WORLDS **IN MOTION**
VOLUME 14

Edited by **Noel B. Salazar,** University of Leuven, in collaboration with **AnthroMob,** the Anthropology and Mobility Network of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA).

This transdisciplinary series features empirically grounded studies that disentangle how people, objects, and ideas move across the planet. With a special focus on advancing theory as well as methodology, the series considers movement as both an object and a method of study.

(UN)SETTLING PLACE

Diverse and Divergent Place-Making of People on the Move

Edited by Nanneke Winters, Heike Drotbohm & Yaatsil Guevara González

This volume breaks from the usual. Winters, Drotbohm, and Guevara González have assembled an excellent collection of cutting-edge contributions that cast new light on the meanings of place and place-making. With rich insights, the collection reveals how people on the move transform the "out-of-the-way places" they traverse in their journeys, even if when they stay only temporarily. The book offers much-needed clarity and insight into the multiple dimensions of (im)mobility that is sure to inspire future research. Highly recommended!

Cecilia Menjívar, University of California

People who are "on the move," particularly migrants and the displaced, often inhabit places that are considered temporary, peripheral, and remote. *(Un)Settling Place* recentralizes these "out-of-the-way" places as key sites in the shaping of people's mobility and identities. Ranging from the surveillance and care that migrants experience, to the re-creation of social ties and the re-claiming of space, this collection volume seeks to show how a critical approach to in-between place-making can challenge the idea of place as fixed, singular, or one-directional, offering new ways of understanding migrant trajectories.

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(Un)settling Place

Diverse and Divergent Place-Making of People on the Move

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Nanneke Winters, Heike Drotbohm, and Yaatsil Guevara González

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Acknowledgments

The idea for this book originated at the international workshop "Along and Out of the Way: Place-Making amidst Migrant Trajectories," organized (virtually) in Mainz in July 2021 and part of the project African Trajectories across Central America (ATXCA), funded by the German Research Foundation from 2018 to 2022. We thank the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz and the German Research Foundation for providing generous funding (Grant no 406978565). We also thank all the participants of this workshop and particularly Heath Cabot, Heide Castañeda, and Nauja Kleist, who served as discussants and enriched our collective thinking. Three reviewers provided valuable feedback on the book, for which we are grateful. We are also thankful for the kind guidance of Berghahn's editorial and production team, in particular, Keara Hagerty, Amanda Horn, and Emma Wallace.

Introduction

(Un)settling Place Along- and Out-of-the-Way

Heike Drotbohm and Nanneke Winters

People considered to be "on the move" do not move in a void. They encounter, dwell in, and engage with particular places along-the-way, along the routes of their trajectories toward a desired destination. In the literature on migration, displacement, and humanitarianism, many of these places remain almost invisible, especially if they are not located near heavily monitored nation-state borders. They may thus be constructed as "remote," "peripheral," "marginal," or "out-of-the-way" (Tsing 1994) from a scholarly and policy point of view. However, in this volume, we wish to emphasize and interrogate the centrality of these places along-the-way as key sites in the shaping of people's mobility, from the surveillance and care that migrants and refugees experience, the re-creation of social ties in arrival settings and their struggles over communication and documentation, to considerations of onward travel and the futures of meaningful lives. Moreover, the histories of these places, their (geo)political positioning, ethnic and religious diversity, socioeconomic dynamics, and variety of local actors—who may be mobile themselves—interact with passing and dwelling "Others."

In this volume we ask how people on the move, and those they encounter, make sense of the along-the-way and out-of-the-way place. Such a meaning of a place, gained through social interaction and imagination, is not given, fixed, or singular. Furthermore, the extent to which a place is considered and perceived as temporary or marginal shapes not only people's experiences, perceptions, and practices of im/mobility but also the place itself.

(Un)settling place refers to a theoretical and empirical concern with an understanding of place as it has been discussed in anthropology, critical geography, and migration scholarship. By bringing these literatures together, we aim to rethink the co-constitutive relationship between place and im/mobility, further unsettling (normative) ideas about what it means to be

on the move, to transit, to dwell, to settle, and to make place. We position ourselves at the intersection of anthropology and critical geography while working in the broader field of migration studies. This vantage point allows us to simultaneously study people's mobility beyond conventional and often state-defined categories of migration (Bakewell 2008; Malkki 1995; Menjívar 2023; Drotbohm 2024) and consider the geometries of power (Massey 1994) and politics of mobility (Cresswell 2013) that shape different access to, control over, and enjoyment of different types of migration.

More specifically, we bring in the notions of along-the-way and out-of-the-way to argue against singularity: of supposedly linear migrant journeys, of limited socialities of place-making, and of so-called transit places. By empirically introducing along-the-way and out-of-the-way places, we enrich migration scholarship that tends to target "typical" sites of transit. By employing a non-normative way of selecting ostensibly marginal but still meaningful and often crucial along-the-way and out-of-the-way places, we bring out the productive tensions in how people on the move understand, engage with, and make place. In other words, this approach allows us to bring out the (un)settledness of place in a migration studies field that often aims to fix the meaning, characteristics and categories of places en route.

This line of thought requires thorough consideration of the open and dynamic character of places. In both anthropology and geography, it is in particular the recognition of a dialectics of mobility and immobility that has enabled a reappreciation of place in thinking about migration (Bjarnesen and Vigh 2016; Lems and Tošić 2019; Charmillot and Dahinden 2021) and migrants' cross-border connections (Drotbohm and Winters 2021; Drotbohm 2024). Not place as a static, bounded entity, but as a specific articulation of flows, relationships, and exchange: place constituted by movement and intersection (Massey 1994). Indeed, people on the move are always in place through their bodies, and by being in place, they co-constitute place (Casey 1996). Throughout their journeys, even those displaced become emplaced through sensing, navigating, claiming, and, ultimately, transforming the places that make up their journey. Hence, in this volume, the diverse and divergent place-making of people on the move is understood at the intersection of place and mobility. Although the inspiration for this volume draws from our work on migrant trajectories in transit settings (Drotbohm and Lems 2018; Drotbohm and Winters 2020; Drotbohm and Winters 2021; Guevara González 2022; Winters 2019, 2021, 2023), as we will show, empirically and analytically these trajectories belong to a broader field of situated im/mobilities. By examining how bodies, ideas, information, infrastructures, relationships, and objects move across and become part of differentiated space, we follow scholarly approaches

that consider movement and mobilities both as objects as well as methods of study (Salazar, Elliot, and Norum 2017; Sheller 2018; Lauser et al. 2022).

Here we also acknowledge the work done in feminist and postcolonial studies, in particular showcased in the seminal volume *Uprootings/Regroundings* (Ahmed et al. 2003). While this volume established a dialogue between migrating and homing and showed how "the work of migration" and "the work of inhabitance" (2003: 1) are intimately related, it questioned assumptions that equate mobility with freedom and staying put with stagnation, fashionable during a time when a boundless and rootless mobility was seen as becoming the norm (2003: 2–3; see also the section on place-making below). The authors' emphasis on different scales, including the body, and on the intersections of social differentiation encouraged power-sensitive explorations of places that become part of migrant trajectories and thus incorporate differently positioned people in terms of their gender, ethnicity, nationality, and so forth. Moreover, their recognition of how the legacies of different colonial and imperial encounters shape current-day cross-border connections, displacement, and belonging, including alienation from one's own land, serves as a powerful reminder to consider these histories in migration studies. Complementary scholarship (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2020; Grosfoguel et al. 2015; Gustafson 2014) further informs our effort to interrogate place itself, its materiality, and the meaning it acquires despite its possibly peripheralized status in global (knowledge) hierarchies.

In migration scholarship, the importance of considering not only place but the *multiplicity* of places that are part of winding migrant trajectories between departure and (un)desired destination settings has received growing attention in the last decade (Schapendonk and Steel 2014). However, although there have been critical explorations of migrants co-creating (sanctuary) cities (e.g., Bauder and Gonzalez 2018; Çağlar and Glick Schiller 2018), and migrant presence transforming the fringes of the so-called Global North (e.g., Tazzioli 2018), there has been considerably less attention for the ways in which people still on the move engage in place-making along the way (notable exceptions include Constable 2022; Schapendonk 2012; Guevara González 2022). As if the supposed temporality of their stay, in places away from hegemonic centers, would inhibit such place-making.

Yet drawn-out migrant trajectories, in which people spend considerable time in a diversity of places, have become more rule than exception. This is exemplified in the literature on transit migration and border externalization (e.g., Ould Moctar 2022; Vogt 2018), which has, through notions such as the arterial border (Vogt 2017), drawn attention to the ways in which the (unintended) manifestations, ruptures, and openings of border and mobility regimes (Khosravi 2007; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) steer migrants and refugees toward an increasing diversity of places located

away from the territorial borders of the Global North (Lucht 2011; Mainwaring and Brigden 2016). Places that may be mentioned as in-between "footholds" or "anchorages" in the migration journey literature (Schapendonk et al. 2020), requiring further exploration, as well as places not immediately affected by the implications of migration control yet interacting with people on the move, their circulations, and cross-border connections. Examples include coastal villages that alternate livelihoods between fishing and transporting people; Indigenous communities that carve out a living in marginalized territories by catering to migrants passing through; (sub)urban neighborhoods that function as, yet cannot be reduced to, gateways to elsewhere; refugee shelters that serve as "temporary homes"; or desert towns along trade routes that have so far escaped attention of the international policy and scholarly community. Considering such often-overlooked places challenges preconceived ideas in migration scholarship, including those about the directionality of migrant trajectories and the exceptionality of people on the move and their lives.

A note on terminology: migrants are central to this book. However, we opted for the broader term of "people on the move" to account for the different guises a migrant's life may take over time, as a refugee, an asylum seeker, a tourist, someone looking for a job in the city or looking for safety across borders, or someone included in a "resettled" diaspora. We hope the more open notion of "people on the move" avoids premature categorization. At the same time, although the protagonists in this book are surrounded by movement (actual/desired, facilitated/withheld, enjoyed/enforced, past/current, momentary/drawn-out), "on the move" does not refer to an ongoing and unproblematic movement, just as along-the-way does not refer to linear journeys. "On the move" helps us consider the mobilities at play, while our simultaneous focus on place—with the variety of actors and dynamics that are part of it—helps us to further interrogate these mobilities as well as migrants themselves as part of their environment.

Thinking against Singularity, Centering the Out-of-the-Way

The literature on transit migration has stirred our imagination for considering migrant lives beyond the supposed origin and destination of their migration (De Haas 2008; Düvell 2010; Collyer 2010). However, labeling a person as "in transit" also implies a political stance and can reinforce a limited, unidirectional understanding of people's trajectories. This would obscure the increased unpredictability of such trajectories (Basok et al. 2015) and the multiple movements, directions, and places that may be part of it.

Some authors have addressed the central role of (changing) temporality and spatiality in migrants' trajectories by characterizing transit as "in-between" or "liminal" phases (Schapendonk and Steel 2014; Mzayek 2019). Yet in writing about migrants and refugees they interviewed in Turkey, Greece and Italy, Crawley and Jones (2020) problematize the notion of the in-between now regularly used to describe migration journeys and their concrete local manifestations. According to the authors, speaking of in-between places still evokes the linear representation that policymakers and researchers often attach to the way in which migrants travel and dwell, yet it does not sit well with the multiple meanings that places assume. The in-between status of place is often assigned retrospectively, as a methodological, political, or personal decision, rather than established empirically. Such labeling may erase other possible meanings of place, gained as people carve out space for themselves in terms of work, family life, and sociocultural identity. As has been established in the literature about "waiting" (Conlon 2011; Griffiths 2014; Brun 2015; Stock 2019; Jacobsen, Karlsen and Khosravi 2020; Guevara González 2022), life happens and continues to take shape and place as new obstacles are encountered and new opportunities and strategies arise. Glossing over the in-between moments and places as just a passive backdrop to migration obscures the multilayered meaning attached to place as well as the histories and particularities of place that influence migration (Crawley and Jones 2020: 12).

Although Crawley and Jones rightfully argue that a "failure to understand the significance of places to people—and of people to places—undermines conceptual and empirical understanding of migration and reduces the analysis of migration journeys to the physical movement itself," obscuring immobility experiences, and "plays into dominant anti-migrant policy and media narratives" (2020: 3), we propose to emphasize another limitation. A one-sided view on the travels or anticipated movements that get labeled as "migration" (from a border-control and migration-management perspective) tends to prioritize a limited number of high-stakes places as well as essentialize migrants situated in those places, rather artificially setting them apart from the people they encounter and dwell with along the way. A focus on the multiple meanings and roles of place amid movement, a place that, to use Casey's word (1996: 24), "gathers" migrants and non-migrants alike, would help to de-essentialize studies of journeys and trajectories (Schapendonk et al. 2021).

By thinking through the importance and production of places in and along migrant trajectories, we aim to contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of place amid transit, mobility, and displacement. We simultaneously consider how cultivating a "peripheral vision" (Nash 2001)—that is, centering the out-of-the-way by looking at actors, sites, and environments

that are not conventionally considered central to migration research—might open up new avenues for understanding emplaced trajectories. Next to border-control agents, police officers, civil servants, humanitarian workers, volunteers, activists, missionaries, smugglers, traders, and other entrepreneurs, we may think of an additional diversity of inhabitants such as earlier arrivals or diasporic communities, and residents of neighborhoods and towns commonly considered to be peripheral, and explore how together (though not necessarily in sync) they join people on the move, of different flows and directions, in experiencing, interpreting, and making these places.

People on the move are of course often not (voluntarily) moving at all, as they are also diverted, deterred, detained, and deported. Our desire to center the out-of-the-way enables us to address these fundamentally uneven (im)mobilities of our time (Sheller 2018) in three ways: First, a focus on along- and out-of-the-way places and place-making in contexts of temporariness allows us to advance scholarly work that has usefully countered fixity/flow binaries and integrated too-fixed-sedentary or too-mobility-celebrating notions of people's lives by reappreciating place (Ballinger 2012; Bjarnesen and Vigh 2016; Lems 2016). Relatedly, we explicitly seek to address the global inequalities and power geometries (Massey 1994: 149) that produce the marginality of certain people, places, and mobilities (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2020) and that relegate what is considered the margin(al) to mere "negative space," defined by exclusion from what is preeminent and powerful (Iskander and Landau 2022). Second, as this marginalization is actively contested, our focus helps to integrate place experiences of both people on the move and their (temporary) hosts (Turton 2005), thereby contributing to a de-migranticization of migration scholarship (Nieswand and Drotbohm 2014; Dahinden 2016). Third, we hope our volume contributes to upsetting the crisis-like mindset of much migration scholarship by transcending the humanitarian framework that has often equated displacement with loss (Bjarnesen and Vigh 2016; Cabot and Ramsay 2022; Drotbohm and Dilger 2024; Lubkemann 2016; see also Malkki 1995).

On Place and Place-Making, Along-the-Way

For understanding the value of place-making notions in contexts of (assumed) temporariness, we draw inspiration from earlier anthropological and geographical thinking about place. Although the late 1980s and the 1990s saw the typical anthropological focus on ("exotic") place give way to an emphasis on displacement and uprootedness through notions of globalization, nomadism, and fluidity (Appadurai 1996; Lems 2018: 12–14), in the 1990s different anthropologists also started to engage more critically

with the notion of place itself and its continued importance for people's lives (Feld and Basso 1996; Escobar 2000: 113; Lems 2018: 17). They emphasized a notion of place that is not fixed, tied to culture, or definitively demarcated but rather always evolving and porous. In geography, Massey's influential work on what she called "a global sense of place" argued for place as an open and evolving node of relationships and their concrete manifestation (Massey 1994, 2005). In tandem with these developments, in migration scholarship, a number of transnationalism scholars emphasized the situatedness of transnational dynamics in particular places and the importance of these places for transnational lives (Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Levitt and de la Dehesa 2017). More recently, migration scholars have begun to recognize the importance of mobility in producing place (e.g., Gregorič Bon and Repič 2016; Jefferson, Turner, and Jensen 2019; Lems and Tošić 2019; Charmillot and Dahinden 2021).

These debates paved the way for acknowledging how people on the move engage in place-making. Although place-making is often used interchangeably with emplacement, referring to rebuilding livelihoods and social belonging (Glick Schiller and Ċaglar 2016: 130) as well as social recognition (Lems 2018: 16), in this volume, as elaborated below, we also incorporate possible conflictive dimensions that may be better captured by the term "place-making." Castillo (2014: 244) provides a useful definition of place-making as "a process [that] transforms space into familiar places and generates personal attachments and commitments—it is often used as a survival strategy and as a tool to unveil opportunities in a new place." Everyday place-making is thus both material and affective (Ballinger 2012: 392; Lems 2016) and results in people leaving traces in the places they cross (Cantor 2014; Marcelino and Farahi 2011; Pelican 2014). They encounter, dwell in, and give meaning to place; they position themselves in it, appropriating and thereby transforming it (Escobar 2010; Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2016; Vogt 2013).

Almost four decades of anthropological and geographical thought and migration scholarship has thus given us a wealth of insight about the open character of place and its defining role in people's sense of who they are or aspire to be (Lems 2018). It is important to note here that the different characterizations of place that have been developed over time have two things in common: they point to both its shifting and its anchoring qualities. Place evolves, yet it has the capacity to settle people's lives. At the same time, a place may *un*settle lives, when it changes unrecognizably, or when it is inhospitable, urging people to find new footing elsewhere.

Considering that place-making does not refer to fixed positions but to ongoing struggles for access (Bjarnesen and Vigh 2016: 14; Feld and Basso 1996; Malkki 1995: 516), "producing and maintaining a more or less pre-

carious sense of place in a contested environment" (Turton 2005: 265), carving out place in a migration context may be fleeting or transient and may involve different localities. At the same time, transience and liminality may become permanent states of being or characteristics of a place. On transit migration, Marcelino and Farahi note how migrants' "permanence is perhaps one of the notable realities the term 'transit' is bypassing" (2011: 844). Similar situations of temporariness and their permanence have been addressed in a number of transnational and urban studies (on itinerant traders and labor migrants, see Castillo 2014; Pelican 2014) as well as displacement studies (on refugee settlements, see Malkki 1995), but not for the along-the-way and the out-of-the-way place.

On the Out-of-the-Way Place

How, then, do we theorize places that may be significant from one perspective but perhaps not from others? How do we approach the production and transformation of these places and their entanglement with people passing through? And how do we research how migrants inscribe their own meanings into places that might be occupied, named, and claimed by a range of other actors? In an early piece that was originally written against the core-periphery binary of globalization research, Anna Tsing (1994) introduced the notion of the "out-of-the-way place." With this term, she criticized the nostalgic ascription of a special status to places that were depicted as pristine, stable, and "different" and thus opposed a cosmopolitan, hybrid, and dialogical modernity. With her work on the deep historic entanglement of spaces across the globe, she argued that ideas of "marginality" and "remoteness" need to be understood as matters of perspectivity.

Although Tsing's interest in "zones of unpredictability at the edges of discursive stability" (Tsing 2005: 279) points to the importance of questioning taken-for-granted categories and research foci, we argue that what is considered "the margin," "remote," or "peripheral" is more than a vantage point. It has tangible consequences for the positioning of places and people and their place-making efforts. This becomes clear in Saxer and Andersson's introduction to a recent special issue about the "return of remoteness" (2019). Not unlike Tsing, these authors make the case for seeing remoteness as something that is constructed, not given. Building on Ardener (2012 [1987]) and Harms et al. (2014), they start from a notion of remoteness as "a structural relationship of social distancing" (Saxer and Andersson 2019: 141). In addition to emphasizing its relationality, the authors aim to historicize remoteness with specific reference to shifting global (dis)connectivity and geopolitics. They set out to investigate the processes behind defining what is remote, and the power relations involved, conclud-

ing that the making of remoteness is culturally, economically, and politically productive (2019: 144). What is considered remote is therefore central to global hierarchies (2019: 152).

It follows that studying sites of "marginality" or "remoteness" does not imply studying outside or beyond configurations of power. In their seminal work *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, Das and Poole (2004) make it clear that forms of illegibility, partial belonging, and disorder that seem to inhabit the margins of the state constitute its necessary condition as a theoretical and political object. Disconnection and exclusion need to be understood as necessarily constituting hegemonic power itself.

Ideas of (dis)connectivity and remoteness are also central to people's sense of place. This becomes clear in Charmillot and Dahinden's work (2021), which, in exploring the production of community boundaries and perceptions of membership in the Swiss Alps, considers multiple dimensions of mobility for understanding how a sense of peripherality comes into being. According to their understanding of "emplaced peripheralisation" (2021: 2), a sense of peripherality can take many forms (geographic, demographic, economic) and may coexist with an actual firm embeddedness in regional and international mobilities, connections, and fields. Hence, a peripheral sense of place is intimately related to the im/mobilities that are part of it and people's place-making is shaped by this relative positioning.

Together, these authors, writing from very different contexts and disciplinary perspectives, point to the embedded character of supposedly out-of-the-way places. A place may be removed geographically and imaginatively from traditional fields of power, but it can be central to, for example, cross-border economies of smuggling, or the perception and construction of the self and identity. Moreover, the place-making that happens in these places and co-constitutes each as a place can figure centrally in the experiences, memories, or future orientations of people on the move.

(Un)settling Place

The contributions to this volume cover a wide range of along- and out-of-the-way places, places that certainly could be considered remote, marginal, or peripheral from a hegemonic perspective but that exemplify their significance and centrality for the understanding of the mobility processes, actors' subjectivities, and newly emerging social relationships to be explored in this volume. In keeping with our effort to move beyond singularity, these contributions make use of a rich variety of empirical and theoretical tools to engage with the co-constitutive relationship between place and im/mobility. Wendy Vogt, to start with, in her chapter "Etched into Place: Communities

of Knowledge, Memory, and History-Making along Migrant Trajectories" takes us to places off the beaten track, as she calls it, to Mexican landscapes of transit, to the roads, train routes, footpaths, and rural transit towns—but also migrant neighborhoods or tourist zones—that people on the move pass through. Through the traces and residues migrants leave behind, Vogt brings to light questions of presence, absence, and memories that store the journeys and struggles of people who have already departed. In these settings, as she shows, the accumulation of practices of mobility are bound up with place-making and survival in the long run. Such accumulation also figures clearly in the chapter "Emplacing Arrivals: The Infrastructural Accommodation of Migratory Difference in Urban West Africa," where Michael Stasik introduces us to Accra's central bus station and the key capacity of this urban infrastructure to facilitate exchange and emplacement under permanent conditions of arrival. He follows his interlocutors' distinction between old and new arrivals to foreground the affordances of an infrastructure that, from an outsider's perspective, may be merely a place to pass through with a poor reputation. Just like the bus station, which can ultimately be understood as a site of manifold encounters across social difference allowing one to navigate the experiences of unfamiliarity and reorientation, the gym, presented in Noelle Brigden's chapter, "Gym Mobilities: Shaping Bodies and Lifting Community at the Edges of San Salvador," may, at first sight, be seen as a mundane and apolitical space. As her ethnography makes clear, however, this fitness space in a stigmatized neighborhood of San Salvador, which extends its transnational ties to communities in Los Angeles, supports collective attempts to transcend socioeconomic marginalization, continuing animosity and accusations of criminality, especially in the aftermath of internal displacement due to civil war and other disasters.

While Brigden, in the latter part of her chapter, compares the gym's significance for the creation of alternative communities with that of a sanctuary, this notion is even more central in Friederike Eichner's chapter, "A Place in the Making: Sheltering Unaccompanied Minors and the Limits of a 'Safe Haven.'" In her account of a reception center for unaccompanied minors in an eastern German municipality, she contrasts the (assumably well-intended) ideas, desires, and rules of the organizing welfare organization with the diverging perceptions of the young asylum seekers who refuse to understand this shelter as a welcoming home. Although the symbolism and material infrastructure of such a shelter-in-the-making and a courtroom differ significantly, the place Lirio Gutiérrez Rivera presents in her chapter, "Strategic Place-Making in US Immigration Courts: The Role of Migration Attorneys, Expert Witnesses, and Place Narratives in Asylum Cases," also attests to potentially fraught experiences of place-making, as multiple actors are involved in developing a common set of courtroom

rules to be imposed on migrating subjects. This imposition not only makes the courtroom a key site in migrant journeys but also requires narrative and imaginary references to "place," understood as a painful loss experienced earlier through the violent process of displacement, serving as a meaningful and at times even strategic momentum in asylum procedures. In her chapter "Hesitant Place-Making: Dwellings and Avoidances in a Popular Mall in Argentina," Franziska Reiffen tackles other often-disregarded contexts of place-making—those of consumption. In a shopping mall in Buenos Aires, long-term city dwellers, recent arrivals, and those who just pass by socialize and forge their—albeit provisionary or punctuated—relations. While her chapter highlights the openness, fluidity and momentariness of place-making, a radical absence of place, as a site of productive encounters, features prominently in Antje Missbach and Gerhard Hoffstaedter's chapter, "Survival and Deferred Place-Making at Sea: Onboard Socialities of Vietnamese and Rohingya Boatpeople," as they examine a hampered process of place-making in the hostile or even dangerous maritime environment of refugee vessels.

Exploring further the question of how a sense of place can come into being in contexts of highly differentiated mobility in the first place, Joris Schapendonk and Tine Davids in their chapter, "Place Acrobatics: Re-envisioning Mobility-Place Relations along Migrant Trajectories," invite us to consider places like a shelter in Mexico or a street-vending spot in Rome, which are created—or inscribed with meaning—through the place-making processes of mobile actors who target and dismiss, balance and reconsider, value or reject places along their fragmented journeys. Finally, that places are not only forged through movement but are also part of a historically embedded political ecology becomes evident in Georgina Ramsay's chapter, "The Political Ecology of Displaced Place-Making," as she traces the ecologies of place-making of Congolese refugees from a tiny garden at the outskirts of Kampala, to their food habits at their place of resettlement in Australia. Through this intertwinement of history and ecology she manages to capture a much broader constellation of ongoing and interrupted place-making and, ultimately, processes of dis- and emplacement. Together, by highlighting often marginalized or otherwise forgotten places amid mobility, the contributions to this volume bring out aspects of place-making that complicate clear beginnings and endings of migrant trajectories and that address persistent global inequalities as well as people's situated resistance to these inequalities. In the afterword provided by Annika Lems, the contributions constitute "an archive of the often-overlooked stories, histories, and experiences of movement and interconnection making up such 'out-of-the-way' places," showing how people's mobility is linked to the enabling and limiting particularities of place-in-the-making. As will become

clear in the next sections, we can further distinguish the contributions by the insights in emergent social ties, temporalities, and materialities they reveal.

Socialities and Sociabilities

Numerous authors have emphasized the importance of social relationships that come into being along migrant trajectories (El-Shaarawi and Razsa 2018; Schapendonk 2012; Vogt 2018; Brigden 2018). The experience, meaning, and memories of a place come about through actors who share and accompany moments of migrant journeys and who eventually support or deny access and interaction. These can be people who are part of one's own ethnic group, fellow travelers, or strangers who become trusted friends over time, but they can also be perceived as different, foreign, or hostile, just like the places they stand for. Arguing against a simple distinction between functional relations based on alliances and coalition, on the one hand, and affective, friendly or respectful relations, on the other, the variety of constellations coming together in this volume illuminate how new social relationships emerge in moments of tentative, often fragile, and possibly skeptical or even violent situations of place-based encounter. How do these processes of (denied) access and integration impact on the perception and classification of places and social relationships? Here we are interested in exploring the "domains of commonality," as Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2016: 18) name it. That is, to understand what kind of social relationships, frictions, and conflicts are formed and maintained between people on the move and between them and the diversity of actors they encounter along the way. Glick Schiller and Çağlar affirm that sociality "denotes the entire field within which individuals are embedded in a matrix of relationships with others" (2016: 3), urging us to explore how encounters, identities, and socialities are understood and embedded in these places. Moreover, the contributions compiled here explore how sociabilities—that is, the social relations emerging from a "mutual sense of being human" (2016: 3)—are created in moments of brief contact, in pragmatic forms of mutual support and competition, or rather in more profound encounters and sustainable relationships that continue after leaving a certain place.

Of particular interest is certainly the transformative potential of relationships that is linked to certain place-making processes, for example, when people struggle for getting access to support and care, be it in informal or in institutionalized settings, or when they integrate their lives into a given place's rules and routines such as those of urban markets, migrant shelters, governmental institutions, or "safe houses," even if only temporarily. A key example in this regard is Stasik's chapter on Accra's central bus station, in which mobility is taken as the norm and the categorical distinction be-

tween locals and foreigners, or non-migrants and migrants, is blurred. As he shows, an emphasis on commonality over difference was decisive to the observed social practices and the emerging relationships. In comparable ways, the community gym at the edges of San Salvador explored by Brigden transcends the differences between people from the surrounding neighborhoods, their genders, ages, and abilities. Repairing the "social fabric," despite place-stigma, as she calls it, under conditions of violence, criminalization, and out-migration, appears as a clear characteristic of this site.

Although also home to internal differentiation and exclusion, these are clearly places of connectivity, interaction, and support—yet people on the move can also encounter controlling, deterring, or even violent interactions. Unlike a range of earlier scholarship, which mainly underlined the supportive quality of social relationships along migrant trajectories, the chapters included here move beyond a normative dimension and explore more openly how different types of social encounters are part and parcel of place-making processes, in turn informing people's (im)mobilities. This becomes clear in Reiffen's chapter on the momentary dwellings in the popular mall, in which relational dynamics of reliability and care are as obvious as techniques of avoidance and noncommitment. The most sobering case is certainly contributed by Missbach and Hoffstaedter, whose examination of forced socialities on board refugee vessels show the constraints of these usually involuntary social encounters. However, other cases provide more ambivalent insights. Shelters for instance, crucial and intrinsic components of the international migration regime that appear in the chapters by Eichner, Vogt, and Schapendonk and Davids, are imagined as places of protection and relief. However, as Vogt shows in her chapter, shelter life can also be shaped by the experience of violence and by security concerns that are detrimental to the well-being of both staff and guests. In Eichner's chapter on the fragile encounters between three minors and a shelter's staff, the welfare organization's intention to provide a "safe haven" is contradicted by the youth's search for freedom and autonomy. Under circumstances of unequal mobility, and largely contradicting institutionalized practices of sedentariness, categorization, and containment (Drotbohm and Winters 2020), the nonbinding qualities of open places and even spatial instability can be the preferred mode of daily existence.

Temporal Regimes and Rhythms

Not only social relationships and the shape they take as they are formed through dwelling in, experiencing, and imagining place but also the temporal dimensions of a place contribute to differences between people either converging or becoming manifest. Perceptions of time and speed as well

as place-based experiences of waiting or accelerating are part of complex and shifting processes of social encounters and contribute to the hierarchization of differentially situated actors (Amit and Salazar 2020; Bendixen and Eriksen 2018; Jacobsen, Karlsen and Khosravi 2020; Ramsay 2017). In ports, neighborhoods, and bus stations, in the reception halls of NGOs and providers of legal or medical assistance, the difference between those who reached a place earlier and more recently can become manifest in different sociospatial and temporal (self-)positionings. The uncertainties of recent arrivals can be felt in hesitation, observation, and waiting, and those who already know the place set themselves apart through their already developed rhythms and routines. Most importantly, these sites of constant arrival and departure incorporate accumulated knowledge, storing the experiences and memories, the strategies of survival and mobility, of care and comfort of those passing through, who wait for their strength to return, their papers to be processed, or their allies to arrive, as Vogt's and Stasik's chapters illuminate so clearly.

Waiting certainly is one of the key temporal routines along the way. In her work on internally displaced Georgians from Abkhazia, Cathrine Brun explores multiple dimensions of waiting that can become indicators of different kinds of social status and represent the framework of different persons' identities (Brun 2015: 23). At the same time, as Katerina Rozakou convincingly shows in her work on the Greek migration regime, through the ubiquitous and "violent reconfigurations of the border," not only waiting but also radical acceleration can mean the loss of control over time (Rozakou 2020: 35). Especially in institutionalized contexts, the temporal rhythms imposed by the state or an organization—clock time measuring when to appear and when to leave, imposed routines of acceleration or deceleration—can be felt as a form of dominance, control, or even violence (Ramsay 2017), as the refusal articulated by the young asylum seekers in Eichner's chapter reveals. Barber and Lem speak of "discrepant temporalities" (Barber and Lem 2018: 4) that highlight the inconsistencies and disjunctive time scales in the lives of migrants who are expected to submit themselves under unfamiliar temporal regimes. Yet, as Lems argues in her afterword to this volume, part of the particular and unequal temporalities of these places is also the "stubbornness" people invest. Spending shared time at the gym, on a bench or under a beautiful tree in the backyard of a migrant shelter, as Brigden's, Reiffen's and Vogt's chapters show, can generate a sense of agency, hope, and communality that transcends the confinements and burdens of daily life.

Another temporal dimension of out-of-the-way places explored in this volume is the reference to the past, especially under conditions of displacement, loss, and exile. Ramsay's interlocutors unmistakably expressed their

sense of alienation due to a dislocation from the social and material conditions of the life they had lived before. In this case, it is the afterlives of colonialism and the continuation of extractive industries in the postcolonial present that produce the rupture with one's chosen place. The past also becomes inscribed—or etched, as Vogt names it so tellingly—into these places, as people who pass through dwell in and engage with place, leaving social and material traces, transforming the landscape permanently.

At the same time, however, we are aware of the risk of reinforcing a logic of otherness that is attached to a particular spatiotemporal framing of both migration and the figure of the "migrant other" as it has been (re-)produced particularly in migration studies (Çağlar 2016; Ramsay 2019). Place-based temporal aspects, such as those related to a linear conception of time and an interpretation of migration processes as relating to a temporary "crisis," often contribute to migrant othering and a type of categorization that may not coincide with the experiences, concerns, and ambitions of people on the move (Drotbohm and Winters 2020). Several chapters in our volume point toward alternative spatiotemporal framings that resist common categories. The chapter by Schapendonk and Davids reveals intersecting temporalities and rhythms of people who come together and share places, who inscribe them with meaning albeit from different power positions. Stasik's chapter highlights different temporalities coming together at Accra's main bus station, where earlier arrivals interact with newcomers and defy common migrant categorization. In Gutiérrez Rivera's chapter we get insights into an imposed chronological order of events that needs to be understood as a requirement of an acceptable story that eventually supports the chance of obtaining asylum. Exploring such "nooks and crannies of a globalized world order," as Lems describes it in her afterword, thus allows us to explore different qualities, entanglements, and tangible implications of time structures along these routes.

Materialities and Infrastructures

Place not only becomes a place through situated social relationships and the rhythms that are imposed, accommodated, and resisted but also through the meanings that people attach to it (Agnew and Duncan 2014 [1989]; Cresswell 2013; Geertz 1996). This becomes especially clear through the sites and things that are key to people on the move: from the landscapes of deserts, jungles, and seas to the very concrete boats, buses, trains, rented rooms, shelters, and the papers and devices that people make use of. In their recently published volume, Lauser et al. (2022) point to how things interact with people on the move, providing them with new possibilities of agency, perception, and knowledge. Following Xiang and Lindquist (2014)

as well as Kleist and Bjarnesen (2019), we see these sites and things as part of "migrant infrastructures" that enable, frustrate and facilitate mobilities through material, social, environmental, institutional, and technological structures. We consider it important to include the mediating powers of these materialities into our understanding of place-making along-the-way, as they have a considerable impact on how migrant mobilities achieve significance, legitimacy, and value, and on experiences of traveling.

In his seminal work on the Sonoran Desert of Arizona, where thousands of migrants annually attempt to cross the border from Mexico into the United States, Jason De León (2015) vividly exposes how this desert is not a neutral space to pass through. Rather, it figures as an unbearably dry and killing ally of US border-control policies and agents. Inevitably, it invites migrants to develop devices that may improve their chances of comfort and survival, devices that are subsequently abandoned, such as special water bottles, shoe soles, and shrines. Similar meanings of materiality can also be found elsewhere, for example, in the "remote" terrain of the Darién Gap, an extensive swath of jungle on the border between Colombia and Panama (Drotbohm and Winters 2020: 13–15). In different ways, the Darién Gap may be considered an out-of-the-way place, illustrated by the fact that it is here where the Pan-American Highway, which stretches from Alaska to South America, is interrupted. At the same time, this jungle has become a key witness and accomplice to migrants who try to cross the dense rainforest and rugged mountain peaks from Colombia to Panama on their way north, with its dangers of deadly animal species, river currents, and criminal groups. The emergent migrant infrastructures that arise for guiding and misguiding these migrants, as well as the belongings and footprints they leave behind, contribute to people's lived experiences and multifaceted perceptions of place amid mobility. The little stony statue in Annika Lems's home village (Lems, in this volume), similarly, not only displays a certain stubbornness to the winds on this path leading up to the mountain ridge but also provides orientation and possibly even an anchorage in times of rupture and friction.

In our volume, a range of unexpected and somehow unlikely materialities comes together to allow for solidarity and community building among and with people on the move. It is the rusty, noisy, pounding bus station that allows people to come to rest (Stasik). It is the loud music, the red walls, and the imitated but coveted brand products that attract urban city dwellers in Buenos Aires's mall (Reiffen). It is the formal and symbolically ostentatious courtroom where migrants and refugees, shoulder to shoulder with their lawyers, defend their claims to belonging (Gutiérrez Rivera). And it is the small, wind-broken boats and their human-hostile maritime environment—

emblematic of the ephemerality of transit—that provide people with the hope for safe journeys (Missbach and Hoffstaedter).

The mural, noted by Vogt during one of her recent field trips, is probably one of the most impressive examples for how meaning-making en route becomes materialized. This wall is composed of a grid of white crosses on a rust-colored background, each cross carrying the name of a migrant who has gone missing. Such reminders of absences, pinned as posters on the walls of bus stations, acquire political and symbolic meaning, not only for people on the move but also for the communities they engage with along the way and for their (international) allies. Materialities highlighting the gaps and voids of earlier presences are also unearthed through the precious minerals that are part of the global extractive industries contributing to loss, war, and displacement in the DRC, clearly shown in Ramsay's chapter. At the same time, she also makes clear how the attachment to our (rebuilt) ecological surroundings, such as the gardens, plants, and food cherished by Congolese refugees for continuing vital, and viable, relationships, despite the painful experience of displacement, can constitute opportunities for imagining one's future. When Brigden explores not only the informal passports that provide access to the gym in San Salvador but also the concrete wall that separates one community from another, we get a glimpse of the sense of solidarity that emerges through the shared space of dumbbells and fitness machines, creating connected bodies that transcend social boundaries normally so prevalent in these neighborhoods. Thus, all these materialities, resources, and infrastructures are part and parcel of broader place-making processes that lend themselves well for challenging fixed notions about the relevance of particular places and the meaning that becomes materialized en route and in transnational fields.

An Unsettling Understanding of (Un)settled Place-Making

The contributions to our volume point out that the ambiguous relationships, temporalities, and materialities that people encounter and mold along-the-way are inscribed with differentiating power. They not only illustrate the steering and controlling power of states, governments, and their allies but also the powerful positions of other actors who inhabit these routes and places. People and the ways they enact and experience im/mobility differ in their skills, their material or financial resources, legal status, biographical preconditions, and other characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, class, or age. These differences have affective and material implications for the ways places are made and people are positioned in it.

Focusing on how differently situated people make sense of places that are considered and constructed as along-the-way and out-of-the-way, and the tangible effects of these efforts, not only contributes to de-essentializing the study of people on the move and its accompanying sociospatial hierarchies; it also allows us to highlight aspects of place-making that have so far remained sidelined. As place-making always builds on existing structures of exclusion and privilege, its effects can be contradictory, controversial, precarious, exclusionary, even xenophobic. Dwelling in place, turning it into something familiar, making use of it to survive and get ahead, making it into an archive of migrant agency, appropriating and transforming it can be redemptive but can also be resisted. It can amount to feelings of recognition and acceptance, as well as to new dynamics of alienation. This unsettling understanding of place-making reveals how place and displacement are produced. The contributions to our volume document people contesting marginalization in their daily lives, be it through migrating, fleeing, or staying put. Through centering the along- and out-of-the-way, we are able to nuance what place-making entails, simultaneously substantiating how place amid mobility has not only open and anchoring but also unsettling qualities.

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CHAPTER
1

Etched into Place

Communities of Knowledge, Memory, and History-Making along Migrant Trajectories

Wendy A. Vogt

In the backyard of a migrant shelter in Oaxaca, Mexico, where I worked for a year conducting fieldwork with Central American migrants, there was a coffee tree that produced stunning bright red "cherries" to be harvested. The tree was not visible from the street or the front of the shelter where the offices, living room, and kitchen were located, where much of the official business happened, but in the back near the dormitories and outdoor wash basin, where the people who passed through spent most of their time—resting, recovering, planning, preparing, waiting—but also where they spent hours just being there, together. Around the coffee tree and other fruit trees people socialized, sharing information about where they'd been and where they were going. It was where they made connections, in this place, this little orchard of quiet solidarities. It was here also where people shared stories of the abuses they suffered and witnessed and where rumors, suspicions, and deceit also circulated just below the surface. And while at any one time there might only be a dozen or so people staying at the shelter, there were physical traces of migrants, present and past, all around. A colorful array of shirts and pants of all sizes hung on the clotheslines that stretched across the yard. Sprinkled throughout the shelter were art and handicrafts—a mural depicting migrant journeys to the United States, miniature cricket sculptures made from reeds, airplanes made from aluminum soda cans, a crocheted cozy for the teapot in the kitchen—that migrants had made

while waiting. There were small carvings in the stumps and trunks of trees—someone's initials, a tiny Guatemalan flag. On the washing station were the names of migrants, dates, and various hometowns in Central America, as well as lines from the Lord's prayer, etched directly into the concrete. And right in the middle of the washing station were the words "FOREVER REMEMBER" in all capital letters written in English. As I sat in the yard, I would stare at those words. Who wrote them and who were they written for? What or whom did their author hope would be remembered? At first, I saw them as gifts and messages to future migrants, people they will likely never meet yet are still connected to across the spatiotemporal planes of transit. But more than as words of guidance or material markers of identity and solidarity, I began to see these markings as part of the informal archive of the shelter, a way for migrants to actively document their presence and their existence in these places, to not be disappeared. They become part of that place as that place has become part of them; their absences continue to have presence.

As I meditated on these physical traces, I started thinking about the concept of etchings in relation to the socialities of transit life. In printmaking, etching is a medium of art. The intaglio method of printmaking is when a metal plate is etched or incised with a design or image that is then placed in a chemical solution and removed to reveal the drawn image. It is then filled with ink, so that the ink fills the valleys of the etched lines (this is the opposite of a relief print where the ink touches and makes an image of everything that is not engraved), which is then pressed and transferred to paper, revealing the etching. Like etched art and the physical etchings left in shelters and along train tracks and other spaces of transit, I began to think about etchings as a metaphor for the larger journeys that migrants make across transit landscapes, cutting, carving into social life of places along the way, which are filled not with ink but with social ties, knowledge, and memories. Places like migrant shelters are depots that serve as crucial platforms for knowledge-sharing and solidarity for people on the move, but they also become repositories of accumulated experience and knowledge.

Through a metaphor of etchings, this chapter conceptually explores the linkages between movement, connection, history, and place-making within migrant shelters and other often invisible "along-the-way" places (see the introduction in this volume), as well as places that may be removed from journeys themselves but reflect their ripple effects in the lives and actions of families, activists, and communities. It examines how the places that migrants move through are not only embedded within historical forms of exclusion but are also constantly being remade—or etched—in relation to changing contexts of violence, securitization, humanitarianism, and capitalism. To use the metaphor of etching we might think first and foremost

of borders themselves, the ways steel and concrete walls and fences have been constructed and etched into the ground dividing nations, peoples, Indigenous lands, and natural ecosystems. This would be an example of how the state enforcement regimes that govern mobility—and their related economies—are etched into place as the physical and symbolic manifestations of deterrence and border spectacle, which have clear consequences on people's lives.

But what if we were to think beyond the semipermanent physical markers that separate nations to the more everyday landscapes of mobility where place-making occurs? What are the etchings made by social actors—migrants, authorities, facilitators, criminals, residents, aid workers, families, and activists—and how, through everyday activities and actions, do they both refigure and are refigured by place, leaving us with a bigger picture, what I have now come to think about as transit landscapes, in both the material and social senses? Can mobility itself be characterized as a sociopolitical movement with its own logics or potentially an act of creative resistance against borders and bordering practices (Walters 2006; Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013; Ataç, Rygiel and Stierl 2016)? Or, as Noelle Brigden (2018) argues, is it more productive to think of migrant routes as spaces of refusal, where, through their ever-changing and improvised practices and tactics, migrants generate new ways of seeing, knowing, and being that challenge the legitimacy of the state? Either way, what are the implications of these processes on local places? How do etchings travel across spatial and temporal fields, through emerging social relations and connections, but also back to people's families and communities? I argue that, beyond physical markings, it is the social connections and encounters between and among mobile and immobile actors, and the stories and memories they create and leave behind, that also become etched into particular places as repositories of knowledge. Places like migrant shelters become archives of sorts along migration trajectories, where knowledge may then be harnessed by both migrants and those who profit from them (Brigden 2018), in transformative ways.

The co-constructive processes of place-making and strategies of mobility and survival that emerge across transit landscapes are dynamic, and in some cases unstable, but they may also act as forms of refusal, resistance and beacons for potential futures (McGranahan 2016). Moreover, in contexts of violence, migrant death, and disappearance, place is intimately bound with memory, where absences and losses have continued presence (Lems 2016), where ghosts haunt everyday spaces (Gordon 1997) and where families, activists, and migrants practice radical acts of remembering. In this way we see how memories are central to place-making practices and creating a "sense of place" across migration landscapes (Basso 1996; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). Remembering, along with imagining—two practices at

the very heart of migration—become central to the collective making of migrant journeys as place worlds and, as I argue, sites of history. Migrants are rarely included as actors of history, and in fact are often "imperceptible to history" (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013). But by tracing the physical and social etchings, communities of knowledge, hauntings, and collective acts of memory that emerge across the temporal and spatial dimensions of migration landscapes, we may develop a deeper understanding of the production and politics of history along migrant journeys and the ways migrants themselves are not victims of history but history-makers.

