

Reimagining Refugee Encounters in The Displaced

Li Yawen

PhD student

National University and Singapore

In refugee discourses, though much has been discussed at the levels of humanitarianism, law, geopolitics and sociology, refugee voices (interviews, testimonies, memoirs, etc.) as well as scholarship on them are largely missing.¹ While historian Dan Stone calls for a more active presence of refugees in these studies, instead of taking refugees as ‘a pre-existing category’ in relation to present-day concerns (103), Nando Sigona elucidates the public confines imposed on refugees in asserting their subjectivities with respect to credibility (that they are widely deemed ‘bogus’ necessitates careful assessment and Western experts’ corroboration) and social expectation of ‘pure’ victimhood, echoing Spivak’s question on the potency of the subaltern voices. Furthermore, Sigona offers a literature review of how refugees have been (mis)represented in a fetishized (dehistoricized and depoliticized) and pathologized (dependent and vulnerable) manner in Western mass media, so as to deny their political agency and conceal the real causes of their forced migration, which often relate to wars waged by the Western countries. The ways in which these portrayals of refugees are ideologically constructed and the intended effects will be examined later. In addition, the heterogeneity within the refugee subjects — ‘there are a thousand multifarious refugee experiences’ (Soguk 4) – which might lead to the (self-)questioning of the authenticity or representativeness of refugee stories, and ethical risks involved in appropriating refugee positions, pertaining to both nonfictional/memorial and fictional writings, could inhibit the creative force informed by refugee experiences, in intervening in ‘the international order of things’ (Malkki).

¹ For example, in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* (2014), ‘literature’ or memory studies is not among the nine major approaches (history, law, political theory, anthropology, etc.) outlined in the contents. Amidst 53 chapters, only chapter 29 “The Politics of Refugee Voices” is partially relevant.

This paper aims to address the aforementioned problematics by showcasing the plurality and diversity of refugee reality in *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives* (2018), an edited collection by Viet Thanh Nguyen, consisting of 17 short memoirs narrated by refugee writers worldwide, based on their own refugee experiences.² The multiplicity of refugee voices is achieved in this book without relativizing or prioritizing any specific experience, which demonstrates what Michael Rothberg terms a ‘multidirectional memory’, drawing on connections from colonial and Holocaust discourses, which entails ‘cross-referencing’, ‘borrowing’, and productive ‘interaction of different collective memories’ (3). Although refugee writers in *Displaced* each tell their own story, who also speak to a larger group that embark on the same routes (Afghanistan to America, Soviet Union to Canada, Ethiopia to Germany, etc.), their experiences are in dialogues and solidarity, while they also recognize the particular encounters different groups and individuals are subjected to, which will be further substantiated in this paper. Individually and collectively, their writings disrupt and challenge the normative script of refugee imagination, which will be analyzed in arguing for the potential transformative power of memoirs and story-telling in refugee studies. Before delving into the text, this paper will first critically scrutinize the very notion of refugee authorship and its stakes.

In response to the possibility of subaltern agency, Spivak suggests that ‘the subaltern cannot speak’ in the sense that she is unable to be heard; one ceases to be subaltern in making oneself heard (*The Spivak Reader* 292; 5-6).³ In contrast, Nguyen prefaces *Displaced* with the awareness of this seeming contradiction: ‘I was once a refugee⁴, although no one would mistake me for being a refugee now...I insist on being called a refugee...It would be so much easier to call myself an immigrant, to pass myself off as belonging to a category of migratory humanity that is less controversial, less demanding, and less threatening than the refugee’ (7). His insistence on keeping the refugee identity complicates Spivak’s claim through proposing

² Except in ‘God’s Fate’, Aleksandar Hermon tells the story of one of his fellow Bosnian refugees Kemal Frašto.

³ Gramsci is referenced as an organic intellectual emerged from a subaltern position and speaks for them, whose status as a subaltern would be changed utterly (6).

