful in such circumstances because it allows us to focus on movement, involving overt aspects of power, force, and conditional coercion, without losing sight of the underlying ways that people seek to move into place despite being forced out of it. Displacement does not, in this perspective, merely designate an involuntary movement across geographical space. People may be displaced while not moving, as the social environment moves around them making the formerly familiar seem foreign and frightening (a common experience of many xenophobic nationalists or stranded civilians). Just as being emplaced may necessitate a move away from the place where one seeks to locate oneself socially (a common experience for many migrants) (Vigh 2015). Emplacement is as such not a question of physical localization but a striving toward being positively situated in a relational landscape (Englund 2002: 263; Jansen and Löfving 2009). In this manner, emplacement directs our attention to people's struggle to gain and move toward positions of valued presence with respect to life conditions and recognition of one's important others; that is, to the desire to inhabit a position of relational worth from which people may engage in a positive sociality.

Taken together, the articles in this thematic section offer an analytical reframing of the study of wartime mobilities, exploring the dialectical dynamics of displacement and emplacement that underpin its variable and varied effects at the level of refugee or migrant biographies. Based on long-term ethnographic research, the contributions bring together empirical studies of changing regimes of labor migration; life-making in a refugee camp; the existential implications of transnational lives; and the conceptual paradoxes of war-related movements and immobilities. This empirical diversity, cutting across conventional thematic categorizations, is connected by a shared focus on conflict or post-conflict societies, and an innovative approach to studying the meaning of disruptive (im)mobilities. Although diverse in their conceptual orientations, the articles share an understanding of displacement as a movement that unsettles our social embeddedness. Importantly, however, this understanding opens up for an exploration, rather than a mere presumption, of its social and existential consequences. By locating the study of displacement in the intersection between migration research and peace and conflict studies, this thematic section contributes to the disentanglement of the concept of displacement from its humanitarian connotations—a theoretical development that several of the contributors have already been instructive in initiating. Moving beyond the discourse of a humanitarian frame-

work, regardless of its otherwise praiseworthy dimensions, enables us to explore movement and (im)mobility by looking at the actual practices and understandings that emerge, rather than assuming we know their meaning beforehand. In times of both war and peace, being stuck may be more detrimental than flight. As Simon Turner demonstrates in his analysis of young Burundian refugees in Nairobi (this issue), displacement may be sought so as to enable future emplacement, and humanitarian institutions may be experienced as providing incarceration rather than protection.

Mobility as Privilege or Predicament?

Escaping or engaging in violence may, as such, be inscribed in long-term livelihood plans and imaginaries of future social positions and being. The notion of a dialectics between displacement and emplacement indicates the blurred boundaries between the willed and the involuntary when looking at motion and motility in conflict situations. What seem, at a distance, to be examples of force and freedom (i.e., confinement or escape) might not necessarily be that clearcut when looking at people's intentions and hopes. Mobility generally calls for critical explorations of the relationships between capabilities, compulsions, and aspirations, as we need to question a priori assumptions about mobility and its implications. This becomes all the clearer in situations of conflict where the stakes are high and the social terrain volatile and turbulent. The difficult circumstances surrounding mobility in such situations serves to clarify and underline some of the less fruitful aspects of mobility theory as such.

Part of the emphasis in mobility studies has, recently, been on quantitative degrees of mobility as indicative of stratifications or class formations. The more affluent one is, or so the argument goes, the more freedom of movement life affords. While this may, on a global scale, provide an entry point for the study of mobility practices (Appadurai 1996; Bauman 1998; Hannerz 1996), the central question is, of course, not how much or little, but the social conditions under which people move in relation to their subjective experiences of (im)mobility and its existential implications. In other words, rather than delving into quantities, researching mobility calls for qualitative explorations that can situate movement within the lifeworlds of the people in question, if we are to make sense of its social and political consequences.

The value of mobility is, thus, a question of what it affords in relation to people's ability to lead fulfilling lives. Despite the merits of their work, we need to avoid the risk inherent in the works of globalization scholars such as Zygmunt Bauman and Ulf Hannerz, of seeing mobility as the quintessential privilege of our times, implying that involuntary immobility is the corresponding curse of the underprivileged. A predefined dichotomization of voluntary mobility and involuntary immobility into, respectively, powerful and powerless not only fails to account for subjective experiences and existential implications of movement but implicitly quantifies social processes that are inherently qualitative. Similarly, although Appadurai's well-known ideas about the deterritorialization of cultural formations fit well with constructivist epistemology, the focus on accelerating flows may have had the effect of writing off the importance of place for articulating notions of home and belonging too soon. In the words of Jansen and Löfving, "rather than propagating a free-floating placeless paradigm, we … need to critically investigate the unequal, differential and contested processes by which persons come to be (dis)associated—and (dis)associate themselves—with or from place" (Jansen and Löfving 2009: 6).