To explore these themes, this chapter brings together ethnographic insights from research conducted across multiple migration landscapes in the Americas—primarily from my long-term work in migrant shelters along Central American transit routes in southern Mexico, but also with families of missing migrants (Vogt 2018). Rather than focusing on one case study, I hope that the multisitedness of these examples illuminates the divergent yet interconnected forms of place-making between and across borders and spaces of transit. In doing so, I highlight the visible and less visible markings that migrants leave in local places, the metaphorical valleys they leave behind, and perhaps more interestingly the residual effects of these valleys, these etchings in social spaces and relations well beyond their trajectories. And while much of this is focused on traces, material or otherwise, it will also consider the absences and silences of place, of the ways peoples and histories become effaced from landscapes, and yet how they may even still have presence in a more metaphysical sense, through various forms of haunting and memory-work.

As such, this chapter examines several dimensions of place-making along and beyond migrant trajectories through a lens of etchings. It begins with a discussion on place-making and the production of knowledge and history in migration studies. It then examines the relations between place and transit, presence and absence, displacement/emplacement through observations at migrant shelters. Just as the places we have lived or passed through can have "inescapable presence" and importance in people's lives in an existential sense (Lems 2016), the people who pass through places may also have continued presence once they leave. That is, migrants do not travel in a void but leave traces and thus transform the places they move through (Brigden 2018; Drotbohm and Winters 2021). Moreover, as I discuss in the final sections of the chapter, their presence may even be felt not just through their physical absence but through their total absence, their disappearance. The ghostly presence of disappeared migrants along migrant trajectories is not just a residual reminder of human life and loss but one actively cultivated and made visible through the place-making strategies of local actors and families of the missing in places beyond the journey itself. Finally, the chap-

ter considers the ethical dimensions of the ways we, as migration scholars, may also create etchings through our work as we witness and accompany migrants, produce and reproduce certain types of knowledge, and commit to embodied forms of solidarity.

Movements, Socialities, and Place

In much of the migration literature on transit journeys there is a push to destabilize and complicate the idea of migrant trajectories as neat, rational, linear, progressive. Instead, scholars have worked to show how migrant trajectories and journeys are multidirectional and dynamic, that they can be serendipitous, improvised, and chaotic (Collyer et al. 2014; Mainwaring and Brigden 2016; Phillips and Missbach 2017; Schapendonk, Bolay, and Dahinden 2020; Drotbohm and Winters 2021). They do not always end in arrival to a predetermined location, and migrants may spend indeterminate amounts of time in the often liminal spaces between home and destination. This work is important to demonstrate the multiple encounters, entanglements, decisions, and unexpected realities that make up individual journeys, allowing us to have a more nuanced and complex understanding of migrant trajectories and transit lives.

At the same time, when we move beyond the scale of the individual, we begin to see a more complex system made up of places, patterns of movement, daily rhythms, shared experiences, and collective forms of knowledge and solidarity. To return to the metaphor of etchings, if we think about each migrant's trajectory as a scratch or a line on the same plate of metal, what happens when these lines intersect? When we zoom out—what is the image or design that is revealed? As Drotbohm and Winters ask in their introduction, how do the repeated movements and social encounters that occur along migrant journeys become embedded, or etched into place, even when the conditions around them are in constant flux?

I conceptualize the journey as both the physical and material landscapes people move through, made up of roads, train lines, transit sites, shelters, hospitals, deserts, urban neighborhoods, and borderlands, as well as the more abstract and social landscapes that imbue migrant journeys, which are equally critical to strategies of mobility and the making of place. Geographers and anthropologists have analyzed place not as something bounded or static but as something dynamic. For Doreen Massey, places are "constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus"; they are "articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings"; "places are processes, too" (Massey 1991). Inherently social, and thus historical, Massey de-

scribed space "like a pincushion with a million stories in it" (Massey 2013). Like Massey, Tim Ingold sees place as composed of "knots of stories" created by the intersecting paths of people, whom he calls wayfarers in an ever-dynamic social "meshwork" (Ingold 2011). His description destabilizes the dichotomy that is so common in migration literature between mobile and immobile subjects or migrants and locals/residents. Rather than positioning migrants as moving and locals as place-bound, Ingold's description allows us to see all people as wayfarers moving between and across places, shaping one another's lives and co-constructing place, albeit in unequal ways within the regimes of mobility. Moreover, these movements produce knowledge, not derived from locations but "forged in movement," "in the passage from place to place and the changing horizons along the way" (Ingold 2011). Such an approach works to de-exceptionalize both mobility and sedentarism in transit and migration studies (Schapendonk, Bolay, and Dahinden 2020) and, as Schapendonk and Davids do through their concept of "place acrobatics," instead interrogate the complex relationships between movement and place and the multiple meanings that emerge from them (Schapendonk and Davids in this volume). Moreover, as I discuss later in the chapter, the idea of a transit meshwork is useful for understanding the ways multiple actors—migrants, residents, shelter workers, security forces, activists—co-produce place and knowledge, but also the ways memories and ghosts, the absences of social life, may still have presence through place-making processes.

As we think about both the literal and metaphorical nature of place, scholars have also worked to de-essentialize ideas of displacement and emplacement with physical space. As Heath Cabot and Georgina Ramsay argue, displacement is not solely about wars or poverty or the physical act of migration but also about the alienating effects and existential crises wrought by global capitalism that transcend categories of uprooted/rooted, mobile/immobile, migrant/citizen (Cabot and Ramsay 2021). Displacement can be experienced by migrants and refugees just as it can be experienced by war veterans, homeless populations, and other groups that live precarious lives where they are deemed disposable and dehumanized within the "capitalist order of things" (Ramsay 2021). Similarly, scholars have worked to dispel ideas of emplacement as solely connected to physical space, and instead examine the political, economic, social, and existential dimensions of emplacement as a sense of belonging and meaning derived from value in social worlds—to be seen and heard (Bjarnesen and Vigh 2016; Lems 2016; Cabot and Ramsay 2021), and as I argue, to be remembered.

The concept of etchings thus builds on these multiple understandings of place and displacement, seeing it both in a tangible and material sense that people move through, as well as a more abstract and social sense, through

the relations, stories, memories, and knowledge that accumulate in place and may be central to place-making strategies along and beyond migrant trajectories. Both the phenomenological and the tangible dimensions of place are crucial in the lives of displaced people, be it in existential ways or connections to the past, but also as they move (Drotbohm and Winters 2021; Schapendonk and Davids in this volume). As Annika Lems writes, people on the move "do not move through an indifferent space. Rather, they move through places—and in moving through shape them and are in turn shaped by them" (Lems 2016: 320). Displacement and emplacement coexist in the contemporary world and in people's lived experiences, and place-making and emplacement may involve both feelings of existential disconnect and connection.

They Are the Center: Migrants as History-Makers

One of my closest interlocuters during fieldwork conducted between 2007 and 2013 was Padre Alejandro Solalinde, arguably the most well-known (and controversial) migrant rights defender in Mexico, whose efforts were so influential in changing Mexico's outdated immigration law that it was dubbed "La Ley Solalinde/The Solalinde Law" in 2011. In one of my later interviews with him, we talked about his own trajectory in founding a migrant shelter and the fact that he and several other priests had started to garner attention and praise due to their work with migrants. During our conversation, Padre Solalinde resisted this hero narrative. He said, "If it weren't for the migrants, we would be nothing. We would be anonymous people, without all the pain and the glory . . . we would have no recognizable merit, they have given us all this. They are the protagonists; they are the center. They are the ones that people must understand are changing history. They changed my history."

I found Solalinde's characterization striking in a context where Central American migrants were so dehumanized and treated as disposable, *los migrantes que no importan* (the migrants that don't matter), as Salvadoran journalist Oscar Martínez poignantly characterized them (Martínez 2010). Yet for Solalinde, migrants were not the disposable surplus of humanity but rather the protagonists in a larger story of global inequality and social change. Not only were they protagonists, but they were also making history. Solalinde's centering of migrants as history-makers resonates with this volume's goal of cultivating a "peripheral vision" in understanding the often-overlooked actors, places, and processes in migration studies.

In much of the migration literature, including my own work, history is most commonly invoked to talk about processes and contexts that propel

people's mobility—the root causes of migration, may it be political or interpersonal violence, economic uncertainty/opportunity, or climate change. History is explanatory and structural; it is seen as external, often originating from states or other dominant powers—it is something that happens to migrants, not something they themselves create. In his classic work, *Europe and the People without History*, anthropologist Eric Wolf encourages scholars to "search out the causes of the present in the past" (Wolf 1982: xv). But more than this, he encourages scholars to challenge the way history is conceived of and written, and especially the ways everyday people are often treated as victims or silent witnesses to the powerful and victorious (see also Trouillot 1997). Instead, Wolf urges us to consider the active histories of those "without history"—peasants, laborers, immigrants, and other marginalized groups. As Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein wrote in a critique of the social sciences, "Do not think only in the short term. Do not believe that only those actors who make noise are the most authentic. There are others who matter but who are silent" (Braudel and Wallerstein 2009: 187). The world's migrants not only have history but, as I argue, actively produce history through their movements, their connections, and their traces. Such a perspective adds a new dimension to calls to historicize migration studies; not only must we place mobilities into historical context to understand why people move, but we may also begin to see migrants as historical actors who are not simply responding to state and structural crises and processes but, through their movements—in multiple senses of the words (El-Shaarawi and Razsa 2019)—reshaping translocal and global landscapes. They do so in coordination with other local actors to produce and share forms of knowledge, infrastructure, economies, and communities in spaces of transit that facilitate the actual movement of people, what scholars have called the "mobile commons" in autonomy of migration literature (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013). Such a perspective reconceptualizes the relationship between migration, history, and place as dynamic, multiscalar, and actively produced from the bottom up.

In this way, the concept of etchings is inspired by a rethinking of migrant journeys and the temporalities of history—the ways we understand the logics, systems, and social processes of transit—not as exceptional crises or as events frozen in the ethnographic present with the timeless other (Fabian 1983) but as accumulations within spatial and social spaces over the longue durée. Braudel and Wallerstein wrote of understanding the slower temporalities, the almost imperceptible changes in social life to truly understand history (Braudel and Wallerstein 2009: 181). They also stressed the importance of paying attention to everyday people. How can ethnographers, whose greatest asset is "being there" in the seemingly mundane everyday of social life, capture the deep historicity that comes with place-making over

the longue durée? A historically attuned ethnographic perspective provides insight into the ways migrant movements and stays, which may be short and frantic, or prolonged and immersive, contribute to place-making along migrant trajectories. It is with such focus and archiving of repeated acts of mobility, of arrivals and departures, of staying awhile, that we may grasp the significance of place along migrant trajectories and migrants and others as history-makers.

Shelters as Archives

Migrant shelters are unique locales along trajectories to examine the ways displacement, place-making, and emplacement coexist. One of the methodological challenges of conducting ethnographic research in migrant shelters and other spaces of transit is that the researcher may only have a few days, or even hours, with their interlocutors. Shelters are, by nature, meant to be temporary spaces of dwelling, marked by a continual cycle of comings and goings through what I have previously characterized as depots (Vogt 2012). And yet, they are also spaces of accumulation, archives if you will, of migrant lives and journeys, of strategies of survival and mobility, of care and comfort, and sometimes of deception and exploitation.

At a surface level, migrants leave physical traces of their presence. At the entrance of the shelter where I worked in Oaxaca there are hundreds of colorfully painted handprints, the unique markings left by migrants symbolizing their shared humanity as they pass through the shelter and the journey. As you go deeper into the shelter, you discover other visual traces, like a mural of a bird in flight carrying a long rope that is threaded through the flags of Central American countries with the question, "Who created borders?" along with more mundane objects like scribbled drawings, used clothing, empty shampoo bottles, and trash.

These accumulations come in physical form through artwork, artifacts, letters, photographs, and engravings left behind in shelters, but also through less tangible forms of knowledge. Through their expertise, experience, and relationships, migrants, shelter workers, and community members make imprints on shelters and collectively constitute them as places (Eichner in this volume). In her work with domestic workers in Hong Kong, Nicole Constable argues that enduring forms of socialities, place-making and solidarities form not through the permanent settlement of workers, but through their continual arrival and claims to collective rights across the longue durée. It is despite the "revolving door of arrival and departure" that domestic workers—and I argue migrants through migrant shelters—create meaningful ties and alliances that have coalesced into enduring social

institutions and organizations over decades. Indeed, it is only through the temporary presences and ever-evolving nature of shelters that knowledge accumulates into a living repository. As such, ethnographic encounters with temporary populations in places like migrant shelters can be conceptualized as samples taken from historical stratum upon which multiple layers of emplacement and sociality are built (Constable 2022: 237). Part of the residual effects of these accumulations is the creation of a sense of place within spaces of transit, including migrant shelters. Sense of place comes from the culling of experience, of what has accrued of lives spent sensing place (Basso 1996: 144). In this way, we may see place-making along journeys not as temporary or ephemeral moments and encounters but as deeper historical processes.

In Mexico, a loosely connected network of nearly one hundred migrant shelters and *comedores* (kitchens) (Ng 2020), most of them operated independently by a mix of religious personnel, local residents, and volunteers, dot the landscape between Mexico's southern and northern borders. Shelters provide humanitarian aid to migrants in need, where migrants receive food, shelter, and medical attention. At the same time, the increasingly securitized architecture of shelters and institutional rules and protocols intended to impose a sense of order also create new forms of control and confinement (Balaguera 2018), insecurity, and exploitation (Vogt 2018). Nevertheless, there are many other social dynamics that further shape people's journeys in tandem with (or sometimes despite) these complex material and institutional structures. Inside shelters people collect and share knowledge, connect with potential guides, and learn strategies of mobility—how to make phone calls or money orders, how to access healthcare, which routes are the safest, which places to avoid, how to pay off criminals, what local customs they must observe, and what norms and language to use to try to avoid detection. Since 2014, shelters have become more permanent spaces of dwelling for asylum seekers filing claims to stay in Mexico, where they receive legal support and guidance. Rather than seeing these tips, strategies, and forms of collective care as natural or inherent, they are in fact based on the accumulation of experiences of people past and present who continuously carve valleys of knowledge into social space. This knowledge is embodied in material objects, messages, and physical traces left by migrants, but also in more ephemeral moments of joy and connection—playing a game of *fútbol*, watching a movie, preparing a favorite hometown dish—such forms of solidarity may appear simple, but they provide sustenance for people as they navigate larger landscapes of risk and violence. Migrants who pass through established shelters, which are often located in some of the most dangerous stretches, know that their presence will, at the very least, be understood, if not welcomed wholeheartedly. The tempo-

ral spaces of waiting are reworked into strategies of survival as individuals assert their agency even within circumstances of violence, constraint, and uncertainty (Hage 2009; Khosravi 2014).

The idea of knowing along-the-way thus resonates deeply with the empirical realities of movement and survival within transit landscapes. Knowledge does not exist in a place a priori; rather, it exists as the sum of the many emerging movements, connections, and knots (Ingold 2011). Through continued arrivals and accumulated knowledge, shelters become archives of experience and connection. Shared knowledge came both from the experience of people who worked in the shelters and through the relations between migrants and shelter workers. Part of my job as a shelter worker was to interview and document the dangers, forms of violence, and risks that newly arrived migrants had recently experienced and pass that information on to other shelters and future groups of migrants, just as they did with us, creating a cycle of shared knowledge among the shelter network. This knowledge helped create mental maps of risk and care along migration trajectories, forming a living archive of knowledge to adapt to changing circumstances.

Beyond this living archive, shelter volunteers also contribute to the sense of place and socialities of migrant shelters in more existential ways. One shelter worker stated:

> The challenge for the *casa*, for the migrant shelter, is to have everything it needs to be able to attend humanely to migrants. Not just a place where they are given a plate of food or a roof, but to give them a place where they can feel heard, where they are heard. A place to be heard on a psychological level, on their loneliness, on the mistreatment they have experienced. Attend to the whole human, not just physically or medically, but also spiritually and morally.

While some of this work is done by priests and spiritual leaders, I found that much of the everyday care work that is grounded in shelters is performed by migrants who are stalled in their own journeys, what Frank-Vitale (2020) has called "stuck in motion," and by local residents with knowledge of the migrant experience. As one priest explained to me, "With the volunteers we have here, the majority have been migrants, who have had that experience and who in some way feel the need to help a little, so it is those people who are helping in this, in this reality that we see." Here the priest is talking not about Central American migrants (though as I discuss later, many migrants do end up staying to work in shelters) but local community members whose lives have in some way been touched by migration, typically as migrants themselves to the United States, or as parents with children who have migrated. For example, during my fieldwork I stayed in the home of a local woman who lived alone because all her children had migrated to the

United States. She spent her time volunteering at the shelter with her church group. One afternoon she hosted a Bible study with about twenty community members, several of whom also volunteered at the shelter. During the closing prayer, we went around in a circle giving each person an opportunity to ask God for help in something. Every single person asked God to protect their loved ones who were in the United States. Through their shared experience and understanding of migration and its tolls on families left behind, these community members had empathy and understanding of what the migrants in transit were experiencing, and could provide expertise and guidance not necessarily on the local tactics and strategies of mobility but on some of the more affective and intimate dimensions of migration, to be away from home and from family. These local residents, along with migrant volunteers, priests, foreign volunteers, and migrants themselves make up the meshwork of migrant shelters, whose stories, knowledge, and presence intertwine and collectively make place.

And while shelter volunteers are often important conduits of knowledge between departed and newly arrived migrants, migrants also developed strategies for communicating with one another. For example, inside one of the shelters where I worked there is a large message board for migrants staying at the shelter to write notes, affirmations, and messages to people they will likely never meet. The board is filled with hand-drawn pictures—a migrant boat off the coast of Honduras, a heart with a bullet hole through it wrapped with a banner that says El Salvador, a drawing of Jesus looking over "La Bestia," the infamous cargo train carrying migrants on top, and the Statue of Liberty in the distance. Some of the messages give practical advice, like recommendations to visit the Doctors without Borders clinic and the psychologist, but most are words of encouragement and statements of faith for future migrants. One states, "We all have the same mission, Central American brothers, keep going and remember that you are never alone." And another, signed by a migrant from Guatemala: "It is hard to leave home because you leave all that you love the most, for example your family. But never forget about God because without his company you will never reach your objective. Don't turn back, have faith and fight for your dreams."

While shelters are critical sites of accumulated knowledge and expertise for migrants in transit, they do not exist in a vacuum (Drotbohm and Winters 2021; Drotbohm and Winters in this volume). On the contrary, shelters are significant and often highly contested places within local communities. Around the world, scholars examine the contested politics of citizen aid and everyday humanitarianism around migrants and refugees (Rozakou 2012; 2017; Sandri 2018; Vogt 2018; Fechter and Schwittay 2019, Guevara González 2022). In Mexico, the presence of shelters is not universally welcomed but fraught within local politics of embrace, distrust, and resistance. On one hand, they are locales where residents may enact forms of care work

and solidarity through hospitality, medical attention, accompaniment, and human rights work. However, they may also be rife with internal tensions (Balaguera 2018), and external ones as they negotiate their practical, legal, and political roles within both humanitarian and repressive state regimes (Galemba et al. 2019). Over more than a decade, I have documented shelters shut down by community protests, shelter workers threatened and intimidated by both state and criminal entities, and a general unease around their presence. I observed one shelter in Oaxaca transform from a dirt lot with an open-fire cooking pit and a few plastic folding tables to a fortified compound replete with barbed-wire fences and CCTV cameras due to external security concerns. Shelters are not only sites of emplacement for transient populations but may also be understood as sites of emplacement for shelter workers and local populations as they grapple with the contested presence of outsiders in their communities.

Beyond these local dynamics, we can also trace the historical development of shelters as sites primarily centered around humanitarian aid to nodes within a broader and transnational movement of solidarity and migrant rights. Much of Mexico's migrant rights movement, which echoes earlier movements, most notably, liberation theology in Central America and the sanctuary movement in the southwestern United States during the civil wars of the 1980s, emerged from the day-to-day work, encounters, and relations formed within shelters. The most well-known public figures in the movement are priests who founded shelters and work closely with everyday people who through their quiet labor keep them running (Brigden 2018; Vogt 2018; Guevara González 2022). Shelters and the activism that has emerged from them have also become critical nodes in the movement of caravans through Mexico, which are both a strategy of mobility and survival as well as a form of resistance against the violence of securitization and border enforcement (Wurtz 2020; Frank-Vitale 2023). In these ways, I see shelters as spaces of both place-making and emplacement, their meaning and significance in the production of history becoming legible through the embodied realities, socialities, and work of the people who pass through them.

One of the shelter workers I came to know quite well was a woman named Mayra (pseudonym), a single mother from Guatemala who left her home and an abusive partner in search of a better life for her children. On the day I first met her, she told me about her "accident" on the train and how she lost her foot. In a rural stretch of railway in southern Mexico she was pushed from the top of a train by another migrant, sucked underneath where her foot was crushed and mangled so badly she needed to have it amputated. She was found in a hospital by a local priest who offered the shelter as a place for her to recover. Her entry to the shelter was through her bodily injury, leading us to perhaps think about the ways processes of mo-

bility become inscribed or etched onto people's bodies in both temporary and permanent ways. People arrive to shelters without having slept or eaten for days, often after grueling journeys through sweltering jungles or gritty urban locales on trains, buses or by foot. Exhaustion and hunger compound more severe bodily experiences like illness, infection, or injury—intestinal parasites, urinary tract infections, open blisters, miscarriages. Beyond these calamities, we may also trace the ways people's bodies become inscribed by more intentional forms of violence—for Mayra this meant a dismembered limb, but what about an ear being partially bitten off during a fight or an unwanted pregnancy as the result of a rape? I argue that even in these cases, which we may initially see as the result of bad people doing bad things, we must also see them as embodiments of structural, political, and symbolic forms of violence. Through scars, injury, and trauma, migrants embody the histories that both propel and circumscribe their movements. Their bodies are in themselves sites of violence, but also of resilience and resistance.

Mayra's injury was permanently etched onto her physical body, but its significance took on a life of its own as a cautionary tale, and also became a story of recovery and hope that circulated through the walls of the shelter. After her accident, Mayra worked as the main cook at the shelter for several months, a coveted position in the social hierarchy of shelter life, and she came to see it as her mission to help other migrants, and especially to provide support and counsel to female migrants passing through. She used her own experience and example as a point of caution, but also resilience. I remember watching her say goodbye to two female migrants who had been staying at the shelter for about a week and the way they embraced and cried when it was time for them to go. Mayra was more than a cook, she was more than a victim of a train accident. She was a trusted figure in a place that was often steeped in distrust and her presence crucial to the experience of other migrants passing through. Her life was transformed by her journey experiences, but she was also a force of transformation for countless others. Eventually Mayra was able to procure a prosthetic leg and continue on her way to the United States, so while there was no material trace of her presence beyond a few photographs, her story, repeated by the volunteers that remained, and the connections she made became etched into the social memory of the shelter even after she was gone.

Transit Landscapes

Places are made up of stories, of lives intertwined, even if the people who crossed through them are no longer there. I see this as complementary to the idea of etchings as the products of interconnected socialities between

people through and across transit landscapes. I use the term "landscapes" to refer not just to the natural world but to socially produced spaces embedded within historical and geographic formations of power, capital, and community (Harvey 1989; Soja 1989). Migration journeys, as landscapes, can be understood both as produced by the inequalities and contradictions of global capitalism and as points of struggle against those very forces in translocal settings. They are prismatic, refracting multiple social forces, economies, and politics within and across space and time, and observable in places like migrant shelters. As such, we may trace and conceptualize migration landscapes thematically—landscapes of violence, landscapes of solidarity—within the broader umbrella term of migrant trajectories. It is the nexus between the physical landscapes of mobility (crossing oceans, deserts, urban centers) and the human landscapes of mobility (encounters and entanglements with state security forces, facilitators, humanitarian actors, researchers) that shape people's experiences, and through their accumulation, produce knowledge and histories.

I now want to turn to some of the landscapes that are both "along-the-way" and "out-of-the-way" (see introduction in this volume). Here, I am talking about the roads, train routes, footpaths, rural transit towns, and staging areas that migrants pass through, but also the spaces where they may dwell upon "arrival," which may only be temporary—in urban centers, immigrant neighborhoods, and tourist zones. The surveillance of (im)migrant bodies does not stop or begin once people cross national borders, or receive legal documents as asylum seekers, those with protected status, or even residents. If anything, the policing of their bodies may be amplified within the "arterial" (Vogt 2017) borders of transit or the "thickened" (Rosas 2006) borders of arrival, again allowing us to reconceptualize migrant trajectories as encompassing more than borders or even the journey itself (Schapendonk and Davids in this volume). For example, throughout Mexico, there are specific passages that are off the beaten path of the typical routes migrants take that have become epicenters of racial profiling and extortion. State agents, often working in concert with bus drivers, track and identify suspected migrants, pull over buses, extract migrants from the bus, and demand payoffs or they will be turned over to immigration authorities to be deported (Morante Aguirre and Araiza 2016; Megchún Rivera and Guevara González 2023). There are places along the coastal route in Chiapas, where migrants attempt to circumvent state checkpoints, that are known to be fraught for travel—migrants have been stripped naked, robbed, and sexually assaulted. Further along in Veracruz, in the towns that line the train tracks, migrants are known to be targeted by drug cartels to be kidnapped or forcibly recruited to work for them. The lines between migrant/smuggler, victim/criminal, protector/protected also become blurred

as individuals both move between these categories and circulate through the physical landscapes of Mexico, often as means of survival (Frank-Vitale 2020).

While much of the journey is marked by landscapes of violence, it is also marked by landscapes of care and solidarity. In addition to the sense of place and solidarity that forms between residents and volunteers at the shelters, migrants encounter serendipitous acts of care and solidarity along the way—a bottle of water, a floor to sleep on, a word of encouragement. Here, a migrant from El Salvador explains the importance of these encounters in his journey:

> As I told you, it is a difficult road, but not impossible, it is hard, we are going to suffer, and although they rob us, I tell you, of our belongings, our money, they are not going to rob us of the good intentions that we have, the projects we have in mind, our value. No criminal can steal that from you. There are bad people in Mexico, but there are good people. Even when we are shaken, people from the houses come out to the train and say "Hey, God bless you!" They make you want to keep going, they make you feel more encouraged, because despite everything, there are good people here, and that gives you more encouragement to keep going.

Through these words we see how diverse actors and random encounters along migrant trajectories in some of the most remote locations can be important markers in how people remember their crossings. Once people's journeys are over and people have left the physical places behind, the meanings and power of places along the journey continue to have presence, to shape the lives, memories, and imaginings of migrants and those around them. What emerges, through a constant stream of experience, knowledge sharing, and documentation are patterns that are mapped onto place that cumulatively constitute a larger racialized geography of risk, violence, and care, which are central to both transnational and intimate economies of mobility. At times, these maps take material form in the scribblings, jottings, and hand-drawn renderings of places and pathways that are passed between migrants, guides, and shelter workers. These relics are significant in the everyday tactics of mobility, but also within broader imaginaries of what it means to migrate, to cross Mexico. These artifacts, and ultimately the memories created through the crossing experience, resonate with the longue durée approach in understanding the slow and enduring impacts of movement, space, and place in people's lives. Likewise, as I turn to next, communities of memory form around the places and landscapes of transit. Such etchings demonstrate the ways migrant trajectories transcend the spatial, temporal, and material realities of movement.

Radical Remembering: Absences, Ghosts, and Reclaiming Place

While the examples above help us think about the ways landscapes are etched by economies of violence and care, the traces and residues they leave behind and how they inform social memory, we must also consider the absences within these same landscapes and what they tell us about place-making along and beyond migrant journeys. Here I am inspired by the work of archaeologists like Alfredo González-Ruibal and Paul Mullins who study the absences in contemporary landscapes to understand spaces that "pass without reflection in everyday life" (Mullins 2015), that are "beyond social remembrance, where memory is erased" (González-Ruibal 2008) yet may still lurk near the surface. The study of absence in contemporary landscapes resonates with more recent literature on ghosts, haunting, and social memory that may be useful for our understandings of place-making along migration trajectories. Following the work of social theorists Jacques Derrida and Avery Gordon (Gordon 1997), anthropologists have increasingly turned attention to ghosts and haunting as analytical frameworks to understand the ways histories of violence and injustice—slavery, settler colonialism, war, global inequality—continue to haunt the present and the communities we work with (Good, Chiovenda, and Rahimi 2022). Migrants are often haunted by the legacies of violence in their home communities—war, precarity, ongoing social and political violence—and through their mobility, their comings and goings, and their absences, they may also come to haunt local communities and spaces along migrant journeys. Sometimes this takes the form of tragedy, like massacres or mass kidnappings along train routes, but also in the more subtle and everyday disappearances of individual migrants who go missing along the way and the unsettling presence of ghosts in more acute ways, like within the walls of migrant shelters.

During a 2022 visit to the Oaxacan shelter after a long hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I noted a new mural on the wall surrounding the garden. This mural was composed of a grid of simple white crosses on a rust-colored background. Each cross was adorned with the name of a migrant who had gone missing and the word *desaparecido* (disappeared) below it. The priest at the shelter explained to me that each name represented a person that had passed through or was known to the shelter. Like the painted handprints I mentioned earlier, the crosses are also markers of a shared humanity, reminders of the violence of migration and memorials to those lost, whose ghostly presence is captured in the everyday architecture of shelter life. Their presence is not anonymous but identifiable and connected to social worlds that go well beyond the space of the shelter.

Indeed, through my work with the families of missing migrants, I learned about the ways migrant journeys continue to have ripple effects in the ma-

terial and everyday lives of peoples and communities well beyond migrant trajectories. For example, the material traces of missing loved ones become etched into people's homes—through an old shirt hanging on a rusty nail, a makeshift altar to hold candles lit in their memory, a bedroom left untouched. The materiality of migration journeys are also evident as objects discarded along the way, as Jason De León (2015) has documented in his analysis of the material culture of the US-Mexico border crossing.

For many families of the missing, etchings come in the form of absences, the uncertainty and unknowingness like weights on their hearts. "Every time I hear a key in the lock, I hope it is my son that walks through the door," a mother whose child went missing while attempting to cross the US-Mexico border told me. "I can never change the locks, because then how will he get in?" Migrants are not anonymous, but they are known ghosts who continue to haunt spaces like migrant shelters or through missing-persons posters pinned on the walls of bus stations, and increasingly through virtual spaces. Indeed, there are entire Facebook groups dedicated to sharing information on missing persons—migrants and citizens alike—in Mexico. One group called Migrants Missing at the Border is flooded with almost daily posts of loved ones who disappeared while crossing the US-Mexico border. The ghosts that haunt the journey must also be understood within sociospatial contexts of disappearance in Mexico more broadly. In 2022 Mexico had over one hundred thousand records of disappeared and missing persons, 80 percent of whom have disappeared since the most recent phase of Mexico's drug war began in 2006 (Brewer 2022).

The legacies of these absences became apparent in the years following the Tamaulipas massacre in August 2010, when fifty-eight men and fourteen women, one of whom was pregnant, were kidnapped, tied up, and shot execution style in an abandoned ranch in the northern state of Tamaulipas about 150 kilometers from the US-Mexico border. The victims of the massacre were mostly Central Americans from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, but there were also migrants from Ecuador, Brazil, and India. In the aftermath of the massacre, the gruesome images that circulated showed the victims slumped over one another with their hands bound, as well as aerial and roadside images of the abandoned structure where their bodies were found. If you drove past the unremarkable structure, you would likely not know that this was the site of one of the most deadly and politically significant massacres of migrants in Mexican history.

In Tamaulipas there is an absence of remembrance in the physical space where the violence occurred, but at the same time a host of other actors—the families of the victims, families of other disappeared migrants, religious figures, and migrant rights activists—have continued to make visible, to remember, and to honor the victims in public and political ways. In the south-

ern Mexican city of Tenosique, which is hundreds of kilometers away but has become a crucial transit point near Mexico's southern border, a shelter called La 72 was opened to honor the victims of Tamaulipas (Guevara González 2022). The dedication of La 72 to the fallen migrants speaks to the ways otherwise invisible or "peripheral" actors and events may become central to the place-making strategies and practices in places far removed.

Another poignant example of this occurred on the tenth anniversary of the massacre when activists and families of missing migrants erected what they called an anti-monument directly in front of the embassy of the United States in Mexico City. The imposing 10 ft. high iron sculpture, symbolically placed in front of the embassy on the famous *Paseo de la Reforma* avenue features a large 72 with a red plus sign to symbolize other migrants who have been killed or disappeared, and the words "*nadie es illegal en el mundo* (no one in the world is illegal)" and "*migrar es un derecho humano* (migration is a human right)". The monument has become a permanent feature of the city's landscape and a place where families and activists gather to speak out against violence and impunity, build altars, and place photographs of other missing migrants to put their faces and stories into public view and make sure their lives are not forgotten. The +72 anti-monument is one of several anti-monuments across the city dedicated to victims of other national shames, such as the missing forty-three students of Ayotzinapa and the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre. These anti-monuments, in addition to murals, political posters, and graffiti, are akin to anti-colonial archives as ways of reclaiming public space and memory through historical counternarratives. The intentional and public act of erecting the sculpture and ongoing protests are repeated performances of visibility, remembrance, and solidarity. Through this repetition, these collective acts of radical unforgetting become significant etchings in the social space of the journey and in the physical space of political power where the anxieties and spectacle of Central American migration coalesce.

Building on the work of Judith Butler (2009) on the differential distribution of grievability among certain groups in contexts of war and racism, Karina Horsti (2019) argues that the silent ungrievability and invisibility of migrant deaths stems from the perception that the lives of migrants are already perceived as lost, thus making their deaths naturalized and unremarkable. This politics of indifference has in recent years been contested through the work of activist, community, and family-led efforts to remember the dead and the disappeared, making them some of the most important sites of political contestation, resistance, and solidarity with migrant struggles (Rygiel 2016; Stierl 2016). Such "grief-activism" (Stierl 2016) may take place in both physical spaces as collective gatherings and protest and in transnational social media spaces, and work to challenge conditions of

ungrievability (Butler 2009) created by colonial and racist structures of difference.

This radical remembering is apparent in the caravan of mothers who make an annual trek following in the footsteps of their children who went missing while crossing Mexico, and in the more recent caravans of migrants and asylum seekers that have emerged whose collective mobility is seen as a central strategy of survival in an increasingly perilous and militarized Mexico. The families traveling in these caravans know that they will not likely find their children, and the migrants and asylum seekers know that Mexico, under the pressure of the United States, will not grant them free transit. Nevertheless, they persist—they are part of a collective movement for a future where such outcomes may be within reach. It is precisely through their movements—which are highly visible and unapologetic—that they emplace new meanings and forge new social connections within and across journey landscapes. The caravans, like migrant shelters, are fraught with political tensions, yet through their very presence they exemplify a new type of etching in that they seek to reimagine the possibilities of mobility, and in turn the legitimacy of the state. Through a politics of refusal, these collective movements not only transform place but also make visible the violence and impunity that have defined the journey for so long. In this way, we see how these collective etchings span time—the participants move on behalf of those who have moved before them and those who come after them, seeking to make their movements, in both senses of the word, meaningful.

Etchings create possibilities for the future. Individual movements are primarily motivated by individual and family needs, but they are purposeful and rarely just about the people who are doing the moving. While migrants embark on their journeys primarily for their families, through the accumulation of movement, connection, and knowledge in places, their movements have impacts that go beyond their individual journeys. As such, individual movements become part of something larger, creating both new possibilities and challenges for people they know and people they will never know but will nonetheless be connected to in the paths, the valleys, and journeys they have made. And so it is with etchings, which tell us about the social relations, experiences, and residues that become marked in places, on bodies, in families, and within communities between and across borders.

Ethics and Engaged Research

If we are to think of places as pincushions with a million stories in them then we, as scholars who dwell in these places, have the privilege of recording some of these stories, to reconceptualize mobility through a lens of pro-

ductivity, to see the history-makers as they are. We may also work to create archives that capture some of the counternarratives of migration journeys. For example, a collective of journalists created a digital archive dedicated to the memory of the seventy-two migrants who died in the massacre. The archive features video of a grandmother holding the photograph of her fifteen-year-old granddaughter, Yeimi Castro, who died on her way to reunite with her mother in New York, and a mother from Honduras whose son disappeared in Tamaulipas in August 2010, and she still does not know if he was one of the victims. There is also the story of a woman who, while watching the news of Tamaulipas two weeks after the massacre, recognized her nephew and his clothing—black t-shirt, jeans, white tennis shoes—through the photographs that were displayed on TV. The archive is a profound example of the ways scholars, journalists, and activists alongside migrants, volunteers, and family members may create their own histories through radical acts of remembering. The making and unmaking of places of memory through assemblages of objects, practices, and imaginaries not only recall and/or contest narratives of the past—in this case, the invisibilization of migrant deaths—but may also be considered historical processes in themselves through which memoryscapes are produced (Rose-Redwood et al. 2022).

For us as scholars, our work, too, then, becomes etchings that both reflect and shape the places we go, forged by the connections we make. Over a decade after I first entered the migrant shelter that I began this chapter with, I returned to it with my published book in hand. The book cover features the mural that greets you upon entering, now chipped and faded, and due to pandemic-related restrictions the inside of the shelter was eerily empty, except for a few volunteers and the priest I had worked alongside years before, still wearing his signature leather jacket. After we embraced and shared updates on families and other happenings, I presented him with my book, which he promised to proudly display. In that moment I saw the book, my life's work for so many years, leave my hands to return to the place that it was born from. It is now an imperfect ethnographic artifact, a collection of experiences and encounters from a moment in history, yet still an etching in its own right. Even as I am absent from that place, like most of the others who fill the pages, passed through and dwelled for a time, we have left a small mark in the shelter archive. It is here, through our collective efforts and work as scholars, that I believe we have incredible opportunity, to not only document and analyze but also to contribute to history-making through thoughtful and ethical scholarship that emerges from our collaborations. To produce knowledge that minimizes harm and seeks to honor the people we work with, the people who share their lives with us, and who, through their presence and collaboration, make their own etchings on our work and our lives. Through our collective embodied movements we can ac-

company migrants and asylum seekers at shelters and in caravans, in detention centers and inside court rooms. We, too, are wayfarers, inhabitants, interconnected in the knots of countless journeys, who can use our privilege to help create new possibilities for justice, a new meshwork for the future.

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CHAPTER
2

Emplacing Arrivals
The Infrastructural Accommodation of Migratory Difference in Urban West Africa

Michael Stasik

October 2019. I spent the evening visiting friends at the central bus station in Accra, Ghana's capital, where I conducted my dissertation fieldwork six years ago. As many times before, we spoke about the station. Mohamed, a veteran bus driver hailing from Nigeria, raised the issue of the station's poor reputation, lamenting its negative portrayal in media and local politics.[1] A discussion ensued, with the bar guests rehearsing many of the bad qualities attributed to Accra's station, such as the dangers of theft and its supposedly chaotic organization. Albert, a trader from Côte d'Ivoire, suggested that the station is reviled by locals because it is a place of foreigners. In a tone at once ironic and pressing, he added: "Look at us, all foreigners sitting idly at a Ghanaian's bar." At that point, Victoria, the bar owner, felt urged to intervene, crying out:

> Nonsense! I'm not a Ghanaian. My father is Ewe. He arrived here from Togo. There are no locals here at all. Everybody in Accra is a foreigner. Even the Ghanaians. Everybody is an arrival. Some are old arrivals, some new. But they all arrived here from some other place.

This brief exchange of views on the role of the central bus station in Accra's urban life foregrounds key aspects of its significance. Not only does it reveal the station's quality as a site imbued with a range of social meanings and affective resonances, including its perceived quality as a potentially dan-

gerous and out-of-the-way place (as framed by this volume's editors) from the perspective of some city dwellers, but it also foregrounds the generative potential that the station offers to depart from the presuppositions of sedentarist thinking (Malkki 1992), as succinctly expressed in Victoria's intervention centered on the notion of *arrivals*.

In Ghana, as in most parts of West Africa, the central urban bus station serves as a major site for organizing motorized mobility, which here is largely tied to collectively organized road transport (Stasik and Cissokho 2018); it also provides livelihoods for large numbers of people who earn their living as transport workers and traders, and as travelers of various backgrounds, including migrants. Besides choreographing the movement of people and freight, the station is also home to a wide range of businesses, from restaurants and food stalls to retailers, money changers, hairdressers, cleaning and repair services, and the myriad itinerant services provided by head porters, itinerant preachers, sex workers, shoeshine boys, and many others. The many services and establishments it harbors attract people from different walks of life, many of whom come to the station for purposes other than travel. As I will show below, these different functions of the station decisively shape its role in creating encounters.

In its role as an infrastructural and economic hub, the station, through the encounters occurring there, challenges conceptions of groups and places as bounded entities that are central to constructions of autochthony and the social boundaries they delineate. The blurring of social boundaries not only is a key feature of its infrastructural form as a site of intense movement and exchange across geographical distance but is also constitutive of its social form as a site of multiple encounters across social difference, whose role and reach is intricately entangled with the wider urban fabric and the near and far mobilities that connect the urban to the world.

Victoria's incisive comment on old and new arrivals is drawn directly from this mutuality between the station's infrastructural and social form. Not only is the term "arrivals" embedded in the language of West Africa's transport operators, but the rearranged perspective it opens up on the relationship between space, identity, and difference is tied to the work of road mobility performed there. By relativizing the valence of the term "locals," it captures some of the recent theoretical efforts of migration scholars to "de-migrantize" the migrant and "re-migrantize" the citizen (Anderson 2019; Nieswand and Drotbohm 2014). It also echoes earlier anthropological arguments about the relational, situational, intersecting, and ultimately porous boundaries that inform ascriptions of self and other, whether regarding ethnic or other types of distinctions (Barth 1969; Werbner 2018).

By framing mobility as the norm rather than the exception, Victoria's arrivals notion replaces a categorical distinction between locals and for-

eigners, or non-migrants and migrants, for a chronological view of those who arrived earlier and those who arrived later, and continue arriving. Reminiscent of Kopytoff's (1987) classic theory of the shifting grounds of the African frontier (see also Lentz 2013), it articulates a salient social reality of the demographic composition of the city of Accra, and similarly of many other urban centers across West Africa, where most people claim some near or distant elsewhere as their ancestral home. While her alternative concept of arrivals foregrounds the commonality of newcomers with earlier or old arrivals, it does not gloss over differences but rather situates them within different degrees of orientation, attachment, and belonging. Resonating with insights on the relative irrelevance of territorial belonging across West African societies (Kopytoff 1987: 22; Whitehouse 2012: 210), the different temporalities of arrival here supersede place- and ascription-based forms of identification. These temporal differences may also create social fault lines, linked for example to cohort effects created by shared generational or mobility experiences, but the shared experience of being an arrival (whatever the time frame) provides ample ground for social connection and empathy.

In this chapter I wed the theoretical space that Victoria's arrivals concept offers with the ethnographic vantage point of the bus station to rethink the significance of migratory difference in relation to mobility, place, and belonging. By examining the station's spatial and material affordance for providing new arrivals with direction, contact, and exchange, I bring an infrastructural perspective into conversation with what migration scholars call the "sociabilities of emplacement" (Çağlar and Schiller 2018; Wessendorf and Phillimore 2019). Following Çağlar and Schiller, I understand emplacement not as a synonym for "integration," a term conspicuously absent from local discourses in urban West Africa anyway, but as a dynamic concept that links the conditions, opportunities, and contingencies of building connections with and through specific places, on the one hand, with "a person's efforts . . . to build a life" (2018: 21), on the other.

In keeping with the emphasis on relationality that the concept of emplacement establishes, I seek here to refine its reach through the lens of infrastructure. I build on a cluster of studies that consider how interlinked material sites facilitate transnational mobility and shape lives abroad, thereby opening up new ways of thinking about and decentering migration. In their study of labor migration in Southeast Asia, Xiang and Lindquist (2014) introduce the notion of "migration infrastructures" to problematize assumptions about migration as linear movement between two sites, conceptualizing it instead as a "multi-faceted space of mediation" that conditions mobility.[2] In the same effort to better account for the plurality of spatial and social relations that give direction to migrant trajectories, Meeus and colleagues (2019) foreground the multiscalar constitution of

"urban arrival infrastructures," challenging teleological accounts of the accommodation of newcomers as tied to specific places and groups (see also Wessendorf 2022).

The following ethnography expands on these approaches, extending the purview of infrastructure as an analytic to consider what Berlant, at a more abstract level, outlines as the capacity to accommodate multiplicity and create proximity across difference: an "infrastructure of association" and "of sociality itself" (2016: 401, 394). The value of this perspective is brought home strongly in Kleinman's (2019) work on the infrastructural practices of Soninke migrants in Paris. She describes how the migrants' life-building efforts are directly linked to the Gare du Nord train station they engage with, as they seek to realize the potential for connection its locale affords.

Drawing on the perspectives of the West African migrants I work with in Ghana, I argue that their efforts—to build a life by making connections—are similarly found in cultivating infrastructural practices to create expansive social relations conducive to emplacement. This is manifest in the ways my research participants themselves think through and express ideas about infrastructure in different ways, and in the ways new and old arrivals draw on the place of the station to create, harness, and at times also disrupt connections. Unlike the practices of West African migrants at the Gare du Nord or of southern African migrants around Johannesburg's Park Station (Zack and Landau 2021), the sociabilities of emplacement at Accra's station are not a kind of residue of formal or dysfunctional infrastructural relations realized from social and legal margins, as Simone (2004) suggests. Rather, they are a long-established and institutionalized feature of the infrastructural work in mobility performed there. As I will show, this feature is tied intimately to the station workers' *sensus communis*, which, following Berlant's (2016) evocative interpretation, blends practical judgment with a strong sense of commonness.