⁴ Nguyen fled from Vietnam to America at the age of four. Now he is a Pulitzer-winning author and Professor at USC.

the layer of the non-organic,⁵ re-embodied and cultivated refugeeship. However, it is also tempting to view this gesture as melancholic, or to dismiss this book in suspicion of its ‘authenticity’ and representativeness, since one cannot make oneself heard and remain a subaltern according to Spivak. Regarding the former (the melancholic), Wendy Brown considers the stakes of what she terms ‘wounded attachments’ in the context of left-wing identity politics and how an identity fixated on pain might lead to the reification of suffering, which forecloses further possibility of criticality and empowerment. Evoking Brown’s ideas, Maggio expounds how ‘wounded aesthetics’ would be parasitic, both on the verisimilitude, that is, a ‘truthful’ replication of the lived experience or reality, which risks individuating the suffering by not attending to the structural and systemic aspects, while at the same time universalizing it through the decontextualization and consumption of it practiced by the mainstream readers; and on the ostensibly liberal regime, which causes the pain in the first place and gets to decide whether to be affirmative or sympathetic.

On that note, Nguyen contends elsewhere that ‘we must do more than tell ghost stories. We must also tell the war stories that made ghosts and made us ghosts, the war stories that brought us here’ (Nothing Ever Dies 222). This tenet is tacitly adopted throughout *Displaced* in every refugee story. Their evocation of the wounded refugee memories is intended to restore what Nguyen calls ‘a just memory’, which ‘constantly tries to recall what might be forgotten, accidentally or deliberately, through self-serving interests, the debilitating effects of trauma, or the distraction offered by excessively remembering something else, such as the heroism of the nation’s soldiers’, without which, the current inequality cannot be addressed (Nothing Ever Dies 17). Hence, the collection does not seek to reify wounds or fetishize the refugees—‘the transformation of the wound into an identity cuts the wound off from a history of ‘getting hurt’ or injured (Cultural Politics 32)’—but to weld the wound and that history together, to expose

⁵ In ‘Dislocation is My Location’, Nguyen reflects how he was trapped in a double bind as a PhD student in English at UC Berkeley –Vietnamese bodies were not wanted in academia, nor could they be portrayed as political ones in creative writings. He has to wear masks in both fields in order to be heard and only ventures more experimental writings after he got tenure.

contemporary forms of that injustice, and as Nguyen underlines, ‘true justice will be when we no longer need a voice for the voiceless’ (Displaced 11), which implies that the re-embodiment of such a wounded position is enacted to eventually eradicate it or the conditions that produce it, rather than securing a static identity. With respect to critics that question the ‘authenticity’ of refugee stories written by established writers, particularly those whose experiences are not so ‘miserable’, concerned that their ‘successful’ stories might block other more painful ones from view, Sedgwick’s notion of ‘paranoid reading’ is useful here in illuminating how this type of suspicion, which involves a certain level of sympathy for refugees and criticality of the West, can be read as systemic oppressions of refugee voices (126).⁶ In the name of searching for ‘authenticity’ as Nguyen and those refugee writers are no longer ‘qualified’, it reproduces Western rhetoric of refugeeism represented by ‘pure’ victimhood and extends the skepticism towards refugees’ credibility inside the camps to the outside.

There is also a familial dimension to the refugee authorship discernible in *Displaced*, which calls for a further reconsideration of Spivak’s definition of subalternity through the lens of postmemorial witnessing. In conceptualizing the experience of living with her mother’s illness, Ahmed suggests that ‘love as empathy’ is achieved through the ‘sociality of pain’: ‘Her pleas would sometimes just be for me to bear witness, to recognise her pain. Through witnessing I would grant her pain the status of an event, a happening in the world...I would give her pain a life outside the fragile borders of her vulnerable and much loved body...I want to have her pain so she can be released from it, so she doesn’t have to feel it’ (Cultural Politics 29-30). In a similar vein, many refugee writers in *Displaced* foreground or touch on the familial dynamics and acknowledge their parents’ suffering, as well as the inexplicable gap between first-generation refugees’ skin memory and children survivors’ mediated knowledge (Hirsch 80). For example, Meron Hadero retraces the emigration route from Ethiopia to Quedlinburg to Berlin to Düsseldorf that her parents took (when she was around three) at her age, ‘to put myself

⁶ Sedgwick refers to Guy Hocquenghem’s *Homosexual Desire*, in which Hocquenghem argues that the popularity of Freudian tradition of understanding homosexuality as a paranoia precisely reflects the mechanisms of homophobia heterosexuality.