The relation between mobility, emplacement, and displacement thus inscribes itself forcefully into political anthropology and ethnography, and into current debates concerning the makeup of our worlds. It resonates critically with the current theoretical fetishization of global

movement (Friedman 2002). However, maintaining a focus on the dialectics between the two entails that our point of departure may unsettle essential categories of belonging and problematize their counterreactions to the movement of people, such as restrictive immigration policies, increased border controls, and more uncompromising "localisms" (Ferguson 1999). In this way, Jansen and Löfving invite us to:

> approach the key concepts of both sedentarist and placeless paradigms—including territorialisation and deterritorialisation, and emplacement and displacement—as empirical issues to be investigated rather than philosophical assessments about what characterises our age … [by exploring] … the ways in which practices of identification are related (or not related) to territory. (2009: 5)

Stephen C. Lubkemann (this issue) calls for a similar awareness of the specific practices of contextualized subjectivities as opposed to preconceived notions of the significance of place in the life course of social actors. In this view, mobility may be a key social practice for achieving a sense of normality and belonging, as opposed to an unsettling and anomic threat to those very sentiments, and an inability to pursue movement may engender an experience of displacement-in-place (Hammar 2014; Hammar and Rodgers 2008). Taking the relation between displacement and emplacement as a topic of inquiry, then, opens up new conceptual space for exploring processes of identity-making in the context of globalization from a perspective that does not preconceive of mobility as either a (cosmopolitan) privilege or a (sedentarist) problem. As Lubkemann demonstrates most acutely, enacting particular emplotments of movement, rather than rootedness, may be a key source for a sense of emplacement—in war or peace.

Displacement as Disruption and/or Empowerment

The implicit association of mobility and estrangement on the one hand, and rootedness and belonging on the other, still informs policy thinking and public debates, in spite of the past decade's academic insistence on its deconstruction. But such presumptions of the social and existential effects of a spatial move tend to omit the most significant anthropological questions regarding involuntary mobility and immobility (Hage 2005: 469). What aspects of the move were experienced as disruptive by the migrant? Why did the move take the form and trajectory it did, rather than any other? How did aspirations and expectations change during the course of a move—including a longer or shorter period of settlement? The articles in this thematic section evoke the ambiguous experiences and consequences of displacement and thereby raise a series of conceptual questions. If displacement is divorced from refugee-oriented studies that tend to equate involuntary mobility with given social and existential consequences, what part does mobility play in the equation? If displacement denotes a (radical) disruption that deteriorates the actor's relation to the social terrain, what does the notion of "place" imply?

Several of the articles in this section address these questions by pointing out that displacement is most analytically useful when approached from subjective experience and existential life-making, rather than a migration or refugees studies perspective. The experience of being displaced can, as such, be caused by being forcefully moved physically, just as it may be caused by crisis, *déclassement,* or change in one's position relative to others, entailing that less immediate forms of coercion may lead to involuntary (im)mobility, just as a trajectory that may have been initiated involuntarily may result in new opportunities of empowerment in or liberation from suppressive social hierarchies. While disruption unsettles, and conflict and warfare causes suffering, the chaos pilots of the world might actually find livelihoods and recognition in such

volatile or tumultuous environments (Vigh 2006). However, displacement still connotes unsettledness and estrangement, as an experience of hardship related to mobility and change. Against this backdrop, Lubkemann understands displacement as:

> the transformation of lifescapes in ways that render essential life projects harder to achieve and that, in the extreme, place life strategies at risk of ultimate failure. … It is when people find that their best choice is to inhabit a lifescape in which normal—and vital—life projects are dramatically more difficult to realize that displacement occurs. (2008: 193)

Displacement thus entails a disruption of the pursuit of a meaningful everyday life, in the context of movement or involuntary stasis. It is in response to displacement that social actors draw on social and symbolic repertoires as well as idiosyncratic and collective inventiveness, leaving conceptual room for the exploration of such responses and their repercussions (Bjarnesen 2013). It is this space between structural disruption and agentive responses that enables "the paradoxically productive dynamics of displacement" (Hammar 2014: 8).