By shifting the focus from groups to sites of interaction, the lens proffered by infrastructure provides an apt avenue to depart from the tendency to approach West African migrations within fixed categories of identity and objectives; a tendency that critical migration scholars working outside the African context have criticized as the "ethnic lens" (Schiller and Çağlar 2018). Such fixity becomes acutely visible in the emphasis placed on how hierarchic affiliations of kin, village, ethnicity, religion and nation (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000) are mobilized in cross-border movement, then reproduced in migrant quarters and institutionalized through patterns of chain and circular migration (see, e.g., Cohen 1969; Lambert 2002; Nyamnjoh 2017; Schildkrout 1978).[3]

A key motion stemming from my study, one prefigured by Bruce Whitehouse (2012) in his detailed portrayal of West African migration to and

strangerhood in Brazzaville, is that this fixation on kinship, ethnicity, and nationality tends to obscure more than it reveals. In particular, it tends to conceal the relevance of contact, sociality, and solidarity outside co-ethnic affiliation, including those between hosts and strangers. In framing my analysis outside categories of ethnic and national groups, however, I do not mean to suggest that ascribed affiliations are, or have become, irrelevant to the social organization of West African migrations. But rather than taking their relevance for granted, I argue that they should be interrogated and situated more dynamically within the multiple linkages of different social relations and places that shape urban lives.

Contemporary migration practices in West Africa are constitutively diverse, and my aim here is not to covey a generalized or comparative view of these practices. By focusing on the eminent site of West African mobility and connectivity that is the central bus station, I want to highlight how different kinds of social and spatial relations shape mobility practices and lives and how these relations contribute to and transform modalities of urban place-making.

I begin this chapter with a brief description of the background of my research. I then discuss two examples to explore the affordances for emplacement the place of the station offers to new arrivals. Next, I turn the analysis around and describe the perspective of old arrivals, attending to the composition of the groups that run the station, which, I suggest, is conducive of a particular ethics of accommodating difference. In the concluding section, I scale up the argument to consider how the vantage point of the station opens up new perspectives on emplacement practices in urban West Africa.

Ethnographic Background

The analysis of migrant emplacement practices I develop here draws on twenty-one months of fieldwork conducted intermittently in Ghana from 2011 to 2021. It combines insights from two research projects. The first was a study of the workings of Accra's central bus station. Migration was not the focus of this research. But the close engagement with various mobile groups of the station, including old and new arrivals of different backgrounds, revealed to me a certain discrepancy between the way West African migration is commonly described in the Africanist literature, with its strong emphasis on kin and ethnic ties, and my interlocutors' own conceptions of migrant ventures, which weighted differently the relevance of ascribed affiliations over other relationships, both spatial and social. These emic conceptions then served as an analytical guide and ethnographic point of departure for

my subsequent project on the mobility and associational and livelihood strategies of West African migrants in urban Ghana.

Accommodating the diversity of connections constitutive of West African migration was one main goal of my study. This is particularly evident in the composition of my study group, which includes people from more than a dozen countries. Corresponding to the large number of different nationalities, my research participants were very differently situated in terms of linguistic and educational backgrounds, prior migration experiences, legal status, and preestablished social ties in and social knowledge of Ghana. I focused primarily on people of francophone backgrounds who had recently arrived in Ghana, most of whom had made their journeys individually and without mobilizing transnational kinship networks. This diverse group of largely neophyte migrants represents a growing share in West Africa's current migratory circuits toward Ghana, which is characterized by intensified mobility from countries with no significant historical, political, or economic links (RMMS 2017).[4]

Owing to my own gendered positionality, the majority of my research participants were men. Some women also participated in my research, but with few exceptions (including the case of a young female migrant discussed in this chapter), their involvement was less profound than that of my male interlocuters. Many of the migrants I engaged with came with little financial capital, some almost penniless. While a significant proportion had relatively high levels of cultural capital, particularly in relation to levels of education, the general lack of knowledge of English forced nearly all to start from scratch. As a result, their occupational profile was mostly limited to menial and low-income work. Some older and long-settled migrants also participated in my research, and although their experiences were not the primary focus of my study, their perspective as old arrivals adds substantial depth to the analysis I develop here.

Spending time with different research participants in different constellations took me to a variety of places in Accra and beyond. I visited their homes and accompanied them to work, school, job interviews, and the immigration office. I attended activities in mosques, churches, and places of nighttime leisure. My interlocutors would often take me to the bus station where they first arrived. They utilized the station not only to leave for home visits or other destinations but also to inquire about work, travel, housing, particular types of food, or the rates for exchanging, sending, and lending money, as well as for the purpose of sociability, which was, however, inseparable from more practical matters.

During these go-along tours, I shared insights about Accra with my migrant interlocutors, drawing on my familiarity with the city developed over the previous decade and introducing them to various old acquaintances in

and beyond the bus stations. These encounters highlighted the fluid, situational, and connecting nature of the old and new arrival categories. Because of my social knowledge and contacts, the migrant newcomers positioned me firmly within the old arrival category. To many of my old acquaintances, especially those whom I rarely have the opportunity to visit when I am in Accra, I may have not been a newcomer, but I was still far from being an established old arrival. Notably, it was at one of the stations where I had previously worked that I first encountered some of my research participants, such as Ali, a twenty-five-year-old new arrival from Cameroon.

Urban Entry: Ali (Baba)

Ali, nicknamed Ali Baba, knew no one in Accra when he arrived in mid-2015. In Cameroon, he had completed his *baccalauréat* (high school degree) and was looking for employment while making do with sporadic jobs arranged for him by relatives. To improve his chances, he decided he needed to learn English and explore new opportunities abroad. When he left for Ghana, he adopted Ali Baba as his *nom de voyage*, a self-fashioned journeying title referencing the folktale hero who unlocked hidden treasures.

His retelling of the night of his arrival, four years before I first met him, abounds in detail. He recalls the heavy downpour that began immediately after he stepped out of the dilapidated Nissan car that carried him on the final leg of his journey from Lomé to Ghana's capital. On arrival, the fatigue stemming from the arduous three-day travel from his native Yaoundé gave way to the characteristic blend of excitement and anxiety that captures the newcomer to unknown lands. That night, Ali's anxiety prevailed. Disoriented by the darkness and the strangeness of languages and people around him, he sat on a bench right next to the vehicle he arrived with and held firmly to his small travel bag filled with nothing but a clean spare shirt, a tattered English pocket dictionary, and some Naira he had exchanged in Lagos, the actual value of which he was unsure about. There, he stayed put throughout the night, remarking that he would have remained seated on that bench forever if not approached by a female vendor at daybreak.

The woman probably spoke to him in Twi, Ghana's main lingua franca alongside English, which at the time might as well have been Sanskrit, as he did not understand a word. Realizing that he was a francophone, she sent for a befriended vendor who spoke some French, to whom he explained that he was looking for cheap accommodation. The young man, a Burkinabe, accompanied him to a lodging place at the back of the bus station. The shared room in the hostel, frequented by itinerant laborers from northern Ghana

and sex workers from Nigeria and Togo, became his stay in Accra for several weeks. From there, he set out to discover the opportunities (and treasures) he hoped the city would offer him to work, learn English, and "learn about life" (*apprendre la vie*), as he recapitulated his motivation for migrating.

Every morning, Ali started his exploration from inside the bus station where he first arrived. And each time he would return to the station before setting off in another direction, gradually widening the radius of his explorations. The first English sentence he learned by heart, he recalls, was to ask for directions to the station, the place of which became his anchor, both geographically and socially. It was here that he ate at the various food stalls, accustoming himself to Ghanaian dishes and to ordering these in the first place. And it was here that he spent many hours watching people depart and, even more curiously to him, arrive, which made him reminisce about his own arrival. It was at the station that he began to make contacts, first with fellow francophones, then with people from across anglophone West Africa, from whom he picked up a rudimentary command of English. As chance encounters developed into more regular acquaintances, Ali accessed his first jobs, working in various shops in and around the station yard while gradually consolidating his presence and gaining knowledge of further opportunities.

Recursive Projects of Place-Making and Relationship-Building

The challenges Ali faced on arrival were spatial, social, and linguistic. He did not know the place, the people or the language. This is by no means the situation of all newcomers to Accra. Many new arrivals rely on existing networks of kin as well as, and increasingly so, on commercial and technological solutions—notably, mobile apps for route planning, accommodation, and translation. But neither is Ali an unusual case. Many of the migrants I met during fieldwork had to shift for themselves after coming to town, often with limited means for survival and only a vague idea of where to find what they were looking for, especially shelter and work.

For new arrivals like Ali, the place of the station becomes an essential reference point. It was inside the station that he began to take his bearings and map the urban surroundings. His concentrically structured exploratory walks illustrate the centrality he ascribed to the station's geographical location: he used it as a compass of sorts. In a closely related capacity, the station also provided him with a safe space, granting him security and respite. Reflecting on his initiatory experience of arrival, Ali emphasizes the role of the station in facilitating his entry.

> I arrived as a complete stranger. Everything was strange to me: the food, the language, the women's attire. The station made me access the city (*accéder à la ville*). When you come to the station, people don't ask where you are from. They ask where you are going.[5]

As Ali's case further demonstrates, spatial orientation alone is not enough. The "objective of everyday orientation," Widlok (1997: 324) remarks, is a matter "not primarily of getting somewhere geographically, but of getting somewhere socially." In other words, practical knowledge of spatial coordinates is only a means of accessing resources, establishing contacts, and entering into exchange relations. For new arrivals, the task of place-making is primarily one of navigating social coordinates (see also Reiffen in this volume about new arrivals in a shopping mall in Argentina).

Here, the station's diverse groups serve new arrivals to realize what Kleinman (2019) describes as a recursive project of channel and relationship building. The mainstay of this project is the repurposing of place in ways that create new social relationships. These relationships open up new channels that can be mobilized for social and economic means. The outcomes of these projects cannot always be anticipated; and Ali's emplacement path bespeaks of various contingencies and "serendipitous encounters" (Wessendorf and Phillimore 2019). The place of the station, as an infrastructural site that mediates many different relations, makes serendipity a particular kind of engine for creating expansive connections.

Ali put this engine to good use. Through one of his station jobs, he met a Togolese bookseller who hired Ali as his assistant at his vending spot outside an English-language school. The bookseller also arranged a more permanent place for him in the school's dormitory. Through his contacts with students and staff, Ali began attending English classes and working toward a B1 language certificate, which he believed would improve his opportunities upon his return to Cameroon.

While the station served as an anchor for Ali upon arrival, the contacts he made there opened up new channels for furthering his emplacement in Accra and for building a life beyond his stay in Ghana. The distance to the station increased in proportion to his consolidation of contacts. His progressing place-making endeavor provides a striking illustration of the strength of "weak ties" (Granovetter 1973). In contrast to the hierarchical associations based on the "strong ties" of kin, village, ethnicity, and so forth, emphasized in much of Africanist migration scholarship, weak ties foreground the potential to create new relationships outside of one's familiar affiliations, which may or may not convert into more networked connections. Creating connections outside kin and co-ethnic affiliations also allowed migrants to loosen the grip of social control and expectations, as

several participants in my research emphasized. In Ali's case, as in the case of other new arrivals with whom I worked, these familiar ties were nonexistent to start with. For other arrivals I met, the station's affordance for encounter served to detach them from existing (strong) ties, allowing them to explore new connections and redirect already commenced emplacement practices, as the example of Mariam from Côte d'Ivoire illustrates.

Paths of Escape: Mariam

Mariam was twelve when she first arrived in Ghana together with her mother, having fled from the violence that erupted after the 2010 election in Côte d'Ivoire. After spending a year in a refugee camp, her father put them up with distant kin in the so-called Liberia Camp at the outskirts of Accra. While her mother soon returned to Abidjan, Mariam stayed for another two years. During this time, she did mostly domestic work while sporadically attending school and making friends among the members of her host family's Ivorian Roman Catholic church.

Shortly after her return to Abidjan, the reunited family experienced threats of reprisal. Mariam, now aged sixteen, was again sent back to Ghana, where her father's relatives arranged for her to work as a housemaid for the family of the Ivorian church's pastor in Accra. She recalls the two years she spent there as the "worst" of her life, alluding to work exploitation, social restrictions, and ongoing sexual harassment by the pastor, which eventually led her to run away.

Her retelling of the night of her escape is reminiscent of the detailed description of Ali's arrival. Like Ali's narrative, it centers on the place of the bus station where she went to seek help and refuge. I reproduce here an extract from an interview I conducted with her in English, in which she describes the course her life took after she left the pastor's house.

> There are many people I know in Accra, Ivorian and Ghanaian and other. But the people are from the church. I don't trust them. But I know I want to go to the station, where I arrived with my mother. I don't know the place, really. But I remember francophone women who work there. They helped my mother. So, I go and ask them for help, for work I can do. If they have no work for me, I can take the bus to Abidjan. I had all my money with me, not much, but the ticket is not too expensive. When I walk the street I fear for myself. Everywhere the city is empty. But when I find the station, I see many people. I feel . . . [switches to French] *Je suis tellement soulagée, heureuse* [I am so relieved, happy]. But I don't know a person. So, I walk the station. I listen to how people speak, who speak French. One woman shouts. She is an-

> gry with a man. She curses in Twi. But she has this accent. I know the French accent, even in Twi. She is Fon from Benin, Efosa. She listens to all my story, like you listen now. She says she helps me. But that night, she travels to Benin. She brings me to another woman. She is Ghanaian. The woman takes care of me before she returns. I stay with the woman three days. She sells bread inside the station. Many women sell and sleep there. They are very kind to me.
>
> When Efosa returns, she did not forget about me. She brings me to a friend, a Nigeria man, Al-ḥajj. He owns a restaurant inside the station. The man, he takes me as his daughter. I work in his restaurant with many girls, Burkina, Dagbani.[6] The manager is Nigeria-Ashanti, Zauna. She is very disciplined but she is fair with us. We live together in a compound behind the restaurant. . . . When I start [the work in the restaurant], Efosa tells me two things. One, I call my family in Abidjan. Two, I don't waste my wage but save for schooling. So I do. . . . After seven months, I tell Efosa I saved so much. She brings me to the seamstress shop. The master is a Fon woman. I give my money to the master for training.

Mariam's path of emplacement differs from Ali's in significant ways, as does the position from which she approached the station. Unlike Ali, Mariam was not a new arrival. She had already attained some familiarity with the city and its people, and she had competences in English and Twi. Most importantly, she had long been involved in a transnational network of extended kinship relations that had facilitated her entry and shaped her life abroad. Clearly, this was not the life Mariam had imagined for herself. Her situation in the pastor's house, as well as her status as an involuntarily displaced refugee, placed her in a position of a high vulnerability, particularly in relation to gendered dynamics within domestic relations.

Of Exit, Reorientation, and Reentry

In turning to the station for help, work, and possibly return, Mariam, unlike Ali, was not seeking orientation but rather reorienting her position and action. Notwithstanding the difference in positionality and objective, the kind of gravitational pull the station exerted on both of them underlines the importance it holds for new and old arrivals alike: it is from inside the station that most migrants enter the city; and it is from here that they can exit or escape, whether to return to where they came from or to travel on to other destinations. In this dual capacity—as a principal port of entry and of departure and return—the place of the station blends spatial with emotional security, revealing the affective force of its infrastructural function of providing transport connections.

Mariam's escape was less an exit from Accra than a reentry. There is a certain irony in the fact that in seeking to escape from the pastor's family, Mariam sought refuge inside the bus station. This not only contradicts ideas about the bus station as a place of insecurity and danger, a stigma shared by urban stations in many parts of Africa (Stasik and Cissokho 2018), but also complicates often taken-for-granted notions about kin, ethnic, and religious ties as providing "the backbone of coping strategies from insecurity" for migrants (Nyamnjoh 2017: 248).

The alliance Mariam sought to mobilize for help was based not on the ascribed affiliations but on the more diffused connection of female solidarity and the felt proximity of the French language. These intersecting qualities of gender and language proved vital for many of the migrants I worked with. As noted above, the direction of these encounters is not always predictable, and they may ultimately lead to outcomes that are different from those previously imagined or intended.

In Mariam's case, the chance encounter with Efosa at the station turned out particularly well. Efosa, whom I knew from my earlier research and who also introduced me to Mariam, attributed her protégé's successful change of life situation to what she referred to as Mariam's "*ténacité*" to realize God's plan, implying a particular form of "stubbornness" that echoes what anthropologists working in Africa describe as the "labor" invested in one's divinely predetermined destiny (Elliot 2016). Mariam did indeed demonstrate a remarkably courageous, perhaps even stubborn, determination to work toward improving her life. But there were also other factors at play. Two in particular stand out, both related to the continuity of the cultural grammar and ethics underlying West African frontier mobility.

The first is the solidarity shared among West African female traders (Clark 1994), manifested in the unquestioning support offered to Mariam by Efosa's fellow vendors at the station. The second are the ethics of hospitality that have long helped to sustain host-stranger relations across West Africa (Gaibazzi 2018; Lentz 2013), as exemplarily embodied in Al-Hajj's care for Efosa and the group of other restaurant workers, composed largely of female migrant-strangers. Another more fleeting but nonetheless telling manifestation of this ethics—based on the shared understanding of "the humanity of the stranger" (Gaibazzi 2018: 472; see also Whitehouse 2012)—was also evident in the initial direction Ali received upon arrival, the implicitness by which it was offered to him extends to any other new arrival in need of assistance.

This brings us back to the "sociabilities of emplacement," which similarly invokes a mutual "sense of being human" (Çağlar and Schiller 2018: 128). This emphasis on commonality over difference is crucial to the social practices and relationships that prevail among the groups working at Accra's sta-

tion. This has to do with the station's character as an in-between place, linked to its infrastructural function of facilitating association through exchange across distance, and it relates to the composition of station groups and the routines of their members in dealing with difference. In the following, I attend more closely to this interplay between sociabilities and infrastructures of emplacement by reversing the perspective from the new to the, chronologically speaking, old arrivals and their workplace that is the bus station.

The Difference Old Arrivals Make

A key feature of the groups that run the station is that they are defined as much by their work in mobility as by their own mobile histories. They are almost exclusively made up of people who have come from outside Accra, and often from outside Ghana, whether as transport workers, shopkeepers or itinerant vendors. In most cases, they come from a town or region served by the station, either directly or via the many feeder routes that branch off from its destinations, extending the station's connectivity throughout West Africa. Framed in Victoria's terms: practically all station workers have, at some point, been new arrivals themselves, comprising a broad range of degrees of attachment, identification, and emplacement.

There is a pragmatic reason for their diverse composition, linked in particular to the commercial logic of organizing long-distance transport and trade.[7] Most transport links to Accra are initiated by efforts at the other end of the route, which then creates an exclave of people who work the connection to their hometown or region from within the destination station. This chiefly includes transport workers, but also traders who use the connection, as well as the many informal service providers peddling their trades in and around the station area. This exclave-like function then also attracts other earlier arrivals, who frequent its site not primarily for utilitarian purposes of travel, trade, or work but to exchange news and gossip from home, to chat in their one language, or to find their native foodstuff brought in fresh from afar.

A station of the size and with the range of route connections (more than thirty in all) as Accra's central station creates a multiplicity of such exclaves in close proximity to one another. This proximity generates encounters, exchanges, and collaborations, both commercial and social. While many of these encounters are fleeting, others prove to be lasting and regularly lead to new connections.

This is not to construct a romanticized image of the station as a place free of conflict, let alone as delivered from inequality. Its organization of labor is deeply entrenched in hierarchical and unequal relations and is linked

to a wider political economy that reproduces the uneven distribution of income and access to resources (Stasik 2024). The chronological distinction between those who arrived earlier and those who arrived later, thus the older and newer arrivals, maps onto these hierarchies and the inequalities that result from them.

Disputes also arise here with a striking regularity and are regularly fought out with great intensity. These conflicts, however, rarely arise along the lines of ascribed affiliations, but rather from clashing commercial and personal interests. And while people habitually draw on ascriptive categories of identification to make sense of their interactions, these are not the primary determinants that structure their relationships. Rather, diversity—in terms of ethnic, national, religious, and linguistic difference—is a taken-for-granted reality here and dealt with accordingly: as daily business.

The station workers' routinized engagement with difference echoes what Werbner (1999) and others call "working class" or "tactical cosmopolitanism" (Landau and Freemantle 2010). This cosmopolitanism does not follow from some kind of philosophy of moral universalism but relates a form of practical knowledge of, and openness to, different human groups. In terms of the station workers' engagements, this knowledge combines expertise in matters of infrastructure, related to the practicalities of organizing transport and trade, with "matters" of culture, related to the cultivation of practical competence in, and ethical sensibility to, the different languages, customs, and dispositions.

This blending of pragmatic and ethical goals is illustrated by the remarkable linguistic skills of many station workers. They routinely draw on a variety of West African languages to communicate with and attract potential customers and patrons while also cultivating a peculiar kind of bus station pidgin. Bar owner Victoria, for example, not only is fluent in five of the main languages spoken in Ghana (Dangme, English, Ewe, Ga, and Twi) and French but also has competences in half a dozen West African languages, including Hausa, Igbo, and Mossi. Victoria's multilingualism is no exception in the linguistic repertoires of the people at the station, or indeed of West Africa's urban dwellers in general.

The diverse composition of the station's groups of old arrivals, together with their exponentiated infrastructural, cultural, and linguistic knowledge, provides the main ground for social practices poised to explore, engage with, mobilize, and accommodate differences of varying kinds and scales. In turn, these individual and collective engagements with difference, which enfold across the range from old-established arrivals like Efosa and Al-Hajj to new or relatively new arrivals like Ali and Mariam, sustain the station's affordances for encounter, exchange, and connection that facilitate processes of emplacement.

In the context of the station, belonging becomes an utterly flexible and situational construct, and one of multiple intersecting dimensions (see Werbner 2018 for a related argument). While ascriptive affiliations such as ethnicity, nationality, and religion initially define one's identity, these markers do not preclude the possibility of finding commonality with others. The routine of creating commonality across social difference is particularly evident in the elaborate system of joking relationships maintained by the station workers and regular visitors, often in the form of "sweet talk" across the gender divide, as the station dwellers refer to flirting. These interactions and the relationships they generate, beyond their instrumental role in mobilizing resources and business relations, underline the strong tendency to perform, emphasize, and adapt different identities in different social situations. The close relationship between Efosa and Al-Hajj, for example, seems to be based solely on extensive joking and flirting, with to my knowledge no ulterior motives other than sustaining mutuality.

Here, Victoria's chronological view of new and old arrivals adds analytical value in another important way. It foregrounds the particular form of reciprocity that informs the sociabilities conducive of new and old arrivals' efforts of life-building through connection-building, with reciprocity here understood in the classic anthropological sense of delayed exchange. As new arrivals draw on the guidance and help offered by earlier arrivals, they themselves become more established arrivals, now committed to sharing their experience and expertise with fresh arrivals.

Ali and Mariam are cases in point. During my visits to Ali at the bookstall, he engaged in conversations with groups of francophone students, exchanging his knowledge of Accra with the students' insights about the places they came from, visited, and aspired to travel to. The last time I met Mariam at the station, which she continued to visit regularly, she had changed her status at the seamstress shop from "junior" to "senior apprentice," a raise in tasks and responsibilities that she embraced wholeheartedly. She proudly told me how she was helping to guide the new junior apprentices, many of whom, she emphasized, had arrived in Accra lacking even the most basic orientation.

Engaging with Difference

Engaging with difference in encounters is nothing new for West African urbanites. For at least a hundred years, processes of rapid urbanization have created the conditions for different human groups to live together in close proximity, while interacting with and learning from and about one another in different ways and with different effects. Specific cultural politics

of belonging and identity have shaped their encounters and interactions in particular ways, and there is no shortage of evidence of the construction and maintenance of boundaries between groups, as reflected in social, economic, and spatial demarcations and related struggles over prerogatives of access to resources and rights.

But this is only one side of the story, told from the parochial perspective of groups cast as bounded entities. I have proposed here a different view, one that shifts the focus from prefixed groups to sites of connectivity and interaction. What the vantage point of the station helps to reveal is that migrant paths and affiliations are considerably far more diverse than is captured by the tired methodological paradigm of the ethnic lens. It also helps to recast the conceptual purview of these categories in relation to their emic uses and significances. The West Africans I worked with in Ghana routinely use categories of ascribed affiliation such as kinship, ethnicity, religion, and nationality to situate their encounters and relationships, as the ethnography presented in this chapter also showed. But their use in organizing everyday relations is far more flexible, situational and open to rescaling than the fixity they have attained in common use as an analytical category.

Crucially, the affiliations and boundaries supposedly prescribed by these categories are far less formative of my research participants' life-building efforts than Africanist migration research routinely describes them as. Indeed, what is perhaps most remarkable here is the routine with which many of my interlocutors engage in relations across difference, working with rather than reifying categories. The routinized ways in which old arrivals like Efosa and Al-Hajj work with difference in encounters can, to a significant extent, be attributed to the place of the bus station where they work. Many station workers are true masters of working with difference and making it work for different ends—with "work" not understood as some kind of metaphor for agency or practice but literally as denoting acts of human effort and of the creative, often challenging and strenuous labor invested in managing diverse social and material relations.

Many of their efforts are of a more utilitarian orientation, pertaining especially to the organization of transport and trade. But the importance social and linguistic competences, cultural sensibilities, and ethics of shared humanity have in their daily work with difference can hardly be overstated, nor can it be separated from more ends-oriented actions. Here the intimate connection between the infrastructural function of the station, with its capacity to facilitate exchange across distance, and its social form, with its affordance to create exchange across difference, becomes acutely pronounced. This blending of infrastructural and social significances—wedded to movements at different scales—makes its site a powerful engine for the new arrivals' emplacement efforts. In much the same vein, its dynamic

conflation of countless mobilities and of temporalities of arrival makes it an especially relevant site to depart from static notions of place and de-essentialize categorical distinction between migrants and non-migrants, as emphasized in the introduction (Drotbohm and Winters, this volume).

While the power to emplace arrivals is particularly manifest within the place and within the groups of the station, it is by no means exceptional for West African urban spaces and societies at large. The sociabilities of emplacement created within the station, with their dense agglomeration of exclaves and the many weak ties that their proximity produces, differ from the wider urban environment in terms of the density and complexity of their diversity, but not in their basic propensity to accommodate difference.

Both the density and the complexity of differences condensed within the station are, at least to some extent, responsible for its reputation as a chaotic and dangerous place among certain urban groups, as raised in the exchange of views reproduced at the beginning of this chapter. However, their valuation of the station's role in urban life and the hazards it supposedly poses is perhaps less informed by a concern for order and safety than by a particular thinking about difference, which, to paraphrase Hannerz's (1980: 56) critique of the early Chicago school of urban sociology, tends to conceive disorder when describing diversity. In claiming autochthony, they tend, intentionally or not, to obscure the fact that they too, or some of their more immediate ancestors, were new arrivals to the city at some point. From this historically widened perspective, it is not only the station that is "a place of foreigners," as the Ivoirian trader Albert claimed, but the city itself.

Rather than seeing the perspective offered by the station as an exception to broader social practices and values, it serves as a prism through which the practices and values that West African urbanites have long cultivated in their engagements with difference are brought into sharp relief. Victoria's concept of new and old arrivals, with its strong emphasis on commonality over categorical difference, captures the refraction that these engagements generate in a particularly incisive way.

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NOTES

1. I refer to all individuals described in this chapter with pseudonyms.
2. For a critical review of the concept of "migration infrastructures" in relation to West Africa, see Kleist and Bjarnesen 2019.
3. Important exceptions to the prevalence of the ethnic lens in Africanist migration research include recent studies concerned with the high-risk mobility of West Africans en route to Europe, which highlight in particular the relevance of "dynamic social networks" (Schapendonk 2015) created outside ethnic and kin affiliations (e.g., Bachelet 2019; Bredeloup 2013).
4. In addition to people from Nigeria, Togo, Burkina Faso, and Niger, for whom Ghana has historically been a preferred destination, these include people from many countries that, until recently, did not represent any significant portion of in-migration to Ghana, especially Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the two Congos, Gabon, Guinea, and Mali. This changing trend is occurring against the backdrop of Ghana's widely established image as what many of my research participants refer to as "a peaceful country," highlighting the absence of xenophobic tendencies and violent conflict. An additional driver includes the perceived chances presented by Ghana's lasting economic growth, in turn said to facilitate opportunities for education, job training, and employment, especially when compared to the economic strictures across other West and Central African countries. This reputation of economic prosperity, however, may change due to the severe economic downturn in the wake of the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which in combination created record levels of inflation.
5. Ali's metaphorical allusion here has a concrete basis in the language of transport workers. Most people coming to the station are first welcomed by the urging cries of the so-called loading boys who tout the bus tickets to "load" passengers onto the buses by asking *Wore ko he*?, meaning "Where you are going?" in Twi.
6. Dagbani is the language of the Gur people of northern Ghana but is often used generically as an ethnic marker.
7. As I have described in detail elsewhere, public road transport in Ghana is, for the most part, neither run nor subsidized by the state but operated by a vast number of small-scale private entrepreneurs and workers (Stasik 2024). This includes the groups running the bus stations, where most of the transport connections are coordinated, who likewise work in a context of a relative lack of state control and support.

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CHAPTER
3

Gym Mobilities

Shaping Bodies and Lifting Community at the Edges of San Salvador

Noelle K. Brigden

The concept of *mobility* has a dual meaning. In the world of social sciences, mobility refers to a myriad of sociopolitical processes structured by spatial travel, including those implicated in the migration of human bodies. In the world of exercise science and fitness settings, mobility refers to the body's ability to progress through the physical range expected for its joints. In both worlds over time, mobility routines can extend or limit our capacities for future moves, structuring our material reality and, ultimately, place-making. The two meanings of mobility coincide in a community gym at the edges of San Salvador. People (including myself) develop meaningful physical routines that shape our sense of belonging as well as our bodies. As this chapter will explore, the gym represents one of many topographical features within a transnational landscape of confinement and resistance, displacement and migration, which is experienced in daily life and imprinted in embodied norms.

To contribute to this volume on migrant trajectories, I argue that a local gym in El Salvador provides a mundane location to witness multiple dimensions of mobility in the context of transnational diaspora and place-making processes. In so doing, I follow Ahmed et al.'s (2003) rejection of easy dichotomies of grounded/fixed, mobile/detached, presence/absence, and here/there. Specifically, to illustrate how a gym becomes a microcosm of complex global bordering practices that defy such binary modes of think-

ing, I scale back and forth between the body and broader social processes. I develop three metaphors that traverse studies of the North American migration route and the lived experience of a local gym in El Salvador: walls, passports, and sanctuaries. Artifacts that materialize these metaphors, such as concrete barriers, paper documents, and fitness facilities, entangle and elucidate mobilities.

In this chapter I begin by briefly describing my own relationship to these material artifacts, their broader social processes, and people who imbue them with meaning (though all individuals' names are pseudonyms). What follows is a series of autoethnographic observations, based on personal reflections and fieldwork notes. As such, the reader may notice some slippage in the temporality of the argument as I trespass across writing *about* place-making and writing *in* place. Some of the events and relationships recounted in this chapter occurred in the past, others continue into the present. Within this chimeric positionality, occasional confusion in verb tenses feels inevitable and correct rather than grammatical err. After briefly explaining my position within this narrative, I describe the gym's origins within a broader history of displacement. Finally, through a series of vignettes, I explore the resonance of walls, sanctuaries, and passports, drawing from migration studies to discuss the place-making processes visible from the vantage point of the exercise floor.

Autoethnographic Moves

I arrived in Romero community and its neighboring barrio Distrito Italia to study boundaries between street gangs and their role in displacement, but I harnessed the capacity to project my membership in a transnational tribe of "gym bro" to create a place for myself. In 2014, I adopted the hobby of lifting weights as a coping strategy after years of fieldwork on violence along the migration route from El Salvador across Mexico and into the United States, and I brought that hobby with me on many visits back to El Salvador over the years.

Since I began lifting, I have reveled in my capacity to find community anywhere in the world that I wander, using a visual display of my muscles to project identity. If I find a gym, no matter where I travel, people treat me as though I belong there, presumably because I look like I do. In New York City or Mexico City, Lima or Berlin, Verona or Lesbos, I expect coaches to express a look of acknowledgment upon seeing me, visually assessing my strength, and then to inquire about my athletic background.

Despite language barriers, I reply to their inquiries in a shared dialect of fitness jargon that conveys common experience. This shared dialect of

fitness jargon is not a coincidence; it emerges within a transnational mediascape and recent reorganizations of the capitalist political economy that link El Salvador and the United States (Brigden, forthcoming). In both countries, gym slogans and commercialized fitness imagery circulating in popular media often convey racist, ableist, classist, sexist, and heteronormative messages (Brigden, forthcoming). In this context, to be demonstrably "fit" has become a manner of signaling class and character, greeted as both an indicator of discipline and access to leisure (Brigden, forthcoming). Thus, whether I want to be or not, I am implicated in the transmission of practices and ideas that generate both belonging and exclusion.

Of course, the capacity to project my belonging through my physique is fleeting; I am acutely aware that as I age, I cannot continue this performance indefinitely. That moment of identity-loss feels near for me now. However, for a time, I found community in gym spaces around the world, and where a gym was lacking, I built one. In so doing, I had hoped to co-craft an inclusive space for embodied collective joy, thereby subverting commercial fitness values (Argueta and Brigden 2023). My role in this process will be acknowledged in the history of the gym that follows, but elsewhere I develop a decolonial and critical reflection on positionality, the thorny ethics of this intervention, and the potential weaponization of my "fit" body to the detriment of Salvadoran women (see Argueta and Brigden 2023; Brigden 2022).

During my visits in 2017 and 2018, as I began my own amateur career as a powerlifting competitor in the United States, I taught powerlifting to women in San Ramon, Mejicanos, and (across the city in a different barrio) co-ed calisthenics classes in Romero, Tonacatepeque. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and with the collaboration of the local leadership of the Romero governing council and a partner NGO, I co-designed an open-air facility to minimize contamination potential. In collaboration with the gym manager, I expanded athletic programming during intermittent visits. Informal classes grew to a scholarship program for locals to study wellness-related themes, a trauma-informed body resistance program for mothers and daughters, hosting a visit from Australian trauma-informed kickboxers, and a nonprofit fundraising effort. Thus, beyond simply observing fragmentation and solidarity, I played an integral role in these processes, engaging in the very mobility and social practices that constitute a transnational corridor for people, information, and resources (see Brigden 2018; Brigden 2020; Brigden 2022; and Argueta and Brigden 2023 for reflections on this evolving role).

This gym has profoundly changed my research trajectory, generating the questions that inspired this chapter. I moved away from research on gang violence and migration to a focus on applied trauma-informed work and

a study of "fitness" as body politics in El Salvador (Brigden 2022). In this chapter, I provide an autoethnographic reflection based in observations from these moves; it is not an ethnography of Salvadoran worldviews. Instead, this chapter represents a glance through my own participation, as I trespass across realms of community practice and analysis. Therefore, with these vignettes, I make humble knowledge claims, providing a basis for future exploration of gym mobilities (see also Brigden and Vogt 2015 for an example of autoethnographic approach as a starting point for research). Focused on my embodied role in place-making, I complicate (though not obliterate) insider/outsider binaries that often structure ethnographic methods. Acknowledging these complications and situating myself within a transnational corridor as an active participant in a variety of cross-border mobilities begins to de-essentialize "migrants." Writing autoethnographically within transnational fitness worlds complicates categories of emic/etic understandings, because some of these spaces have been co-created, shaped, and/or reproduced through my own practices alongside my Salvadoran friends and others. In the community gym, I am neither home nor away, neither a true member nor a stranger. Instead, I refocus on the ways locals and foreigners, would-be migrants, people left behind, and other visitors cohabitate through both contested and complimentary mobilities.

Situating the Gym within a History of Displacement

The facility, located next door to a communal building down a dirt path in the small barrio known as Romero, belongs to the local governing council; my nonprofit shared the costs of its construction with a partner NGO. The gym has a rectangular shape with a high tin corrugated roof and cement flooring, enclosed by bars allowing visibility and free flow of air. A small bodega stores equipment under lock and key at night. There are currently no changerooms, but a small garden space remains reserved as a children's play area to be further developed when we have sufficient resources. Until a recent intensification of police repression in the zone, beginning with the "State of Exception" declared by the Salvadoran government in March 2022, the gym served over forty-five regulars assigned membership cards, and more than thirty people used the space on any given weeknight. Men and women train together, though men slightly outnumbered women. The space houses two squat racks, several barbells and plates, a set of lightweight dumbbells, a few kettlebells, a couple of cable machines, rubber band sets, rings, mats, and a few other fitness items. Those items were insufficient for the numbers of participants, and many people turned to high-intensity interval training (HIIT), calisthenics, or cardio classes when

the weights became scarce due to overcrowding. A gym director oversees the organization of the facility.

The facility sits at the edges of the greater San Salvador metropolitan area, a zone recently incorporated into a sprawling cityscape. This sprawl blurs the boundaries between rural and urban, becoming home to many of the social ills associated with poor city living yet none of the convenience of an easy commute to work. Each neighborhood in this zone grew following successive waves of internal displacement: civil war, a series of natural disasters, and a sudden loss of opportunities in the agricultural economy. The first wave of internally displaced people arrived after a severe earthquake in 1986, and the Italian government collaborated to develop the rehousing project, christened Distrito Italia (Ramírez 2011). After another earthquake, in 2001, the project expanded with Spanish government support (Ramírez 2011). An adjacent neighborhood, La Libertad, formed as a private, for-profit development project, in which people purchased homes, setting the stage for socioeconomic differences between neighborhoods. In the most recent settlement in the zone, called Romero, internally displaced people squatted on the land and won their claim after a legal battle with the support of a transnational coalition of advocates, financed by US-based civil-society partners. In addition to legal support, these partners built dignified housing and a few public spaces for the neighborhood, which draws on well-organized community leadership with deep knowledge of how to access and promote their causes to transnational advocacy networks. However, Romero's neighbors, who previously settled the terrain and had been subsistence farming the land that the newcomers occupied, objected to their arrival. Several violent confrontations erupted at the site as they contested the legal claim. This distrust between waves of internally displaced people represents a broader pattern of conflict at the edges of San Salvador (see Hume 2009). However, these neighborhoods nevertheless remain interdependent, with economic trade and kinship ties extending across their territorial boundaries. Despite continuing animosity and recurrent accusations of criminality between neighbors, people have relatives and conduct commerce across the barrios.

All these neighborhoods confront socioeconomic marginalization and stigmatization by state, media, and popular associations of the zone with criminality. In practical terms, this stigmatization influences the availability of volunteers and programming in the gym. For example, I contracted with a volunteer yoga instructor to lead trauma-informed seminars, but after a nationally syndicated newspaper ran a story that Distrito Italia had been ceded to the gangs, she canceled due to security concerns.[1] As a result, there is currently no yoga class available. This place-stigma is gendered with men frequently coded as threats and thereby rendered vulnerable to po-

lice violence (see Gamlin 2021 on situating gendered urban edgework in neocolonial perspective; on gendered vulnerability and feminism, see also Argueta and Brigden 2023). Periodically, when police presence in the zone becomes intense, the gym closes to avoid encouraging young men to risk travel in the street or gathering in groups, where they might be targeted. For months after the initial declaration of the State of Exception, the gym closed to men and boys. Across the city and country, men from this zone wear their place-stigma with them. One of the gym's volunteers lost his position as a soldier in the Salvadoran military because his superiors discovered that he hails from La Libertad. They warned him to change his address or face investigation for gang ties, and he resigned rather than move from his family home: "Where would I go?" He sometimes helps organize the gym's cleaning teams at night as a volunteer and gives others a ride home on his motorcycle. Other youth face similar labor discrimination if they use their home address on job applications in the capital city.

This place-stigma derives meaning and potency from the Salvadoran crime-fear politics that emerged from wartime displacement and an unfulfilled transition to democracy (Moodie 2010). Contemporary Central American street gangs are cross-border cultural formations, informed by embodied experiences of socioeconomic and political exclusion. For example, the MS gang (which dominates the zone surrounding the gym) is a specter of transnational marginalization, not simply local street conflicts or Salvadoran state-society conflicts (Zilberg 2011). The members of the local gang rarely have transnational experience; few have traveled far from home (even around their own country) as their mobility remains tightly restricted by their rivals and the state. However, the gang is a legacy of the partial integration and mass deportation of Central American refugees from the United States in the 1980s and early 1990s, bringing LA street culture with them (Zilberg 2011). Meanwhile, transnational policy networks adopted US-style hard-on-crime policing tactics with US funding and turned gangs into political boogie men—that is, fear-provoking images weaponized in Salvadoran electoral competition (Moodie 2010; Wolf 2017; Zilberg 2011). In turn, both gang and police violence now motivate continued Salvadoran out-migration (Brigden 2012). Two girls who used the gym fled the community due to separate incidents with gangs; one girl now lives in California with family, and the other received help from friends she met through a human rights delegation to make a new home in Nicaragua. In this sense, the gym sits at the edges of a transnational society forged through decades of displacement, urban exclusion, and international deportation, not just in San Salvador. Meanwhile, a recent wave of police repression will likely motivate more people to flee. Through experiences of displacement, the gym simultaneously occupies the edges of Los Angeles and Managua.

Border Infrastructure

During a recent visit, I woke early to use the gym before sunrise so that I might finish my own lifting rituals before others call upon me to help them. Through the glow of streetlamps and the changing dawn sky, I looked across the dirt road to admire the enormity of a cement wall around the tiny barrio. The gym is nestled within that tiny barrio. In my eyes, the wall represented a material manifestation of both conflict between neighborhoods and their relationship to transnational NGOs that facilitated its construction. I also noticed that the lights at Esperanza's house were already on.[2] During the dry season, she routinely woke at 3:30 A.M. to try to capture water that might be trickling from the community well through her pipes. The early risers sometimes had a chance to fill their buckets before the day set upon them.

Like the wall, Esperanza's routine reflected local conflicts and transnational relationships. A transnational NGO constructed the community well for Esperanza's walled neighborhood, and when wise local leadership understood that such inequality in resources between barrios was unsustainable, the NGO built a second well, serving people living beyond the wall. Sadly, under longer and stronger dry seasons, this act of good faith exacerbated scarcity, and the new well construction seems to have negatively impacted the vitality of the original well, which might be connected underground. In fact, the gym sits in a microcosm of border dynamics under conditions of climate change (on walling under such conditions, see Miller 2017); environmental pressures play an intensifying role in out-migration for the Central American region (Hallett 2019).

The large cement wall with a metal gate, built by a transnational NGO, sometimes exacerbates tensions between communities in the area. Walls around wealthy Salvadoran communities are standard, unsurprising. Closures of streets in middle-class communities, usually staffed by an armed private security guard, have also proliferated, and became normalized, despite their illegality. However, a wall around a poor community of former squatters is an aberration. Because of its carceral appearance, residents of surrounding neighborhoods nicknamed the Romero community "La Mariona" in reference to a notorious Salvadoran prison. Jokes that liken the neighborhood to a prison demonstrate how the wall marks spatialized difference between neighborhoods. The odd cement structure is a fixed feature, a relic of conflict and unequal access to transnational resources. Despite the permanence and imperviousness of cement, the wall means different things to different people, and these meanings have changed over time. The origin of the wall and its purpose remain disputed.

When I asked community members where the wall came from, one replied, "Perhaps it was a gringo's idea?" Some locals cited a range of purposes from keeping cattle from trampling gardens (farfetched for that level of expenditure) to fear of the neighbors who had threatened the squatters. Others have noted its importance as a symbol of community. However, when I asked about the wall's role in keeping out the gangs, local people universally scoffed at the idea. One man succinctly explained, "There is no wall to [that kind of] violence." For a time, however, the wall served an essential purpose for the safety and well-being of the community: it kept out the soldiers and police. A worsening spiral of extrajudicial killings swept the country since the intensification of Mano Dura (Iron Fist) policing in the early 2000s (Cristosal 2018; HRW 2022). Police abuses run rampant, and a member of a local governing committee in a neighborhood just outside the wall complained that the soldiers had broken into his home to harass him on multiple occasions. That local leader lamented that his neighborhood did not have a wall, because it would benefit their security to keep out the state authorities. Within the wall, community members cited the capacity to keep out soldiers and police among its benefits. Community members also note that, on more than one occasion, the wall has saved homes from traffic collisions when speeding cars on the main road lost control.

Jill, a seasoned NGO worker with a long-standing relationship with the community, retold a tale about the wall: One of the local boys had been running from the soldiers and managed to get inside the gate. When the soldiers demanded entry to track him down, the townspeople pretended to lose the keys. A performance ensued, as they pantomimed a good faith effort to open the barricade for the military. The soldiers became angry and tried to scale the wall but were too fat and slid back down. At this point, Jill shook with laughter. I too smiled at the image of the incompetent soldiers falling, as the humble but clever townspeople watch from safety behind their fence: a stark contrast to the images in my mind from around the globe of stealthy police officers in riot gear who intercept the African migrants attempting to scale Ceuta's fences or fire rubber bullets at Central American asylum seekers in the dry riverbed in Tijuana. The story subverted the usual power dynamics of borders, and the concrete structure became a prop to this turning of the tables. The story also leveraged fat phobias and body shaming, redirecting a form of symbolic violence often borne by women and redeploying it as a (problematic) weapon against the state.