in their place, as best I could...to feel more a part of the story' ('To Walk in Their Shoes'). For Nguyen, apart from memorializing his parents' pain, which includes being refugees twice, enduring robbery, shooting, grenade attacks, among others ('Dislocation' 430), he also wishes to register the voices of his adopted sister who was left behind, of the dead and the disappeared with whom he shared the exodus, through imagining conversing with them:⁷ 'If I can imagine them, then maybe I can hear them...then perhaps we can make you hear them, too' (Displaced 12). A 'labor of missing', yet unlike the Lebanese who sustain the presence of the absent in the civil war by 'interring' them through dialogues with silence (Sadek), Nguyen strives to 'give voice to' the ghosts, which connotes a melancholic (not 'wounded' in Brown's sense) attachment to a history of losses, acted out in a less pathological but an ethical light (Eng and Kazanjian 3).

The following sections will focus on the multidirectional or connective, postmemorial, and affective aspects of selected refugee stories in *Displaced* that concerns refugees' plight, losses, yearnings, social (especially familial) relations and how these inform their identity (re)negotiation. Ultimately, it will consider the ways in which these stories 'disturb the reader' ('Dislocation 435), or 'move', thus unsettling the negative affects that stick to certain (refugee) bodies (Cultural Politics), and prepare the grounds for a 'just memory'. It has been acknowledged the two strands of media rhetoric of refugees in Western countries (pure victimhood; untrustworthy), whereas Nguyen points out how they are developed into two kinds of socially prescribed beliefs in host countries (America): refugees are 'either to serve or to threaten', 'invisible and hypervisible' (Displaced 9). These stereotypes popularized by officials and media of the host countries affirm that the proximity of the Other, who come to 'embody the threat of loss: lost jobs, lost money, lost land' promulgated in state narratives (Cultural Politics 44), facilitates the circulation of hate and fear among Subjects, which will be acted upon the abject bodies in the name of love (for the nation) (Cultural Politics chapter 2, 3, 6).

⁷ One could argue the elements of survivor's guilt and dialogues with the deceased brother in 'Black-eyed Women' in *The Refugees* by Nguyen invites such an association.

Indeed, as revealed by postcolonial critique of Orientalism that the colonizer constructs the colonized Other in order to affirm what he is 'not', and similarly suggested by Butler that the abject beings 'form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject' (3), the proximity of refugee bodies is likely to be reimagined as the invasion and crisis of the Subjects.

Marina Lewycka's story reveals the contingency of security, even for a Ukrainian refugee like her who was comfortably settled in the UK, and brings to the fore authorities' maneuvers of crisis declaration as a way to advance their own political agenda. She came to the realization in mid-2010s that the 'unforeseen' rise of refugeeophobia and hate crimes perpetuated by right-wing media (such as calling refugees 'cockroaches' and 'bogus'; a woman MP was murdered for supporting migrants) in the 2000s is to incite nationalist sentiments and persuade Britons to vote for Brexit ('Refugees and Exiles'). It is worth noting that Agamben's explication of the politicization of the 'bare life' of refugees, whose subjectivities may be stripped of place, symbolic value and human relations conveniently (75-79), still has force in present-day world. Lewycka also underscores the same rhetoric adopted by the UK and the US led by Trump. This is picked up by Ariel Dorfman, a Mexican refugee, who remarks on how Trump plays his nativist card through denigrating Mexican refugees as a bunch of "bad hombres", rapists, criminals, and drug dealers' ('How Succulent Food Defeated Trump's Wall Before It Has Been Built'). The ideologization of refugee bodies at the macro level can be translated into forms of everyday violence. Dina Nayeri, for instance, tells her story of being bullied, both physically and verbally, in primary schools in London and Oklahoma for being an Iranian refugee ('The Ungrateful Refugee'). This can be read in light of Bourdieu's consideration of the state as central to fields of power, which sets the leitmotif for regulating social groups across various fields and subfields (Swartz 36). Additionally, Bourdieu stresses the fact that the dominated is complicit in their own domination because the influence is so pervasive (Bourdieu and Wacquant 272). This can be seen in Nayeri's complex feelings towards her mother's giving testimonies to their escape stories for months in churches and public institutions submissively ('The Ungrateful Refugee'), catering to the Western charitable gaze and demands for

gratitude,⁸ as well as in David Bezmozgis's critical reflection on his refugee parents' 'skeptical—if not cynical' (20) attitude toward refugees once they have established themselves ('Common Story').