Emplacement as Spatial Belonging and/or Confinement

The concept of emplacement has, despite its mundane etymology, taken on a somewhat cryptic analytical meaning. In terms of conflict, the concept is apt as a military term, implying a permanent position of (usually) heavy weaponry. Yet, a broader definition includes the settling, mounting, situation, or location of an object, such as the emplacement of a house. This latter understanding has lent itself to social analysis, informed by phenomenological thinking about the embeddedness of the sensing subject—as expressed in the more established concept of embodiment. For example, to Harri Englund, "[e]mplacement refers to a perspective in which the subject is inextricably situated in a historically and existentially specific condition, defined, for brevity, as a 'place'" (Englund 2002: 267). He draws on the work of geographer Edward Casey, who argues that "We are never anywhere, anywhen, but in place" (Casey 1996: 39, cited in Englund). While Englund's approach is articulated against the overly constructivist celebration of global flows—what he sees as a globalist imaginary that disregards the social and material constraints of lived experience—the notion of "place" is reminiscent of Appadurai's often-cited definition of "locality" as "primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar or spatial" (Appadurai 1996: 178). The concept of emplacement, however, emphasizes the subject's continuous process of embeddedness rather than the locus of such processes. Emplacement implies a conceptual move away from place as location toward place as a process of socio-affective attachment, as a point of valued or tenable being, as "a vast, intricate complexity of social processes and social interactions at all scales from the local to the global" (Massey 1994: 115).

The association of place with belonging seems to us to run the risk of an a priori confirmation of the sedentary logic of seeing rootedness as the basis of identity. Rather than evoking "homeliness," the struggle for emplacement may be indicative of the structural vulnerability that potentially enacts displacement (see Bjarnesen, this issue). Similar to theories of embodiment, therefore, we advocate a less normative approach to emplacement, as neither a privilege nor a predicament, but an engagement and entanglement with the lived environment that influences our outlooks and maneuverings. The extent to which these entanglements are structurally stratified must be researched empirically, rather than assumed (Hage 1998: 38).

By relating emplacement to embodiment, we wish to move beyond the depoliticizing tendencies of some phenomenological writings, whereby body and place become merely the locus of perception for the sensing subject. Engaging explicitly with emplacement as a contested site for

the articulation of belonging (cf. Jansen and Löfving 2009: 13) articulates a social positioning that enables the pursuit of existentially meaningful life-making, but as an ongoing struggle for access, rather than a fixed position or status. In this way, the pursuit of a meaningful existence may be understood as enacted within intertwined processes of emplacement and displacement. Our approach to emplacement, in short, engages with the meaning of "place" in dis*place*ment, rather than proposing its conceptual opposite (Massey 1994: 118).

The Dialectics of Displacement and Emplacement

In conclusion, this thematic section of *Conflict and Society* explores the dialectics between displacement and emplacement in order to move away from a dichotomization or polarization of the two concepts—which would imply a continuum with displacement at one end (anomic, disempowering, and disruptive) and emplacement at the other extreme (connoting rootedness and belonging). Rather than thinking in terms of a continuum—and rather than thinking of displacement and emplacement as mutually exclusive concepts—we approach the dialectics of displacement and emplacement as mutually constitutive processes of (dis)embeddedness that are fundamental to understanding the dynamics of wartime mobilities. In Turner's contribution, the space between displacement and emplacement is explored through the concept of *diaplacement,* emphasizing how young Burundian refugees in Nairobi actively seek to remain "in-between" the institutionalized spaces of the camp and the city, as a strategic investment in their future emplacement in Burundi. Temporality is intrinsic to the processual approach taken here, whether in the form of potentiality or retrospection (Bjarnesen 2009).

This analytical perspective intends, first, to contribute to the deconstruction of the voiceless refugee and emphasize not only the agency of the displaced (Korac 2009: 8) but also the potentially empowering effects of involuntary (im)mobility (Carling 2002; Hammar 2014), as Lubkemann's contribution posits most forcefully. Second, this section insists on moving the focus of displacement studies from the displaced as a population to displacement as a process, as Bjarnesen puts it in his contribution to this issue. Finally, analyzing the dialectics of displacement and emplacement enables an empirically grounded understanding of the "politics of mobility and access" (Massey 1993: 62) by which the distribution of both voluntary and involuntary forms of (im)mobility are structured according to contextually specific hierarchies of gender, generation, and class.

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