While I now doubt that the events occurred as told in the legend, the narrative nevertheless constructs an image of the relationship between the state and its citizens that is widely shared between transnational NGO workers and locals. True or not, the legend is a social fact, repeated to express key

identities and a distinct politics. In fact, the legend of the wall represents a very different state-society relationship than the narrative that emerges at the border walls of the nation-state, where structures project sovereign power against a backdrop of globalization (Brown 2010). Racialized and class-discriminatory "crime talk" frequently justifies the construction of gated communities in urban and suburban settings around the globe (Caldeira 2000; Maher 2003, 2004; Maher and Carruthers 2018; Moodie 2010). In this instance, the community members' "crime talk" narrates the role of an illegitimate state, alongside other meanings of the wall. Within and beyond the wall, stories of extrajudicial assassinations, police beatings, abuses of power, sexual improprieties, threats by authorities, and other humiliations abound, forming part of daily conversations for people of all ages. This crime talk also becomes body talk, as women routinely poke fun of fat cops. For example, late one night, with much laughter, my teenage friend Krissi joked that the extrajudicial killings become disappearances, not murders, because the police are eating the bodies. Her elegant theory also explained their bloated *panzas* (bellies). Legends and fat-shaming jokes about borders and bodies say a great deal about the (un)settling of political authority.

Alas, the wall no longer serves a security purpose. The police eventually broke its lock. Now, nobody even bothers to shut the gate. Nevertheless, the structure memorializes the multiple conflicts that forged these communities as bounded places. Today, Romero's leaders and their transnational NGO supporters recognize the strategic need for improved relations and benefit-sharing across neighborhoods. Jill's NGO purchased land and cosponsored, along with the local governing committee and other supporters, the new well, sharing precious water resources across their boundaries. However, contested politics continue, even when new infrastructure is cast in cement. The gym is also cast in cement with a mission that includes solidarity between neighborhoods, much like the well project. From its charter, the gym welcomes people from all the surrounding neighborhoods, genders, ages, and abilities. Indeed, one of the local leaders involved in construction of the open-air gym facility expressed hope that it might repair the "social fabric." With this purpose, the space becomes a place of bordering and un/bordering. The neighborhoods it serves share a common fate. They remain tied together socially and economically, though the din of accusations between neighbors sometimes renders these ties as imperceptible as the underground flows that weave together the consequences of dueling community wells.[3] The material landscape, mobility practices, and everyday life in the gym become deeply entangled (see also Stasik in this volume, on infrastructures of emplacement). The gym, despite its permanent infrastructure and material emplacement, does not settle or stop such

complex renegotiations, and the wall is still visible from the exercise floor. The open-air gym is located inside the wall while trying to subvert patterns of exclusion.

Local Passports

On one of my early visits to the community, the boys in the street hailed our vehicle. The local gang rarely stops foreign NGO workers, but on occasion they did, at least before the State of Exception. Often, it was a simple security measure, as they inspected vehicles to avoid an ambush from rivals. During a later visit, when questioned about my purpose, I declared that I had a donation for the gym. In response, the leader of the checkpoint politely apologized for the nuisance of stopping my car, waving me through regally. At other times, the boys stopped me to try to sell fruit or cookies for their own eked-out livelihood. The boys sometimes complimented the beauty of the tattoos that adorn my shoulder. However, on the occasion of this early visit, I could only laugh. A boy with a thin t-shirt climbing over an exposed beer belly lounged in a wheelbarrow, passed out. The other two lanky boys, obviously inebriated with bleary red eyes, stood by with shovels. They explained that they repaired the road and asked for a small "collaboration" in exchange for their efforts. I glanced at the patchwork of sizeable potholes in front of the car and giggled sarcastically, "Well done, boys," but gave them a quarter and a smile. Up to the time of writing, this was the most difficulty I had experienced entering the zone.

Nevertheless, most people assume that violence perpetrated by gang members represents the key challenge to running a gym in the zone. Without a doubt, the gang's control of the area casts a shadow onto the gym, and its members watch its activities closely; we are careful to avoid insults. However, thus far, disagreements between local neighborhoods and intensified police repression, not the gang itself, have been the major challenges to the continued existence of the gym.

When more young men from nearby barrios entered Romero with excitement over the arrival of fancier equipment and the opening of a new facility, tensions escalated. Some members of Romero's council decried the gender imbalance, claiming that the influx of male outsiders had frightened local women away from the facility. On one occasion, members of the council wrongly accused a gym volunteer of being a gang member when he sought keys to the facility from a local girl. Rumors about a lack of hygiene in the facility also circulated in the context of the COVID crisis, and several male volunteers, aware of the precarious status of the gym, broke with gender norms to become a cleaning crew at night. Members of the council continu-

ally raise the issue of resegregating the space by gender, with an eye to limiting access to the facility (and neighborhood) for men coming from outside the wall. This local leadership has the capacity to close the gym in response to community outrage or fear, and it does periodically, for example when COVID-19 risks or police attention become acute. To placate outrage and fears about young men from surrounding neighborhoods, the gym manager instituted membership cards that regulate entry.

The cards register names with contact information and membership numbers, verifying identities. Upon each entry to the gym, the card holder signs a log. If questions arise about why a gym-goer has entered the neighborhood, they must provide the membership card. The cards have not resolved anxieties over the gym, but they represent a version of regulated mobility and monitored border crossing. In essence, the community created gym visas, and over time, these tiny, laminated papers redefine territorial belonging and community boundaries, playing an important role in place-making.

On the day of the grand opening, teams of volunteers from the surrounding communities prepared decorations, and streams of brightly colored balloons adorned the gym from floor to ceiling. Foreign visitors and a few Salvadoran guests from the capital arrived in a convoy with easily identifiable vehicles to avoid the gang potentially confusing them with security threats. I made my rounds door to door, personally inviting folks to the party. With an abundance of tamales, cake, and a raffle, the volunteers and I engaged in serious diplomacy. Our presentation included a discussion of our inclusive, body-positive ethos, and we proudly displayed the membership cards. Volunteers, dressed in respectful business attire and looking very much like Mormons, wore lanyards with the cards around their neck. The blue-and-white laminated card had the gym name, the logos of the two NGOs that sponsored the construction, outlines of male and female lifters in the bottom right corner, and a collection of small black-and-white images in the upper right corner, including a flexing male bodybuilder, dumbbell, barbell, plate, and kettlebell, the member's name and membership number inscribed with a date, and a pledge to accept the rules and honor inclusivity in the gym. We later developed an official gym seal for paperwork, and a recent revision of the membership cards in a sharp black-and-green theme looks far more professional, thanks to the efforts of a local graphic designer.

A few weeks after this grand opening, disaster struck. On March 27, 2022, in a dramatic escalation of decades of Mano Dura, the regime of President Nayib Bukele declared a "State of Exception" and suspended constitutional protections (HRW 2022). This declaration effectively eliminated the right to legal defense. Meanwhile, the government extended its own

right to surveillance of private communications and increased penalties for those accused of gang membership. The government also initiated massive police and military repression: stopping and searching citizens as they attempt to enter or leave areas stigmatized by reputation for gang activity, effectively locking down some of these neighborhoods, entering homes to interrogate community leaders, and dragging young men onto their knees (and sometimes stripped naked to their underwear) into the street before disappearing them into the prison system. In the targeted neighborhoods, like Distrito Italia, tearful mothers search for their arrested children and proclaim their innocence. Such police actions psychologically compound the deep fear that some Salvadoran citizens already feel as they attempt to move through their cities (Cristosal 2021). On social media, in response to this escalation of violence, the Salvadoran Federation for Body Building (FSFC), affiliated with the government-led National Institute for Sports in El Salvador (INDES), urged its members to take actions to protect themselves, "Bodybuilding athlete, it is a good idea in this exception regime, to carry your federated athlete card" (Facebook, 4/1/22). Gym passports had gone national.

The gym temporarily closed due to these measures. In more normal times, the membership cards provide access. Even under better conditions, however, the cards might unintentionally legitimate the exclusion of non–card holders from the neighborhood. As police repression in the zone redoubled, the card system became increasingly elaborate and interfaced with the state; gym-goers must now trek to a government office downtown to receive a criminal history report that shows no priors, and then provide this official report with a copy of their government-issued identification to receive a gym membership. This contact with the state bureaucratic apparatus is justly terrifying for many people. To assuage these fears and facilitate documentation, the gym sponsored an escorted road trip for this documentation. In so doing, the gym became implicated in the paradox of vulnerability and security that arises in moments of what Horton (2020: 3–6) calls "bureaucratic inscription."

Thus, the mundane gym membership card draws on and becomes complicit with a long tradition of state surveillance. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the invention of passports made contemporary notions of the nation-state possible, allowing for the documentation of a legal category of nationality tied to territory (Torpey 2000). Such documents legitimate, facilitate, and perpetuate the exclusion of those who lack them (Ahmed et al. 2003: 7). Insofar that the gym cards serve as a passport, we may expect a similar bordering process to unfold around them; they allow gym neighbors to interrogate and differentiate among outsiders. In a context of more mild police repression, the cards also provide a potential

resource for gym-goers questioned by government authorities on the street, sometimes justifying the presence of young men in public. In one reported incident, police allowed a gym volunteer to move through a checkpoint after he showed his card. Gym members hope that the cards document their engagement in a healthy pursuit of wellness, thereby signaling their conformity to norms of discipline and self-improvement. Or at least, some gym-goers (and the national federation of bodybuilders) hope so. As noted by Ordoñez (2020: 210), the "documentary realities" that shape mobilities respond as much to beliefs and rumors (and perhaps, I would add, hopes) as the materiality of the papers.

The fact that the gym receives foreign support seems to buttress its local authority. Mirroring the racialized and class inequalities of the international passport system, which forms part of a broader global mobility regime, gym visas have been unnecessary for white foreign visitors from the Global North, who can move transnationally with a relatively warm welcome. To some extent, foreigners also have a modicum of influence dictating the terms of mobility for others. For example, when the gym first began night programming, the police lurked around the corner, and the young men would wait, sometimes for hours until the police left, to walk home. The police often harass local boys walking after dark in this zone. Acting in my capacity as a powerlifting coach affiliated with the NGO and accompanied by the leader of the community council, I addressed the police at the municipal station. I informed the local chief of my intention of continuing night classes and requested safe passage for my athletes. He expressed surprise that I was sleeping in the zone (presumably because I am foreign) and chagrin that I had not reported my presence for "protection" (as though he could offer such a thing). However, the harassment of the gym-goers ceased for a time after my visit. During the COVID-19 closure of the gym's indoor facility and my long absence, the police returned to harass young men practicing calisthenics with women on a soccer field at night.

The membership cards are insufficient for safe passage in a situation of heightened security risks. In that context, racialized class/place membership, stigmatized by an association with criminality, trumps documentation and weak NGO legitimation of mobility. Similarly at international borders, despite the façade of impartiality provided by documentation, governments continue to rely upon on racialized class markers to accuse some people (occasionally their own citizens) of trespassing (Brigden 2018; Heyman 2009). Around the world, racist and capitalist carceral logics influence both domestic policing in urban environments within nation-states and immigration enforcement at their geographic periphery (Walia 2021). Thus, local boundaries surrounding the gym reflect and refract processes of global ra-

cial apartheid in a myriad of ways, including the limits to and possibilities for access mediated by documents.

The echoes between international and local mobility management points to the need to de-exoticize migration scholarship, noted in the (Drotbohm and Winters this volume). In confronting the everyday indignities of profiling and policing, migrants are not exceptional. Stigmatized urban dwellers around the globe also engage in a struggle to access place, including when they simply try to get fit.

Sanctuary

I knocked on doors. The sun was hot, and I welcomed invitations into shady homes, despite COVID-19 concerns that kept us from hugging. I conducted this outreach because the neighborhoods distrust one other, and the gym serves the entire surrounding area. Because it draws young men from other neighborhoods, the gym is not popular with everyone living nearby it, and when I visited, I attempted to listen and resolve conflicts, addressing concerns as they arose. I began by asking whether the occupants of the house had used the gym, why or why not, and whether they approved of its presence. I invited them to complain to me. I also invited them personally to the gym, reminding them that they are its true owners; the gym belongs to the public, free of charge, and I encouraged them to enjoy movement and their body. Ultimately, I tried to transmit the inclusive ethos that inspired the gym. However, not everyone wanted to hear my body-positive evangelicalism. On more than one occasion that day, people ducked and hid behind their drapes or hurried into a backroom.

People often hide in the same way from the Mormons, who represent a different transnational temple. These similarities do not go unnoticed by gym-goers, who often joke with me about my status as a secular "missionary." In response, I clasp my hands piously and dramatically admit that I serve the temple of the body. Elsewhere (Argueta and Brigden 2023; Brigden 2020; Brigden 2022), I critically reflect on, rather than joke about, disturbing similarities between my role as gym evangelist and the imperial legacies of missionaries. However, the gym *is* our sanctuary, and for the most die-hard gym volunteers, a sort of religion. They get the joke.

Gyms and churches play similar roles in community. They provide opportunities for social interaction, identity development, structured time, and even cathartic release. The most passionate gym-goers understand fitness as a "lifestyle" beyond the confines of the space (a claim repeated frequently in the gym), complete with a system of values, beliefs, rituals, and rules. Fit-

ness has become one of the world's great secular religions, inspiring faith in the possibility of redemption, practicing ritualistic discipline, involving the worship of icons, and creating a shared sense of belonging among devotees (Hejtmanek 2020; Pronger 2002). Contemporary Americanized fitness trends embody a traditional ideology of Christian devotionalism, in which diet and exercise become the newest means for demonstrating obedience and worthiness of divine love (Griffith 2004: 5). At the community gym, converts to this secular faith offer salvation narratives about discovering lifting and thereby unlocking a "much greater passion."

For Saúl, a volunteer who frequently welcomes others and helps them learn how to lift weights, a sense of strength and muscular progress brings him meaning in life. For him, and others, the activities in the gym represent a path for "a better future, not just for ourselves, but for the community." Anita, another volunteer, explained that "when we go to the gym, we are developing a certain strength, not just physical, but also mental. We are acquiring a lot, a lot of security, more than anything security in our body and how people see us. The changes motivate us each day to be better, to behave better with our family and with the same people with whom we share the gym." Anita, like many other devoted gym-goers, has been "saved" by her devotion to fitness, and she also testifies that lifting weights miraculously cured her chronic ailments including headaches and insomnia. Together, gym-goers worship a fit ideal as a lifepath promising healing and progress, a weaving together of present practice with an anticipated future. This temporal imagining is central to ongoing homemaking (Ahmed et al. 2003: 9). Whether secular or religious, houses of worship can contribute to a sense of belonging in racialized and fragmented urban contexts. Whether secular or religious, these houses of worship can also exclude, shame, and discipline nonconforming bodies.

In this way, gyms and sanctuaries share commonalities. Noticing these echoes, Wacquant (2003: 14) describes a Chicago boxing gym as sanctuary: "Above all, the gym protects one from the street and acts as a buffer against the insecurity of the neighborhood and the pressures of everyday life. In the manner of a *sanctuary*, it offers a cossetted space, closed and reserved, where one can, among like-minded others, shelter oneself from the ordinary miseries of an all-too-ordinary life and from the spells that culture economy of the street hold in store for young men trapped into this place scorned and abandoned by all that is the dark ghetto." In his understanding of "sanctuary," Wacquant emphasizes two characteristics: the capacity to protect those that seek asylum within its walls, and the possibility of sharing community and purpose in life.

However, in practice, sanctuaries never really are, as Wacquant (2003) implies: cossetted or closed; they are never perfectly safe. In the English lan-

guage, the definition of "sanctuary" remains contested: "not a single thing" (Lenard and Madokoro 2021: 3). The word's usage in Spanish generally refers specifically to a temple where veneration of an icon occurs, and the broader concept would be best translated as *albergue*, *asilo*, or *refugio* rather than *sanctuario* (Delano Alonso 2021: 87). Amparo Marroquín expresses some caution in applying the word in its strict sense to spaces within El Salvador, where "there is no experience of feeling safe or at home" and so many people must flee abroad (cited in Delano Alonso 2021: 87–88). Indeed, the community gym offers no strong protection against violence, surveillance, or economic precarity; it does not stem the flight of Salvadoran refugees, nor can it withstand the pressures of sovereign power, as evidenced by its recent preventative closure under the regime of exception. The gym most closely aligns with the broader conceptualization offered by Vannini et al. (2018: 165), in which "sanctuary encompasses an ethics and a way of life—a means of practicing and embodying expressions of culture." In this case, fitness represents a lifestyle, identity, and mode of being in the world, and the gym provides the place for its physical expression.

Unsurprisingly then, the gym also competes with churches in the community, offering an alternative sanctuary. At night, the rhythms of the gym's music vie with a cacophony of no less than six Evangelical Christian sects, singing out of tune and excitedly praising the Lord over loudspeakers. These rival soundscapes seem a fitting metaphor for the way some Christians believe fitness pursuits run counter to their faith and values, as though a focus on the body, and the capitalist materialism that underpins such focus, cannot be in harmony with the celebration of God. Churches periodically accuse Salvadoran gyms of sexualization of bodies. On Facebook, one such congregation warns that "the majority of people who visit gymnasiums dress in little clothing, sweat and do sexual movements under the excuse of exercising" (Iglesia del Final—IFT CentroAmérica, Facebook, 8/8/21). While some gym-goers embrace fitness routines as a practice consistent with Christian values and asceticism, other locals believe, like the online Evangelicals, that the gym stokes sinful vanity and promiscuity. They disapprove of the Lycra pants increasingly favored by young women in the gym, warning that sexual harassment becomes the responsibility of the victim if she attracts the attention in such immodest fitness clothing. When a local gym-bro posted a muscle-pose selfie on Facebook, a religious friend replied with a biblical quote from Timothy 4:8: "For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." In contrast, gym-goers often view their fitness rituals as a compliment to their Christian beliefs. They recognize the need to cultivate "body and soul" together, thereby honoring God's creation. Such justifications echo the "muscular Christianity" of previous

generations and hint at the historical links between American imperialism, sports promotion, and religious missionaries (Putney 2001). Indeed, across the nineteenth century, gyms and churches have both been conduits for neocolonial influence in Central America, justified as means to discipline and civilize unruly racialized populations (Gems 2012). Similarities and rivalry between religious and secular sanctuaries is not a coincidence.

Of course, no sanctuary, neither Catholic migrant shelters nor the gym, neither religious nor secular, is an inviolable space, exempt from politics. Sanctuaries generate cross-cutting vulnerabilities and visibilities for the people who shelter within them, as people congregate, and sensitive information circulates within and beyond their walls (Angulo-Passel 2022; Balaguera 2018; Brigden 2018a; Brigden 2018b; Doering-White 2018). Discipline is not left at the door of sanctuary, whether church, gym, or migrant shelter. Continual gatekeeping, security imperatives, and trespassing characterize these spaces, and the threat of raids and reimposition of sovereign power haunts them. In the church-dominated sanctuary movement of the 1980s, volunteers sometimes unwittingly reinforced power asymmetries by reproducing gendered discourses about who deserved protection (Coutin 1993: 126–27). Like shelters in the migration corridor across Mexico today, the gym becomes a potential site for surveillance (i.e., a site to extract information or project images of virtuous youth), watched by gang members and community leaders, and potentially targeted by police. Aware of this surveillance from multiple powerful actors, gym management (like shelter staff) often acts preemptively to comply with their pressures and rules, creating complex dynamics of complicity and care (see Doering-White 2018 on shelter staff). In the case of the gym, this includes COVID-19 protocols, prohibiting reggaeton, rigorous registration of members, some regulation of gender norms, and taking care that participants represent an image of moral propriety. In the context of transnational diaspora and repressive policing, a comparison between gyms and churches challenges oversimplified notions of "sanctuary," highlighting the ambiguities of place-making processes.

Lifting Community?

Having come of age in Southern California, I know both a bit about the migration route and my way around a gym. As I trespass across borders to study these places, my own body has become a conduit for a transnational fitness imaginary, read and interpreted by the people I encounter. Admittedly, I inhabit a privileged body. As a white US citizen, I experience the racialized terrain that connects Los Angeles with San Salvador from a

different vantage point in the global apartheid system than my community partners do. As an athletic cisgender woman with socioeconomic advantages, I experience the ableist, fat-phobic terrain of the gym from a position of relative comfort. Recognizing the inequalities that both structure my embodiment and are structured by it, autoethnographic exercises offer clues to contradictions, gaps, and unexpected resonances across migration studies.

For example, after leading classes on Tuesday nights at the gym, I slept in a spare bedroom in the house of an elderly woman, who despite her slight build, stooped posture, and sunken eyes remained extraordinarily active and vigorous during the harvest season. She scoffed at my frailty when I told her I couldn't sleep in the heat of the enclosed cement room without a fan. The vacant bed had belonged to her teenage granddaughter, who previously trained in the gym. The bright, athletic girl, who must have inherited some of her grandmother's spirit, fled north to join her mother and siblings in Los Angeles, not far from where my own sister lives. Meanwhile, her room and belongings remained untouched, even the COVID masks still hung from the dresser, swaying gently in the breeze from my imported fan. Their presence reminded me that she had left suddenly, like several other gym members. Her friends and neighbors prayed for her arrival during the clandestine journey to the United States. With tears, they relived the memory of waiting for word of her safe passage, telling me of the terror of letting her go. After raising her from birth, her beloved grandmother then lived alone. I laid awake in her bed thinking about the many injustices and inequities that made my homestay possible, and how she lived so near to my own former home. While I understood that she would confront restrictions on her movements across LA, due to immigration policing and socioeconomic hardship, perhaps preventing her from pursuing a fitness hobby, I also wondered: Maybe she will go to a gym I know? It will never be trading places, and our absence/presence in fitness spaces on either side of national borders will always be marked by deep inequalities.

From those gently swaying COVID masks to laminated gym cards to steel barbells, material things embody our many (im)mobilities. In my previous work on transnational migration, I described the "route terrain" connecting El Salvador across Mexico through the United States as "objects, ranging from messages scribbled on the walls of shelters to scattered water bottles and altars in the desert, molded by daily social activity that thereby becomes part of the material culture of *El Camino* (the migrant trail)"; as people improvise upon them, these objects weave the landscape of migration into a place within the social imagination (Brigden 2018: 35–37). Migration scholars have long understood the importance of material traces to human movement (e.g., Brigden 2018a; Brigden 2018b; De León 2015; Doering-White 2018; Yi-Neumann, et al. 2022). From that literature, we

know that the traces left behind by migrants' footsteps and the items that people choose to carry on their journeys bear witness to border crossings. Such traces left behind provide information to police and other migrants that both constrains and facilitates mobility (Brigden 2018). In a meaningful way, the gym is yet another artifact of that route terrain.

Thus, seemingly mundane spaces, such as a gym, are powerful platforms to understand these multiple dimensions of im/mobility. Indeed, a "vernacularization of borders" perspective draws our attention place-making and boundary practices far from international borders (Cooper, Perkins, and Rumford 2014). From this perspective, we see that the gym sits in a neighborhood at multiple contested edges of an unequal, gendered, and racialized transnational landscape. It is a site of symbolic violence, transmitted in both stigmatizing criminal media narratives and a fitspo mediascape that marginalizes some bodies, but not others. It is a blind spot in academic work on the politics of boundary-making, dismissed as a recreational space and relegated to the fringes of academic disciplines; fitness spaces seem, at first glance, marginal to politics. However, we exercise many mobilities in the gym.

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NOTES

1. See https://www.elsalvador.com/noticias/nacional/plan-control-territorial-el-salvador-distrito-italia-abandonado-a-voluntad-de-la-ms13/904449/2021/.
2. All names are pseudonyms.
3. For an elaboration of metaphors of underground fluidity at the US-Mexico border, see Rosas (2012).

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CHAPTER
4

A Place in the Making
Sheltering Unaccompanied Minors and the Limits of a "Safe Haven"

Friederike Eichner

On a summer day in 2017, the local youth welfare office announced the transfer to the shelter of three adolescent minors whom the police had arrested at the city's main station. In the shelter's cafeteria, a crowd of employees and residents gathered around the new arrivals. Staff were excited to welcome them but found it difficult to overcome the language barrier, being only able to exchange a few words. Therefore, the three young people mainly talked among themselves while quickly eating the fried chicken they were provided with. As they became restless and jumped up from their seats, Kurt, the shelter manager in his thirties, proceeded to show them around the facility.[1] However, that only worked for a short time, because they quickly ran out of the building again. In a creative modification of their ordinary welcoming routines, some staff gave them residents' bicycles as a distraction. The boys did one lap of the yard before riding off down the driveway and out onto the street. The staff stood in amazement as they disappeared around the corner, happy to see them having fun. After they were gone, they began to wonder if the boys even knew the way back. As the minutes passed, their faces began to take on a worried expression. It slowly began to dawn on them that the three would not be coming back. They were gone, as were the bikes.

This was an exceptional moment in my research at a reception center for young migrants in East Germany. The staff, slightly surprised by the spontaneous transfer during a period when the shelter maintained a relatively

stable resident group, were even more taken aback as the newly arrived individuals seemed noticeably younger than the average shelter resident, claiming to be eleven and twelve years old. Perhaps due to their particularly young age, staff promptly tapped into the core identity of the place to facilitate their immediate arrival. Above all, they intended to shape the environment so that it elicited and intensified affective experiences associated with protected youthfulness. The decision to provide them with bicycles mere minutes after their arrival stemmed from this intention to provide the shelter's residents with a sense of a protected and fun place. However, what was initially meant to cultivate youthful joy was instead seized by the young individuals as a means to swiftly escape it.

Exploring this distinctive moment, this chapter delves into the dynamics through which both staff and residents shaped the shelter as either a prolonged residence or, conversely, a mere point along their way. This was linked to how they attributed meaning to the place, categorizing it as either a destination or a stopover. To achieve this, I draw a comparison between these two conceptualizations of place evident in my research: "place as destination" and "place as stepping stone."[2] The former envisions place as the final destination of a journey, where individuals are welcomed and establish long-term residency. This type of place embodies identity and community, epitomized by the caretaker's concept of a "safe haven." On the other hand, "place as stepping stone" depicts a location as a means to access something beyond itself. It serves as a facilitator of movement, transition, and progress for young people and is related to a transnational context.

Complementing literature that engages with shelters mainly by starting from their position in the migration regime (Altin and Minca 2017; Bhimji 2019; Merlín-Escorza, Davids, and Schapendonk 2021; Turner and Whyte 2022), I describe the making of a shelter as place as a particular kind of activity that is shaped by contentious negotiations between staff and residents and the different meanings that they ascribe to it. While a central function of the shelter is predetermined by political regulations, fixing people in place, the staff did not consistently adhere to this policy of confinement but were primarily motivated by the intention to create a good place. To some extent, their aspiration aligned with the residents' desires, such as when they collaborated on long-term objectives like obtaining residency papers. However, in other respects, there were substantial differences, particularly in their evaluation of the place's potentials and constraints. Contributing to the discussion in this volume about the relation between the inherently open and unstable nature of places, their harnessing as a spatial fix within contemporary politics and practices of migration, and their protecting function, my chapter shows the tensions that arise from this for a single place.

This chapter is based on extended fieldwork that I conducted for my PhD thesis, occurring in a single shelter over the course of two years, from 2017 to 2019. It was a small facility located on the outskirts of an East German city, providing sixteen places for male "unaccompanied refugee minors." Most residents were between, roughly, fifteen and eighteen years old. It can be considered an out-of-the-way place (see introduction, Drotbohm and Winters, this volume) in the regard that it is located on the periphery of Germany, an undesirable location in a desired country. East Germany's "disempowered cities" (Çağlar and Glick Schiller 2018: 13), particularly the smaller ones, grapple with processes of structural transformation and a relative absence of migration history compared to the urban centers, mostly in the western and southern parts of Germany, that typically attract people. This contributes to the transitional nature of the place, as young people might find fewer reasons to stay in the long term.

I focused on one shelter to gain a deeper understanding of the migration processes and relationships of people in this place. During my research, I dove into the microcosmos of the shelter, where I learned that larger migration processes are as important as the details of everyday life (Guevara González 2022: 337–39) in shaping this place. While migration is a mobile phenomenon, I stayed put in this place, interested in the multifaceted phenomena that emerged there. I particularly investigated the instability of the place, which I and others experienced through unstable relationships, sudden shifts in atmosphere, or gaps in understanding. I learned that I had to engage with these highly tangible and yet diffuse shelter dynamics to understand the larger outcome for migration processes. Therefore, methodologically I relied primarily on participant observation. I conducted interviews with professionals in the field, to include perspectives from the outside of the shelter, and with a few staff members. But rather than following the structures of the migration regime, as I had originally planned, being present and part of the everyday life became my main research strategy.

Minors and the Management of Place

The facility opened in 2016 and is thus intrinsically linked to the so-called "refugee crisis" in 2015–16. In critique of the term, De Genova and other scholars have pointed out that what is often depicted as a crisis of control (2017: 9) is in fact a racial crisis (2018) that lays open the postcolonial histories on which Europe is built. Managing migration as a policy problem (Feldman 2012), as done in the European Union, masks the structural roots and the differential mobilities these policies produce. In the vein of policy solutions for unruly mobility, differentiations between wanted and un-

wanted, deserving and underserving migrants have become crucial (Holmes and Castañeda 2016). In this context, the category of the minor is often cast as privileged and beneficial, both by people in my research and by researchers, mostly because it offers close support from social workers and a period of temporary nondeportability, during which paths to legalization can be explored—for which, in turn, the more intensive support can be helpful.

Among those changes triggered by the crisis in 2015 that the German government pursued, which targeted mainly the tightening of asylum and immigration law, was a law that was supposed to "improve the situation" for unaccompanied minors. The "Act for Improvement of Accommodation, Care, and Support of Foreign Children and Adolescents" (*Gesetz zur Verbesserung der Unterbringung, Versorgung und Betreuung ausländischer Kinder und Jugendlicher*) became effective in November 2015. It is part of the German Social Code (SGB VIII). This law aligned with international and EU harmonization, adhering to the legal implementation of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and accommodation standards (Lems, Oester, and Strasser 2020). While the political and legal situation for many asylum seekers got more uncertain, the situation for underage refugees was supposed to become better. Since the enactment of this law, there has indeed been a gradual shift in the situation. The age for asylum and residency law capacity for foreign minors has been raised from sixteen to eighteen, granting them the right to receive longer support, for instance in legal matters, which helped many in obtaining their residency papers. The act also entitles them to access benefits outlined in the social code, such as better health services compared to adult asylum seekers and admission to regular schools. Furthermore, the prioritization of youth welfare over foreign law, while not legally prohibited, practically resulted in minimal deportations. Additionally, there has been an increase in facilities with trained staff, contributing to a more supportive environment.

However, a crucial aspect of the new law for minors was that it introduced new constraints regarding the fixation on a location. It not only focused on improving the situation for minors but also benefited the state. Previously it was the norm that unaccompanied minors would be taken into custody by the local youth welfare office at the location where they first arrived. With the new act, which faced widespread criticism from children's rights organizations, the nationwide obligation for reception and distribution based on statistical measures, specifically the *Königsteiner Schlüssel*, was introduced for unaccompanied minors, too, who were now "transferred" nationwide. This approach restricts refugee youth classified as minors from choosing where they want to live, a similar restriction applied to adult refugees.

The new act changed the local housing provision for welfare purposes in my research context. Most residents of the shelter were assigned to this

place from large cities in the western parts of Germany where they had been taken into custody by other youth welfare offices. Thus, in the municipality where I worked, numbers went from "almost zero" unaccompanied minors (meaning around ten minors a year) to "one hundred percent" (meaning shelters reaching their capacity limits) within a short stretch of time in 2015, according to Mr. Fischer, a manager from the local youth welfare office. Due to its previous status as an out-of-the-way destination for migrants, it lacked infrastructural support from both the city and the federal state in which it was located. But within a year, a dozen facilities opened for unaccompanied minors in the city. The shelter where I worked, which was run by a large German welfare organization, was one of two so-called clearing centers for minors in the city. If young people were new to the city, they would initially be sheltered at these places before being transferred to facilities where they resided until they reached at least eighteen years old. When the numbers of arriving minors dropped to "almost zero" in the beginning of 2017 because the city had met its statistical quota, the shelter where I worked also began offering long-term assistance.

While living under temporary security, residents still faced the threat of "deportability" (De Genova 2002; Drotbohm and Hasselberg 2015). To obtain their residency papers, they had two options: either apply for asylum or not. Many of those undergoing asylum processes received subsidiary protection—a status where the asylum application is formally rejected but deportation, due to mostly humanitarian reasons, is temporarily impossible, granting them access to residency papers. Some residents received a rejection of their case and, along with their caretakers, filed lawsuits. A few residents never applied for asylum. For them, staff relied on a new law that grants papers for professional training, introduced during the refugee crisis. Overall, their legal situation was difficult and highly stressful, but almost everyone eventually succeeded in overcoming it through one of these paths. It is important to note that the German case contrasts considerably with the US asylum system, as discussed in this volume by Gutiérrez Rivera. In Germany, staying put at one place over a longer period is considered crucial for gaining access to residency papers.

I already mentioned that a central function of shelters is to fix people in place and prevent their onward movement. The shelter staff held the responsibility of ensuring that the young residents stayed within their registered location. However, they lacked the authority to compel residents to stay if they did not want to. To make them stay, they primarily relied on persuasion to encourage them, explained the law to them, and simultaneously worked on enhancing the overall appeal of the facility. Disappearing from the shelter was a quite common phenomenon though, called *Abgängigkeit* (being absent without leave) in German. In the years 2015 and 2016 this

was frequent, as many young people were not content with the places they had been transferred to and took advantage of a registration system still being set up by registering at other shelters. Later, these acts of "spatial disobedience" (Tazzioli 2018) decreased in the shelter, but they sometimes still occurred. While *Abgängigkeit* had many causes and destinations, it was difficult to understand from the perspective of people who stayed put. They had a limited understanding of the motives behind it, the journeys and places young people went to, the "outside" and the networks they relied on. Those who were supposed to stop movement struggled to understand it in the first place, being barely able to work against it.

Shelters as Dynamic Places of Encounter and Constraint

My chapter adds to a growing body of literature on shelters and camps that acknowledges the ambivalent nature of these places (Agier 2002; Feldman 2015; Turner 2015; Kreichauf 2018; Otto 2020; Martin, Minca, and Katz 2020; Merlín-Escorza, Davids, and Schapendonk 2021). In current debates on shelters, authors increasingly perceive them to be multifaceted places where different elements and actors feed into the constant evolution of place (Kreichauf 2018: 4; Turner 2015). As threshold places (Fontanari 2015) where people navigate the complex terrain of being physically in place but not necessarily secure in terms of rights and belonging, shelters combine multiple and contradictory features. First and foremost, they sit uneasily between different "junctures" (Turner and Whyte 2022) of mobility and immobility, serving as blocking points in a mobility regime that engenders differential mobilities, and points of connectivity, facilitating existential movement of people in search of places to stay (Lems 2016; Otto 2020: 85). In the everyday life of shelters, these locating and dislocating elements are closely related (Merlín-Escorza, Davids, and Schapendonk 2021: 116).

Despite this prevalent understanding of shelters as shaped by diverse elements and actors, a notion of a bounded, coherent place lurks behind many approaches. Studies on shelters often approach them as an intrinsic part of the migration regime, even as a "spatial political technology aimed at governing, disciplining, and qualifying the 'migrants'" (Altin and Minca 2017: 31). However, most studies also attest to the limits and contestations of these unified power apparatuses. Yet, framed as places of attempted confinement where residents can face an "exclusionary order" (Gueguen-Teil and Katz 2018: 96–97), many studies tend to establish that shelters are institutions with a consistent infrastructure, design, and purpose of governing migrants, which are then confounded by the creativity of their residents (Gueguen-Teil and Katz 2018: 97), who challenge fixed

meanings and create new ones (Otto 2020: 91). Such approaches have offered detailed analysis of the exclusionary aspects of shelters and their creative reappropriation. But often these studies implicitly perceive the shelter itself as a stable institution that residents then work with or against. My approach builds on these approaches but also offers another angle by showing that the restrictive aspects of shelters are not always dominant, and when they are, then they do not only come a priori but can also be the result of painful processes of collaborative and contested place-making. There are significant differences between shelters that I do not want to negate. However, a focus on the disciplinary tendencies tends to overlook everyday attempts to create a sanctuary inside the shelter in which people can dwell. Topics such as solidarity or intimacy (Vogt 2018) are largely absent from approaches to state-run or state-funded shelters in Europe, being almost exclusively ascribed to the self-organization of refugees (Gueguen-Teil and Katz 2018: 96).

Therefore, I go beyond the notion of shelter as a place shaped predominantly by the migration regime. To do so, I bring Augé's "anthropological place" (1995) and Massey's "global sense of place" (1993: 65) into dialogue. Augé frames anthropological places as "places of identity, of relations, and of history" (Augé 1995: 52). While Augé stresses the work people do to invest in place by giving it meaning and identity, and by creating community, Massey puts strong emphasis on the open character of place that has no single or fixed identity. She conceptualizes places as being shaped by multiple local and global relations. According to her, places are "articulated moments in networks of social relations" and, as such, not the source of being but of becoming (1993: 66, 63). Massey criticizes the assumption that places simply mean attachment, stability, or fixed identity and stresses their constantly evolving character. "The identities of place are always unfixed, contested, and multiple," she states (1994: 5). Applying both notions to the shelter draws attention to the ways in which staff want to fix the meaning of the shelter to establish a small counterworld against a global condition that produces displacement, while acknowledging that its global positioning thwarts a singular identity.

My angle draws from this notion of place made up of encounters and social relationships, global dynamics, and structural inequalities. As dynamic places of encounter, shelters are settled and unsettled by these diverse processes, relations, and forces (introduction, Drotbohm and Winters this volume). I focus on two main aspects in this chapter, acknowledging that there are many others too. Shelters are places that have the potential to create relationships, community, and well-being. Legal precarity and related experiences of displacement and exclusion can generate a feeling of being out of place for young people (Lems 2022: 24). From this angle, young people

need a stable sense of place for their well-being (Chase 2013). Social relationships can be stabilizing factors, as staff can help residents to literally put their feet on the ground in helping them to obtain papers, education, or work. On the other hand, anthropologists have traced the ways in which youth migration is driven by collective fantasies of the West and the complex dynamics that go along with these fantasies. Searching for "possibilities of becoming" (De Boeck and Honwana 2005: 7) and oriented to a globalized (digital) space, young people can experience shelters and other places as limiting and representing the precarity they want to leave behind (2005: 7). In this regard, instability of place can even be a form of freedom, in which people's desires are not impeded by the limiting possibilities of place (2005: 15). Both aspects, the need for places and the constraints of place, shape the shelter.

Crafting Infrastructures for Unaccompanied Minors: Making a Good Place

Staff members were determined to turn the place into a welcoming and hospitable place, providing the arriving youth with care and comfort so that they were able to process the hardship of their flight. In the guidelines of the shelter as well as in the interviews and narrations of staff, I encountered a vision of the shelter as a peaceful, restful place that they wanted to realize. Working with concepts of unaccompanied minors being vulnerable and traumatized, they approached shaping the place in the following way—I quote from the shelter's performance description of 2017: "They should feel accepted and safe in our house, be given a lasting sense of security and comfort for the first time after their flight." The authors conceived of a place where people can arrive in conditions created by caretakers sensitive to their needs. Since they imagined the young people's past as very stressful, caretakers focused on making the shelter peaceful and stabilizing from the moment of arrival. As the description evinces, the shelter should be more than just a physical retreat, a place where residents should also feel well and protected.

In an interview, Kurt used the term "safe haven" (*sicherer Hafen*) to capture how he imagined the place. Deploying the metaphor of a haven, he drew attention to the process of arriving and anchoring. In this safe haven—"as safe as it can be"—residents should feel that they belong without fear, he stressed. Comparing the shelter to a family home, Kurt spoke of the sense of strong feelings of belonging, safety, and trust he associated with this kind of home. He hoped that residents feel that they can express themselves freely, that they do not need to act immaculately but have the

freedom to transgress, and express anger. Fostering this kind of trust in residents and cultivating a feeling of belonging was one aim of the work, according to Kurt. However, he also strove to remain grounded in reality, pragmatically acknowledging the differences between the shelter and a family home. For instance, although he recognized that it was impossible to fully re-create the feeling of homely security in the shelter, he understood his task, and that of the other staff, as at least "providing the framework" for its realization. Perceiving the shelter through a lens of protection, staff wanted to "nurture in them [residents] a sense of place, belonging and security" (Chase 2013: 858). Kurt emphasized the possibility that conflict could take place in this "safe haven" without endangering residents' sense of belonging. Thus, caretakers sought to invest the place with feelings of home and ascribed, especially to relationships, the power to settle peoples' lives by enabling their well-being.

I want to highlight here Augé's positive approach to the identity and, thereby, stability of anthropological places that people actively create, especially in contrast to the solitary, anonymous, and transitory nature of non-places (see Missbach and Hoffstaedter's discussion about non-places in this volume). Applied to the context of my research, this helps in understanding the making of the shelter, where staff strived to imbue it with identity, community, and history. To create community, they placed a high value on casual interaction and fun activities. The facility was equipped with two large recreation rooms, a TV room, and a ping-pong room. Kurt, who is an accomplished ping-pong player, often announced competitions in the afternoon after work, which residents and other staff members joined. The mood was often very boisterous, marked by jokes and teasing among the residents. Over time, the residents found their own mixed language, in which they conversed. Table tennis was a good way for everyone to socialize. In the ping-pong room and during many other free-time activities organized by staff, such as visits to the gym, football tournaments, or races, a sense of community indeed emerged.

Staff also gave the shelter a history—for example, through commemorating and decorating together with residents. In the kitchen, for instance, handprints and names on the wall served to memorialize former residents. Every year, they celebrated the anniversary of the shelter's opening with a party to which residents who still lived in the city were invited. Staff also documented every activity, decorating the walls of the common rooms with photos from the shelter's short history. Later, they encouraged residents to imprint themselves into the place by painting the common rooms with street art and pictures and symbols of their homes. Thus, the identity they gave the shelter was primarily that of a protected place, materialized as a

space where young people could engage in youth-related activities—including transgression and conflict.

Place as Destination

So far, I have described that staff perceived place as a rather stable, positive resource, and associated values like home and family, emotional stability, and durable relationships with it. It is this sense of "place as destination" that they mobilized when working with the residents. Not long after I started my research, I was asked to help translate a conversation between Boubakar and Lisa. Like everybody else, Lisa, who was in her forties, had been new to the job when the shelter opened. She had already worked for the welfare organization and perceived this new job as an exciting new opportunity. She was an energetic person, very communicative and caring, and clearly dedicated to the cause of helping the young people feel at home. Shortly after moving in, Boubakar had expressed the wish to move to another shelter because he was annoyed that he had waited for an extended period, which was caused by delays from the local authorities, to enter school, and Lisa was eager to convince him to stay. During the conversation, she resolutely emphasized that this place was in no way inferior to others. She listed the things they were going to do for him: "Here you can go to school. We will organize an internship for you. Everybody will help you here." But for that, she said, he must work with her and be patient. At the end of the conversation, Boubakar agreed to reconsider his decision to immediately insist on a transfer. Afterward, she explained to me that staff at previous shelters would try to smoothen the transition to this out-of-the-way place by making promises of what would happen there. This meant that young people would arrive with high expectations, hoping, for example, to start school immediately. She felt they had to work through the resulting frustration. Her message to the new residents was that the arrival process takes time, but patience pays off.

Pointing out the possibilities of access and the amount of time it often takes to get there was an important aspect of her persuasive speech. In many ways, staff followed good practice guidelines of social work, such as trying to be an ally, acknowledging the difficulties of obtaining refugee or residency status, and trying to maintain the safety of people against this backdrop (Nelson, Price, and Zubrzycki 2017: 606, 608). They were acknowledging the insecurity of residents and how the political situation made it difficult for them to feel safe, and accordingly staff put much time and effort into the regularization of residents' status. Part of the identity of

a safe space was the work of turning the shelter into a place offering future possibilities, such as education and residency, by emphasizing a relational understanding of place-making with the message "we work together" to achieve these goals. Lisa's persuasive efforts were certainly not the only reason, but Boubakar did become a long-term resident and received residency papers supported by his caretakers through the path of education and formation years later, something he had strongly desired. Back in the beginning, when I talked to him on another day about his transfer, he told me about the home where he had briefly lived before somewhere in the South of Germany. He had really liked it because it was small and calm. When I asked him how he felt about this transfer, he responded to my surprise: "Now I am here, then that is also good." Even though he didn't want to go there, he got involved with the new place. Despite having experienced a forceful dislocation from another shelter, he demonstrated a flexibility toward place that I often encountered among residents, many of whom were showing a willingness to engage with the new location.

The localizing tendencies of the shelter become evident. It was no longer just a place of transition but allowed for forms of dwelling. The connections of people were not solely linked to onward movement but contributed to more permanent forms of place-making (see Merlín-Escorza, Davids, and Schapendonk 2021: 116). The idea of giving residents the semblance of a typical teenage life matched their desire to have a positive place to stay. Once I walked through the nearby forest with a group of residents. Everyone was in a jolly mood, listening to music and taking pictures with their phones, using an app that drew funny cat faces. The photos grasped a moment of joy and ease on everybody's face, framed with whiskers and cat ears. Carried by the mood of the moment, one of them declared that he liked staying here because he had found friends.

Picking up on my argument that the locating and dislocating, blocking and enabling elements of the shelter are closely related, it is noteworthy that the place itself also presented challenges that the young people had to contend with in their place-making efforts if they intended to stay longer. The clear identity of the shelter as a protected space for youthfulness, which the staff aimed to establish, was supplemented by specific intervention strategies (see also Engebrigtsen 2011; Vanderhurst 2022) of German youth welfare that also influenced the shaping of the place. The shelter served as a space where young people were prepared for their future in a new society, and the primary means through which staff could implement this was the daily life within the facility. Within these interventions, dissonances emerged in the way the place was imbued with various projects.