Built on his argument on the state's monopolizing regulatory function, Bourdieu further expounds on the concept of 'symbolic violence' on the habitus, which takes more invisible and insidious forms of embodied dispositions, such as language and bodily gestures, reproduced by singular agents and institutions through their 'practical adaptation' into existing social hierarchies (Swartz 89-101). Lev Golinkin, as a Soviet Jewish refugee in Austria, expresses his sense of disturbance by people's looks as his body is marked with signs of strangeness, such as a foreign accent, clothing from shelters and his Jewish appearance in a country haunted by Hitler's long shadow ('Guests of the Holy Roman Empress Maria Theresa'). From the ordinary shop that can conveniently reject him, to the nationalists who stare violently at him, not to mention undergoing the process of being relegated to objects, 'a visa to stamp, a pair of pupils for the quarantine doctor to check, fifty-five kilos to add to the maximum capacity of a train' (38), Golinkin's narrative spans various quotidian aspects and different degrees to which his life is symbolically violated. The course of being literally reduced to objects evokes Ahmed's argument of 'an investment in strangerhood as an ontological condition' that 'cuts "the stranger" off from the histories of its determination' (Stranger Encounters 5) — the anti-Semitic Soviet system, in Golinkin's case. Golinkin disrupts this ontologization by planting fleeting details of his old life, and weaving in a juxtaposition of his father who, back in Soviet Ukraine, always abided by the validation in tram when no one checked and most people cheated, and here in Austria, who 'becomes' a hitchhiker, scrounger and sneaker. Although Golinkin only gives a compact and 'uneventful' account of his experience of exile with his father, one is compelled to imagine the rest, knowing that this forfeit of dignity is an effect of the dehumanizing treatment they received, rather than some characters they just 'have'. In the end, Golinkin finds

⁸ As for more analytical accounts of the problematics of 'compassion' as a normalized liberal ideology, see V. Spelman's *Fruits of Sorrow* (1998) and L. Berlant's *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion* (2004).

comfort in the heterotopic space of art museums where everyone is so engrossed in the art and the differences disappear for an instant.

Along the same line, and craving for the same kind of anonymity, Joseph Azam, an Afghan refugee growing up in America, focalizes retrospectively his interiority that evolves through his name changing (from ‘Mohammad’ to ‘Yousuf’ so as to sound like Joseph, and eventually adopting ‘Joseph’), indicating that those names with strange and foreign sounds (to the mainstream ears) are metonymized into the subjugated positions, with or without a green card (‘Last, First, Middle’). Azam complicates this association with the ambivalent idea of mimicry which suggests, transposed from a postcolonial context, the refugees, willingly or unwillingly, imitate the language, dress, politics, or cultural attitude of the mainstream Americans in the hopes of being accepted by, assimilated to, or becoming them. However, as proposed by Homi Bhabha, mimicry is a double vision which also ‘articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial, and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority’ (129). The nuanced depiction of Azam’s inner turmoil regarding name changing alludes to, therefore also exposes and disturbs, the social hostility and structural policing imposed upon refugees in host countries, including the complicity of refugees themselves as mentioned in Nayeri and Bezmozgis’ stories. This can be evidenced by Azam’s father, who bears stronger cultural identification with Afghanistan as a first-generation refugee, upon detecting his son’s dilemma— ‘being identifiably foreign or secretly false’ (17)—makes the decision, almost in a self-erasing manner, of registering his son officially as ‘Joseph’. The disturbance evoked from this symbolic suicide across generations of refugees foregrounds refugee ambiguity in terms of cultural identification. Although Azam comes to terms with his hybrid identity by means of conflating the names in the end, which suggests that refugee identities could not, and should not, be singularly constituted by either the ethnic homeland or the new country, but rather contingent on the individual experience, the powerful question remains: who or what causes these struggles, compromises, and agony to happen? Azam’s story shows that there are no overt perpetrators to be found, only ‘faceless structural enemies’, to borrow Spivak’s term (‘Crimes

of Identity’), and much has to be reflected on at societal, communal and personal levels.

