



CREATIVE ENCOUNTERS

Introduction

Engendering Plural Tales

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Since its inception in 2018, the aim of the “Creative Encounters” section of *Migration and Society* has been to offer alternative ways of engaging with “voice” or, more pertinently, as I have argued elsewhere, “to embroider the voice with its own needle” (Qasmiyeh 2019). This dialectic is proposed to problematize the notion of the voice as it is often perceived and mobilized: a medium offered to those in need of (their) voices rather than as a prior state of being that is initiated by and therefore intrinsically belongs to the individual herself. In this vein, “to embroider the voice with its own needle” is to see the voice within its owner, as a given and not to be given, through tracing the thread as it touches the needle eye to go through it and in so doing ushering in the embroidering that will come. Indeed, embroidering the voice is writing the intimate, the lived, and the leftovers in life into newer times as imagined by the writer herself; it is writing without a helping hand from anyone but rather through continuously returning to the embroidered (and what is being embroidered) and its tools, notwithstanding how incomplete and fragmentary they are.

In light of the above and in response to it, in this volume, Simone Toji’s short story set in Brazil articulates the question of dissipating languages/voices through the figure of the migrant with dementia, whose disjointed remembering and engagement with others happen in his native Polish but also in the form of “borrowed” individual words from other languages. In particular, what this story does is to restructure the interior of these people’s places—what is normally not in the range of the naked eye, granting the reader the opportunity to peek into the lives of migrants who now belong indoors, people who are no longer able to venture beyond the boundaries of their places. To put it succinctly, by returning the migrant to the inside through the mind and the place, Toji reengages with the different routes, be they geographical, linguistic, or legal, that mark these people’s presence. In so doing, Toji sheds light on these intersecting (and often overlapping) modes of existence that tend to be overlooked or at best diluted in the bigger narrative. This is a story about a singular migrant’s life (and voice) engendering plural tales.

Similarly, Suranjana Choudhury’s short stories tackle divided territories and memories during and in the aftermath of the Partition of India by centralizing the ability to narrate such experiences with an uncompromising personal voice. In the first story, Choudhury traces the intimate value of past objects and their unrelenting capacity to travel across time and space,



changing hands, from grandmother to granddaughter, without changing the explicit historical significance, as precursors for retaining memories and passing them on intergenerationally. With a delicate treatment of an object (a jewelry box in this context) as a container of/for old senses that continue to reverberate in the present, Choudhury elevates a material possession to the status of the human, the box's owner, or, if we may say so, to an alibi for a presence that is no more and yet remains powerfully detectable nonetheless. In the second and final story, Choudhury focuses on the human interactions across these partitioned territories whereby communities as a whole and at times individual families within these communities are redrawn and thus realigned to fit in these nationalistically charged geographies. In this way, Choudhury brings the question of home to the fore, prompting the reader to think through the experiences of those whose "home" is also the experience of permanently not having a home.

The final contribution in this volume is Rafael Guendelman Hales's "Objects Removed for Study," which is a collaborative project with a group of exiled Iraqi women in London that endeavors to document, in the form of reassembled ceramic books and artifacts, the re-creation of a segment of the Library of Ashurbanipal (currently held at the British Museum). In reimagining present and past displacements, the study—accomplished by women this time contra the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal—proposes a haptic engagement with material culture. It does so in three arrangements: first, by assigning the role of reconstruction to the Iraqi women solely (these newly made artifacts are created by Iraqi hands); second, in a contemporary setting through which Iraqi history seems to be rewritten in transit, and where displacement and farness from Iraq are critical motifs; and third, as the study is conceived of as a continual re-creation of displaced Iraqi lives, it weds the individual tenses and times of those involved in the project to the collective and national history of Iraq through bringing Iraq (back) to them materially. In this sense, what Guendelman Hales firmly dispels in such a study is mimicking (i.e., a *re-creation* that is owned entirely to the original *creation*), instead offering a rewriting of history in the present (and for the future) based on multiple singularities. This is a study that, in a sense, has created parity between history and the individual and her imaginaries.

■ REFERENCE

Qasmiyeh, Yousif M. 2019. "To Embroider the Voice with Its Own Needle." Berghahn Books blog, January. <https://berghahnbooks.com/blog/to-embroider-the-voice-with-its-own-needle>.