The kitchen was the shelter's central room. In this large, functional room with a tiled floor, white multipurpose tables had been pushed together to

create one large dining table with many chairs. Large windows looked out onto the patio, flooding the room with light. The room was often crowded, buzzing with multiple languages. One day in April 2018, the kitchen was filled with the fragrant aroma of apple pie. Mamadou was busy in the kitchen. He was a funny, communicative person and well-versed in English, which made it easier for him to talk to staff from the beginning. He would turn eighteen shortly after this day. As part of the shelter's program for becoming self-reliant, he had had to bake the cake together with Jessica, the shelter's cook. She, a warm, maternal person and avid cake-baker, showed him the individual procedure. He did as she said with good humor. Together, they created a delicious apple pie that a few roommates and I were invited to try. Sitting at the dining table, we had coffee and enjoyed the pie. When I complimented Mamadou on his baking skills, he told me that according to the staff he still had to learn cooking. In response to my asking whether this was really the case, he said: "Of course I know how to cook—I did this a lot in the past. But now I am on a break."

The shelter had a program that prepared residents for an independent life. This was part of larger welfare discourses mediated by the youth welfare office that implemented these politics by predefining goals the young people had to reach, which were then realized by staff through educational programs such as cooking with the shelter chef. Through these measures, residents were supposed to learn life-planning skills and individual responsibility. The breaking down of this discourse into everyday activities such as baking a cake was somehow at odds with the reality of residents, as Mamadou pointed out, but it nonetheless had the potential to create moments of relational place-making. The baking of the cake created a cozy moment, and Mamadou bore the task with humor. The open nature of the place meant that many residents utilized it a as stepping stone for their own ambitions while also complying with the efforts to create a protective environment. Many residents adapted to their surroundings, forming connections in less-than-ideal locations with mismatched intervention policies. To accomplish this, they occasionally relied on humor and flexibility. However, other residents more clearly expressed their discontent, refusing to commit themselves to these programs and pursuing their own projects. This posed particular challenges for the project of creating a safe haven.

Place as Stepping Stone

I will now dive into the problem that place-making, figured as collaborative work (as in Lisa's message "we work together"), turned into conflict when residents showed a lack of cooperation. I want to illustrate this with

the story of Hamza, who had often been away from the shelter for days or sometimes weeks. A small and slender teenager, he was around fifteen at that time and transgressed many shelter rules. Hamza's recurring disappearance irritated staff. Perceiving *Abgängigkeit* mainly from the perspective of protection, they still understood their responsibility in enacting a stable, reliable place to facilitate his and others' well-being. But it became more and more difficult for them to maintain this idea in some cases. Kurt had said that young people should be protected, even when transgressing, to give them security in the knowledge that they would not be expelled from the shelter. Although he meant it earnestly, it was not entirely true, because Hamza was expelled in the end, and so were a few others. In these cases, the wish to enact a stable place for the young people turned into a struggle against them.

Once I witnessed an informal conversation between staff members where they discussed Hamza's situation, his constant refusal to follow house rules, and his disappearance from the shelter. They shared their impression that he doesn't want to stay and that he doesn't fit into this place. One caretaker asserted that he was gambling with his life, because disappearing from the shelter for a longer period resulted in dropping out of the system, like losing a school place. Another staff member said that Hamza could not articulate at all why he was there: "There's a hole opening." Someone even suggested that maybe he should go back to his country because he has such big problems here, a remark well outside the realm of how staff usually spoke about residents' futures, which they saw in Germany. Their argument betrayed a sense of puzzlement surrounding Hamza's rejected place-making. It also shows that they were hurt that he did not reciprocate their efforts to make it a comfortable stay for him. Another important aspect of place-making came up in their discussion, too.

The shelter followed a so-called participatory approach. In the guidelines, this was mapped out as an ideal. It states: "The young people take responsibility for their living spaces and the community of the facility as a whole: They design cleaning schedules and stick to them, articulate wants, needs and interests, manage sub-areas themselves (e.g., care and maintenance of their own bicycles)." Residents were supposed to take over responsibilities, and staff encouraged, assisted, and expected them to attach to place on this everyday level. In their discussion, staff alluded to this expectation that residents display attachment to the place by performing tasks and showing commitment to make it nice, which Hamza did not do. As an example of such transgressions, I return to the point of bike maintenance mentioned in the guidelines: One day he turned up at the shelter without the bike he had received. When I read a note about the incident, it said: "To everyone's surprise, he took the bicycle saddle out of his backpack." He was

asked to fetch the rest of the bike but refused. This upset the staff so much that they stopped giving him tickets or other bikes as a penalty. But where did their strong reaction come from?

The shelter's identity as a protected space was challenged when young people voluntarily disengaged from it and staff faced a predicament in trying to comprehend why young people chose to leave or neglected the collaborative place-making. While they were angry, they were also worried because Hamza's escape from the shelter was a point of concern for them. In their imagination, he probably had experienced bad things while being away, like sleeping rough and maybe even being abused. They experienced his spatial disobedience as unsettling. Likewise, after the incident with the three young people who fled the shelter with the bikes, tension erupted within the team, sparking a controversy over the assessment of the situation. While some viewed it as an incident of youthful disobedience, others considered the flight a potential threat to the young people's well-being—referring to them as "endangered children." The case managers of the youth welfare office, who assign minors to the facilities and formally commission the assistance, took a similar stance. For them, the shelter was a place where these young and—as they understood them—deviant people should have been fixed. The predicament for the shelter staff was whether they should work toward fixing young people for their protection, for example, by adopting a more disciplinarian approach in their daily care, thereby aligning more with an administration that aimed to prevent them from moving on, or not. Their lack of insight into the desires of young people, coupled with the notion that a stable place is beneficial for their well-being, led them to lean in this direction.

This contrasted with the ways young people used places as facilitators of movement. I do not focus on their desires per se, as they often remained opaque or fragmented. Staff and residents speculated about the allure of larger cities and urban metropoles when others left. Many residents spoke about their hope for career opportunities and quicker access to residency papers at other places. However, in a few instances there may have been a lack of concrete ideas, as staff speculated with Hamza. Instead, there seemed to be an adventurous desire to let oneself drift through places. This indicates that in residents' imagination, place held the dimension of potentiality as a means to access careers, opportunities, and capital. As numerous scholars have shown, youth cultures in the Global South are deeply shaped by the desire to leave places where people feel disconnected from a global standard of living (Graw and Schielke 2021), made visible globally through social media. When young people are searching for "possibilities of becoming" (De Boeck and Honwana 2005: 7), today they are predominantly oriented toward consumerism and capitalist dreamscapes. As a re-

sult, some of the young people seemed as if they were on the verge, as if they had not properly arrived, which appeared to staff as a "hole" where attachment to the place should be. The "transitory emplacement" (Drotbohm and Winters 2021: 4) of residents was thus fraught with complicated feelings for staff, as they desired stable lives for young people at this place but struggled to relate to residents' practice to "routinely imagine a life elsewhere" (2021: 9), which stood in contrast to their own experiences. However, this does not necessarily mean that they were incorrect, as the attempt to give the place an identity is indeed important to transform it into a destination. But the desire to create a counterplace against the condition of displacement is thwarted specifically by its global relations (Massey 1994). Shelters produce this specific form of unsettledness also because they heavily interact with other places (1994: 121), they are junctures of movement, while people working there lack knowledge about these connections.

Most directly through their *Abgängigkeit*, Hamza and other residents rendered the shelter tangible as an along-the-way place. In response to this spatial disobedience, staff increasingly tried to enforce their own notion of place with recourse to rules and discipline, which led to an increase of fights between them and him. One day, Hamza came to the kitchen and demanded chocolate. Tom, an athletic, middle-aged staff member who was on duty, said that he should clean his room first. Hamza made an annoyed impression and indicated his unwillingness. Tom and other staff members started to tease him about his room, which had not been cleaned in a while, what they understood as neglect of the place. A few moments later, with Hamza still in the kitchen, staff started to discuss the forthcoming week. Hamza asked about an upcoming event, and Tom replied: "You're gone again then anyway." Hamza countered with "Inshallah," to which Tom replied in kind.

Tom's sarcasm hinted at the frustration that had grown in him. The relationships that were an elementary part of place-making had become charged with tension. Negative emotions circulated between the staff and Hamza, affecting the relational undertaking of nurturing the place. At this point, place-making as collaborative work was no longer possible. I later heard Tom complaining, "I am annoyed that the young person behaves here as if it were a hotel," something I overheard staff mumbling occasionally, by which they meant that residents came only to eat and sleep and were the rest of the time absent from the shelter. Their hope for residents to actively engage in the community and embrace the identity of the place as destination remained unfulfilled. In the case of Hamza, they started to sanction transgression in a more coordinated way after a series of conflicts with the hope that more guidance would facilitate Hamza's place-making. Notwithstanding the conflicts, they still wanted to provide him a home, as

Kurt said. But things escalated quickly. After yet another fight with staff members, Hamza jumped against a car belonging to the shelter, leaving a dent, for which they filed a complaint against him for damage to property and, shortly thereafter, expelled him from the shelter. They unwittingly found themselves entangled in the broader dynamics of upheaval inherent to the migration regime, a circumstance diametrically opposed to their envisioned sanctuary.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the shelter as an inherently open place to which people ascribe different meanings, emphasizing its role less as a coherent space of governance and confinement. My primary focus was on the staff who face challenges in their attempts to create a place with a singular identity and to establish a safe haven for young people on the move. I was particularly interested in the tension between a protected and a transitory place, on the one hand, and place as a spatial fix in the migration regime, on the other, which was placing caretakers in a challenging position. Consequently, even though their enactments of place produced moments of arrival and security, these moments were frequently disrupted. I demonstrated that this attests to the inherently open nature of the place, especially in its role as a stepping stone within a transnational context. The different meanings that people ascribe to it can eventually lead to further displacement when the tensions between them become too intense.

If young people fail to establish long-term residency at one place, they become more susceptible to the risks generated by governance processes that differentiate between wanted and unwanted migrants. They may encounter difficulties in receiving substantial support and obtaining residency papers. My research indicates that the supposed privilege of being a minor in the migration regime, leading to successful legalization, is more evident when individuals adhere to the out-of-the-way places and demonstrate flexibility toward them. Relationships formed at these places can support their place-making and challenge the condition of deportability inherent in the migration regime. In some instances, young people who might otherwise be categorized as unwanted can achieve legal stability through these places. But they can also contribute to further displacement. From my immobile position it is challenging to say, but their high mobility might provide young people opportunities for access that remaining in one place would not offer. Moreover, further research on the desire to avoid becoming too attached to one place could also provide insightful perspectives (see, e.g., Bialas and Sohail 2022). As I learned later from a case manager at the youth welfare

office, the three young people that fled the shelter so swiftly had no desire at all to stay at this place, or for that matter at any other place, for longer. It transpired that they already had a record in Germany for fleeing youth welfare offices. It appeared that they, too, drifted through places, an action conceptually hard to grasp for the administrations.

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NOTES

1. All names are pseudonyms. Moreover, the depiction of people and situations that I present below are partly (but not all) composite images of different situations and people in the shelter. They are exemplary for certain moments, tendencies, and recurring events in the place. For reasons of anonymization, I do not state the countries individual residents hail from.
2. Thank you to Heike Drotbohm for coming up with these conceptual terms after reading a previous draft.

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CHAPTER
5

Strategic Place-Making in US Immigration Courts

The Role of Immigration Attorneys, Expert Witnesses, and Place Narratives in Asylum Cases

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In 2020, 82.9 percent of nationals from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala entering the United States were asylum claimants (Migration Data Portal 2022). Yet obtaining asylum as well as avoiding deportation has become an ordeal for many Central Americans in the United States. The Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR) is the office responsible for deciding immigration cases, including cases involving "detained aliens, criminal aliens, and aliens seeking asylum as a form of relief from removal" (EOIR website) at immigration courts. It consists of 67 courts and 460 judges (Pagni Barak 2023). Regardless of their legal status (i.e., documented or undocumented), Central American migrants are already at odds in the asylum/immigration system that constructs them outside of the category of political asylum (Coutin 2011). Seventy percent of Central Americans will be deported (Pagni Barak 2023). As Menjivar (2006: 1000) points out, Central Americans can even remain in a legal limbo, which she terms as "liminal legality," in the asylum/immigration system for decades.

Obtaining asylum depends mainly on being able to access legal counsel and representation at an immigration court. However, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) generally deports non-citizens using fast-track methods of removal such as "expedited removal" or "reinstatement of removal." One report noted that only three out of every ten families had been represented by legal counsel in removal proceedings and that families and individuals that had legal counsel and representation were ten times more likely to be granted protection from deportation (American Immigration Lawyers Association 2016).

One of the main challenges of Central Americans seeking asylum is getting access to legal counsel and representation at an immigration court. Representation rates for Central Americans from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are low. A news report in *The Guardian* pointed out that approximately 30 percent of Central American families had legal representation in 2016.[1] This is less than other nationalities—for instance, 95 percent of Chinese asylum claimants have legal representation at immigration courts. Legal counsel and representation matter as it considerably increases Central American migrants' chances to be granted asylum. For instance, from 2010 to 2016, 96 percent of Central Americans with legal representation were granted asylum (Human Rights First 2019).

However, in recent years, Central Americans have faced challenges securing asylum even with legal representation at an immigration court. The Trump administration delegitimized asylum applications by Central Americans, claiming they were "abusing the asylum system" (Human Rights First 2019). The EOIR's Board of Immigration Appeals' landmark decision Matter of A-B- in June 2018, which blocked asylum to persons on the grounds of domestic violence and nongovernment persecutors such as gangs or criminals, limited considerably Central Americans' chances of asylum.[2] Since then, the percentage of Central Americans granted asylum has decreased considerably. For instance, from June to November 2018 the asylum grant rate fell to 14.4 percent, which was right after the Matter A-B- decision, whereas from January to May in that same year before Matter of A-B- the asylum grant rate was 23.9 percent.

Central Americans face asylum limitations not only because of the EOIR's Board of Immigration Appeals' decisions, which limits the interpretation of asylum/immigration law, but also because of the judge assigned to the case.[3] Some immigration judges have high denial rates—granting asylum to only one or two applications. Since the Trump administration, Central Americans are more dependent on legal counsel and representation to secure asylum as they must demonstrate that they are eligible. In other words, they must show that they have "fear of persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or their inclusion in a particular so-

cial group" (Immigration and Naturalization Act). Yet demonstrating to be part of a "particular social group" has represented a challenge for Central American asylum claimants under the recent Board of Appeals' decisions. Claims based on fear of gangs and/or domestic violence, for instance, are immediately rejected as these claimants are not considered as part of a particular social group.

Aside from immigrant attorneys, expert witnesses have become increasingly important in asylum applications and immigration courts as their reports add credibility to the legal claims of deserving asylum. Their expertise on the country, the country's particular political history, and key events that shaped its political history gives weight and coherence to an asylum claimant's application. Expert witnesses typically write an unbiased report on country conditions of the asylum claimant's place of origin, which is tailored to their migratory journey. Expert witnesses are expected to rely on a positivist language that, in many cases, reinforces stereotypes of many places (e.g., a country, a low-income neighborhood, a city, etc.) (see Wilson 2016). At the end of the report, expert witnesses write their opinion based on their personal expertise (i.e., "positivist" facts and objectivity based on their research), stating whether the fear of returning is credible if the asylum claimant is returned. In reshaping their migratory narratives of place or places and participating in immigration courts giving testimony to support their expert opinion during a hearing, expert witnesses become part of asylum claimants' migratory journey and experience. In doing so, expert witnesses participate in the power structure of immigration courts, which reproduces asymmetries between asylum claimants, expert witnesses, immigration attorneys, judges, and other actors present in the US asylum/immigration system.

In this chapter I suggest that immigration courts are not the endpoint of asylum claimants' journeys. In fact, they add to the uncertainty of cross-border trajectories. To continue their trajectories, asylum claimants depend on the legal outcome of their claim. Immigrant attorneys and expert witnesses' reports and testimony can increase their chances of obtaining asylum. To do this, immigrant attorneys and expert witnesses reshape the asylum claimants' migration journey(s) at an immigration court in order to show that they deserve asylum. Immigration courts are yet to be understood as part of the asylum claimants' migratory journey as well as a place of place-making that involves not only asylum claimants but also immigration attorneys and expert witnesses (see Schapendonk and Davids's chapter on migrants' journeys temporalities in this volume). In this chapter, place-making is understood as how places are remembered, represented, and reconstructed. In immigration courts, place-making is a "survival strategy and a tool to unveil opportunities in a new place" (Castillo 2014:

114), which is done through written documents, such as the client declaration and the expert's report, as well as by oral testimony describing how a place or places are remembered, represented, and reconstructed. I argue, however, that immigration attorneys use a strategic form of place-making with the aim of making asylum claims more credible and logical. "Strategic place-making" is intended to help asylum claimants navigate the asylum/immigration system with its power-laden institutions that discriminate and, in some cases, criminalize asylum claimants. Strategic place-making invokes a sense of solidarity of the expert witness and, to a lesser degree, the immigration attorney toward the asylum claimant; however, as part of the power-laden complex of the asylum system, it also contributes to reproducing asymmetries in knowledge regarding the asylum claimants' migratory journey. Following Drotbohm and Winters (introduction to this volume), immigration courts can be conceptualized as places "along-the-way" for asylum claimants, but simultaneously as powerful places, in which imaginings are transformed through narratives of origin, persecution, and flight. How place is reimagined and represented influences the legal outcome that determines an asylum claimant's next move. In this sense, immigration courts are key to rethinking and reconstructing place. Despite scholarship on expert witnesses in immigration courts, expert witnesses in the case of Central American asylum claimants and the role they play in constructing place is yet to be explored. In this chapter, I look at expert witnesses' work from a place-making perspective, which sheds light on how places of origin are reimagined and re-presented in immigration courts but also how this reimagination of place is tied to the institutions of power in the asylum system.

To explore immigration attorneys and expert witnesses' narratives of asylum claimants' migratory journeys in immigration courts, this chapter draws on my own experience as an expert witness for Hondurans seeking asylum in the United States since 2012. I have written more than one hundred asylum cases for US immigration courts and have given telephonic testimony (or have been available for testimony) to support asylum claimants. Writing reports and giving testimony has not required that I physically attend US immigration courts or meet with immigration attorneys and asylum claimants in person. I have carried out my work as an expert witness mainly through the exchange of emails with immigration attorneys and via telephone calls. Beforehand, the immigration attorney submits my telephone number to the immigration court, and on the day of the hearing I am called by the immigration attorney or the immigration judge. When the COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020, immigration judges used virtual platforms (e.g., WebEx) to allow testimony at the hearing. Today, many immigration judges and immigration attorneys maintain virtual platforms to allow testimony in an immigration court. It is through these multiple forms

of online and offline, formal and informal forms of interaction with immigration attorneys and asylum claimants and ways to testify in immigration courts, that I was able to trace and figure out the forms and processes of place-making in court procedures.

As an expert witness, I have written reports based on documents provided by immigration attorneys such as the asylum application form, a declaration of the events of the asylum claimant that led him or her to leave the country, statements and/or declarations from other family members, and, when available, evaluations by medical practitioners. In some cases, I have written reports based only on the asylum claimant's declaration and telephone calls with immigration attorneys who explain their legal arguments. In other cases, I have been able to speak to the asylum claimant to clarify parts of the declaration drafted with the immigration attorney. As an expert witness, I navigated the asylum system from a position of power/knowledge since I was providing expertise and credibility to an asylum claim based on my research and other studies. In reading their declarations, speaking with immigration attorneys handling their case—in some instances, speaking with the asylum claimant—writing a report tied to the asylum claimants' experiences, and testifying in the immigration court, I too became involved in the asylum claimants' migratory journey. In this chapter, I reflect critically on this experience as well as on the expert witnesses' role in reshaping migrants' journeys, including the immigration court as a place "along-the-way" to obtain asylum, but also an unsettling place. Passing through it adds uncertainty and anxiety to the journey of migrants trying to figure out their next move.

In what follows I develop my claim about strategic place-making by immigration attorneys and expert witnesses in US immigration courts. In the next section I briefly discuss the literature on expert witnesses and the debates surrounding their work. The third section looks at immigration attorneys and expert witnesses' reshaping of asylum claimants' journeys and place-making in immigration courts. The final part of this chapter offers conclusions; it suggests ethics expert witnesses and immigration attorneys could consider in their work in immigration courts.

Expert Witnesses in Immigration Courts

Given the increasing role of academics and researchers in asylum casework, there has been a growing scholarship examining and reflecting their role. An expert witness is defined in international law as "a person who by virtue of some specialized knowledge, skill or training can assist the trier of fact to understand or determine an issue in dispute" (Wilson 2016: 732). Most of

the expert witnesses working on asylum or international criminal casework are academics and researchers who have extensive knowledge of a country or region generally acquired through their fieldwork, investigations, and academic training. Through their reports, academics bring nuanced knowledge of the asylum claimant's country of origin. Furthermore, the expert witness assesses the social and political conditions of the country of origin and the degree of danger for the asylum claimant if deported (Lawrance and Ruffer 2015). Immigration judges do not grant asylum solely on the expert witness's report; however, it is one of the documents a judge consults when deciding. As Wilson (2016) points out, judges from immigration and criminal courts tend to cite more reports from academic expert witness, in particular social researchers, than medical, financial, and military and police experts.

Researchers and academics who work as expert witnesses are motivated by ethical and moral reasons in part because most have spent considerable time in the asylum claimant's country or region and have extensive networks there (Good 2004). In addition, in some cases academics see their expert witness work in a more critical light resembling a form of activism (Speed 2006). Hepner sees expert witness work as a form of "pragmatic solidarity," understood as a form of social justice that contributes to "the needs and interests of the vulnerable" (Hepner 2019). A sense of ethics, duty, and service in expert witness work was pointed out by Farmer and Gastineau (2002) who highlight the moral duty of researchers and academics to use their expertise in assisting populations affected by structural violence and different forms of abuse. In the case of Central American asylum claimants, most of whom lack or have difficulties accessing legal representation, expert witnesses' work can be a way of counteracting the asymmetries of power in immigration courts.

Despite this sense of solidarity, scholars have pointed out the troubles surrounding the work of expert witnesses. They are inevitably tied to what Farmer (cited in Hepner 2019) identified as powerful institutions such as governments and judicial systems. Asylum and refugee law are no exception; both are "tightly tied to power" (Farmer cited in Hepner 2019: 266). Expert witnesses navigate in a legal system that distrusts and suspects asylum claimants' life stories, but also reproduces unequal power relations between asylum claimants and the institutions that are tied to asylum, refugee, and migration law. Though not the intention, immigration courts end up "undermining legal protections and reinforcing existing hierarchies of class and ethnicity" (Terrio 2003: 137). Berger et al. (2015) point out that this is in part because of the discretional powers of immigration judges as well as assumptions by immigration officers and judges about the place of origin of the asylum claimant.

Complicating things more, academic expert witnesses must frame their report within the world of law, which, in some cases, differs epistemologically from systems of knowledge used in the social sciences. Whereas law makes assertions using "nonscientific rationalism" and positivist approaches, social sciences such as anthropology, political science, sociology, and history tend to draw on interpretative epistemology to give nuanced cultural and historical explanations based on fieldwork (Wilson 2016). This "clash of epistemologies" (Wilson 2016: 730) troubles academic expert witnesses as they find themselves reducing complex information that has been researched using critical epistemological frameworks and theories to a "simplistic" approach and to a "reductive legal process" that reproduces stereotypes and reinforces discourses of inequality regarding a region, a country, or the persons from that place (Good 2004; Hepner 2019; Speed 2006).

Referring to asylum claimants as "vulnerable" in the expert reports is common as it makes them eligible for asylum (see Galli 2020); however, this is problematic for academic expert witnesses. As Speed (2006) points out, asylum is not only a human right but also a form of agency. Asylum claimants see it as a "durable solution" to the risky journeys, threats, and danger experienced in their place of origin. Yet, in immigration courts, asylum claimants are silenced—despite being hypervisible—because "they do not possess the proper subjectivity through which they can be heard" (Gibson 2013: 3). Rather, they require legal representation through experts and attorneys to structure a narrative to make their stories credible vis-à-vis immigration judges. For instance, Galli (2018a) observes that immigration attorneys victimize and infantilize Central American minor asylum claimants as a strategy to distance them from criminalized adults and to present them as "child refugees." For some adults, suffering is transformed into "humanitarian capital" as a strategy to grant asylum based on compassion (Galli 2020). Both strategies are a contradictory and dehumanizing process for the "vulnerable" and "suffering" persons.

The media portray Central American migration as a humanitarian crisis, nevertheless, Coutin (2011) shows that Central Americans mainly from El Salvador, but also from Guatemala and Honduras, have been seeking asylum since the 1980s when the region was going through civil wars. However, they were perceived as economic migrants and deemed ineligible for asylum in the United States. Recent studies find that the narratives used by immigration attorneys reinforce the vulnerability of Central American asylum claimants in immigration courts and describe how US migration and border controls, which extend beyond their political territory, strip Central American asylum claimants from basic human rights (Galli 2020, 2018a, 2018b; Torres 2018; Stephen 2017).

Immigration Courts as a Place of Place-Making

This chapter sees immigration courts as places that are "along-the-way" of migrants' journeys. For asylum claimants, immigration courts are places along-the-way to have the papers to work and not be exploited, to not be separated from their children or family members who are legal residents or even citizens, to feel safe and protected. Specially, immigration courts are places along-the-way to not be deported. Asylum claimants see immigration courts positively; they are places where rule of law works and that may secure their legal entry and a life of opportunity and safety in the United States. As Pagni Barak (2023) notices in her study of immigration courts, asylum claimants described immigration courts optimistically, even considering that they had had a fair experience in these places.

Despite seeing immigration courts in such positive light, these along-the-way places do not always have great outcomes. Immigration courts can be along-the-way places that order an asylum claimant to go to a detention center to be deported to the country of origin where they might again relive the experiences that led to them to flee the country in the first place. In this sense, immigration courts are a "transitory space" (Haas 2023) characterized by ambivalence. As Haas points out, immigration courts are places that show the inclusionary and exclusionary aspects of the asylum system as asylum claimants "assert the need for protection, but do not have it yet" (ibid: 5). The outcome of a hearing may be positive if asylum is granted, or negative if deportation is ordered.

Immigration attorneys and expert witnesses play key roles in this transitory and ambivalent space of immigration courts. The materials presented by an immigration attorney, which include the asylum claimant's declaration—that is, the story detailing her experiences in the home country—the expert witness report, and the testimony of the asylum claimant, witnesses, and the expert, are part of the strategic forms of place-making that aim to demonstrate that the asylum claimant has "credible fear" if deported, thus deserving asylum. Immigration courts are places where strategic place-making occurs. Even though immigration attorneys and expert witnesses have written the materials beforehand, it is the immigration court where strategic place-making makes sense as the migrants' story is retold, re-narrated, reproduced in ways to demonstrate that there is credible fear of returning.

Asylum claimants' journeys are not necessarily smooth, predictable, or linear. Despite the experience of uncertainty in these journeys, scholars have pointed out the importance of place-making in these contexts (see De León 2015; Brigden 2017; Vogt 2016). Asylum claimants establish connections with the various places they pass through, inhabit, or stay, in some cases, for an unforeseeable period of time (Drotbohm and Winters 2020). These

connections can entail forms of place-making as asylum claimants become familiar with and ascribe meaning to these places (see Eichner in this volume). In the case of Central American migrants, their journeys tend to be understood as the transit from the place of origin in Central America to the United States. However, arriving to the United States—be it the border, a city, or a town—does not mean that the asylum claimant's journey is over. On the contrary, it continues when some apply for asylum at the border, or when others are sent to detention centers (directly from the border or when detained by the Immigration Borders Enforcement) and, if lucky, get legal representation to apply for asylum.

Despite recent studies problematizing the beginnings and endpoints of migrant journeys (Galemba, Dingeman, and DeVries 2021), migration scholarship has not yet considered the asylum process as part of the asylum claimants' journey or as part of a development of place-making. Similarly, studies about immigration courts, immigration attorneys, and expert witnesses in the context of asylum may point to testimony as a new form of knowledge (see Stephen 2017), yet they do not engage with the notion of place-making (Arriola Vega 2020; Good 2004; Wilson 2016). Drawing on a place-making perspective to understand how expert witnesses and immigration attorneys reshape asylum claimants' journeys, stories, and connections with place shows, on the one hand, the place-making process as one of the many "survival strategies"—following Castillo's (2014) notion of place-making—employed in migrants' journeys and key to gaining asylum. On the other hand, it shows the adaptability of the place-making process depending on its context. In this case, a focus on place goes from what studies have shown as anchoring the uprootedness, unpredictability, and nonlinearity that characterize migrants' journeys to presenting journeys and place(s) as linear, anticipated, a consequence of a fixed place that is "dangerous" and "insecure." This is, I argue, a strategic form of place-making as expert witnesses and immigration attorneys essentialize place(s) in order to fit the eligibility of asylum. A place-making perspective contributes to understanding the significance of this strategy in that it reproduces stereotypical representations of place(s).

Immigration courts as a physical place of place-making are not the focus of this chapter; rather, it centers on the remembering, representing, and reconstructing of places *elsewhere* in the context of seeking asylum and immigration courts. Nevertheless, immigration courts have turned into a familiar place for migrants seeking asylum. The immigration court is not a one-time experience. Asylum claimants must go various times as hearings are constantly rescheduled. Haas (2023) rightly points out that hearings at immigration courts are part of violent bureaucratic practices of the asylum system that seek to govern and discipline asylum claimants as well as add

uncertainty to their journeys. Nevertheless, applying for asylum and going to the immigration court (i.e., navigating the asylum/immigrant system) has become a key practice in which asylum claimants, immigration attorneys, and expert witnesses view immigration courts as a place of opportunity and/or uncertainty. Asylum claimants develop attachments and commitments especially with the immigration attorneys and expert witnesses who not only become part of their journey but also play a role in retelling their stories during the hearings. Immigration attorneys and expert witnesses aim to produce a credible narrative based on a migrant's declaration or story of his/her journey in order to convince an immigration judge of the need for protection and, thus, asylum. In the immigration attorney's legal arguments and the expert witness's report, the aim is to re-signify the asylum claimant's journey in the immigration court by retelling place(s). They retell their experiences, their relation to the different places they live in or pass through—which includes attachments and connections to these places—and re-portray the home country in order to produce a convincing claim.

In the next section, I look at how expert witnesses and immigration attorneys' strategic form of place-making takes place in the case of Central American asylum claimants. In this strategic form of place-making, expert witnesses reimagine an asylum claimant's place of origin in order to make them more eligible for asylum. However, in doing so, expert witnesses reproduce stereotypes of the place of origin.

Navigating Asylum

The involvement of expert witnesses and immigration attorneys in reshaping narratives of Central American asylum claimants occurs within a specific context, which is asylum law and the institutions, actors, and places tied to it, such as immigration courts, detention centers, expert witnesses, immigration attorneys, immigration judges, the government—that is, the Department of Homeland Security—shuttling from home to the immigration court and back. As do their places of origin and the journey to the United States, so too the context of asylum represents another space in which Central American asylum claimants navigate with uncertainty.

Asylum claimants from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala enter these spaces of asylum asymmetrically. Carl, an immigration attorney who worked in an organization that advocated for migrants, explained to me that "getting access to legal representation and navigating asylum law are the most difficult things for Central Americans when they seek asylum" (Carl, phone call, May 2019).[4] Getting legal representation is challenging because many asylum claimants are not aware that they have the right not

only to claim asylum in a country but also to be legally represented. Some undocumented migrants who may be aware of the immigration/asylum system see legal representation as too expensive and, thus, unreachable. In other cases, border agents detaining incoming migrants did not explain to them that there was a possibility of asylum if there was credible fear of returning to their place of origin. As a result, migrants are arrested and sent to detention centers for deportation. These examples show what Torres has termed "uneven geographies of immigrant justice" (2018: 29), which refers to "the different state practices which restrict asylum seekers and immigrants' access to fair due process and legal relief to which they are entitled" (2018: 28). Uneven geographies of immigrant justice occur in various spaces such as the border or detention centers and, later on, in immigration courts when asylum claimants give testimony. Immigration attorneys like Carl try to counteract the limited access to legal representation by doing voluntary community work in neighborhoods with high populations of migrants to let them know about their legal rights, or by going to detention centers to speak with detained migrants, explaining their right to seek asylum and to be legally represented. Some migrant organizations work at the border where they inform incoming migrants about their rights and provide legal services such as representation. Despite these efforts, Central American migrants continue have little access to legal representation in part because migrant organizations work with limited funds, and they do not have enough resources to reach and legally represent all migrants.

As for the complications of navigating asylum law, Central American asylum claimants are at a disadvantage due to various reasons. As Abrego and Cárcamo (2021) point out, Central Americans are generally seen and represented in the media as violent or embodying danger and insecurity. Because many are undocumented, Central American migrants are not only subjected to "poorly paid, low-mobility jobs" (Massey and Riosmena 2010: 303) but are also deportable (Golash-Boza 2015). To legalize their stay through an asylum application, Central Americans need to demonstrate at the immigration court that there is credible fear if returned to their homeland. In US asylum law, this means that there is a high likelihood that the person will face future danger if deported. Immigration attorneys' work is to demonstrate that there is credible fear of going back (e.g., threats, harassments, torture, and eventual death after returning). The Immigration attorneys assemble various documents[5] including the expert witness report. I see these documents as part of the reshaping of asylum claimant's narratives of place by immigration attorneys. A strategic form of place-making is part of an asylum claimant's transit in the immigration court and can help determine his or her next move in the journey. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore all the documents of an asylum casework (some can be

over five hundred pages). Instead, I will focus on the role of expert witnesses in reshaping Central American asylum claimants' journeys in immigration courts.

Redefining Place

Immigration attorneys' main challenge in an immigration court is to demonstrate that asylum claimants' fear of returning to their place of origin is credible. To do this, immigration attorneys ask the asylum claimants to describe the events in their place of origin that led them to leave. As Galli (2020) has pointed out, this is an initial screening to see if the asylum claimant's story fits the requirements to obtain asylum. If immigration attorneys see a possibility of asylum, they will start organizing the documents. This includes organizing the prior conversations with asylum claimants about their journeys, which many perceive as a displacement, in a document known as the "client's declaration." The declaration is key to attorneys and expert witnesses' reshaping asylum claimants' narratives of place(s) and, in general, the asylum claim. It is *this* narrative that expert witnesses base their report on; it is the narrative that asylum claimants rely on during testimony in the hearing at the immigration court, and it is the narrative that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) cross-examines with the asylum claimant during testimony.

The client's declaration involves rewriting an asylum claimant's experience of displacement "coherently," "logically," and in linear form. As I have witnessed when receiving materials from the immigration attorneys for an expert report, many asylum claimants have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms due to the experience of severe trauma and/or near-death moments at the hands of criminal gangs, authorities, or partners (in cases of domestic violence). Reliving these moments is not only emotionally painful but also makes it difficult to provide a "consistent" account of the events. It is normal to "forget" painful and traumatic events due to alterations in memory of persons suffering PTSD (De Jesús-Rentas, Boehnlein, and Sparr 2010; Cohen 2002). As Drotbohm and Winters (2020) point out, such events can contribute to narrating migrants under new categories (e.g., asylum claimant, refugee). For instance, one asylum claimant mentioned that she was unaware of what a "refugee" was until she claimed for asylum. The use of these categories through strategic place-making favors the asylum claimant's eligibility for asylum. However, in immigration courts, narrating events in nonlinear form and "changing" or "forgetting" to tell the events that led to displacement and movement abroad are perceived as "inconsistent." Immigration judges and cross-examiners, that is,

the Department of Homeland Security, look for "consistent testimony without contradictions and a history that matches the known conditions in the country of origin" (De Jesús-Rentas, Boehnlein, and Sparr 2010).

To demonstrate such a testimony, immigration attorneys redefine the asylum claimant's journey and place(s) by describing the events in a sequential order. This is because asylum and migration law and the institutions tied to it are rooted in the epistemology of law and its positivist approach to evidence (Wilson 2016)—that is, facts demonstrate a claim. However, showing facts in the declaration is laborious for immigration attorneys who try to "logically" write a story that, upon hearing the first time, does not fit their epistemological perspective. Difficulties increase when the asylum claimant does not speak or understand English, which is common. Immigration attorneys hire a translator who sometimes misses important information or does not understand social and cultural details of the place of origin, thus excluding them or misinterpreting them. I recall speaking to an immigration attorney about an asylum claimant's "client declaration" I received. Some events described were not clear, especially of some places. I mentioned this to the immigration attorney who replied, "I don't know what to do; I've spoken to her many times. I've tried to make sense of it" (Zoom meeting with immigration attorney, October 10, 2021).

I suggested calling the asylum claimant to clarify some movements to places that seemed "irrational" for the attorney. I asked the asylum claimant in Spanish to tell me more about these movements. She explained that she moved to those specific places because she had relatives there who hid her from gang members and a violent partner. She associated these places with protection in part because of childhood memories. However, the information of relatives living in the places she "spontaneously" went to, the meaning of these places to her, as well as how family in Honduras (understood differently from the nuclear-extensive family distinction in the United States) constitute an emotional and financial support system had been left out by the translator and sounded "illogical" to the immigration attorney. When I explained to the immigration attorney these "gaps," she spoke again to the asylum claimant and amended parts of the declaration to narrate her movements "consistently" while still leaving out meanings, feelings, and memories of place that would complicate the narrative. Immigration attorneys select thoughts, memories, and lived moments of the asylum claimant's place (i.e., house, neighborhood, town, city, or country) when drafting the declaration with the purpose of demonstrating the credible fear. This example shows one of the ways place is redefined in an immigration court. In this case, the immigration attorney rewrites the journey and places logically; the places where the asylum claimant passed are presented as dangerous and unsafe to demonstrate credible fear of returning.

Client declarations and expert reports highlight asylum claimants' traumatic experiences lived in places when re-narrating place. My conversations with some asylum claimants, however, indicated that they did not always associate these places with violence. I remember a phone call I had with Carlos from Honduras. He spoke about his neighborhood in Tegucigalpa, which was gang controlled, as a difficult place to live, but where he also had good memories. Carlos had learned to cope with gang members' daily presence and, thus, was able to meet with friends and go to school. He described his relation to the neighborhood as "tough but bearable." Problems started when gang members wanted to involve him in their criminal activities, and he refused. As this example shows, asylum claimants' place-making is shaped by ambiguous relations, experiences, thoughts, and perceptions. But places in declarations and expert reports are not narrated relationally but rather as fixed, and characteristics are essentialized. For instance, in Carlos's case, my expert report included the following sections: "Violence in Honduras" and "Gang Violence" (especially in neighborhoods). In these sections I discussed the inability of the Honduran state to establish a stable democracy and to protect citizens, or the use of violence of gangs to impose order in their neighborhoods. Although violence in Honduras is real, the country's weak democracy and state inaction in protecting Hondurans are not essential features. Rather, they are products of the country's aborted state-formation process partially due to a detrimental involvement of the United States in the country's politics and economy, and Honduras's position within the global capitalist system. Similarly, even though I present gang violence as an essential feature of the gang, it is complex. It is also a product of the government's security policies to control violence, which, in turn, are part of a global agenda of crime control (see Gutiérrez Rivera 2013). In other words, violence is entangled with larger global and historical processes that I leave out in an expert report in order to strengthen the claim of reasonable fear if the asylum claimant is deported.

In instances when I included more critical discussions in the report, immigration attorneys suggested editing to avoid an interpretation by the immigration judge that the country is not so dangerous after all—for instance, if I point out that there are various social programs and state institutional restructuring initiatives to strengthen democracy. In one report I discussed the involvement of the United States in Honduras's aborted state-formation process to explain the "weak democracy" and state institutions. The immigration attorney suggested that I delete this as it appeared critical toward the US government and foreign policy and would not look solid or coherent in an asylum claim—after all, the asylum claimant is seeking protection from the US government, which grants or does not grant asylum. I deleted the section. In the report, these places—that is, country or neighborhood—are

essentialized as violent in order to adhere to the language of asylum law. The aim of narrating this strategic form of place-making, which involves stereotypical representation, is to show credibility and consistency of the asylum claimant's story and the credible fear if deported to the country, and to avoid upsetting the institution that grants asylum. As Gibson points out, the asylum regime is unwelcoming toward asylum claimants, inclined to consider their stories as "bogus." In this "culture of suspicion," asylum claimants' and refugees' stories are "carefully controlled and contained" (2013: 3). Hence the emphasis on presenting place(s) mainly as violent and dangerous, even though asylum claimants' experience with the place was more complex.

Strategic Place-Making

Expert witnesses' strategic forms of place-making use an objectivist, positivist approach rather than a nuanced analysis to fit legal claims of the asylum application. As mentioned above, I have employed such language when discussing violence in Honduras in my reports. For instance, I remember a report in which I discussed reasons why Hondurans did not go to the police for protection. The section supported the legal claim that there was reasonable danger of the place of origin due to the lack of state protection. I detailed the history of the police in the country, its former militarization, its history of human rights violations and disappearances under the military dictatorships, and failed attempts to restructure the police under the democratization process. The immigration attorney was particularly uncomfortable with the use of the word "restructure" as it gave the impression that recent governments had been trying to improve the police. An immigration judge could read this as a good sign of a government attempting to establish strong institutions—that is, "it might not be such a dangerous place after all." I agreed to leave out "restructure" from the report and phrased it instead as, "Despite various attempts, the Honduran government has been unable to establish the police as a credible and solid institution, thus, it continues to be mistrusted by Hondurans." This sentence supports the credible fear claim as it reproduces and represents Honduras as an unsafe place for a person who is forced to return. Furthermore, the sentence draws on a positivist approach that essentializes Honduras is an unsafe place, a "logical" consequence of weak state institutions.

Expert witnesses' strategic place-making not only occurs in the writing of reports as mentioned above but also happens during testimony at a hearing. Immigration attorneys generally have expert witnesses testify to strengthen the credibility and coherence of the asylum claimant's story, as well as to

support the legal claim of credible fear if deported to the place of origin. In some cases, the judge or the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) asks the expert witness to testify to clarify or even challenge the expert's report. Immigration attorneys generally prepare the asylum claimant and the expert witness for testimony. This involves meetings with the immigration attorney—in my case, via phone call or a virtual platform—before the hearing. In my experience as an expert witness, the immigration attorney sends me the questions she or he plans to ask at the hearing. Immigration attorneys sometimes organize these questions into sections: a set of questions aimed to establish the knowledge of the expert and to be admitted in the hearing for testimony, another set of questions organized around subjects discussed in the report (e.g., violence in the country, gender-based violence, or gang violence), the final questions about the expert's opinion if the asylum claimant is deported to the place of origin. In addition, a "prep session" or mock testimony is organized. As I answered the questions during preparation, the immigration attorney would give me feedback on my answers. For instance, I learned that using words such as "maybe," "could," "possible" have the effect of weakening the credible fear claim that Honduras was not a safe place for the asylum claimant. As immigration attorneys explained to me, these words were interpreted in an immigration court as, "[violence or death] might happen, it might not." The "might not" as a possible interpretation was the problem; it weakened the credible fear claim. Immigration attorneys suggested that instead I use words such as "more likely than not," "high likelihood," "highly likely" as they reinforced the legal claim. This example shows how expert witnesses' narratives of place-making in immigration courts are "carefully controlled and contained" (Gibson 2013: 3) through the suggestion of using or avoiding certain keywords. Immigration attorneys told me to base the answers on two main documents: the client's declaration and the expert's report. They suggested that I read these documents beforehand so the details of the (altered) asylum claimant's journey and experience with place were fresh. As one immigration attorney wrote to me, "When in doubt, [the client declaration and the expert report] are the pillars to fall back on" (Email from an immigration attorney, June 2022).

Testimony is the opportunity to retell the alternative narrative that both immigration attorneys and experts have prepared. Many immigration judges give weight to testimony that can be key to deciding whether or not to grant asylum. One immigration attorney shared an excerpt of the immigration judge's decision to grant asylum. In it, the immigration judge mentioned my report and testimony as crucial to his decision as it confirmed the reasonable fear the asylum claimant would "most likely" experience if returned. In other words, my work was "coherent," "logical," and adhered to the positivist language and approach that dominates in courtrooms. However,

an expert's testimony can also be contested. I have experienced being challenged by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). As representatives of the government, they are expected to question the expert's narrative of place both in the report and testimony. Some take the positivist approach to the extreme. In one case, the DHS asked me how many policemen were in the neighborhood I mentioned in the report. In another case, the DHS asked what the exact number of domestic violence filings at the public prosecutor's office was. I answered negatively to both questions and, mirroring their positivist approach, explained that I did not have to know those exact numbers because, as a well-versed researcher of the subject, I was able to reach a conclusion based on other cases resembling the ones questioned.

Although potentially decisive in asylum decisions, immigration attorneys and expert witnesses' strategic place-making may also strip the asylum claimant from agency and a voice as narrations of places tend to frame asylum claimants as victims in need of protection. Studies have shown, however, not only that asylum claimants develop agency throughout their journeys (see Brigden 2017) but also that claiming asylum can be seen as an act of agency (Hepner 2019; Speed 2006). As Speed (2006) notes, asylum for many migrants is a "durable solution" when considering the risks and dangers they have been through in their journeys and places of origin. Various Honduran asylum claimants I spoke with described their experience in the immigration court as an opportunity, despite the fact that they were placed at the bottom of the asylum regime, and their stories and experiences were questioned and altered to fit legal claims. As Pagni Barak (2023) points out in her ethnography of asylum claimants from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala in the United States, asylum claimants see the immigration court as a place of fairness and legitimacy. This is because they see the United States as a country that exercises the "rule of law." In some cases, the experience of successfully navigating the asylum regime and its immigration courts (i.e., obtaining asylum) contributed to new narratives of identity for the asylum claimant, most of which are rights based. Some Hondurans I spoke with and who had obtained asylum in the United States perceived the experience as life changing and had started to work voluntarily with local migrant organizations to help other Hondurans get legal representation.