Both Golinkin and Azam’s stories reveal how refugees are dehumanized by symbolic or ‘slow violence’ in ways that are not entirely different from the lives of the poor who are asymmetrically affected by the protracted environmental aftermath induced by wars (Nixon). Culturally and politically manufactured negative affects are circulated and accumulated among the masses, which inflict imperceptible yet irreversible harm on refugee bodies. Golinkin goes beyond the passive position of victimhood and makes his resistance to being ontologized explicit, stating that:

The drastic images which make newsreels create the impression that people turn into refugees overnight...becoming a refugee is a gradual process, a bleaching out, a transition into a ghostly existence. With the exception of those born in refugee camps, every refugee used to have a life...a thousand little anchors once moored you to the world. Becoming a refugee means watching as those anchors are severed, one by one, until at last you’re floating outside of society, an untethered phantom in need of a new life (37).

This confrontational statement not only appeals to a more responsible and comprehensive media coverage of refugees, but points out that the slowly affective intrusion of refugee bodies exercised by subjects in host countries is in synchronization with the bit-by-bit collapsing of refugees’ interior, during the process of being forced to leave their home. Notably, many of the refugee writers articulate the motifs of desire for home (hometown, homeland) and returning home, in hopes of restoring those anchors or some of them.

Vu Tran’s story of revisiting his city of origin, Saigon, implies how refugees cannot simply be re-anchored by way of returning to their old homes, because the result of those anchors being severed not only denotes a status of geographical displacement, but also temporal ruptures. In an uncanny manner, Tran rediscovers his other life there through conversing with his aunt, who

helped raise him the entire five years prior to his exile, the life he once participated and sustained his presence as a ghost, ‘and ghosts never die’ (83), signaling the inevitable failure of inhabiting the original territory in the same way he once did. However, returning is not entirely pointless. As a successfully assimilated refugee in America, albeit not without struggles, Tran is able to reconnect with Saigon almost immediately after 14 years. ‘A sudden familiarity that I found again in the heat and farraginous smells of the city, in the throng of life on the streets, in the people who at once resembled me and behaved nothing like me. For two weeks, it was the shock of recognition amid aliens, over and over’ (82). Despite failures on some levels, the rediscovery and reconfiguration of the sensory impression of a place that was once home, ‘a city that was mine and no one else’s, hostile and seductive, which I had taken possession of for the first time on that long-ago day’ (Ferrante 150), is not necessarily a frustrating one. The title ‘A Refugee Again’ suggests that something is irreducible about the place and people of origin that enriches the refugee identity making and remaking process, and that each time of revisiting the past could facilitate the cultivation and re-embodiment of a productive refugeeship. Novuyo Rosa Tshuma, a Zimbabwean refugee writer, also notes that returning can work in ways that ‘surprise and sadden’ (84) her, and in her recent revisit of Bulawayo in 2015, she transformed the idea of being displaced and misplaced into an embodied sense of ‘feeling at home’, which she can cultivate in the quotidian details of everyday life as well as creative writings (‘New Lands, New Selves’), a process of ‘unlearning strangeness as confinement...assuming anew the predicament of deterritorialization’ (Minh-ha 30).

As Tran and Tshuma’s stories have unveiled, home or senses of ‘being-at-home’ cannot be reclaimed simply by returning to the places of origin, therefore, the losses cannot be measured by the yardstick of nostalgia either. In the illustration titled ‘What Gets Lost’, Thi Bui names some major categories of what gets lost —family, friends, roots, job, home, cultural savvy/local know-how, way of life, language — etched on broken pieces of stone tablets which surrounds a girl dressed in a Muslim fashion. The inscribed tablets only constitute part of the picture, with the empty space alluding to many other losses that resist definition, language, visibility, and

accessibility even by the refugees themselves. Bui, as a Vietnam-born American graphic novelist, intentionally places a Muslim girl in the center, to highlight the multiple dimensions of victimization of such groups of refugees: being foreign, Muslim, female, children, in an English-speaking country, which is likely to be awash with sentiments of xenophobia and/or Islamophobia, white supremacy, sexism and so forth. When one encounters Porochista Khakpour, an Iranian refugee writer, in the later section of the book, and her soliloquy ‘no kids, no husband, no home you own, no roots in this country. No real reason to be here...your country is of “Muslim ban”’ (63) after 16 years spent in America (‘13 Ways of Being an Immigrant’), Bui’s illustration of the nameless Muslim girl is evoked again and embodied for the shared elements of marginalization. Bui also chooses to leave the face of the Muslim girl visible and the veil only covers her head and neck, so that one is confronted with her solemn, vexed, but almost desireless look, and forced to imagine the trials and tribulation of her life.

Besides the mental struggles experienced by refugees in processing the past losses and new challenges, in another illustration named ‘Perspective’ comprised of two images, Bui also highlights the atrophy of material belongings for Vietnamese refugees (presumably her own family)⁹. The five (or six) refugees illustrated – a pregnant mother, a father, with their three children — only carry with them five identification cards, five set of clothes, and 10 limes. This is contrasted with ‘traveling light 2017’, a young woman whose baggage comprises of a dazzling variety of things that are deemed daily necessities today. The contrast serves as a critique of the trendy narrative that romanticizes the act of leaving home¹⁰ as something that showcases courage, fluidity, free spirit, whereas Bui sharply points out that it is closely linked to privileges: choice vs choicelessness, equipped vs deprived, mobility vs constraints and containment. Like Golinkin’s juxtaposing of everyday details of past and present in a discursive manner, Bui’s critical deployment of contrast, memorials of losses, a penetrating look, and the

⁹ The family composition in the illustration resembles Bui’s in her illustrated memoir *The Best We Could Do* (2017); the year ‘1978’ coincides with the time when Bui and her family migrated from Vietnam to America as part of the wave of ‘boat people’;

¹⁰ See also Ahmed’s critique of the proliferation of ‘global nomads’ (*Strange Encounters* 83-7).

insertion of two illustrations in the middle of a collection of writings provoke senses of discontinuity, not only disturb the reader, but exhibit the intimate correlations and solidarity within refugee aesthetics.

As can be seen in 'Perspective', as well as Azam, Golinkin, and Nayeri's memoirs, refugees often migrate as a family unit. Hence, memories of forced migrations frequently take the form of 'generational acts of story-telling about prior histories of movement and dislocation' (Stranger Encounters 90). Reyna Grande, who was once a child refugee, reflects on the more covert and protracted trauma of fractured family relationships, despite eventually managing to resettle in America from Mexico with her parents ('The Parent Who Stays'). As Grande grievously unveils, 'it is the central irony of my life that my parents emigrated to try to save our family, but by doing so, they destroyed it' (42), referring to the fact that both her parents initially attempted crossing the border without her and only came back for her years after. Though the challenges awaiting her subsequent to border-crossing (when she was almost ten) did not stop Grande from realizing her ambitions, the agony derived from the broadening gap between her parents and her in meeting different social demands of assimilation (surviving vs thriving), and witnessing the slow death of her father who was plagued by psychological pain would not go away. This calls upon more attention to be paid to the complicated and buried family traumas that most refugee children have to tackle with as a result of forced separation. Towards the end, Grande, as a mother herself, redeems her perception of her late father in the story, who is disassociated from affects of 'anger, resentment, and shame' (42), and perceives him as someone farsighted and enabling. 'His (my father's) decision to immigrate has allowed me to be the parent...who stays' (44). The belated recognition of her father's decision restores her father's role as an active player in claiming the refugeeship for the sake of future generations, rather than a merely passive victim depicted in Western scripts. It also hints at the constantly renegotiated refugee consciousness and the metamorphosis of old familial relationships enacted through the arrival of new ones. In a similar but broader context, Joseph Kertes' revalorization of his present refugee condition—as a Jew fleeing from anti-Semitic

Soviet Hungary who can decide their destination—also takes place with reference to his racial ancestors, the 600,000 Hungary Jews that perished in WW II ('Second Country').

Conclusion

We are situated at the intersection of several collective determinations, and therefore of several 'identities', of several forms of subjection...should it not be incumbent upon us to construct discourses and theories that allow us...not to exclude any form of oppression, any register of domination, any form of inferiorization, any form of shame that is linked to some kind of practice of insult from the range of what is considered political, or from what can be actively addressed (Eribon 242)?

To try to understand the experience of another, it is necessary to dismantle the world as seen from one's own place within it, and to reassemble it as seen from his. For example, to understand a given choice another makes, one must face in imagination the lack of choices which may confront and deny him...The world has to be dismantled and re-assembled in order to be able to grasp, however clumsily, the experience of another. To talk of entering the other's subjectivity is misleading. The subjectivity of another does not simply constitute a different interior attitude to the same exterior facts. The constellation of facts, of which he is the centre, is different (Berger 93-4).