Expert witnesses and immigration attorneys are aware that asylum is a key right and that migrants are entitled to apply for it. Being able to help and give service to persons who need to navigate an asylum system that structurally disadvantages asylum claimants is one of the main reasons why academics engage in expert witnesses' work. In other words, helping others and a sense of solidarity are at the heart of doing expert reports in the context of asylum. Hepner observes that expert witnesses' work is linked to

"pragmatic solidarity," understood as social justice that aims at prioritizing the needs and interests of the most vulnerable (2019: 266). It is what drew me to do this work. It is only when I started writing expert reports that I became aware of the role that expert witnesses play in strategically altering migrants' narratives of place(s). Doing so meant representing these places rather simplistically, leaving out certain information about a place, as well as reproducing stereotypes and asymmetries of knowledge by using a predominantly positivist approach and giving artificial coherence to migrants' journeys and experience with place(s). Strategic place-making has become part of asylum claimant's journeys, experienced principally in immigration courts when they apply for asylum.

Conclusion

This chapter reflects on the role of expert witnesses and immigration attorneys working on asylum cases in the United States. Though writing expert reports and putting together asylum casework emerges from a sense of empathy and solidarity from expert witness and immigration attorneys, both immigration attorneys and expert witnesses alter the asylum claimants' narratives of place(s) of origin to support their claims in immigration courts. The altered narrations of asylum claimants' journeys and place, I argue, is a strategic form of place-making in immigration courts. These immigration courts are part of the asylum claimants' journey and are key sites of place-making. This chapter uses a place-making perspective to show how immigration attorneys and expert witnesses reimagine, represent, and reconstruct place.

These altered narrations of place, however, reproduce asymmetries of knowledge as place adopts an essentialized and fixed notion in large part because they are framed from a legal, positivistic approach. As an expert, I am confronted by the "clash of epistemologies" (Wilson 2016), that is, the positivist approach that dominates in immigration courts and the interpretive approach that I use in my research.

One way of ameliorating this tension may be to reinforce expert witnesses' work as a form of activism. Speed (2006) argues the need for a "critically engaged activist research" approach in which expert witnesses include ethical conduct and the politics of knowledge production in their reports to support a person's claim in the immigration courts. Some experts I know are active, for instance, in migrant organizations; others have created expert witness groups and databases offering workshops and exchanging experiences.

Similarly, Eckenwiler (2018) has pointed out that "ethical place-making" could be helpful to try to navigate the controversies of place-making in asylum claims. Grounded in a capabilities-oriented conception of justice, she suggests that "ethical place-making" includes "nurturing relations of care and interdependence . . . supporting autonomy not in terms of individual self-reliance but in a relations sense that sees us persisting and flourishing within relations of care and interdependence." (Eckenwiler 2018: 566) In this sense, expert witnesses and immigration attorneys could foster relationships of care in the hostile environment of the asylum world (e.g., judges, courts, the DHS)—for instance, following up on an asylum claimant after a hearing regardless of the legal outcome. I generally ask immigration attorneys about the legal outcome. In some cases, I have been able reach out to an asylum claimant and ask them how they felt after the legal outcome. It is difficult not to fall into the essentialization of places; however, it may be helpful to actually include the ways how asylum claimants understand place(s) into the expert report and the "client declaration." For instance, immigration attorneys could bring an expert to help draft the "client declaration" (though this would demand significant time), this way not losing valuable information on place(s). Similarly, expert witnesses should be able to better incorporate their critical knowledge on how place is understood and experienced into the report as well as how these notions of place-making tie into the asylum claim. It is important for immigration judges, immigration attorneys, and the DHS to understand that place is complex. Finally, place-making is not limited to an immigration court. Many asylum claimants struggle to make sense of their new places of destinations, where in many cases they feel isolated or disconnected. Ethical place-making could contribute by involving migrant organizations and activists into healing the trauma of certain places—for instance, in the homeland, in the journey, or in the United States. Ortiz and Gómez Córdoba (2023) refer to "place-based healing" in the case of communities that have experienced different forms of violence. Ortiz and Gómez Córdoba focus on urban contexts that have experienced armed conflict (e.g., Colombia), yet the notion of healing from traumatic places resonates the experience of asylum claimants who witness violence in different moments of their journey—for instance, they are caught in the crossfire of gangs or criminal organizations—as well as the asylum system. Ethical place-making could involve community work and activities to heal and even repair asylum claimants' traumatic past experiences with different places as well as making sense of the place(s) they have arrived.

At the center of ethical place-making is solidarity recognition. In the United States, some cities and/or states (e.g., California, Oregon, and New

York) with a high population of migrants from Central America and Mexico have become sanctuary states in which local governments do not cooperate with federal authorities to enforce immigration law. Various law departments in US universities have clinics that provide legal counseling to undocumented migrants and may even represent them in an immigration court. It is worth considering how the collaborative work of expert witnesses and immigration attorneys, which stems from a place of solidarity, can contribute, through relations of care and interdependence, to bear the difficulties and hostilities of the asylum regime and the immigration courts.

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NOTES

1. See Oliver Laughland, "Most Families Facing Deportation from US Do Not Have an Immigration Lawyer," *The Guardian*, 20 October 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/oct/20/family-deportation-immigration-lawyer.
2. Matter of A-B- is the decision of then attorney general Jeff Sessions in which he overturned an applicant's grant of asylum on the basis of domestic violence and gang violence. Matter of A-B- states that cases of domestic violence should not be approved because they are private issues.
3. Aside from Matter of A-B-, the EOIR Board of Immigration Appeals has made other decisions that limit Central Americans' asylum claims such as the Matter of S-E-G-, which limits asylum on the grounds of gang recruitment.
4. All names have been changed.
5. The documents to file for asylum include drafting a declaration with the asylum claimant in which she or he describes the events that led to his or her departure from the place of origin, in some cases, medical and psychological evaluations, documents from the home country that support the asylum claimant's claims (e.g., declarations from family members or neighbors, police reports, etc.).

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CHAPTER
6

Hesitant Place-Making
Dwellings and Avoidances in a Popular Mall in Argentina

Franziska Reiffen

When train and subway passengers arrive at Constitución Station in southern Buenos Aires and step out onto Lima Street, they first perceive the flashy red walls, lights, and music that emerge from the popular mall Paseo La Estación across the street. On one of my last days of research in March 2020, I arrived at the station with Verónica and Malena, whom I had known from Paseo La Estación since 2018.[1] Verónica, from Peru, worked as a vendor in the popular mall for some years but had recently given up that job. Malena, from Corrientes in northern Argentina, had been living in Buenos Aires for several decades but had no place to stay, spending her nights in different shelters close to the mall. On that day, upon arriving at Constitución, Verónica left to do some errands, and Malena and I headed toward Paseo La Estación. Before stepping into the premises, Malena pointed to the escalator that would take us directly from the pavement to the second floor. "Let's walk upstairs," she said. "Because if we walk downstairs, they will start talking." I didn't have to ask who "they" were. Malena wanted to avoid running into Verónica's sisters, Luz and Sandra, who worked on the mall's first floor. Malena spent much time with the sisters, but their relationship was not without conflict. The relationship the women had forged there was why Malena frequently headed to the mall, and it was sometimes a reason for her to avoid it.

In this chapter, I explore Paseo La Estación as an "along-the-way" place (Drotbohm and Winters, this volume) where different urban mobilities

concentrate. Paseo La Estación is along the route passengers take when arriving at Constitución Station and heading to other destinations in the city. It is also part of internal and international migrants' trajectories as they arrive and settle in Buenos Aires, seek jobs and a sheltered place to stay, and forge social connections. Paseo La Estación acts like a border zone in which people shift between inclusion and exclusion, formality and informality, transit and dwelling. I argue that place-making and dwelling in transit and amid precarious conditions is possible because the mall as a border zone allows for meaningful relations, multiple spatial uses, and creative ways of allowing one's life to emerge. While working and socializing in the mall is fragile, I intend to show that this fragility does not preclude place-making and dwelling but is an integral part of it.

Dwelling, as used by Jared Zigon (2014), refers to a specific mode of being-in-the-world that differs from mere survival. Building on Martin Heidegger and Tim Ingold, Zigon (2014: 757) suggests that dwelling corresponds to a being-in-the-world that does not leave people "trapped in a world." Instead, dwelling means creatively building and caring for one's world. According to Ingold (2011: 173), from a dwelling perspective, life does not follow preestablished plans and forms but takes shape and meaning as people inhabit the world. Therefore, Zigon (2014: 757) suggests that dwelling always entails the possibility of becoming otherwise. Making dwelling possible involves a concrete engagement with place. In Zigon's (2014) study of anti–drug war activism in the Bronx, this concrete engagement occurs in the activists' efforts to create places for drug users where they can socialize, receive help without feeling stigmatized, and eventually become activists themselves.

Unsettled lives might become settled in sites that seem unlikely dwelling places at first sight. Kathleen Millar (2018) describes an astonishing example of such a dwelling site as she explores the comings and goings of *catadores*, garbage collectors, at a Brazilian garbage dump. Many of these *catadores* face uncertainty in all areas of life. They continually return to the dump, not out of sheer necessity, as Millar finds, but because the dump provides them a "form of living" (Millar 2018: 9) that accommodates their specific rhythm of life and social needs and opens up the possibility of pursuing specific life projects. The garbage dump, despite its apparent marginality, is a life-building site. People's changing presences and absences do not mean the site is unimportant. They are part of a specific way of place-making amid precarity.

Addressing malls as sites of dwelling and place-making along-the-way is also not self-evident. Marc Augé (1995) famously describes the mall as a "non-place" alongside other transitory places, such as airport terminals and public hospitals. According to Augé, these non-places are devoid of his-

tory, identification, and social relations, and people tend to pass through them without developing attachments. While many scholars have rejected this description, showing that malls are places of socialization and identification (Jackson, Rowlands, and Miller 1998; Stillerman and Salcedo 2012; Aceska and Heer 2019), one remaining question is how these possibilities for socialization and identification reinforce exclusion.

Indeed, malls have been characterized as "fortresses" (Dirsuweit and Schattauer 2004) or "fortified enclaves" (Caldeira 2000: 258). According to these conceptualizations, malls enhance urban segregation by enabling privileged city dwellers to retreat into highly surveilled and regulated spaces. At the same time, (racialized or lower-class) "others" are kept outside (Dirsuweit and Schattauer 2004). This exclusion is generally found in malls that cater to a wealthy clientele by offering expensive brand-name products or, especially in the United States, are only accessible by private cars (Stillerman 2015: 44).

However, Paseo La Estación is different. One of many commercial sites that have proliferated in Buenos Aires and the surrounding metropolitan area since the early 2000s, it is modeled after the vast market "La Salada." La Salada was founded by Bolivian migrants on the city's outskirts in the 1990s and became successful through its offers of locally produced, imitation brand products for cheap wholesale prices. In the context of the economic crisis and loss of purchasing power among Argentina's urban middle class in the past two decades, the commercial strategy of La Salada has become a model for other, mostly privately owned indoor markets opening throughout the city. Some of these, including Paseo La Estación, have started using increasingly sophisticated designs. They carry logos and brand names reminiscent of more expensive shopping sites while selling the same merchandise as in other markets. The conditions under which people work here combine aspects of formality and informality.

In Argentina, places like Paseo La Estación are sometimes colloquially addressed as *bolishoppings*, a portmanteau of *boliviano* (Bolivian) and *shopping* (the Argentine expression for mall). *Boliviano* is used as a derogatory term that connotes racialized and classist ways of othering, referring to supposed backwardness, racial difference, and poverty (Grimson and Kessler 2005: 126–27). The term *bolishopping* contributes to constructing a place of consumption as marginal (Drotbohm and Winters, this volume), classifying it as supposedly of and for migrants and the poor. A different way to conceptualize the commercial practices that evolve in this place and that entail self-fashioned ways of earning a living in times of decreasing wage-labor is to consider them as part of the "popular economy" (Fernández-Álvarez 2016). As a place that defies conventional classifications, such as "mall" or "market," "formal" or "informal," I call Paseo La Estación a "popular mall."

In this chapter, I discuss Paseo La Estación as a place that fits neither the idea of an upper-class enclave nor a migrant niche. Instead, the popular mall gains different meanings as city dwellers who would describe themselves as *gente humilde* (humble people, i.e., part of the poorer sector of society) work, stay, and encounter others within it. Exploring the popular mall as a border zone that unsettles unequivocal attributions of meaning and that, instead, enables place-making along-the-way also entails paying attention to how place-making in the mall bears signs of people's varying possibilities to dwell and feel in place in Buenos Aires more generally. In the following, I ask: Through what kinds of spatial practices and social interactions do people inhabit this place, become attached to it, or reject it? How do people's experiences in other temporary dwelling sites, such as hotels or shelters, contribute to their perceptions of this place?

For my analysis, I draw on data collected during eleven months of ethnographic fieldwork in Buenos Aires between 2017 and 2020.[2] Focusing on migrant and non-migrant emplacements in the popular mall, I conducted participant observation and semi-structured interviews primarily in Paseo La Estación, the neighborhood of Constitución, and other popular malls in the city center and shopping district of Balvanera. Most of my research participants were vendors who worked in the mall and came from eight different countries, including Argentina; however, I also met with people who dropped by the mall for other reasons: to shop, to sit and wait, or to visit family members and friends. This segment of my research was complemented by interviews with city government employees and representatives of social institutions in Constitución.

In the following, I introduce Paseo La Estación as a place of consumption in a specific urban context before turning to various people who frequent Paseo La Estación and their place-making efforts. I further explore the meanings of Paseo La Estación as a place of (precarious) work, shelter, and social connection to discuss how this is reflected in the social relations taking shape in the mall.

The Popular Mall at the Urban Threshold

Paseo La Estación is indicative of a new retail format that has developed in Argentina since the early 1990s and whose emergence is linked to processes of un- and resettlement of the city's inhabitants. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, structural adjustments, including financial reforms, privatization, and trade liberalization, led to factory closures, skyrocketing unemployment, and an economic crisis in Argentina. In Buenos Aires, this crisis also led to the impoverishment of working-class neighborhoods (For-

ment 2015: 118), and many of their former inhabitants moved into shantytowns or informal settlements. There, they lived alongside internal and international migrants, especially from neighboring countries. For many, these shantytowns initially served as entry points into the city but increasingly became permanent places to live (Cravino 2018: 79). In a city in which boundaries of belonging and possibilities of participation often reflect in the city's spatial organization, the shantytown is a structurally disadvantaged and stigmatized site in which migrant and non-migrant city dwellers have nonetheless developed new ways of making a living.

At the edge of one such shantytown, La Salada emerged in the 1990s. La Salada, primarily comprising migrant owners of small garment workshops, served as a model for numerous indoor markets throughout Buenos Aires (Forment 2015). As in La Salada, many workers in these markets are migrants from an increasingly diverse list of countries, including member states of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and many Caribbean and African countries.[3] This heterogeneous and continued migration to Argentina (see Cerrutti 2018) occurred partly due to Argentina's economic stabilization after 2003. Additionally, migration was facilitated by the adoption of liberal migration policies by the Peronist governments in office until 2015 (Acosta Arcarazo and Freier 2015), as well as specific events that produced new migratory movements, such as the Haitian earthquake in 2010 and the political violence and economic instability in Venezuela (Reiffen and Drotbohm 2023).

Many migrants continue living and working in Argentina under precarious conditions. Especially migrants from non-MERCOSUR member states and those who have entered Argentina without a visa face difficulty accessing residency permits (Acosta Arcarazo and Freier 2015). Furthermore, at the time of my research, Argentina was mired in another economic crisis entailing high inflation and unemployment, further exacerbating the situation for migrants and other city dwellers.

In challenging times, indoor markets in Buenos Aires continue selling commodities at affordable prices and generating jobs. Some that I call "popular malls," like Paseo La Estación, draw on increasingly elaborate architecture and provide services such as restaurants and playgrounds for children. Their names allude to places of leisure, incorporating words such as "Paseo" (from *pasear*, to stroll), "Plaza," or "Centre." Many of them are placed at well-connected sites in the city center or near central train stations like Constitución.

As a high-traffic transit area, Constitución works as an urban threshold. Its train station and bus terminal are entry and exit points to the city center for those who live in poorer neighborhoods in the southern parts of the metropolitan area. Compared to adjacent neighborhoods, Constitución re-

Figure 6.1. Paseo La Estación, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2018. © Franziska Reiffen

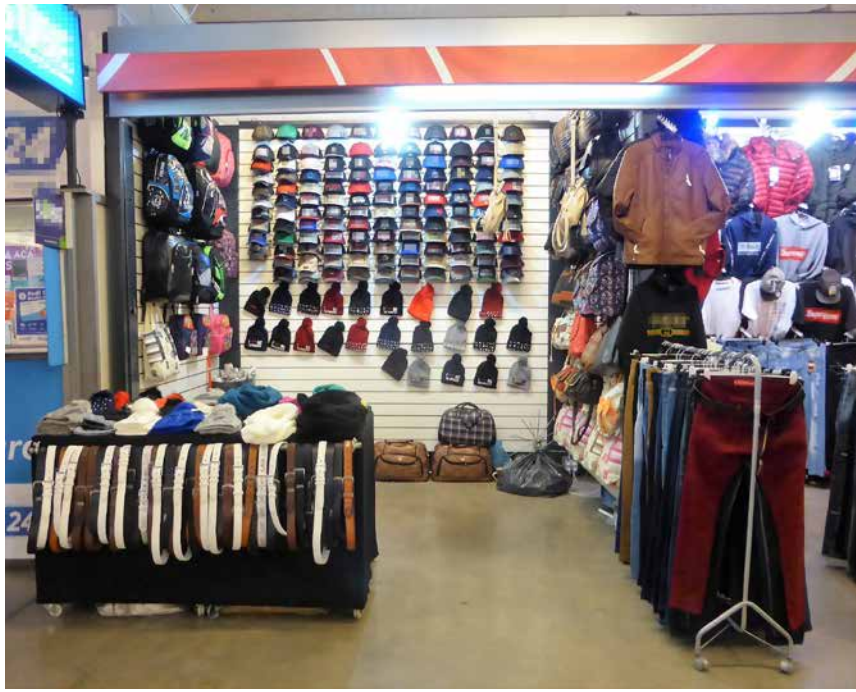

Figure 6.2. Shops in Paseo La Estación, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2018.
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Figure 6.3. Children's rides in Paseo La Estación, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2018. © Franziska Reiffen

mains a relatively affordable place to live (Cifras 2020). Additionally, many who lack access to formal housing live in semipermanent and semiprovisional conditions in hotel rooms rented monthly and concentrated here. Constitución is also a go-to point for many city dwellers in need. The area around the train station hosts service points where people can access documentation, financial subsidies, and legal counselling, while soup kitchens and shelters provide material assistance to poorer city dwellers.

Paseo La Estación is privately owned, with security men patrolling its corridors, but it is also open to the sides and a commonly used passageway. While many passengers consider the train station and its immediate surroundings dangerous, a stigma that Constitución shares with other train stations that attract marginalized city dwellers (Stasik, this volume), Paseo La Estación is perceived as relatively safe. For many people I encountered during my research, the popular mall facilitated circulation in the neighborhood. They traversed Paseo La Estación on their way to and from work, doctor's appointments, or other commitments. Contrary to the idea of the mall-as-enclave, people tend to view the popular mall as an ordinary part of the neighborhood and its street pattern, which they integrate into their daily walking routines.

While the mall's position and open sidewalls make it a passageway, other aspects of its spatial arrangement encourage people to stay and al-

low for uses comparable to other dwelling places. Paseo La Estación has a pizza restaurant, two burger stands with tables and plastic chairs in front, and a small children's playground on the second floor. Benches on both floors invite people to sit, and its bathrooms are used by passersby. While leisure-oriented services and mall plaza arrangements might aim to motivate spending time and money, people use these sites in ways that exceed or counter mall officials' expectations. They might stay to meet friends or have family picnics (Stillerman and Salcedo 2012: 323–24; Dávila 2016: 105). In short, such spatial arrangements allow people to act out existing social relations and forge new social ties.

A key spot known to many passing through the Paseo is a bench on the first floor. The two-sided gray metal bench has three seats on each side, separated by low armrests, and is surrounded by shops, creating a little plaza around it. I observed people engaging in numerous activities on this bench: making calls and checking their social media channels, reading the newspaper, sipping *mate*, and chatting with others. Often, people discussed issues related to life in the city—the traffic, insecurity, politics, the economic situation—but they also occasionally talked about their private lives.

In Paseo La Estación, sociable interaction took place among relative strangers on this bench (Reiffen 2018). Drawing on Georg Simmel's (1949: 257) definition of sociability (*Geselligkeit*), which relies on acting "as though all were equal," Nina Glick Schiller and Ayşe Çağlar (2016) underline the importance of interactions based on a sense of commonality, not difference, for people to become emplaced in a city. While for Simmel (1949: 258), sociability ends where purpose-oriented interactions of "practical reality" begin, Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2016) argue that casual meetings can develop into affective and lasting relationships tied to urban space. This is precisely what happened on the bench in Paseo La Estación.

Some of those who encountered one another on or around the bench took pleasure in the conversations that unfolded there. They started returning to the bench, recognizing and referring to one another by name or nickname. On this bench, the women mentioned in this chapter's introduction also met one another: Malena, who spent her nights in a nearby shelter for homeless women, and the vendors Luz and Verónica, as well as their sisters Sandra and Elizabeth. Luz, who had a shop right next to the bench, liked to entertain herself by talking to the people who sat on it. When Malena took her place on the bench for the first time in 2017, Luz began chatting with her, thus starting a long-lasting, though complicated, relationship.

Before turning to the specificities of this relationship, I want to further introduce Luz, Verónica, and Malena, as the different meanings they attributed to the popular mall can inform our understanding of experiences of mobility and place-making more generally.

Luz and Verónica: The Mall as a Place of Hope and Frustrations

"When I see these clothes, I say: Do you know how much scarcity I suffered? And today I have ten pants to wear. . . . Having achieved this makes me happy. It makes me happy." Luz pronounced the last "happy" with a sigh, her voice seeming to come from a comfortable, reposing place deep inside her. We both stood behind her vending table while Luz turned her head toward the back of her shop, letting her eyes wander over the dresses, pants, t-shirts, and sweaters on plastic hangers, one on top of the other. I followed her gaze over the multiple fabrics with their different textures and patterns, the Mickey Mouse prints and imitation Nike logos, behind which the plywood walls of her shop almost disappeared.

Luz, Verónica, and their sisters Elizabeth and Sandra grew up in a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of Lima, Peru, and had moved, one after the other, to Buenos Aires. The first to arrive was Elizabeth, followed by Luz in the early 2000s. Both sisters worked multiple jobs upon arriving in Buenos Aires. Like many recently arrived migrants, they also engaged in street vending. Luz, who sold mobile phones on the street, remembered feeling exposed to police raids and the weather and often feared having her merchandise stolen. Other former migrant street vendors in Paseo La Estación, especially from West Africa, expressed feeling uncomfortably visible in public spaces as racialized others, exposed to even more police control and racist remarks (see Vammen 2018).

For many former street vendors, renting a shop in an indoor market or mall offered the prospect of working in a more protected and stable environment. Furthermore, mall officials did not ask tenants for proof of documentation, which was attractive to migrant entrepreneurs lacking a residency permit. While the Argentine revenue service expected shop owners to register as *monotributistas* (self-employed), not everybody did so. Luz, however, had a residency permit, and she was glad when she had assembled the necessary funds to rent a shop in Constitución like her elder sister Elizabeth. When their sisters Verónica and Sandra joined them in Buenos Aires, they employed them as shop assistants.

Working in the popular mall was a physically and mentally demanding job. It required driving to the wholesalers and returning with heavy loads of bulk merchandise; it also required careful bookkeeping and reflection on good and bad investments in times of decreasing consumer demand and increasing shop rents. Although times were tough, Luz was relatively successful. She had managed to expand her business, rent a second shop, rent an apartment in the metropolitan area, and save enough money to buy a house in Peru. She sent her son to a private school in Buenos Aires and nurtured hopes for him to have formal employment one day. While

Luz often spoke about her business concerns, the materiality of her shop filled her with satisfaction. The displayed merchandise reminded her of her achievements and carried the promise of upward social mobility.

Beyond generating optimistic prospects, being shop tenants allowed Luz and Elizabeth to employ their sisters, Verónica and Sandra. For them and many other recently arrived city dwellers, places like Paseo La Estación were starting points for an economically independent life in Buenos Aires. Like the bus station in Accra described by Stasik (this volume), popular malls constitute entry points for newcomers shaped by those who arrived before. Newcomers often sought jobs as shop assistants. Their employers, the shop tenants, did not ask them for residency permits. Shop assistants did not receive working contracts. The lucky ones relied on relatives working in the mall to arrange jobs for them. For those with no existing network, the job search was more difficult. If successful, however, the contacts newcomers forged with long-term city dwellers in the popular mall often benefitted them in multiple ways. Through crucial "weak ties" (Granovetter 1973), they learned about free hotel rooms, administrative procedures, and jobs for relatives.

However, Verónica was ambivalent toward Paseo La Estación. At times, she seemed to enjoy her work and take pride in her skills as a vendor, especially when she showed me how to arrange the clothes in the shop to look attractive or when she joked with customers. At other times, she was frustrated, calling her work "slave labor" and cursing the long working hours, minuscule pay, her aching back, and the cold that crept into her body on winter days while she sat for hours in the mall without heating. In Paseo La Estación, shop assistants worked eleven- to twelve-hour shifts, six or seven days a week, for little pay. In 2018, an assistant working six days a week would earn Arg$8,400–10,800 (€260–334) monthly.[4] Many of my interlocutors paid at least half their wage to rent a hotel room in Constitución.

Verónica lived in a hotel room with her younger daughter, her Argentine partner, and his son. These living conditions contributed to Verónica's frustrations. One of Verónica's motives for joining her sisters in Argentina in 2015 had been to separate from her husband. In Paseo La Estación, she met her new partner, Pedro, who had moved to Buenos Aires from Salta in northern Argentina in the early 1990s. However, the couple's life together did not develop as Verónica had imagined. Verónica's income and Pedro's earnings from temporary jobs in restaurants and on construction sites did not allow for more than the rental of a hotel room that had just enough space for two bunk beds, a cupboard, a shelf that also held the television set, and a table with a small sofa and two chairs. They shared a bathroom and kitchen with the other residents. Both Verónica and her daughter dis-

liked this cramped lifestyle and felt uncomfortable sharing their bathroom and kitchen with strangers.

To make things worse, in May 2018, Pedro became unemployed and had difficulty finding work for several months. During this time, his only income was a small widower's pension. Hence, Pedro and Verónica looked for ways to earn extra money. Aside from the merchandise her sister offered from the shop, Verónica started to sell various items on her own from within the shop, including sneakers, bags, and even pillows. Pedro prepared warm meals and empanadas at home and brought them daily to the shop, where Verónica would sell them to other Paseo workers. To do this, they had to sneak around the security men, as mobile vending or food vending from within the shops was not allowed in the mall. Nonetheless, many people sold food or other items, and the security staff tolerated these practices if they were carried out discreetly. Thus, while Verónica found working at the popular mall frustrating, she and her partner could generate additional income here.

In terms of dwelling as a being-in-the-world that enables people to become otherwise, the mall offered workers various opportunities depending on the jobs they pursued and their establishment in Buenos Aires. This is also reflected in the attachments people developed to the mall, which had different spatiotemporal dimensions. Newcomers found the means there to make a living and valuable contacts that helped them transition to life in Buenos Aires. For many former street vendors, the mall was a desirable place to work because it was relatively protected and promised more permanence than work in the streets. The mall also allowed for other commercial activities that helped individuals weather times of shortcomings. For shop tenants, hopes of economic and social progress materialized in their shops. Often, these hopes were not only directed at life in Buenos Aires but also tied to broader migration projects reaching far into the future and out of Buenos Aires. These included ideas of making a place to return to, such as for Luz, who bought a house in Peru.

However, dwelling through work in the mall also remained precarious. Many in Paseo La Estación shared the experience of struggling without moving ahead and working a time-consuming, poorly paid job that did not allow for more comfortable living conditions. Furthermore, an increasing number of closed, empty shops were daily reminders for all workers that the economic situation was not in their favor and that each business endeavor could potentially fail. Paseo La Estación was not an island but a place in and of the city, and the uncertainties and risks of the pressing context of the economic crisis leaked into the mall, leaving visible marks.

While Paseo La Estación often assumed ambivalent and contradictory meanings for the workers, it presented different meanings for those who did

not pursue work there but spent much time in it for other reasons, as was the case for Malena.

Malena: The Mall as a Place of Social Connections

Malena, a woman in her forties, had moved from Corrientes to Buenos Aires in the 1990s. For reasons she did not speak about, she did not have a permanent place to stay and spent her nights in shelters for the homeless. She was one of several women from the nearby shelters who frequently came to sit on the Paseo's first-floor bench.

Those staying at the shelters with whom I regularly interacted in Paseo La Estación often described the shelters as burdensome—places of frequent conflict where many people, some with mental health issues, were cramped together in a relatively small space. They feared theft and had to relinquish control over the temporal and spatial organization of their lives (see Eichner, this volume). As Belen from the southern metropolitan area, who slept in a shelter together with her twin sister and would also frequent Paseo La Estación, put it: "I own nothing in a place like that. You feel like you're a prisoner, a prisoner because it's all [scheduled]. . . . [There are] schedules for . . . entering, schedules for leaving, schedules for eating, schedules for bathing, schedules for everything." Temporal control over everyday life is a common domination technique that becomes particularly visible in contexts of assistance (Auyero 2012; Ramsay 2017). While the shelters ensured that people did not have to sleep outside and had a hot meal, a chance to bathe, and access to the support of social workers, staying at the shelter only allowed for precarious place-making subordinated to the shelter's organizational principles. For example, most shelters were closed during the day, so people had to find other places to stay. Among those staying at the shelter, word spread about locations where their presence was not challenged, such as community centers and soup kitchens, parks and train stations, and Paseo La Estación.

While people spent their days in these sites, not all places allowed dwelling. For instance, the shelter was a place in which Belen felt like a "prisoner" rather than comfortably in place. Malena, too, reflected on how she experienced inclusion or exclusion at various sites across the city. In many places, she felt either directly rejected or uncomfortable. For example, at a well-known fast-food chain, her presence was only accepted on the condition of consumption. Sometimes, she experienced direct rejection, as when she traveled on a public bus with other homeless people, and another passenger loudly demanded that they take another bus. In other locations, she felt misplaced. For a while, she had slept and spent her days in a shelter in the

city center. However, she disliked the city center. "I feel like that is not my place," she told me, explaining that the tourists and "people with money" who populated the city center's streets made her feel out of place (Reiffen 2018). Meanwhile, other sites conveyed to her a sense of being "included" and "integrated," as she put it, such as a neighborhood assembly that organized a weekly soup kitchen that Malena frequented. This was also the case with Paseo La Estación.

Shopping malls where the security staff decides who can enter are not necessarily places one would assume are open for people experiencing homelessness. However, ethnographic enquiries have shown that in many malls, including high-end shopping malls, control and filtering practices are more permeable than expected. For instance, Arlene Dávila (2016: 105) describes malls in Bogotá, Colombia, as "open to anyone who 'performs' the role of a shopper," allowing many people without the necessary purchasing power to enter as window shoppers. Jacob C. Miller (2013: 854) has observed that in the Abasto shopping mall in Buenos Aires, the security staff allows people from the streets to sit and nap as long as they do not lie down.

Even so, in Buenos Aires's popular malls, security staff are responsible for filtering those who traverse and stay in the mall. Two security men told me that it was part of their job to prevent *indigentes* (indigents) from hanging out inside. When I asked a security man from another popular mall whom he perceived as an *indigente*, he pointed his finger at a bare-chested man with dirt-stained trousers who slowly staggered by, possibly drunk. "People without clothes, for example," he said. The women from shelters who spent time in Paseo La Estación did not display what the security man read as signs of indigence. They were properly dressed, and I never saw them display any behaviors that might have been interpreted as resulting from drug use. Generally, they did not draw much attention to themselves.

The women from the shelters made themselves comfortable on the bench. They placed their plastic bags full of belongings on the seat next to them, sipped their *mate* and ate small snacks they had brought, talked to one another, and sometimes dozed off, though the low armrests of the bench made it impossible for them to stretch out for a nap. Such designs exclude certain uses and, by extension, certain users. These designs correspond to the "hostile," "defensive," or "disciplinary" architecture (Petty 2016: 68) found in both private and public urban spaces. While the homeless women were accepted in Paseo La Estación, its material arrangements limited how they could make themselves comfortable.

To understand why Malena nevertheless attributed such a positive and inclusive role to the mall, one must know that Malena had made the mall her own place to a different degree than many others, primarily through the

social connections she had forged there. The presence of others was a significant reason why Malena felt in or out of place, and at Paseo La Estación, she felt socially at ease. By 2018, when I met Malena, she no longer needed to sit on the bench. She would drop by Luz's shop almost every day, moving in and out of the shop as she pleased to fetch hot water from Luz's water dispenser. Luz kept a stool for Malena in her shop, which Malena would place in the corridor. She would sit there for hours, chatting and laughing with Luz. Malena would also keep an eye on the shop when Luz was away. She knew all the prices by heart and sometimes assumed Luz's role as a worker.

Moreover, Luz regularly offered clothes to Malena and invited her to spend the night at her apartment. Malena slept better at Luz's place than in the shelter, and Luz enjoyed having Malena around. Malena also accompanied Luz to the wholesalers, where Luz bought her clothes, and Malena helped her carry the merchandise back to Paseo La Estación. Drawing on years of experience with social institutions, Malena sometimes helped Luz or other family members navigate challenging administrative procedures. She also offered support in other ways. When Verónica's daughter was ill, Malena took Verónica to pray for her daughter's health at the shrine of Saint Gauchito Gil in the southern metropolitan area.

What began as a casual meeting had developed over time into a friendship that involved interactions beyond the boundaries of the popular mall. For Malena, knowing Luz and her sisters had turned the mall into a dwelling place, which became visible through both the material and social aspects of place-making. Much more than sitting and waiting without attracting attention, Malena went to the mall to meet people she cherished. For Malena, Paseo La Estación had become a place of dwelling in which practices that would often occur in the home—sharing drinks and food, sitting and chatting with friends—took place.

Malena also saw more significance in her being-in-the-mall than simply waiting, as evidenced by her statements regarding how she "helped" Luz get her work done. However, when I asked Luz about this, she only laughed. "Yes, you see how Malena is helping me," she said with a smile and a wink at Malena, who sat on her stool, sipping her *mate*. According to Luz, she was the one who helped Malena, not the other way around. While helping or caring for each other is often colloquially perceived as having positive aspects, care as an anthropological concept entails both the practices that create and reinforce social connections and the normative evaluations, conditions, and practices of control that can have marginalizing effects (Drotbohm 2022). While caring for each other helped the women make Paseo La Estación a place of dwelling, their possibilities of supporting each other were not equal, and they did not necessarily share the same expectations concerning the contents and outcome of support.

Confrontation and Avoidance

Despite the connections these women made with one another, their ways of life fundamentally differed. While they rarely addressed this in daily interactions, the moments when these differences were brought up could be very hurtful.

Especially in 2018, Verónica and Malena did not get along very well. At that time, situations that began as harmless teasing sometimes ended in violent disputes. One time, Verónica erupted at Malena, shouting, "You are crazy, you filthy *cochina* [pig], you live in the streets and starve to death!" Malena responded, "This is my country!" and, "At least I didn't abandon my daughters!" In such confrontations, the women expressed morally charged evaluations that legitimized their own way of life. Verónica would confront Malena with stereotypes about homeless people. At other times, she accused Malena of living off her government. In turn, Malena not only accused Verónica of being a bad mother who had migrated for her own sake and left her eldest daughter behind in Peru but also of being a foreigner. When she screamed, "This is my country!" she attributed to herself the entitlement of living as she saw fit in Argentina, in contrast to Verónica, who was "not in her country."

Beyond expressions of the women's personal conflicts, such insults reflect typical schemes of inclusion and exclusion in Argentina that create "hierarchies of deservingness" (Tošić and Lems 2019: 2), differentiating between those who "deserve" a certain life or support, and those who do not. For these differentiations, national belonging and merit-based thinking are important. Many of my interlocutors who worked in the mall made disparaging remarks about "*vagos*" (the lazy ones) and "*planeros*" (welfare recipients), often coupled with criticisms of the Peronist government, in office until 2015, that had supposedly promoted "laziness" by introducing social welfare programs. While such reservations about welfare are widespread in Argentina (Wilkis 2018), this accusation carried a particular connotation among the migrant workers at the mall. They accused the Argentines of being lazier than the hard-working migrants, who were ready to endure tiring and informal work to "*salir adelante*," or move ahead in life, pointing out that hardly any Argentines worked in the mall. Meanwhile, some Argentines I met in the mall who faced difficulties finding employment in Buenos Aires accused migrants of stealing their jobs, also citing the fact that hardly any Argentines worked in the mall.

While many people expressed which way of life and values they approved of (e.g., "hard work" and "moving ahead"), these ideals were often at odds with their needs. While Verónica accused Malena of living "off her government" and emphasized that "work dignifies," her partner, Pedro, was unemployed, and their family depended partly on state benefits. Malena also

struggled with conflicting feelings about her own way of life, including the discrimination she faced across the city. But in other instances, she said living off state benefits was not how things should be. In such moments, she expressed the desire to change her life, to "move ahead" and find a job. For instance, she pictured concrete scenarios of becoming a domestic worker or street vendor. However, during the time that I knew her, she never put these ideas into practice.

Luz, however, attempted to help Malena get her life back on track. She offered her small jobs, such as cleaning Luz's apartment for a remuneration or taking some clothes Luz had purchased for her shop to sell in the streets. However, Malena did not gratefully accept these offers in a way that Luz would have thought proper. Instead, she often reacted to these offers by disappearing from the mall for days or even weeks, as she did after disputes.

Even though well intended, attempts to help or care for others do not necessarily strengthen meaningful ties. They might also lead to disputes about who gives, receives, and deserves support (Drotbohm 2015). Especially in precarious circumstances, helping others can be a balancing act, as Clara Han (2012) shows regarding life in a Chilean shantytown. In the shantytown, acts of kindness and support are concealed to maintain one another's dignity (Han 2012: 87). Explicit offers of help, on the contrary, may evoke feelings of judgment and pressure to put plans into practice, exposing hierarchies and fomenting vulnerability.

In Paseo La Estación, when conflicts occurred based on different conceptions of the proper way to live or plans for improvement, social pressures became too high for Malena to feel in place there. In such instances, she avoided the mall. She was not the only one to do so. Other frequent Paseo visitors who had forged connections inside the popular mall would disappear periodically when they felt their presence or way of life was questioned or that others wanted to interfere in their lives. However, such disappearances were seldom permanent. Malena, for instance, would always reappear and behave as though nothing had happened.

Conclusion: Possibilities of Temporary Dwellings

Paseo La Estación allows for place-making and dwelling in a context in which multiple forms of mobilities overlap: the to-and-fro of passengers traversing the urban traffic node where the popular mall is located, the arrival of newcomers moving to Buenos Aires from different Argentine provinces or other countries, and the daily movements of those continually looking for places to stay in the city.

As people pass by, stay for a while, and continue their passage through Paseo La Estación, they attribute multiple and contradictory meanings

to it. Many perceive the mall as a safe passageway in a threatening urban environment. For some, it can be a place to find employment or build a business that inspires dreams of social ascent. For others, it is a place of socialization, respite, and acceptance, even a place in which interactions that one might expect to take place at home occur. In all of these cases, the popular mall becomes a place of dwelling, where people find opportunities to stabilize or improve their lives materially in a way that inspires hope and plans for the future, generating a feeling of social embeddedness.

However, dwelling in Paseo La Estación is also necessarily connected to and limited by experiences of socioeconomic uncertainty and exclusion in Buenos Aires more generally. As Millar (2018) shows in analyzing life at a Brazilian garbage dump, the constraints people face in all areas of life must be included in an analysis of how people engage in life-building. The popular mall, like the garbage dump, extends a precarious form of being-in-the-world that does not preclude place-making and dwelling but provides such efforts with a fragile frame. As experiences of uncertainty and exclusion converge in the popular mall, they contribute to the negative connotations associated with it. Workers can feel "trapped" in the mall for many hours of poorly paid work that does not help them fulfill their aspirations. Others become filled with anxiety at the sight of abandoned shops emerging due to the economic recession. And those who socialize while staying in the mall temporarily avoid it when the expectations of and inquiries into one another's way of life, characteristic of intensifying relationships, become too burdensome.

The examples mentioned in this chapter offer essential insights into the ambivalent nature of socialities that occur in places of transit (Drotbohm and Winters, this volume). The relationships described in this chapter were sometimes perceived as a vital reason to stay in or return to the popular mall. However, the same relationships were also, at times, perceived as burdensome. For example, mutual support in unequal relationships exposed people to unfulfilled expectations and critical evaluations.

Temporary dwellings, even if they alternate with moments of distancing, are crucial for people to establish their sense of place. These temporary dwellings are made possible through relationships of relative openness that can emerge in a place like the popular mall. In these place-based relationships, affective engagement and care for one another play central roles. At the same time, they leave room for temporary avoidances when necessary, which, in turn, can help maintain relationships in precarious conditions despite their contradictions and the vulnerabilities that float to the surface in conflict situations.

Building on these insights, analyzing the popular mall enables us to see how anchoring and unsettling qualities of place (Drotbohm and Winters, this volume) come together. In the popular mall, emplacement and dis-

placement are not reduceable to an either-or; people are not either totally in or out of place, mobile or immobile, socially connected or isolated. Rather, in this case, as in other areas of transit, moments of passing and transiting alternate with moments of staying and dwelling, while moments of sociable interaction alternate with moments of avoidance. This also means that conflict and avoidance are not equivalent to the endpoints of emplacement. On the contrary, alternating avoidances and reappearances illustrate the stubbornness of people who attempt to make places and dwell in them.

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NOTES

1. All names in this chapter have been changed.
2. This research was made possible by funding from the German Academic Scholarship Foundation (Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes), which provided me with a three-year doctoral scholarship, and the Gutenberg Council for Young Researchers, which funded an exploratory research stay. I would also like to thank the editors of this volume and the reviewer for their critical reading and helpful comments on earlier versions of this chapter.
3. For migrants in Argentina, whether they are citizens from another MERCOSUR member or associated state or not makes an important difference, as migrants from these states do not need visas to legally move within MERCOSUR and enjoy facilitated access to temporary residency permits (MERCOSUR 2014).
4. In July 2018, when I collected these figures, the average euro–peso exchange rate was 32.3.

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CHAPTER
7

Survival and Deferred Place-Making at Sea

Onboard Socialities of Vietnamese and Rohingya Boatpeople

Antje Missbach and Gerhard Hoffstaedter

Studies of place and place-making have gained considerable ground in the last few decades in the social sciences to improve our understanding of social, cultural, and temporal assemblages. In particular, place-making strategies have been considered crucial for refugees and migrants to connect to new environments and social worlds. This chapter takes up this volume's challenge to make central the "along-the-way" places refugees and migrants traverse on their journeys toward safety, new homes, and new lives. There has been increased scholarly attention for place-making in transit scenarios or on the move (Chan and Loveridge 1987; Nguyen 2017; Vo 2006; Vogt 2018). Yet, the majority of studies continue to focus on migration scenarios on land. In light of the growing significance of maritime movements, escapes (Mezzadra 2004), and long-distance travel for refugees, this chapter sheds light on the potentials for place-making, or the way people make sense of and actively shape particular spaces aboard refugee vessels. In particular, we scrutinize emerging socialities of passengers (so-called boat people) who have been confined to vessels for prolonged periods of time and ask whether these can turn into more profound sociabilities (Çağlar and Glick Schiller 2018: 128), thereby contributing to this volume's call to show "how new social relationships emerge in moments of tentative, often

fragile, and possibly skeptical or even violent situations of place-based encounter[s]" (Drotbohm and Winters, this volume).

In this chapter, we discuss two significant mass movements at sea in Southeast Asia: Vietnamese (1975–1996) and Rohingya boat people (2012–present). While the plight of Vietnamese boat people received a substantial amount of international awareness and solidarity in Southeast Asia and the Global North, Rohingya boat people have elicited little to no solidarity; rather, they face racist discrimination even in neighboring fellow Muslim countries (Hoffstaedter 2017). Based on fieldwork interviews with Rohingya we conducted in Malaysia and Indonesia, and on recorded interviews and interview scripts with Vietnamese conducted by other researchers, which are accessible in online repositories, we have collated narratives of surviving refugees who detail their social interactions, including gestures of solidarity and compassion as well as rivalry and fierce competition over scarce resources. The reasons behind relying on two different sets of data are twofold. First, we want to point out the historical continuance of maritime escapes and pushbacks in the region, which makes the recent experience of the maritime mass movements of Rohingya anything but unique. Second, engaging with historical accounts, such as autobiographies from Vietnamese, proved very insightful, as, in our experience, Rohingya were reluctant to speak about what happened on the boats, not least due to the immediacy of their often-traumatic experiences. Former Vietnamese boat people, on the other hand, had undergone a process of healing and coming to terms with their traumatic past. In light of their advanced age, they were often willing to offer more detailed accounts of those prolonged maritime passages.

Despite the ample empirical evidence from Rohingya and Vietnamese boat peoples' testimonies of their deepened social relations and mutual dependency for survival among the passengers of their refugee boats, we argue that the overarching hostility entailed in being stranded at sea precludes place-making stratagems from fully enfolding their (terrestrial) potentials. In our view, place-making is severely hindered by the unreceptive and incalculable materialities of the sea, which contrasts the (terrestrial) breadth of possibilities for effective place-making, particularly for the purpose of refugee emancipation and refugee-led activism. In our analysis we concentrate on Southeast Asia, a region that has seen two significant large-scale maritime migrations over the last fifty years. Following the fall of Saigon in 1975, about two million people left Vietnam, of whom approximately eight hundred thousand made their escapes on boats to neighboring countries, such as Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and Australia. This human exodus peaked in 1978 and 1979 but continued until the early 1990s (Robinson 1998, 2004). There are no definite numbers of deaths at

sea for Vietnamese boat people and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates between two hundred thousand and four hundred thousand Vietnamese died at sea.