In closing, this paper has discussed some of the recurring themes in a collection of refugee memoirs, such as dangers and struggles in new places, losses and desires for home(land), familial tension and reconciliation. It first identifies the gap in refugee discourses where refugees' own presence and voices are lacking or dramatized, sharing French philosopher Didier Eribon's spirit in challenging the hierarchical approaches to studying the past. Meanwhile, it contextualizes the notion of 'refugee authorship' that is re-embodied and works towards 'a just memory'. It then investigates how refugees are negatively affected by state's regulation and various forms of symbolic violence, while processing the losses of being

displaced in the meantime. Through examining the ways in which refugee stories worldwide intersect, resonate and collaborate with each other, this paper demonstrates the immense force of refugee memoirs in ‘disturbing’ or ‘moving’ the reader, which could pave the way for what John Berger proffers a more radical form of understanding (migrant workers). While Berger knits together statistics, interviews, news report, photography, in *A Seventh Man* to effect ‘dismantling and reassembling’, refugee writers studied in this paper have exhibited the power of creative nonfictions, which can be transmuted into a greater capacity to ‘imagine other people’ (Scarry), and may one day inspire real changes at both macro and micro levels.

Works Cited

Agamben, G. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford University Press, 1998, pp. 75-79.

Ahmed, S. *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

---. *Stranger Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, Routledge, 2000.

Berger J. and J. Mohr. *A Seventh Man: Migrant Workers in Europe*, Viking Press, 1975, pp. 93-4.

Bhabha, H. ‘Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse’. *Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 28, 1984, pp. 129.

Bourdieu, P., and L. Wacquant. ‘Symbolic Violence’. *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*. Edited by Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, Blackwell Publishing, 2004, pp. 272.

Brown, W. *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Princeton University Press, 1995.

Butler, J. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’*, Routledge, 1993, pp. 3.

Eng, D. L. and D. Kazanjian. ‘Introduction: Mourning Remains’. *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. Edited by D. L. Eng and D. Kazanjian, University of California Press, 2003.

Eribon, D. *Returning to Reims*. Translated by Michael Lucey, Semiotext(e), 2013, pp. 242.

Ferrante, Elena. *Frantumaglia: A Writer’s Journey*. Translated by Ann Goldstein, Europa Editions, 2016, pp. 150.

Hirsch, M. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, Columbia University Press, 2012.

Maggio, J. 'Wounded attachments and wounded aesthetics: Wendy Brown, Philip Roth, and a modest theory concerning the interaction of art and politics'. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2020, pp. 353-372.

Malkki, L. H. 'Refugees and Exile: From "Refugee Studies" to the National Order of Things'. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 24, 1995, pp. 495-523.

Minh-ha, T. T. *Elsewhere, within Here: Immigration, Refugeeism and the Boundary Event*. Routledge, 2011, pp. 30.

Nguyen, V. T. *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives*. ed., Abrams, 2018.

---. 'Dislocation Is My Location', *PMLA*, Vol. 133: 2, 2018, pp. 428 - 436.

---. *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*, Harvard University Press, 2016.

Nixon, R. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Harvard University Press, 2011.

Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford University Press, 2009.

Sadek, W. 'Collecting the Uncanny and the Labour of Missing'. *The Ruin to Come: Essays from a Protracted War*, Motto Books & Taipei Biennial, 2016.

Scarry, E. 'The Difficulty of Imagining Other People', *For Love of Country?* Edited by Martha Nussbaum, Beacon Press, 1996, pp. 98-110.

Sigona, N. 'The Politics of Refugee Voices: Representations, Narratives, and Memories'. *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, Oxford University Press, 2014.

Soguk, N. *States and Strangers: Refugees and Displacements of Statecraft*, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, pp. 4.

Spivak, G. C. 'Crimes of Identity', *Juliet Mitchell and the Lateral Axis: Twenty-First-Century Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. Edited by R. Duschinsky and S. Walker, Springer, 2015.

---. 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1998.

---. *The Spivak Reader*. Edited by D. Landry and G. Maclean, Routledge, 1996, pp. 289.

Stone, D. 'Refugees then and now: memory, history and politics in the long twentieth century: an introduction'. *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 52, Nos. 2-3, pp. 101-106.

Swartz, D. L. *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals: The Political Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, University of Chicago Press, 2013.