The second large exodus is the forced displacement of the Rohingya ethnic minority from Myanmar. About one million Rohingya live in squalid refugee camps around Cox's Bazar near the Bangladesh–Myanmar border. Because Bangladesh is reluctant to host them permanently, many Rohingya have sought to migrate onward. Within Southeast Asia, Malaysia has become the most favored destination (Huennekes 2018). The UNHCR estimates that between 2012 and 2015 around 112,500 Rohingya headed to Malaysia across the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea by boat. On those maritime journeys at least 1,800 Rohingya are assumed to have perished due to abuse and deprivation (UNHCR 2017). While Vietnamese refugees faced pushbacks from neighboring states in some instances, the intensity of pushbacks of Rohingya boats has increased drastically, which is in line with the global deterrence regime.

Vietnamese and Rohingya embarked on journeys that are usually longer than the crossings of refugees in the Mediterranean Sea, with some journeys lasting up to seven months. For a variety of reasons detailed later in this chapter, the Vietnamese and Rohingya refugees experienced extended periods of being stuck at sea, which had an impact on the forced socialities on board. Based on historical accounts from Vietnamese refugees and more recent interviews with Rohingya refugees, this chapter sheds light on the survival strategies aboard those refugee vessels and thus on precarious place-making in locations often considered "out-of-the-way" (Drotbohm and Winters, this volume). It also documents the extreme hardship Vietnamese and Rohingya experienced along the way and while they were on these boats by seeking to understand how place-making strategies can be related to forced immobility and immobilization at sea. Given that we conceive refugee vessels as non-places (Hoffstaedter and Missbach 2022), we remain skeptical of possible place-making potentials to fully materialize at sea and argue instead that most passengers defer place-making to an imagined future. Their hope for surviving these long and exhausting journeys at sea and orienting themselves toward a desired-for future elsewhere is the key factor to withstand the agony afflicted onto them due to non-rescue.

Refugee Boats: A Fundamental Component of the Migration Infrastructure

For many refugees, the only way to escape persecution and enter any state other than their own is by unsanctioned means, including unauthorized travel by boat. The materiality of the vehicles used for maritime crossings,

whether rubber dinghies, wooden fishing boats, and larger freight ships, can determine the outcome of the crossings in many ways (Walter 2015). Overcrowded, unseaworthy boats and their passengers have become the ultimate image of pitiable people in search of safe havens and safe countries. Not only are refugee boats vehicles for escape and moving targets for border enforcement authorities, but, for the following analysis, they also represent sociopolitical entities. More and more people fleeing by boat experience protracted passages at sea, for example, when boats break down or sail off course. Journeys across the open sea are often deemed dangerous because of the very unpredictable nature of oceans (Steinberg 2001) and the inadequate vessels used. Boat people are at risk of dying from dehydration, starvation, drowning (especially if they cannot swim), or abuse at the hands of their smugglers. Thus, one incident at sea can easily result in hundreds of fatalities. Some boats vanish at sea without ever being detected, turning the ocean in an open mass grave or "seametery" (Abderrezak 2020). Thus, the boat to freedom also holds the grim possibility of becoming a coffin—"one of many floating sarcophagus[es]" that never make it to shore (Maravillas 2013: 19).

Despite the spectacularizing of maritime deaths in recent times, the visibility of drowned or even drowning boat people does not only result in public sympathy. Quite the opposite, the fear of future refugee flotillas also fuels anti-migration sentiments. Politicians react to those fears by creating more or less effective deterrence strategies, but also by shifting state duties to nonstate stakeholders, such as is currently happening in the Mediterranean Sea (Cuttitta 2018).

Yet the state—as potential guarantor of refugee protection—remains crucial for maritime asylum seekers. To claim asylum, people must enter the land territory of another state (Squire 2009; FitzGerald 2019). Once there, that state must avoid *refoulement* (forcing the return of asylum seekers to where they face or fear persecution) under international human rights laws and should not penalize asylum seekers for their irregular mode of entry. To counteract these obligations, many receiving states have enacted laws and maintain maritime interdiction efforts to stop potential asylum seekers landing in their jurisdictions (Hathaway 1992). Thus, potential receiving countries engage in pushbacks, non-embarkation or non-rescue policies, thereby also increasing the duration of journeys and exponentiating different vulnerabilities onboard.

Different state and nonstate actors (for example, coast guards, defense forces, civilian rescuers) involved in international maritime migration are guided by a variety of laws, norms, and operational standards that create a complex legal environment. Yet actors who seek to deter and redirect maritime asylum seekers often gain the upper hand. This becomes increasingly noticeable in, for example, the ongoing impunity for pushbacks enjoyed by

states that violate international laws and norms of aiding persons in distress at sea (Moreno-Lax, Ghezelbash, and Klein 2019).

These "non-entrée politics" (Hathaway 1992) create a new quality of immobilization at sea, transforming boats from a means of escape into floating prisons. Even though some boats are supplied with food, water, and fuel before being turned away, the prohibition to allow people to come to shore results in "carceral seascapes" (Stierl 2021), an imposed condition of strandedness at sea for undetermined or extended periods of time (Hoffstaedter and Missbach 2022). Potential receiving states that deliberately choose to ignore the pleas of boat people in distress or purposefully increase the deadly risks for boat people when pushing them back to the open sea become executors of "necropolitics," the "contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death" (Mbembe 2003: 39), as they decide who is allowed to live and who is left to die. Potential destination countries are increasingly exploiting the carceral quality of the sea to complement their already intensified containment efforts on land (Taylor 2019). The diverse regulatory factors and geopolitical dynamics responsible for making maritime voyages ever more risky and dangerous call for renewed and critical research engagement to better comprehend what those risks and rejections do to the people aboard boats redirected to the open sea (see also Ramsay in this volume, on the historically produced conditions and continuities of displacement).

In this chapter we capture the new qualities of immobilization in carceral seascapes by focusing our attention to South–South mobilities, in Southeast Asia—a region with only minimal formalized national refugee protection standards. Southeast Asia does, however, have a long tradition of maritime (im)migration, hospitality, and an "archipelagic cosmopolitanism" (Hoffstaedter 2011: 192–95). Apart from maritime escapes of Acehnese and Moros to Malaysia, two forced maritime mass movements stand out in the last fifty years: Vietnamese (1975–1996) and Rohingya boat people (2012–the present). These two maritime movements are noteworthy not only because they involve prolonged maritime transit but also because of the large number of refugees traversing the region by sea. These movements have complicated attempts of potential recipient states to control their borders and prevent new arrivals while also fulfilling their obligations under international law.

Although many years separate the migrations of the Vietnamese and the Rohingya, there are striking similarities in the regional responses to these people on the move, not least because legal norms in refugee reception in Southeast Asia remain underdeveloped. There are also, however, noticeable differences in international reactions, first and foremost the global resettlement fatigue that set in after the mass resettlements of Vietnamese

boat people to countries in the Global North. In the mass exodus by sea from Vietnam in the late 1970s and 1980s, approximately eight hundred thousand people fled by boat to Malaysia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, and Australia (Phillips and Spinks 2013). These maritime journeys varied in scale and infrastructure, as some relied on small fishing vessels not made for ocean journeys, while others boarded trawlers and larger vessels in more organized international smuggling operations. While many Vietnamese boat people reported being passed by ships that did not respond to their distress calls, their escapes engendered high levels of international awareness and solidarity. Between 1979 and 1982, some 623,800 people, many of them rescued at sea, were resettled in 20 countries beyond Southeast Asia based on commitments made by the international community (Robinson 1998). Despite international attempts to establish an orderly departure program in Vietnam, "unorderly" escapes remained the norm until the early 1990s.

More recently, from 2012 onward, Southeast Asia has experienced the forcible displacement of large numbers of Rohingya, a stateless Muslim minority from Myanmar. In 2017 alone, around 700,000 Rohingya were expelled by the scorched-earth campaigns of the Myanmar military (Fair 2018). Most Rohingya fled to the makeshift refugee camps in neighboring Bangladesh, where they are only tolerated temporarily and face potential renewed displacement or forced return to Myanmar. Between 2012 and 2020, more than 120,000 Rohingya embarked on secondary maritime movements to Malaysia with the help of a well-developed transnational smuggling and trafficking infrastructure (Hoffstaedter and Missbach 2021). Many leave the shore on small (often fishing) boats to avoid detection and are then transferred to larger vessels that can hold up to 800 passengers. Increased border protection and deterrence policies by Southeast Asian states have on several occasions caused standoffs at sea—the 2015 Andaman Sea crisis being the most internationally recognized lethal deadlock. This crisis was constituted by denial of access to the territory of potential destination countries (Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia) and by diversion to other, undetermined destinations. These deterrence measures were designed to make the prospects so unfavorable that other refugees would abandon their plans to travel by boat. Nevertheless, the number of Rohingya boats heading to Southeast Asia increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, but so did the number of pushbacks. During the COVID-19 pandemic, governments in Malaysia and Indonesia justified their usage of pushbacks as responses to the pandemic. Related public health measures were exploited for the further marginalization of Rohingya who had arrived long before the pandemic (Jalil and Hoffstaedter 2023). In light of this hostile environment and open rejections that contributed to the prolonga-

tion of maritime refugee journeys, the remainder of this chapter will focus on the socialities that emerged on board in order to depict place-making strategies in non-places.

Vietnamese and Rohingya Survivors' Testimonies

In order to set the scene and depart from the macropolitical context, we begin our empirical section with three narratives, two from a Vietnamese and one from a Rohingya refugee about their experience of prolonged boat journeys. Vietnamese testimonies were collected from a range of publicly available oral history projects that document Vietnamese escapes (Pham and Siry 2019; Thong and Tanaka 2022; Tran and Vu 2016; Tung 2020). Rohingya testimonies were collected as part of ethnographic research projects to document refugee lives in peninsular Malaysia and Indonesia. Fieldwork in Malaysia was conducted by Hoffstaedter between 2015 and 2016 predominantly in the Klang Valley, including Klang, Petaling Jaya, and Kuala Lumpur (Hoffstaedter 2017). Fieldwork involving Rohingya in Indonesia concentrated mainly on Aceh and was conducted by Missbach in 2016, following the first Andaman Sea crisis (Missbach 2017; McNevin and Missbach 2018). While both sets of fieldwork have informed our contextual knowledge on Rohingya refugees, in this chapter we have selected only testimonies from Hoffstaedter's fieldwork.

When we began to look at some of the Vietnamese stories, in the form of audio- and video-recorded life interviews and transcripts, (auto)biographies, and even graphic novels produced by second-generation Vietnamese migrants, we were struck by the structural similarities between them and our Rohingya material. The conditions on the boats and the dangers they faced at sea had slight variations but shared a common theme of deferred place-making in a liminal stage of transit from their homeland to a new life elsewhere. Many testimonies of Vietnamese and Rohingya also featured tales of survival from the forces of nature, including bad weather and rough seas, often early in interviews with them.

> You know, hundred mile an hour, lots of rain and wind. And my brother say the waves was so high that you don't see the breaking point. All you saw is a wall of black water, coming toward you, in front of you. And this little boat, like a toy, this little boat just climb up this mountaintop, like 30-story building, to plunge down. And then, again, the next wall of black water. (Tran and Vu 2016)

Both Rohingya and Vietnamese boat people had to face storms, diseases, and starvation aboard their vessels, which often were deemed unsafe for

journeys across open waters, but each group also encountered a number of more specific dangers. These specific dangers derived from the actions of other people rather than from forces of nature. One of the greatest dangers for the Vietnamese during their journeys was pirates, who preyed on boat people specifically, assuming they would be carrying valuables. As the following testimony illustrates, encounters with pirates had very detrimental consequences for those on board.

> First I came to Thailand by boat. My boat so small, but they were 55 people in the boat. We went for 9 days and 8 nights. After 5 days, we didn't have anything to eat or drink, and some people fainted. We opened their mouths and gave them urine and after that they woke up. Two people died, and after two more days we met a boat. I saw seven men on the boat. They waved their hands and my boat came beside it and they picked us up then put us in their boat. They cooked a lot of food for us. After we had already eaten everybody feel full and happy. We thought we had freedom, but bad luck came to us. They spoke Thai Language. We didn't understand what they were saying. They took our hammers, saws and knives. They took every body's gold jewelry and everything precious to us. My boat had three women and one girl. They kidnapped the girl. I was very lucky because I cut my hair like a man. I wore my husband's clothes and on my face I put a lot of oil. I looked so ugly. After that they threw us back on our boat. I remember a man took my daughter and threw her in the sea. I said please help her. My brother in-law immediately jumped down into the sea and caught her and my husband gave him a stick. He held it and he got on the boat. Our boat didn't run on gasoline, but we used sails to continue for more days and more nights. We met another Thai boat. We were very scared, but this boat had eight men on it, and they were humane. They gave us a lot of food. They had a long rope, they attached it to my boat and brought us to Thailand. (Thong and Tanaka 2022)

The Rohingya we were able to interview did not mention piracy at sea. One of the biggest risks for them derives from the very networks that enabled their movement in the first place. Often the traffickers and smugglers started to extort additional payments from the people onboard or from their relatives while at sea.

> In 2013 . . . one of my friends told me "You wanna go to Malaysia, you have to go to the seashore and wait there at midnight. Then the trafficker will get you with the boat. They'll take you to Malaysia." After that, at 3 o'clock, the trafficker got into a boat. I get into the boat with my friend. But it was so difficult to live in the boat because they keep us like rubbish on the boat. It smelt so bad on the boat, we [were confined below deck and] cannot see anything, it's like darkness. So, all the

> people are crying. Even when all people were on the boat, the trafficker tortured us. They gave me food two times a day, in the morning they give us Maggi [instant noodles], at night, a handful of rice. If anyone said they want to go to the toilet, the trafficker won't let them to go. They only beat them. I was in the boat about 15 days.
>
> When we get to Thailand, I stepped off the boat in the water and cut my foot. There are broken bottles in the water. I can show you the scar under my foot. I used to cry a lot because it was so difficult to walk up the mountain. The trafficker said if you don't, you will die now, we will kill you.
>
> On the boat there were two hundred people: 67 girls, the rest men and boys. So, after the boat the trafficker took us into the mountains, jungle. The jungle is so deep. It's like a fierce jungle. So, the trafficker separated the girls from the boys. Even if they were husband and wife, they say "The boys cannot mix with the girls. We will take the girls." But we think they take them for rape. You know in Thailand, most of the traffickers rape the girls. (Fieldwork interview with 22-year-old Rohingya man, 2016)

The exploitative material realities of these escapes via the sea become clear in these testimonies. Refugees on the boats become reduced to cargo, or business opportunities for passing pirates as well as smugglers and traffickers. This evokes the imagery of earlier slave ships, where "the slave ship worked as a machine to produce the commodity 'slave' for a global labor market" (Rediker 2007: 338f). In a similar way, refugees fleeing by boat become subject to external forces limiting their escape routes or forcing them aboard vessels not made for such long journeys. This further endangers them and brings them into the orbit of pirates in the case of Vietnamese or traffickers in the case of Rohingya.

Vietnamese Escapes

When the Vietnamese first started fleeing from Vietnam, they could not rely on a commercial migration infrastructure (Cargill and Huynh 2000); rather, they traveled together with family members and extended kin networks. Many had to find or even build a boat and then sail themselves rather than relying on middlemen and helpers, such as trained boat crews. Often passengers did not bring enough food, as hording large reserves for their prospective journeys could have raised the attention of onlookers.

> My father went underground and he turned himself to a fisherman. He left Saigon and he went to a fishing village near the sea, and he let his beard grow—grew long and by himself, he built a boat out of plywood, whatever he could get his hand on. He got some engine and take

> years—you know, you cannot do it overnight. Years just to gather the material. My brother told us that the boat just have like a little bunker underneath. That's where everybody—420-some-odd people—they all sat like sardine. There's no room to lay down. There were three boats left that night, and my dad was the first boat that went out and they turn on the radio to listen to the weather. And they said the biggest hurricane of the century on the Pacific at that time. And my dad say, doesn't matter, hurricane or not, he went right into the international waterway. (Tran and Vu 2016)

Rather than sailing close to the coast to avoid the open sea, Vietnamese refugees on boats would often head toward the busy international shipping lanes to the east, hoping they would avoid arrest by the Vietnamese coast guards and get rescued by an international freighter as soon as possible. While some were indeed rescued a few days into their perilous journey, many had to continue their passage at sea for months—sometimes many months—suffering from hunger, thirst, and disease before finding safety. Many Vietnamese testified that they encountered boats in international waters, but that help was often not forthcoming from those boats. As one Vietnamese man, the captain of a broken-down refugee boat with ninety-one passengers on board, has stated:

> We try to wave and to ask a lot of big ship we have seen to you know to SOS but no one pick it up. So we are adrift in the sea for about four, five days. We have to ration now the water you know and the food we have evenly when people trying to survive. (Pham and Siry 2019)

Given that one of the greatest risks was piracy, which could be seen as rent-seeking at sea, the UNHCR started collecting statistics on piracy in 1981. That year, "452 boats carrying Vietnamese boat people arrived in Thailand carrying 15,479 refugees. 349 of the boats had been attacked by pirates, an average of three times each. 228 women had been abducted and 881 people were dead or missing" (UNHCR 2000: 87). Yet, those referred to as "pirates" were often rather ordinary seafarers and fishermen expecting some kind of reward from the boat people for the help they offered.

> Finally, after five days a Malaysian fishing boat approached to us. And they, they are not pirates. They want to make money. So, they ask me for gold in exchange for food and water and in exchange to be pulled back to the shore. So, I have to make a deal with them. And they don't speak English. And I speak little. But we can communicate well. Only thing they demand is gold and girl. Ok, gold and girl. And I say gold is ok, girl no. But they say no, they want both. If I don't provide both, they don't pull us. So, if I give them gold, they will give us water and food. If I give them girl, they will pull [our boat]. No girl, no pull. So,

> I don't know what to do. I cannot send girl over there. So, I talk with the people [on board] and some girl, I don't know why, volunteer to go there. And I walk with the girl and talk with the Malaysian fishing people over there and they say ok. I can send girl, but not one. I want to send both men and girl. About ten over there, in their ship. They say ok. And my plan is, if anything happens to the girl then men can try to fight and we maybe jump over there. But luckily the fishermen over there is not really bad, they just want to make a joke, they just want to flirting with the girl, talking. And we still give them gold, whatever they want. We trying to collect all and finally three days of negotiating, you know, hanging around talking, they finally pull me out to the shore. (Pham and Siry 2019)

Those people rescued by commercial freighters were—at least at the beginning of the crisis—taken to Malaysia, Singapore, or Hong Kong, where they were put in refugee camps until a third country accepted them for resettlement. As time passed, the boat people were increasingly ignored out at sea by passing commercial freighters, chiefly because several potential destination countries in the West had declared they had reached the limits of their resettlement capacities and would accept no more refugees. For example, the *Southern Cross*, a Honduras-registered freighter, took on board twelve hundred rescued Vietnamese refugees, intending to disembark those passengers in Malaysia, but was prevented from doing so. When Singapore also declined the captain's request, he took matters into his own hands and sailed to an uninhabited Indonesian island and left his Vietnamese passengers there (Thompson 2010). Given the reluctance of commercial freighters to rescue larger numbers of Vietnamese boat people, more and more Vietnamese set off in smaller boats. Yet, the people in these smaller boats—usually only made for coastal fishing—faced greater dangers at sea, and many did not survive their voyages. When interviewed, former maritime refugee Nicky Tung quoted a Vietnamese saying: "Ten people left, only one survived." She continued:

> I remember when we were floating in the ocean for days without water and we see all these cargo ships passing by. Big giant cargo ships. And we brought out the pots and pans and everything that we have to make noise. We were afraid that they wouldn't be able to see us. And we were just asking, begging for help, begging for any boat to take us, because we were just floating in the ocean. We don't know where we're going. And they saw us, and they didn't pick us up. All they did was just throw water into the ocean, you know, drinking water. Barrels, big barrels of gasoline, big barrels of drinking water, and they just left because they were afraid. And after that experience, I mean seeing those, we were just so disappointed. It's like, how can you let us die out in the ocean

> when you were just so desperately needed somebody to rescue us. And they didn't. None of them did. . . . And then, so we were able to reach Indonesia on the second try. And luckily, Indonesia was taking refugees at that time. (Tung 2020)

Over the years, Vietnamese survivors have engaged in a thorough *travail de mémoire*, manifested in rich oral history projects, podcast series, and publicly accessible video interviews, in order to make sure that their struggles for survival at sea will not be forgotten.[1] No such repositories exist yet for the Rohingya.

Rohingya Escapes

Compared to the passages of the Vietnamese, Rohingya experienced longer journeys at sea and staggered migration for several reasons. First, Rohingya journeys were rarely passages of the entire family. Usually men would leave alone first and then get their wives with kids to follow them later, or if they are unmarried, they call for a future wife to come alone, as soon as they can afford to get married. Second, Rohingya passengers are often subject to unscrupulous transporters, who hold them to ransom on the boats to exact more money from their families and friends before they proceed with the journey. Third, the navies of neighboring and destination countries, like Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia, regularly engage in pushbacks to sea of boats carrying Rohingya. The Myanmar navy, too, has been engaged in onward towing actions, where they supply stranded vessels with fuel and food to make sure they leave Myanmar waters and make their onward journey down the Malaccan Strait. Consequently, Rohingya are forced to spend more time at sea, and as a result they experience high rates of injuries and deaths from undernourishment, dehydration, and disease (UNHCR 2017, 2021).

For this chapter we focus on survivor testimonies from what has become known as the first Andaman Sea crisis, a maritime standoff over several weeks in May 2015. Since 2012, there have been several such "crises" where pushbacks, severe weather, and political tensions in Myanmar, Thailand, and Malaysia have conspired to keep Rohingya stranded on boats at sea. Accounts of these boat journeys vary, depending on the treatment by the facilitators/smugglers/traffickers (Carling 2023), and of course, the nature of their enforced togetherness or socialities at sea. The following accounts demonstrate how such socialities can or cannot develop and how these differences in experience affect Rohingya experiences of escape by boat.

The boat journey that one interviewee set out on was terminated and replaced by a prolonged sojourn on an island that functioned just like the

boat in terms of the confinement of Rohingya—that is, it did not allow for place-making but rather constituted a protracted stay in another non-place, thus adding another layer to the deferred place-making. Mohamad was on a small boat making the journey to Malaysia from Myanmar, leaving by night with around forty people on board. The boat was intercepted by the Thai coast guard near Bulu, a small island between Thailand and Malaysia in the Strait of Malacca. The coast guard transferred half of the crew and passengers to the Thai mainland, leaving the remaining eighteen on what the interlocutor described as an uninhabited island, where they were stranded for two weeks. When asked how they survived, he explained:

> We ate coconuts and sugar cane. It was uninhabited but there was a sugar cane farm, so we ate the sugar cane for 2 weeks. We shared coconut water, and there were some wells in the sugar cane farm. So, we had to hunt for the wells and some buckets and managed to get some water. We also sucked the juice from sugar cane.[2]

They supplemented the sugar cane diet with some reptiles: "Only monitor lizards and other reptiles. They were as big as Zubair [one of the refugee children with them]." Mohamad went on to explain that:

> I was weak and starving. We became emaciated and thin. I thought I was going to die on the island. 10 days after they left us the police came back by boat and brought some food. They brought us back to [Satun, a town on the Thai mainland], because [their smuggler] had paid them off and sent them. I just sat down and counted my beads and prayed to Allah.

On the island the eighteen survivors stranded together had to rely on one another for survival. They cooperated and built a shelter, found and shared food and water while waiting for rescue, all the time unsure that anyone was actually going to come for them. They had no means of communicating or even knowing where they were; their only clue of their whereabouts was that the coast guard had spoken Thai to the smuggler when they were intercepted. Faced with such adversity, the eighteen refugees banded together and found ways to connect beyond rivalry in something akin to forging temporary bonds. This becomes clearer in what happened next for Mohamad:

> They brought us by boat from Bulu to Satun. From Satun the police sent the 18 of us back to [the smuggler's] house nearby. The smuggler said he couldn't pay for us anymore because he was broke. He told us if we wanted to go back to Burma we should. I stayed at his house 1 week—we all cooked and shared food. [The smuggler] had a soft spot for me and he pitied me so he told me he won't take money from me

> anymore. All the money I owed him for our various unsuccessful attempts to get to Malaysia—he wouldn't take it. (Fieldwork interview with Rohingya religious leader 2016)

Common to stories of flight in the Andaman Sea is the way escape is turned into imprisonment and ransoming of vulnerable refugees. Countless lives were lost in these perilous journeys across the sea, and the stories we collect are consequently only those of survivors, as the following testimony demonstrates:

> There are many stories. What my friends and I do and want to do is give information. Information about Malaysia [to those fleeing]. Many are still in trauma from the boat journey and their terrible experiences there. So, they are still in trauma. So, my friends and I always motivate them. We motivate them to get out from the pressure [trauma] that they have. I want them to get out from it and feel like "No. You don't need to feel the pressure, God doesn't allow us to be like that. Continue with your life. Accept the way it is, be grateful and continue with your life with Islamic path. Not to live being gangsters, doing anything bad. Continue life with the shahadah [Islamic faith]. Continue life with Muslim unity.
>
> If you look at my stories, they are interesting and ok. Actually, there are many more horrific stories. My friends and Muslim brothers/sisters experienced far worse. Far worse, and more sad because my family and I were lucky. During the journey, their children, wives, husbands died. They also disappeared when they reached here. In the journey they became victims at sea [drowned]. Look at Wang Kelian [a trafficking camp], many people died. Until now, there is no one statistic that shows clearly how many Rohingya refugees died at sea, on land. But I can tell you although not accurate—actually around 3–4,000 Rohingya died at sea. Many people don't know. Many boats sunk. (Fieldwork interview with Rohingya community leader 2018)

One fisherman had tried to escape Myanmar in a small boat with twelve people on board. They had spent thirty-five days on the water when their boat was intercepted by what they first presumed to be police. It turned out to be smugglers who sold them to traffickers for a ransom in Thailand. One woman reported that men and women were divided on the boat by the traffickers; even families were split up. They were given no water on the day-long crossing so that people would not have to urinate, but some on board began to take water from the ocean to drink and became sick. Another woman noted that her journey took between two and three months from Myanmar to Thailand, during which she changed boats several times. The food rations tended to be sparse, with dry Maggi noodles a key staple provided once a day, along with some water to drink.

While the journeys on the boats are framed by many as harrowing and taxing, the plight continues on land with discrimination, harassment, and violence either in trafficking camps on the Thailand–Malaysia border, where rape, torture, and executions have been documented, or in Malaysian immigration detention sites where detainees are subject to beatings and other corporeal punishments alongside being deprived of food (Hoffstaedter and Missbach 2021). Individual connections based on kin networks can provide some safety for Rohingya on boats; traffickers and smugglers may treat them kindlier or less violently if they know they are related or know someone from their kin network. Yet, even moments of brief privilege or reprieve cannot bridge the fundamental divide between passengers and facilitators on board. Such moments of preferential treatment and sociality provided some refugees with better provisions or more freedom of movement on boats, but remained removed from a shared experience of togetherness or sociabilities that project notions of mutuality and equality (Drotbohm and Winters, introduction to this volume; Çağlar and Glick Schiller 2018).

Theorizing Prolonged Maritime Boat Journeys: Place-Making in Non-places?

The evolving dynamics of people on boats are shaped by the temporalities of those journeys but also depend on the specific materialities of the boats used—whether they are dinghies, wooden fishing boats, or freighters. Making refugee boats the center of attention by treating them as a site in their own right and scrutinizing the emerging socialites onboard offers a fresh perspective on the interactions of the passengers aboard as well as those with facilitators, pirates, and rescuers. In doing so, we hope to sharpen our theoretical understanding of refugee trajectories, and particularly the evolving socialities of maritime refugees, by which we mean not only the initial community formation but also the social relations and interactions constituting and constituted by individual priorities and group interests (Ho and Hatfield 2011). When analyzing the boat journeys and the evolving socialities on board, we draw inspiration from two conceptualizations in particular—place-making and the notion of non-places.

Stasis at sea is experienced by Rohingya and Vietnamese as both existential—their main reason for being on the boat is their hope for a better future, as well as real existential threats in Vietnam, in Myanmar, and in the refugee camps in Bangladesh—and literal, as their stay on the boats was always determined by others and outside their control. In both our encounters with Rohingya survivors and the oral history accounts of many Vietnamese survivors we noted the driving force of hope toward a future placement in a

safe third country, Malaysia for many Rohingya and the West more broadly for Vietnamese. The hope for a better life, maybe even more than the fear of persecution, ultimately prompted people to undertake dangerous passages by boat across the sea, because of the "persistence of hope as the bedrock from which courage, tenacity and determination arise" (Nair 2020: 412). In this regard, futurity as the temporal orientation toward unresolved and problematic issues of the past and present, offers a horizon of hope for a meaningful and dignified life somewhere out there, even if it remains a utopian one (Kallio, Meier, and Häkli 2021).

In interviews with Rohingya boat people, we learned that integral to the hope for a better future is the notion of deferred place-making—that is, the vision and imagination of future place-making in a safer place that allows refugees a sense of belonging and all the ingredients inherent in the sociabilities Çağlar and Glick Schiller (2018: 128) describe for their urban migrants: "social relations that provide pleasure, satisfaction, and meaning by giving actors a sense of being human." This is all in the future and imagined at the point of departure and even after their arrivals, as we learned in interviews, when Rohingya explained why they had opted to come by boat. Hope frames their maritime journey. It is what gets people to board a boat and become indebted to kin and smugglers/traffickers, what sustains them on the perilous journey, and what they bring ashore to their new lives as refugees in Malaysia for Rohingya and the West for Vietnamese refugees. The maritime journey itself we focus on in this chapter is a place where hope in such future place-making sustains the dire present, in full knowledge that any aborted journey will end in a worse fate.

Meanwhile, analyzing the way in which Rohingya and Vietnamese boat people inhabit the space aboard a boat conjures up Augé's (1995) concept of non-place, a space devoid of the ability to form an organic community or simply to live in. In a recent paper we used this provocation to call attention to how nation-states confronted with an influx of Rohingya refugees via boats created a carceral seascape and relied on the hostility of the sea and boats as non-places to deter more from fleeing (Hoffstaedter and Missbach 2022). The stories documented in this chapter move beyond this structural argument and engage more fully with the aim to uncover the place-making potential and occasional transversal solidarity that makes the voyages sometimes successful or at least possible. Thus, we argue that boats can be hostile spaces for all on board, simply non-places that are required for the movement from one place to another. Nonetheless, these boats are also the only means of escape. As moving objects, refugee boats meander between invisibility and hypervisibility, between being "out-of-the-way" from surveillance and rescue organizations and being "in-the-way" for those who consider refugees a burden and are eager to avoid humanitarian obligations.

This analysis of place-making on the Vietnamese and Rohingya refugee boats concentrates on the locality–sociality nexus. For Vietnamese escaping their country of origin after the fall of Saigon and for Rohingya refugees fleeing refugee camps in Bangladesh or their homeland in Myanmar, the boat is a means to escape and seek passage toward a new life elsewhere. While the passengers on board might not see the boat as a place of sanctuary in and of itself, it is a necessary vehicle used to transgress borders in transit in search for sanctuary.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the limits of place-making for Vietnamese and Rohingya refugees seeking safety by escaping via the sea. We showed that while place-making may be limited, there were also always openings for unexpected interactions—the bravery of the single Vietnamese woman to agree to be bartered for the survival of the rest of the boat passengers—and the ever-present human spirit to survive together—as was the case of the stranded Rohingya cooperating on the deserted island. Thus, the boats carrying Vietnamese and Rohingya refugees may be non-places, as is the sea they traverse, but this does not diminish the human desire for sociabilities to occur, even if this is harder and less likely the longer refugees spend confined together. Being perpetually in motion, even when drifting, boats perhaps represent particular challenges to place-making that territorially grounded places do not face: not least the confinement in a closed space that offers no escape and subsequently has been used by traffickers to detain refugees as well as by national navies to create a carceral seascape in which boats can get trapped. Nonetheless, these boats are integral and instrumental to the transit journeys of refugees from their place of persecution and danger to a place of safety.

As noted in this volume's introduction "the place-making that happens in these places and co-constitutes each as a place can figure centrally in the experiences, memories, or future orientations of people on the move" (Drotbohm and Winters, this volume). Rohingya refugees rarely talked about their boat journey, and most were left traumatized from the experience and its memories. Some talked about it plainly and as a matter of fact, while others did not want to remind themselves of it. Their orientation was toward the future, on the land in Malaysia they now lived on and in. Perhaps much more time is needed for the memories to become part of the Rohingya history of displacement, genocide, and flight (O'Brien and Hoffstaedter 2020). The instinct for survival is still raw, and they are in no way as settled as the Vietnamese diaspora are in safe third countries with legal

status, citizenship, and a collective history of their journey from Vietnam to safety. Vietnamese oral history repositories, memoires, and other writing now provides a rich repertoire for remembering and even commemorating the places and modes of escape (Tran 2012). For Rohingya this story is still unfolding through a slow process of writing, recording, and thinking about their journeys from their homelands to safer and more welcoming places. Former Vietnamese maritime refugees have found and made their place in their resettlement countries and built homes, lives, and futures for themselves. Few Rohingya have been resettled, and many Rohingya in Malaysia fear deportation, thus limiting their place-making potential even after their arrival. Some of them might find themselves again on a boat, forced to travel in a new direction.

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NOTES

1. For example, the *Vietnamese Boat People* podcast, 2018–present (https://www.vietnameseboatpeople.org/podcast) and the Vietnamese Oral History Project at University of California Irvine (https://ucispace.lib.uci.edu/handle/10575/1614).
2. All these quotes were translated from Malay to English.

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CHAPTER
8

Place Acrobatics

Re-envisioning Mobility-Place Relations along Migrant Trajectories

Joris Schapendonk and Tine Davids

While border crossings have always been inherent aspects of migration scholarship, studies that focus on the "migration journey" are definitely in vogue (e.g., Mainwaring and Bridgen 2016; Schapendonk and Steel 2014; BenEzer and Zetter 2015; Drotbohm and Winters 2021; Snel, Bilgili, and Staring 2021). This subfield of migration journeys and trajectories has enriched our understanding of the migrant condition. Furthermore, as a political project, the scholarly focus on journeys often comes with the agenda of improving protection mechanisms for people on the move. Indeed, the routes of migration have become important sites of governmental interventions (Walters, Heller, and Pezzani 2021). In other words, when we know better the barriers, violence, and experiences related to a migrant's process of moving, we can address the injustices better (Vogt 2018). For this contribution, we particularly value the empirical and analytical arguments pointing to the complexity of migratory processes. Many studies indicate that many migrant pathways are more complex that the linear logic of departure-movement-arrival (Brigden and Mainwaring 2016; Amrith 2021; Schapendonk, Bolay, and Dahinden 2021). While we sympathize with this argument of nonlinearity, we see at the same time that a considerable number of scholars—including ourselves—still struggle to escape the presumed natural beginnings ("departure"), in-betweens ("transit"), and endings ("settlement") of migratory processes, and consequently risk to

fall into the same logics they point their criticism to (e.g., Lepawsky and Mather 2011). This chapter can best be seen as an attempt to work around this risk. In so doing, we scrutinize the multiple and dynamic relations between "mobility and place" along people's migratory pathways with an approach that does not implicitly position mobility as being inherently in tension with places (e.g., Lems 2018). We thereby start from the relational geography of Doreen Massey and anthropological thought of Tim Ingold. This means that instead of seeing settled lives as the unconnected opposite of mobility or journey, we start from the idea that people's lives never really unfold *inside* the boundaries of single places. Human lives are rather lived as paths of movements; as (nonlinear) life-*lines* from, to, through, and across places (Ingold 2007, 2011). Instead of considering places as existing prior to movement or prior to its relations, places can then be seen as the knotting and assembling of trajectories (Massey 2005)—as the lived geography where forms of movements entangle and people engage with one another.

The insights gained from the dialogue between Ingold and Massey result in an explorative analytical lens that we call "place acrobatics." Place acrobatics can be best approached as the practices by which people stretch, imagine, balance, turn, and reroute *their relations to places* along their paths of movement. Place acrobatics can be individual or collective tactics. They can involve struggles to stay mobile without becoming placeless as well as attempts to stay put without falling into singular and sedentarized forms of belonging (see also Drotbohm and Winters 2021). At any time, place acrobatics are difficult to pin down for at least two reasons. First, through these acrobatics, seemingly opposing dynamics fold into one another, including despair and hope, bordering and transgression, stillness and movement, as well as attachment and expulsion. Second, place acrobatics are not there to be pinned down as places themselves and should not be seen as the stable context *in* which things happen and unfold; places are dynamic entities that may "move on" themselves (Massey 2004).

To substantiate our arguments, this chapter combines insights from very different research projects in very different regions. It includes Schapendonk's ethnographic work on African trajectories to and within Europe as well as Davids's work on Afghan "return" migration and migration across Mexico to the United States. The common ground of these projects is that they all concern people's mobility across highly securitized borders. The empirical entry points may appear to the reader as rather random and confusing, as we jump over geographical settings quickly. However, this jumpy character does not mean that we consider migrants as unsettled and footloose figures. Rather, we sacrifice some of the place histories—that are undoubtedly important to understand how trajectories unfold (Drotbohm

and Winters, introduction to this volume; Ramsay, in this volume)—to create some analytical space to discuss mobility-place dynamics beyond the straightforward "migration journey" of departure-movement-settlement. However, before we get there, we first outline some reservations over scholarly enthusiasm with the migration journey.

Migration, Journeys, and Linear Straitjackets

Despite the repeated confirmations that migratory processes across securitized borders are nonlinear processes—full of waiting, onward/return mobility, zig-zag moves and trials-and-errors—they are often analyzed from straightforward analytical frameworks. To deepen this argument, we discuss two models to conceptualize journeys: the in-between model and the stepwise model. The in-between model positions the journey as a phase of movement—which can still be long and fragmented—between two fixed points. With these fixed points, we could argue that this model starts from ontological sedentarism (Malkki 1992), as people are seen as living settled and immobile lives in the place of arrival and destination. While their study has been agenda-setting for the subfield we embrace, BenEzer and Zetter (2015: 299) somehow pinpoint the in-between journey as the stage between uprooting and settlement, as they write:

> Conditions under which refugees are forced to flee, and then their reception and settlement in host countries, and the impact of uprooting over time, are key themes in sociological, political, anthropological, psychological and legal literature in this field. What happens in between—the actual exilic process, the medium that connects the two ends—is largely ignored or forgotten.

Following Crawley and Jones (2021), there are two problems deriving from this in-between model of the journey. First, as it is also widely argued in transit migration literature, the framing of in-betweenness is highly politicized. As Oelgemöller (2011) articulates, the notion of "transit" is mostly related to the regions just outside the borders of "Western" destinations, including Europe (Stock 2019) and the United States (Vogt 2013). Specific populations are then too easily framed as being on the move, and this indeed "misrepresent[s] the scale and direction of migration" (Crawley and Jones 2021: 3227). This counts, for example, for sub-Saharan Africans in Libya and for Syrians in Istanbul. From Eurocentric positions, these populations are often a priori pictured as transiting to Europe, without any further empirical underpinning. Linearity and the "in-between," indeed, have their politics (Crawley and Jones 2021).

Second, although we are not blind to conditions of precarity for people on the move, as we do not ignore how borders involve temporal techniques of waiting (e.g., Mezzadra 2015), we argue that the in-between logics reduce migrant emplacements along trajectories as *just* an in-between experience until the moment they "settle" somewhere (e.g., Collyer 2007; see also Crawley and Jones 2021; Brigden and Mainwaring 2016). Tellingly, so-called transit experiences are often linked (if not bounded) to particular borderlands (i.e., the Tijuanas, Lesvoses and Melillas of this world). We feel this is a misleading starting point since we know that there is a lot of in-betweenness, limbo, waiting, and feelings of non-belonging in migrant's *presumed* places of destination. This includes studies on "integration" (Arora-Jonsson and Larsson 2021), asylum (Cabot 2014), detention and deportation (Khosravi 2009, 2018b). In a similar way, we might ask ourselves more critically where the limbo starts. In many places, African youth, for example, are confronted with a feeling of global abjection (Ferguson 2006). Many feel that they are affected by globalization, but they don't have a say in how this agenda unfolds (Schapendonk 2020; Pettit 2024). This results in a shared notion of involuntary immobility and a condition of waiting before so-called migratory departures (Prothmann 2018). Again other studies indicate that post-return lives are full of limbo experiences, too, especially when it concerns post-deportation lives (Khosravi 2018b; Schuster and Majidi 2013). In short, "in-betweenness" is as much a characteristic of place as it is of mobility in migrant journeys.

The stepwise journey—which is the second straightforward model of the journey—offers more analytical space for multiple departures/arrivals, fragmentation, and onward movements (e.g., Ramos 2018). At the same time, it starts from a certain ordering of migratory processes in terms of processual stages, such as leaving, the journey, entrance, settlement, return (e.g., Bivand Erdal and Oeppen 2018). Moreover, the stepwise journey reflects a kind of evolutionary geography. In terms of the latter, Paul (2011), for example, stresses the hierarchy of destinations in stepwise migration (see also Zijlstra 2020). The idea is that migrants move gradually from less to more favorable destinations. This is, for instance, reflected in discussions on "secondary movements" in Europe (Schapendonk 2021). For us, however, this explicit hierarchy of destinations is problematic as it derives from a worldview of stringent divides that is similar to the first, second, and third world order of the past. We also feel that this stepwise model of the journey emphasizes gradual progress (Paul 2011), and some relate this progress to an overarching strategy of migrants (Haandrikman and Hassanen 2014) or a migration career (Ramos 2018). From the work of Ingold, we could regard these kinds of movements as forms of *transporting*. Transporting is a movement that leaves its basic features—the body, the object, the pathway—

unaffected (Ingold 2011: 150). Our point is, however, that in the context of securitized borders, we came across very few pathways that reflect the stepwise notion of gradual progress and smoothly ordered stages. Rather, we found turbulence, fragmentation, back-and-forward movements, unexpected turns, and multiple attempts as well as multiple failures. Indeed, these are very layered processes that are multidimensional, multilocal, affecting people, places, *and* pathways (Lems 2018). In this regard, we embrace Khan's challenge "to find a new social, ontological, and theoretical cartography that can interlace a topographic view with a roadside view" (Khan 2020: 15).

Following Khan, we think it is productive to seek ways to unlearn some of the stringent presumptions around mobility-place relations alongside migratory processes. In so doing, we combine different projects that brought a variety of methodological articulations. For example, Joris's ethnographic work combines a reflexive approach with the idea of following the im/mobility trajectories of people (see Schapendonk and Steel 2014). Tine's insights are based on her research in Mexico involving two migrant shelters in central Mexico and on return migration with, among others, Marieke van Houte. To do so, we move toward a conceptual discussion on trajectories, mobilities, and places.

Trajectories, Mobilities, and Places

For anthropologist Tim Ingold, lives are not lived inside places but to, through, from, and across them. "It is of the essence of life that it does not begin here or end there, or connect a point of origin with a final destination, but rather that it keeps on going, finding a way through the myriad of things that form, persist and break up in its currents. Life, in short, is a movement of opening, not of closure" (Ingold 2011: 4). Life is in that sense not a matter of *transporting* (as discussed above), but of wayfaring: a form of movement that is open, ongoing, and full of transformation (Ingold 2007). If we relate Ingold's starting point to the field of migration studies, we end up with the provocative standpoint that the distinction between a journey, on the one hand, and the multifold movements that come before and after the journey, on the other, is not so clear-cut (see also Schapendonk, Bolay, and Dahinden 2021). Evidently, when we ask a person clear-cut questions such as, "When did you depart to Mexico?" or, "Where did your journey to Senegal start?" we get clear-cut answers, like: "My bus departed at 10:15 P.M.," or, "I left my home in March 2012." As social scientists working on migration, we tend to highlight these specific beginnings and reproduce a kind of essential beginning from where to draw a line to presumed ends. In other

words, beginnings and endings are rather methodological artefacts (Lepawsky and Mather 2011)—they are products of our research questions and the preset Q/A interview designs that are dominant in qualitative migration studies.

But for Ingold the point is that lines (and lives) always move well beyond beginnings and endings. This is also how we see im/mobility trajectories. Contrary to the journey in between places, im/mobility trajectories are open spatiotemporal processes that do not unfold in abstract and unattached spaces but across, to, and from places (see Drotbohm and Winters, introduction to this volume). And here we see a clear link with how places are approached from a relational perspective. As mobility is intrinsic to understanding immobility (Bergson 2002: 119), the local cannot be disconnected from the global (Tsing 1994; Massey 1991, 2005; Davids and van Driel 2009). For us, this does not merely mean that places should be connected to mobilities. In fact, a more radical interpretation of relational geography would claim that places actually *are* the multiple trajectories, threads, stories, histories, relations, movements and rhythms that come together (Massey 2005; Aparna et al. 2020). By following this reasoning, we indeed move from a mobility-*versus*-place lens to a mobility-*with*-place lens (see also Cresswell 2002). Nichola Khan translates this argument to migration studies by claiming: "Rather than privileging a model of reality or ontological position where movement as freedom or its converse are seen as opposites in different contexts, or appear as alternately foregrounded or backgrounded in migrants' experiences, holding both together allows two or more positions to be experienced at the same time even if uncertainly" (Khan 2020: 235).

Thus, instead of seeing place and mobility as well as displacement and emplacement as unconnected opposites, we continuously strive to see the relations between them (e.g., Lems 2018). As Ahmed et al. stress, "being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached" (Ahmed et al. 2020: 19). Our term "acrobatics" is not meant to emphasize a sportive or Olympic dimension here. We rather see it as a heuristic device that points to people's diverse capacities in terms of coordination, holding, flexibility, and mobility.

We distinguish three interrelated elements of place acrobatics. First, the inherent relation between place and mobility implies that *multiple "place relations" are forged along paths of movement*. People meet co-travelers in shelters. They create friendships in buses or in camps. They fall in love in nightclubs or while walking. They may break up later on. The carrying capacity of places to hold relations for some time are crucial to understanding how migratory pathways unfold. It is interesting, then, to see how the coming together of relations are navigated by people on the move. In her compel-

ling ethnography, for example, Kleinman illustrates how some movers refer to Le Gard du Nord as a method—a method to connect to people and "find happiness" (Kleinman 2019). These place relations and the way in which they come together in a place are colored by and constructed through intersecting identities and positionings such as those of class, race, gender, and sexuality (see, among others, Ahmed et al. 2020).

Secondly, *place relations are also forged beyond only the here and now* (Drotbohm and Winters 2021). People's connections, whether stabilized over years or continuously improvised, might work as translocal social platforms that facilitate cross-border mobility (e.g., Wajsberg and Schapendonk 2021). In addition, memory places can be reawakened through the reconstruction of trajectories (Lems 2018), and people forge translocal connections while traveling. This is, for instance, reflected in the role of social networks in these processes, but also in the migration infrastructures that assist migrants, such as the network of shelters in Latin America. In this framework, it is relevant to acknowledge the traces that people leave when they cross specific places (Drotbohm and Winters, introduction to this volume). Regarding the latter, Wendy Vogt spoke of etchings as small but meaningful inscriptions into local landscapes (Vogt in this volume).

Finally, as already addressed above, place acrobatics include the crucial observation that *places themselves move on* (Massey 2005). Following the feminist geographer Doreen Massey, we see places as never really static since they always unfold through its manifold relations and mobilities. It follows that people can return to a particular location, but they cannot return to the same place (as it has moved on). From this, we may de-essentialize any presupposed relation between mobility and place, including the notion of returns and homecoming (Lems 2018). For us, people's relation with places could be best understood from the practices involved.

Below we illustrate different mobility-place relations that help us move away from the straightforward in-between and stepwise models of the journey that we discussed above. We thereby start at the *presumed* end of a migration process (returns); from there we further destabilize *presumed* in-between situations by rethinking *onward* movements. Finally we disclose situations of *grounding* and *settlement* in unsettling conditions people are faced with. To understand our arguments, it is important to note beforehand that we use ethnographic vignettes as analytical intermezzos to stand still with one particular moment of a particular trajectory. While of course place matters in these instances, the particular vignettes are deliberately not taken from one setting only in order to indicate that the turbulence of migratory pathways are certainly not bound to specific places or settings. Furthermore, the different vignettes emphasize and elaborate different place relations and relational positionings. The way in which gender intersects

with mobility and positionings, is particularly dealt with in the analysis of the vignettes presented by Tine (see, for example, vignette 1), while the vignettes presented by Joris stress geographical relationalities and the politics of mobility that unfold (see for example vignette 2).

Trajectory Illustrations

Returns and Reroutings from Europe

From the viewpoint of EU policymakers, one of the major bottlenecks of the EU's migration policy is the return of unsuccessful asylum applicants. The European Commission and individual EU member states have drafted return and readmission policies that aim to "close the asylum cycle." The assumption behind this quest for more effective return instruments is, of course, that the return is "sustainable": that the mover is there to stay in the place where one "belongs"—the place of origin. This represents clearly the "sedentarist" metaphysics (Malkki 1992) behind the EU's migration management. However, this policy agenda has a rather dubious idea of return, especially since people are also returned to other places than their presumed places of origin. A recent Swedish report on returns to Afghanistan, for instance, shows that several of the young men investigated and deported from Sweden to Afghanistan, although being Afghan nationals, grew up or were born in Iran and never had set foot in Afghan territory before their deportation (Larrucea, Malm, and Asplund 2021). Thus, in this case, the policy ideal of "rooted belonging," on which this entire return migration agenda is built, is stretched in such a way that people are confronted with another phase of estrangement after "being returned" to a third country (see also Turnbull 2018).

Also in the cases that people are sent back to the places they once departed from, presumed returns are not simple processes of going home (van Houte and Davids 2008). As both the people *and* places involved have changed, returns do not often resemble a cozy and pre-given process of place-belongingness (Antonsich 2010; De Bree, Davids, and de Haas 2010)—they are rather processes of rerouting that involve the renegotiation of social boundaries, struggles over embeddedness, and safety. As such, these new episodes emerge with new uncertainties. Evidently, these processes play out very differently for people with different social backgrounds (e.g., Khosravi 2018a), as we learned from a study on returned migrants (from Europe to Afghanistan) (van Houte and Davids 2017). Gender and mobility turned out to be crucial in understanding how spaces of belonging were negotiated after people's "returns." For example, marriage and marriage practices surfaced as an important relational marker to construct

feelings of belonging and a sense of home, while they, at the same time, functioned as mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, as politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2011).

As Antonsich (2010: 645) argues, "Belonging should be analyzed both as a personal, intimate, feeling of being "at home" in a place (place-belongingness) and as a discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging)." Yuval-Davis coins the ways in which persons negotiate the discursive resources of belonging as *dialogical constructions of belonging*—a dialogue with "the other," as a need to construct a "self" (Yuval-Davis 2011). In these *dialogical constructions of belonging*, different ideas, norms, and discourses on marriage came to the fore and were negotiated (see also vignette 1). These dynamics between intimate feelings as part of identity construction and belonging as a discursive resource proved not to be confined to the limits of one place, however; rather, they were fundamentally determined by mobility strategies. Most of the returned migrants did construct more permeable boundaries of belonging, forming a transnational space of belonging, identifying in different ways with both European as well as Afghan marriage practices and values. The way in which they did was to a large extent affected by gender norms and their access to mobility, as was the case for example with Fahima.

> *Vignette 1: Negotiating Return through Marriage . . .* (from van Houte and Davids 2017: 15).
>
> A first performative strategy of reconciling different practices of marriage was displayed by Fahima. She tried to find a "hybrid" solution of marriage for her daughter, who lived in Europe. Being institutionally, economically, and socially tied to two places, she produced an "in-between" narrative that could be accepted in both Europe and Kabul, when she said the following: "My daughter has received a [marriage] proposal [from an Afghan relative]. But I said, she's going to school in [European country] and there she learned that cousins marrying are like brother and sister marrying, so she doesn't want that. . . . It's her choice. Not that she can have a boyfriend. Not at all. She can just say yes or no." (Fahima, voluntary returnee (f), Kabul 2012, original in English)
>
> The narrative of Fahima testified to her agency that simultaneously subverts and complies with the dominant gender norm of supposed submissiveness of women when managing her daughter's choices over relationships and marriage (Davids 2011). Using the school as an authority of the European country to communicate the diversion from the "Afghan" ideal to marry a cousin freed her from taking full responsibility for this diversion. With a hint of free will, she indicated belonging to more individualistic "European" values and practices, while with

> indicating the impossibility of having a boyfriend, she remained within frameworks of marriage that are acceptable for Afghanistan. Gender norms thus play a central role in constructing permeable boundaries between the two spaces of belonging.

The ways in which the returnees positioned themselves vis-à-vis these discourses varied according to their options for mobility and their negotiation of the gender repertoire. Fahima's negotiation of this gender repertoire is also the result of intersectional positioning along the axes of gender, class, and access to mobility, as she was able to move back and forth between Europe and Afghanistan, while others were not. These other, mainly masculine, returnees often opted for less hybrid strategies of belonging. Some of the men involved, for instance, constructed Afghan arranged marriage, in juxtaposition to "European morals on relations and marriage," as a "safe" space of belonging in relation to their sexual and masculine identities. The experience of a loss of a sense of self(-respect) and agency in being deported, being rejected for asylum, or losing control over children after a divorce seemed to result in renewed search for masculinity. Gender and marriage practices thus figured centrally as part of *the rerouting of the relations* with Afghanistan or Europe or both. Juggling the dynamics between belonging (some sense of feeling at home) and the politics of belonging (the discursive resources such as those on gender and marriage) were part of *place acrobatics* these returnees had to perform. Juggling both the Afghan and European norm of marriage, for example, meant for some men, who were able to move back and forth between Europe and Afghanistan, leading a kind of double life while having relationships in both places. Practicing mobility, is then for some an important tactic in this respect.

Mobility provides explicit room to construct more "permeable boundaries between "European" and "Afghan" spaces of belonging" (van Houte and Davids 2017: 17). In this sense, these cases illustrate that *multiple "place relations" are forged along paths of movement*, in more than one way. Those multiple relations do not only concern movement in the sense of physical traveling but also movement in terms of discursive and translocal place belongingness. Although this was not the case for all men, fewer mobility opportunities mostly meant the creation of more fixed boundaries of place-belonging. Depending on their mobility possibilities, these men moved up and down, as it were, on a continuum between the construction of fixed or more permeable boundaries between "European" and "Afghan" spaces of belonging (see also Pettit 2024 for similar observations in a different context). In doing so, they not only ascribed meaning to places but also transnationalized these to some extent, much like what Appadurai (1990) has coined as "ethnoscapes," referring to people in flux whose connectivity shapes places as

a constantly changing landscape. In this case maybe even to be described as a marriagescape, a scape constructed through homemaking in which practices, rituals, and responsibilities are shared that are "intimately bound up with the idea of home: the idea of a place (or places) in the past, and of this place in the future" (Ahmed et al. 2020: 28). "Homing," as Ahmed et al. (2020) have coined this process, is an integral part of uprooting and regrounding. As such, mobility formed an integral part of their place relations, always producing itself as "the combined processes of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong" (Yuval-Davis 2011: 26), illustrating that people's understanding and experience of place are shaped by movement. It also illustrates that *place relations are also forged beyond only the here and now*, as returning did not mean simply going home to a place that had not changed and where one would automatically belong and want to stay for the rest of one's life. It is thus important to avoid assuming that home is fixed or has an essential meaning prior to the experiences of migration (Ahmed et al. 2020: 27). Instead, home and belonging are not naturalized but contested and rerouted (both by boundary-making *and* mobility). The above illustrations indicate that local and international discourses, modernity and tradition, global and local intersect, and also that mobility and gender give meaning to Afghan and transnational space-belonging. Seeing "home" as the place of immobility, tradition, and ethnic homogeneity—hence as a static place one can return to—is in that sense problematic from the very start.

Destabilizing the In-Between

As outlined in our literature review, in-betweenness is in evident ways articulated in discussions on transit and onward migration. As argued, the linearity of migrant journeys is for a large part a methodological artifact, for the ways research questions relate to research locations. In Athens, for instance, we tend to focus on questions of departure and imagined onward mobility. In London and Amsterdam, to mention two other random cities in Europe, we tend to trace back journeys to presumed destinations and ask ourselves why people move onward from "there" and settle down "here." The semantics of onward, backward, returns matter as it indeed reproduces a certain evolutionist geography with preset centers and margins—indeed a geography of central nodes and supposedly out-of-the-way places. With this semantics, we easily equalize *onward* movements with "*northward*" movements. These semantics might reappear in the narratives of people on the move. At the same time, we came across highly dynamic mobility practices that destabilized the evolutionist geographies of migration. One telling ex-

ample comes from Lamin, an incredibly clever young man raised by the streets of Serekunda (the Gambia) (see Schapendonk 2020).

> *Vignette 2: Onward Mobility as Dizziness*
> When I [Joris] first met Lamin in January 2016, he had just moved from Italy to Switzerland. Compared to other young men, he was generally positive about his Italian life. His first stay in Switzerland was meant to be only brief. For roughly three months, he stayed with a Swiss friend, whom he had known for years, and who supported Lamin also in financial terms. But this travel to Switzerland turned out to be more than "just a short visit." Lamin started a German-language program, and he sought ways to ground in Switzerland, in addition to his Italian life. In the years after, he developed a highly im/mobile lifestyle between the regions of Liguria (Italy) and Bern (Switzerland). I lost count of the number of times he circulated between Italy and Switzerland. His continuous mobility and his groundings in two places diffused the onward/return logics. He counted his blessings in Switzerland and complained about the intense level of racialized control of public space there. Similar ambivalences were expressed regarding his Italian life. He initially stressed that Italy was his home, but he also lively discussed the everyday racism and social isolations involved. At some point, he stated: "It feels like home [in Italy], but in Switzerland I was happier."
>
> Unlike many other Gambians I have met, Lamin was not particularly nostalgic about his life in Africa. Occasionally, mostly during shopping for groceries or cooking (when using the right spices), some snippets of memory-making unfolded. In these moments, he shared, for, instance how his mother has worked as a vendor in Serekunda for decades, selling vegetables and spices that he only found in some shops run by people with a migration background. However, besides these snippets of memories he shared with me, he had no aspirations to return to the Gambia soon. He articulated several times that he did not miss home, and that he focused on his European life. After Lamin lost his job in Italy, his grounding in Italy was affected by doubt and ambivalence, as he said: "Sometimes I think I need to live here [in Italy], but then again I change my mind. Like now. Now my situation has changed because I lost my job. Now I think again about what to do, because my situation was good, but now I don't know any more." This reentering of doubt and ambivalence confuses the temporal logic that a long stay leads to stronger place attachments. That does not mean that Lamin's situation resembles a process of prolonged displacement. One day, he told me how his Swiss friend offered him an opportunity to buy an apartment for him in the Italian town where he was living. Lamin, however, kindly refused the offer. It was not so much financial considerations or a relation of dependency that was at stake. Lamin stressed that this apartment would make him feel restricted in terms of his future mobility,

> as he said: "Because this house means you must stay and live in Italy, but I don't know if I want to know. Maybe I find a job in Germany or Holland, so how can I live in this house?"

In this example, place-making and mobility melt into a position in which Lamin refuses to be pinned down—either as uprooted mobile nomad or as rooted and place-based immigrant. Consequently, the distinction between a transit place and a destination disappears in confusing ways. In a broader sense, all these places become along-the-way places, and as the mobility of Lamin continued, his wayfaring created a kind of analytical dizziness. Lamin's wayfaring is not a structural form of displacement or a migratory move toward a clearly defined destination, displaying more of a rhizome-like pattern than a linear pattern of onward mobility.

Groundings in Unsettling Conditions: Insights from Mexico and Italy

Migrant pathways are not lines across empty spaces (Drothbohm and Winters 2021). By moving, staying, and being, people relate to, and therefore change, places. To understand these dynamics, it is productive to not blindly stare at migrant practices only but to also include a wider mesh of relations and movements to make sense of place-mobility relations and meaning-making along migratory trajectories. In different sociopolitical settings, and especially during precarious crossings, many migrants move through places where there is a very thin line between facilitation/control and care/discipline (Merlín-Escorza, Davids, and Schapendonk 2020). These forcefields are built on shifting geopolitical grounds (Aparna 2020). For example, in one of the migrant shelters Tine visited, she heard how the community belonging to the parish, along with random citizens, enthusiastically collected food, clothing and blankets when the first *caravana de migrantes* passed through the city. This shared notion of hospitality tempered, however, the second and third times the *caravana* came around. According to some members of the parish, the migrants became too demanding in their need for help. The pastor expressed that he felt he had to balance his effort for charity for the marginalized and people in need in general in the region and the assistance to the migrants. According to the director of another shelter in a neighboring state Tine visited, negative news on migrants being too demanding was also spread on purpose to discredit the migrants and stir xenophobia. These comments of both the pastor and the director point at the intersection of migrant trajectories and neighborhood dynamics, where discourses on othering, racism, charity, humanitarian aid, and liberation theology collide and articulate as part of place-making (see also Merlín-Escorza, Davids, and Schapendonk 2020). This place-making seems

to exist out of a wavy pattern of construction and deconstruction. We outline two of these different instances below.

> *Vignette 3: Place Attachments through Motherhood*
> We (Tine and a befriended colleague) arrived at the parish in the afternoon. The parish is located in a lower-middle-class neighborhood of the city, and the shelter is part of the territory of the parish and situated within the parish gates. There is no way of missing that this is not just a church, since big banners with photos of the caravans of transmigrants and the rules by which the transmigrants have to live inside of the shelter are hung on the gates, which are closed. We are welcomed by the pastor, an international volunteer and the coordinator of all the charity work the parish executes, including the work for the shelter for transmigrants. It is not our first visit to this shelter, and the welcome is warm and informal. While walking through the hallway, I sense immediately that there is a buzz of positive excitement in the air. The coordinator takes us to a room where workshops are organized and all kinds of handy crafts and clothes are being made, mostly by women from the neighborhood and regular participants of the parish. The women are busy and chatting cheerfully, they invite us to participate. We answer that we are not that good in handicraft but ask what the excitement and cheerfulness is all about. One of the women says, "Come see for yourself," and takes me by the hand to the next room.
>
> In a rather spacious room with a big king-size bed a woman lays on the bed with two little babies next to her. The woman that took me by the hand proudly narrates: "A little miracle has happened here; these twins were born here yesterday. They asked me to be *comadre* (godmother), and I accepted. We already bought some clothes for the little ones and moved the family up to this room, out of the actual space of the shelter where the transmigrants stay overnight. The father has gone to the municipality to register his girls, aren't they cute? They are going to be Mexican citizens now." It was obvious that the birth and the idea that these two little babies were to become Mexican citizens generated much joy among the women in the room. After introducing myself to the mother of the twins, she tells me that she comes from El Salvador and hoped for her babies to be born in the United States, but Mexico is already better than El Salvador. She stayed for two years in the shelter, also working there, then left for Monterey, a Mexican city at the northern border with the United States. The last I know of her is that she and her husband were still trying to get into the United States but had not succeeded so far.

This birth has been a very special occasion for the mother and for the surrounding women. What stood out for me (Tine) was not so much the peculiarity of the situation but rather the way this event articulated a sense of relatedness and care, which was attached to this place but at the same

time also uprooted. While employing practical assistance to the birth and care of the two babies, a whole set of gendered connotations to giving life, mothering, (social) family, religion, and caring seemed to be set in motion, between the place in El Salvador where they came from, Mexico, and the places they were still to travel to. Indicating that the passing, moving, staying, and dwelling in the shelter—in short, migrant im/mobility—has a lasting bearing on all the participants involved and on this environment. In particular, in this case through the intersection of gender and social family relations practiced in "*compadrazgo*" (godparenting) and the corresponding responsibilities, rituals, and gifts that accompany these, "homing" is constructed as part of place relations (Ahmed et al. 2020). Relations of godparenting are strong lasting relations in many Latin and Central American cultures, and part of networks of social security and social mobility. In this case these social family relations between the Salvadorian mother, who eventually traveled farther, and her *comadre* (literally: co-mother; godmother of the children), who stayed put, became uprooted and regrounded, rendering them both subject and object in and of mobility trajectories. Movement, in other words, leaves traces. Here we see again how *multiple "place relations" are forged along paths of movement* while simultaneously illustrating that places are shaped by these paths of movements.

When we zoom out from this particular moment, we notice how these migrant shelters come into being along the routes migrants tend to follow. These places, although designed and founded by others, are in that sense co-constructed by migrants and their passing through. As the director of the shelter mentioned above indicates, the kind of passing dictates up to a certain degree the place relations between shelters and their surroundings. In shelters of short stay (one or two nights) these dynamics tend to differ substantially from shelters of medium and longer stay. Moreover, the volunteers working there often have their own cross-border mobility trajectories. Hence, shelters can be seen as assemblages of attraction and expulsion, placement and displacement, sociopolitical nodes that connect (or confront) migrants with many other actors, stakeholders, and place histories (see also Merlín-Escorza, Davids, and Schapendonk 2020).

This is not only the case for shelters, as migrant trajectories and the violence that accompanies them in Mexico instigates other, but related, trajectories such as that of the yearly caravan of Madres de Migrantes Desaparecidos y Desaparecidas (Caravan of Mothers of Disappeared Migrants), which consists of mothers and also fathers who have marched since 2006 from countries in Central America to Mexico City, searching for their disappeared loved ones. Every year they arrive on Mother's Day (the tenth of May) in Mexico City. Through their presence, discourse, and the banners they carry, they literally and symbolically inscribe, or to use Vogt's term,

etch, the pain of migration trajectories, but also resistance and protest, into Mexico's political and cultural landscape (Vogt in this volume).

Considering migrant conditions, it is self-evident that place relations do not unfold in a sociopolitical environment that is always welcoming. In the Mexican case, hospitality spaces emerge in a highly violent landscape (e.g., Vogt 2018). Unsurprisingly, Joris also came across many instances whereby migrant relations to places were actually violently contested by the EU's border regime, blunt racism, and other processes of exclusion and expulsion. One particular episode of place-making—or rather place struggle—unfolded in the city center of Rome, where Joris revisited Abdoulah (see Schapendonk 2020: 159–60). Here we see how struggle about national and place boundaries are shaped and negotiated in everyday practices that illustrate the *carrying capacity of places to hold relations* marked by mobility while interfering in the (un)grounding process of, in this case, Abdoulah.

> *Vignette 4: Speaking Back to Territorial Claims*
> I [Joris] saw how one particular waiter of a café at the opposite side of the street fought against Abdoulah's place relations as a street vendor. For Abdoulah it was important to be in the same place every day, around the same time, so that potential customers could find him. For him it was also a relatively secure place because he forged a stable relationship with one of the policemen working in the same neighborhood (and also a regular client of Abdoulah's). It was also a place he cared for; every morning he cleaned his workplace by tidying up some of the cartons, by building little chairs of boxes, and by exposing some of his products in attractive ways. Moreover, this place had its infrastructure. Abdoulah arranged with the management of a nearby hotel that he could use the bathroom there during his short breaks. The same hotel also offered Abdoulah the Wi-Fi codes so that he could change his street vending spot into a truly transnational space, while listening to the latest news broadcasts from Senegal on his mobile phone and making multiple phone calls to his family members elsewhere in the world. These place relations were, however, heavily disturbed by the waiter's loud claims of "mia terra" [my land] and "Questa e l'Europa!" [this is Europe]. The verbal insults soon changed into more territorial acts. I saw this waiter actually putting the café's waste bags at Abdoulah's selling spot just before he would arrive there. It took Abdoulah quite some time to clean up the place. Just upon return after his break, Abdoulah was outraged and ran to the opposite side of the street. He certainly went for a confrontation with the waiter. He stood there tête-à-tête with the waiter, and passersby stopped to see how this situation would unfold. Still mad, he returned to his street-vending spot, and he showed me a plastic bag. He cried: "C'est le kaka des gens" [this is human shit]. This shitty expulsion strategy of the waiter seemed to

> be effective—that day Abdoulah moved out of his sight and tried to make some money elsewhere. However, he returned the next day, and he cleaned the place again to open his shop.

When Abdoulah and I said goodbye that day, I felt in a way impotent, not only for the systemic injustices around me, but also for the fact that I would just return to my hotel, while Abdoulah was perhaps embarking a bus where he was confronted with similar gazes, similar remarks, similar violence, similar Eurospaces that never really reveal themselves to me. This is important since it marks a difference between positionality and place relations. We might indeed strive for ethnographic relatedness, but in so many situations, it was rather impossible to relate to the same place, simply because our positions in mobility regimes are so fundamentally different compared to the position of the people we encounter.

Conclusion: On Place Acrobatics

The empirical sections of this chapter started with return to discuss departures , destabilized transit logics through circulation, and emphasized social traces in transient conditions, and ended with presumed places of arrival to indicate conditions of expulsion. In all instances, the mobility-place relations under study are difficult, if not impossible, to pin down in terms of the linear logics of migration. We have seen how "place relations" in presumed transit spaces are meaningful and long-lasting—all but loose and in-between. We also outlined how returns should not be considered processes of "coming home," and we have seen how people persist to be *in place* despite the aggressiveness around them.

Based on these observations, it makes little sense to pin down the places or migrant positions we come across as *in-between*. We regard place acrobatics as a fruitful alternative, as it provides analytical space to discuss people's stretching and holding capacities of being in place in conditions of displacement. This refers not only to the translocalities through which people forge relations with distant places (e.g. Abdoulah's connectivity with Senegal; Lamin's im/mobile lifestyle; Fahima's search for hybrid marriage solutions) but also to the ways being in place and out of place are situations that may fold into each other. Moreover, place acrobatics may also do justice to the changing character of the "local," either through migrant movements (e.g., the shelters in Mexico) or because of the capacity of time to bring chance, change, and contingency to this world (Amrith 2021). It follows that we should not associate "place" only with the here, the now, the stable, the local, the sedentary and existing prior to movement or prior

to its relations. They are the knots of intertwining trajectories. For similar reasons, we should not mistake mobility for ungrounding, transit, and the nonlocal. Or to put it in relation to the wider debate of this book, we could move away from the notion that place attachments are positive and stable anchors in stories of displacements. If we would envision place attachments in such a one-sided way, we ignore how the process of getting embedded—or how the dynamics of *feeling* in place—can coexist with loss, condition of exile, and unbearable pains—that is, processes and positions that are difficult to "know" for people who are not undergoing it. Instead, we think it is more productive to unpack the various ways particular constraints and intersectional positioning lead to new mobilities, how new mobilities unfold with constraints (e.g., Gill, Calentrío, and Mason 2011), and how this then in the end results in multiple and layered meanings. The continuous dialogues of grounding/ungrounding, welcoming/unwelcoming, new movements/new returns, result in what we have called place acrobatics: we have seen how people need to stretch their belongings, invent acrobatic acts to circumvent border regimes, hop and wave between multiple places—sometimes they fly, sometimes they need to stand still. All this relates to acrobatics, not as an individualized performance but as a collective tactics that may emerge from marginalization and subexistence (Samaddar 2020), or from individual instances of creativity and agency.

This notion of place acrobatics, however, is not a mere migrant story. It can also be translated into a plea to not only take into account "the migrant," "the mover," "the refugee" to understand mobility-place dynamics and meaning-making along paths of movement. As the vignettes illustrate, both migrants and non-migrants construct "marriagescapes" and are part and parcel of gendered transnational relations of kinship and motherhood, involving "homing" as a process that is both uprooted as well as grounded. As Khan suggests, this opening up of understanding multiple positions at the same time calls for "epistemological dexterity that can locate mobility and stasis firmly within an ontological space that is increasingly characteristic of twenty-first-century life—namely as a condition that follows on the disaffected promises of global modernity" (Khan 2020: 236). It makes a lot of sense to move away from our intellectual gaze on the isolated and exceptionalized "migrant journey" in order to scrutinize the processes by which the mobility of some is "migranticized" (Dahinden 2016). Or to relate it to the words of Massey and Ingold, we should perhaps not isolate one line of movement of only one prototypical Other but instead see how this "trajectory" is enmeshed with multiple other lines in terms of mobility and meaning-making. These intersections lead to wavy and dynamic patterns of place-making from where people, imaginaries, and meanings move in various directions.

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CHAPTER
9

The Political Ecology of Displaced Place-Making

Georgina Ramsay

The first time I met Nyomanda,[1] a Congolese woman who had migrated to Australia through the UNHCR's refugee resettlement program, we were sitting across from each other in her living room talking about how she was experiencing life in Australia.[2] I asked if I could take notes on our conversation, and she nodded in agreement. I only had my smartphone with me, and when I pulled it out to get to a digital note-taking application Nyomanda's expression hardened. As I set the phone down on the coffee table between us, she looked at it pointedly and said, "That . . . you know, that comes from my country. Did you know?"

"Yes," I responded, carefully. "I did know that."

"That is why my country is at war," Nyomanda added. Although Nyomanda had fled the eastern DRC some years previously to seek refugee status in Uganda, she still had many relatives living in her former country and was highly attuned to ongoing conflicts there. It was no surprise, then, that she talked about war in the DRC in the present tense.

"The minerals inside?" Nyomanda added, confirming that I understood the link between the extractive rare earth mining industries that proliferate in the eastern states of the DRC and the displacement of Congolese people, broadly—not just her own. I nodded, unsure of how to verbally respond to being confronted with the fact of global inequality vis-à-vis the small machine that was sitting between us.

Nyomanda would become one of my closest research interlocutors over the years, but it was this very first conversation with her that prompted a reframe of my research interests. Like many scholars of forced migration, my initial entry point to studying the displacement of refugees was through a lens focusing on narratives of dislocation, as if refugee experiences are defined by detachment from place and that refugees exist in a state of perpetual exile. I had been unintentionally reproducing what Liisa Malkki (1995a) critiques as the sedentarist bias of migration scholarship, which too often sees physical dislocation from place as a fundamental and seemingly automatic rupturing of personal and collective identity. What Nyomanda was demanding I take account of, however, was the historicity of her migration, and the tangible elements that shape not only her flight from the DRC but also her experiences and sense of place within the various sites through which she has transited (see Lems in this volume) and, eventually, in which she has come to settle. Essentially, Nyomanda was reorienting me toward the materiality of the "place" in her experiences of displacement: a link that may sound obvious but is curiously absent in so much research on displacement and migration (Hinkson 2019; Lems 2016, 2018). Too often, research on displacement begins with the migrant figure as if they come into existence at the threshold of a national border, dehistoricizing them from the broader social, political, and material contexts of their lives (Malkki 1996).

The effect is more than just dehistoricization, however. Readings of displacement as reducible to forced migration also underplay the historicity and materiality of the places refugees flee, which often—and especially in the case of the DRC—reflect longer patterns of colonial dispossession and dislocation. Through a conceptual lens of political ecology, I describe in this chapter how contemporary Congolese displacements are structured by and reflective of these patterns of (neo)colonial dispossession, since it is ultimately attachments to land that are at stake. But these displacements are not wholly defining of their experiences of transit, migration, and eventual settlement. Contrary to the sedentarist fix critiqued by Malkki (1995a), which would see displacements resolved by reinserting people arbitrarily into a "national order of things," Congolese people mediate displacements through what I term ecological "fixes," in which they attempt to reconnect themselves materially and existentially to place. Theorizing displacement and emplacement through this ecological lens recognizes both the violent historicity that so often underpins territorial dispossession as well as the possibility of reestablishing a sense of place in new environments. That is, the figure of the displaced migrant or refugee does not have their displacement resolved through politico-legal recognition (which is increasingly contentious). Rather, they create emplacement themselves through cre-

ative reworkings of the sensorial and corporeal environments around them, within places of transit (see also Vogt in this volume) or the unfamiliar (and often unexpected) places in which they end up settling.

Following that first conversation with Nyomanda, I realized that migration cannot be singularly understood as a struggle toward a specific destination or a stagnant and dislocating stage of liminality—although it can comprise these elements. Rather, as elaborated in the introduction (Drotbohm and Winters, this volume), migration can more fruitfully be understood as a trajectory in which experiences accumulate over time and in conjunction with the materiality of places, including the places that migrants leave behind, the places migrants encounter in transit, and the often-unexpected places within which migrants end up staying for long periods of time—perhaps even "settling" (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011; Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992; Drotbohm and Winters 2021). This expansive perspective on migration consequently shifted my approach to fieldwork, which I had originally only planned to conduct with resettled Congolese refugees in Australia. Instead, I saw that the ongoing displacements of resettled refugees cannot be dislocated from the formative places that they have experienced elsewhere. Hence, I decided to conduct subsequent fieldwork with Congolese refugees living in Uganda (2013), resettled Congolese refugees in the United States (2018), internally displaced people within the DRC (2019), alongside my initial focus on resettled refugees from the DRC in Australia (2012–14). My aim was to understand how Congolese people make sense of displacement from the vantage of various sites and material situations.

By geographic area, the DRC is the second-largest country in continental Africa and the eleventh largest country in the world. Spread over so much territory, "Congolese people" is a category that comprises hundreds of different ethnic groups and societal contexts, from those living in the busy urban center of the country's capital, Kinshasa, in the west, to those living in isolated villages in the hillsides of the country's eastern provinces. In my research, I have predominantly worked with people who had been displaced from these eastern provinces, particularly South Kivu, North Kivu, Ituri, and Haut-Katanga, which is perhaps unsurprising given that the majority of civil unrest in the DRC that has occurred over the past twenty years has been concentrated in these regions and the majority of Congolese refugees have fled those states (UNHCR 2022: 6), although the majority of displaced Congolese people never actually cross an international border. While the First and Second Congo Wars were officially declared over in 2003, an estimated 120 militia groups are active throughout the South Kivu, North Kivu, and Ituri Provinces alone (Kivu Security Tracker 2021), and incidents of conflict and violence were relatively frequent throughout the years 2012–14 when I conducted a majority of my fieldwork with Congolese refugees.

Aside from the persistent threat of armed violence and conflict, these eastern states are also where a significant amount of the country's various mining operations—namely extracting gold, copper, tin, cobalt, tantalum, and diamonds—are concentrated, prompting some scholars to draw a link between these forces—extraction and civil unrest—as co-constitutive (Jacquemot 2010; Reyntjens 2005).[3] As my conversation with Nyomanda recounted above suggests, many of the people I worked with also drew links between their dislocation and extractivism in the DRC, even if they were fleeing an immediate threat of armed conflict.[4] They saw the operation of militias as indicative of continuing contestations over access to territory containing valuable mineral deposits.

In Bukavu, the capital city of South Kivu where I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in 2019, most of the people I worked with had moved to the city within the previous five years from more rural villages in South Kivu. In Uganda, where I conducted fieldwork in 2013, the Congolese refugees I met were more diverse, with people identifying themselves across various ethnic and language groups, including a number of different Bantu groups and also Banyamulenge, a highly persecuted ethnic group who predominantly reside in the South Kivu province. While it would be impossible to generalize a specifically "Congolese" experience of place-making based on this diverse subset of Congolese refugees, there were nonetheless shared patterns of experience that shaped common understandings. For instance, the majority of people I conducted fieldwork with were born in a rural village in one of the eastern DRC states, although many had spent later years in towns or cities to attend school or to work. Their relationship to these remote villages, where most had spent formative years and where they had often relied on subsistence agriculture for livelihoods, had a persistent effect on how the people I worked with experienced place-making. Their sense of being emplaced was often connected to gardens and specific kinds of plantfoods, while the sense of being displaced was often articulated as feeling alienated from these.

Throughout my engagements with Congolese people across these diverse fieldwork contexts, one continuity has stood out. The sense of displacement that they describe is often not only grounded in shifting materialities of place but more specifically experienced at an ecological scale that comprises disturbances that manifest across and intertwine both environmental and social contexts of life. Relatedly, it is through ecological fixes that Congolese people attempt—not always successfully—to repair their sense of displacement. In this chapter, I analyze forced migration from the lens of political ecology (Escobar 1999), using historic and contemporary examples from the DRC to show how displacement involves not only a changed relationship between people and place but ultimately also a disturbance

between human-environmental relations and the kinds of vitality that these sustain. I then illuminate ecological forms of place-making that emerge within nodes of migration journeys that might otherwise remain hidden.

The Political Ecology of Displacement

Since its inception as a colonial territory in the late 1800s, the DRC has been treated as a kind of resource colony for more powerful states and institutions. From the rubber plantations governed brutally by King Leopold II in the early 1900s, which fed then new demands for pneumatic bicycle and motorcar tires, to the establishment of an extensive mining industry under the colonial governance of Belgium driven by the race to acquire minerals like tungsten for armory during World War I, first, and then eventually uranium during World War II in the race to develop nuclear weapons, to the eventual corporate neocolonialism of extractive industries in the DRC that followed the country's independence from Belgium in 1960 (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002; Lalji 2007), the DRC has long been a place where struggles over access to and control over land, and the raw materials within it, have dominated political, social, and economic life.

These contestations reflect what Anna Tsing (2005: 1–5) characterizes as "friction," that is, global encounters structured by and demonstrative of asymmetrical relationships, from which different logic systems rub against one another. In the case of the DRC, extractive systems of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2003) have, since the early twentieth century, worked to restructure Congolese ways of living in the DRC around the prioritization of global capital while simultaneously excluding most Congolese people from participating in—or even benefiting from—the global markets that require extracting their material resources (Smith 2021), particularly in terms of the recent boom in digital technologies that require minerals like tungsten, tin, and tantalum found in abundance in many parts of the eastern DRC (Mantz 2008; Smith 2011, 2015). One regulatory organization, the International Tin Supply Chain Initiative (ITSCI) (2020), alone oversees two thousand mines in the Great Lakes region (comprising the eastern DRC and parts of Rwanda and Burundi), almost all foreign owned, and with a workforce of approximately eighty thousand miners. But the number of mines and miners in the eastern DRC is likely much higher, since so much of this work is now conducted informally and clandestinely to avoid the attention of mining regulators, such as the ITSCI (Smith 2021). In 2021, for example, the DRC was by far the largest supplier of coltan (which comprises components of tin, tungsten, and tantalum) into global markets (Ojewale 2022), which gives a sense of the scale of mining in the eastern DRC, which

also has significant mining operations around diamonds, gold, and other rare earth minerals. Throughout my fieldwork, I have sat across from Congolese people, recording conversations on a smartphone that most of those interviewees could not afford, comprising minerals that were quite possibly sourced from the province they had been displaced from. Our very interactions are an expression of global friction.

For Congolese people on the ground, particularly those located in the eastern DRC states where mining is most concentrated, these frictions have manifested in material ways. The mining boom of the mid-2000s following the demand for minerals used in the development of digital technologies at first offered many Congolese people whose livelihood options had been limited as a result of the Congolese wars a rare opportunity for informal labor with the possibility of making significant wealth, while also stimulating the local economies of towns and villages located near mines (Smith 2015). Within a few years, however, international outcry about the seeming violence of "conflict minerals" led to increased regulation of mining industries from international organizations, which led to the exclusion of many artisanal miners (Kabamba 2010; Smith 2021). In the years since this mining boom, other significant social, political, economic, and environmental effects have emerged: from the clearing of land and the open cuts into the ground for excavation to the pollution of waterways contaminated by chemicals and heavy metals, to decreased agricultural activity as a result of environmental and livelihood changes, to outbreaks of violent conflict between various groups who have interests in controlling specific territories that are rich in minerals, including government agencies (and the Armed Forces of the DRC, the national army), various nongovernment militia groups, those who live on the land under contestation, and distinct Indigenous groups who have ancestral claims to it. All of these processes disturb not only the environments surrounding mines but also the vital relationships between those place-ecologies and the people who live there, impacting on, and at times disrupting, their livelihoods, intergenerational and ancestral bonds with the land, and sense of security and stability in place.

These ecological roots of displacement emerged in my own fieldwork with Congolese people in 2019, which I conducted with people living in the city of Bukavu, the capital of the South Kivu province in the DRC. One of the families I worked with had moved to the city five years earlier, from a remote village approximately five hours from Bukavu. Richard—a young man in his early twenties, whom I talked with the most—described memories from his childhood there, many of which involved searching through the tailings of a nearby mine with friends (clandestinely, without permission from his parents, who were scared that they would be injured if they fell near the mining holes or that guards would violently chase them away).

Over time, a more insidious and unanticipated risk emerged: the local water supply became contaminated by overuse and, they speculated, heavy metals. Local livestock suffered, and people became ill. Unnerved by the social and ecological changes to their local environment, Richard's parents decided to move to Bukavu. This move was especially hard for Richard's father, who angrily burst out during one of my conversations with them that the land was *machafuko*, a Swahili word that broadly translates into disorder, unrest, and chaos. Mining—and the global markets driving demand for Congolese minerals—had resulted in an acute sense of displacement for them, a rupture of their relationship to place.

While the displacement experienced by Richard and his family was not typical in the normative sense that they were not "refugees," this family nonetheless embodied a more foundational form of displacement in the DRC, whereby their relationship to place is damaged at an ecological level, in part because of global frictions with locally felt, material impacts. Such foundational roots of displacement, and their link to systems of extractivist capitalism, are commonly overlooked in scholarly work on displacement which more often focus on the politico-legal spectacle of forced migration and the social ruptures these encompass (Cabot and Ramsay 2021). Nonetheless, attention to these ecological foundations of displacement is important, as Lunstrum and Bose describe (2022: 646, their emphasis): "Displacement is a *prerequisite* to rather than consequence of the environmental or land-use change: people must be moved so that their lands and waterways can then be terraformed." The *machafuko* and displacement experienced by Richard and his family is one such example, which encompasses not only forced relocation but more fundamentally the transformation of land from being a source of collective vitality and sustenance to a source of extractive potential.

Such contemporary frictions and their historic roots in the DRC point to a political ecology of displacement, a focus that was largely overlooked in scholarly work on forced migration until recently (Baldwin and Bettini 2017; Lunstrum and Bose 2022; Morris 2022; Sassen 2016). Political ecology, defined by Arturo Escobar (1999: 3) as "the manifold articulations of history and biology and the cultural mediations through which such articulations are necessarily established," is an analytical lens that transcends the normative binary of society-nature to instead implicate the biophysical and material world within a historicized axis. A political ecology reading of displacement necessitates attention to the materiality of "place" in displacement and understands that the contemporary situations that compel Congolese people to migrate are produced from the interplay of historicized patterns of dispossession and the materiality of the land on which they seek out livelihoods. Their displacement is a product of disturbed and ruptured

ecologies and a wholly predictable outcome of a longitudinal drive to extract resources from Congolese territories. These points of friction reveal an intentionality of displacement, in that it is a predictable outcome of global systems of extractivist capitalism (Mezzadra and Neilson 2017), which at various points require the removal and relocation of "generative units"—meaning plants, animals, microbes, and people—in order for land to be expropriated for extractive purposes (Haraway et al. 2016: 557). Yet, as I describe below from fieldwork conducted with Congolese refugees whose displacement has forced them to leave the DRC, it is through ecological "fixes" that they also attempt to restore their relationship to place.

Ecological Place-Making: Gardens, Growth, and Food

While there is an intentionality to the systems that produce displacement, the forms of place-making that occur within and as a result of displacements are not necessarily defined by oppressive verticalities or horizontal movements into new spaces. Escobar (2008: 289–90) points to "flat ontologies"—that is, emergent assemblages that encompass the material, existential, and social elements of life, broadly defined—through which a sense of place is actualized. Such a reading of place as grounded in social ontologies sees place and place-making as distinct from sedentarist logics, territorialized localities, and simplistic power hierarchies, focusing instead on place-making as emergent and contingent. In my fieldwork, these social ontologies were particularly evident in the relations produced between Congolese people and their ecological surroundings in spaces of transit and new sites of settlement.

Within a week of settling into an apartment in a housing compound in the outskirts of Kampala, Uganda, a Congolese friend, Mama Patrick—a refugee who had at that time been living in Uganda for approximately three years with her son, daughter-in-law, and two nieces—took my hand one late afternoon and walked with me to a small, somewhat hidden space behind the concrete apartment buildings. In the small space between a retaining wall and a high fence there was a strip of soil, maybe a meter wide. The high fence and the apartment buildings on either side of the soil blocked most of the sunlight, so I was incredulous, at first, when Mama Patrick pointed out the bean vines trailing up from the ground and some other edible plants. "I want to show you my garden," she told me as we conversed through my broken Swahili and her limited English. "I want to show you what I grow here."

What was remarkable about this "out-of-the-way" garden (see Drotbohm and Winters, introduction to this volume) was not that it was able to

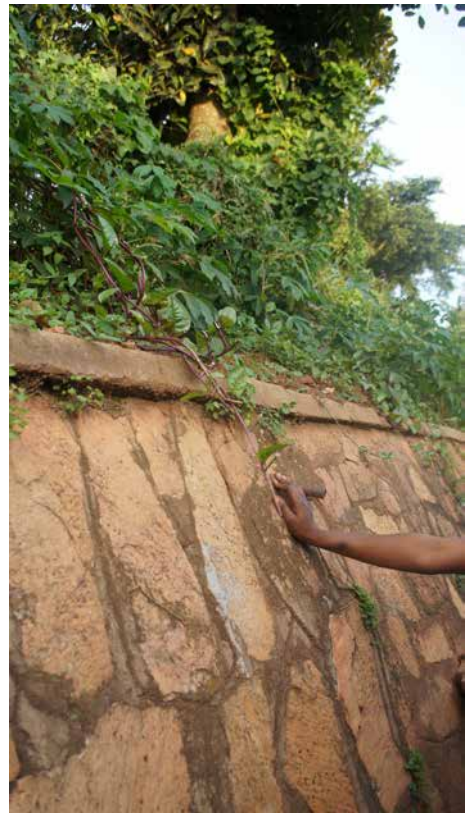

Figure 9.1. Mama Patrick shows me her garden, Kampala, 2013. © Georgina Ramsay.

survive literally between the cracks of urbanity but that Mama Patrick and her family were so dedicated to tending these plants that would offer such a small harvest. Every day, she told me, she came to work on the plants, ensuring they had had enough water and monitoring their health and growth. She described how:

> Wherever I live, I have a garden. Here it has been the hardest. When I first came here, I thought that there was no place that I would be able to grow plants. . . . But then I saw that there was just enough space, at the top there. So, I am here.

Together, we picked some of the leaves of a sweet potato plant, which she would later use to create a stew called *matembela*. As we picked and filled a small bucket, I asked her why she tended to the garden. Was it purely

another source of nutrition for her family? Mama Patrick chuckled and told me: "This is Congolese food. We are in Uganda, yes, but we want to eat like Congolese."

To stress the significance of these foods made from the pounded leaves of tuberous plants (e.g., sweet potato, cassava), she went on to say: "In Uganda, they like *matoke* [green banana]. In Burundi, it is *maharage* [beans]. But for Congolese, it is *sombe* [cooked cassava leaves]."

While foods like *matembela* and *sombe* are eaten throughout east and central Africa, for Congolese people I have worked with these are the foods that have significant social value. In both cases, the leaves of a tuberous plant are pounded into a lurid green sauce that is then cooked, slowly, for many hours, building flavor. Since it takes so long to cook these dishes properly, they require a lot of coal and are therefore more expensive than other kinds of foods. *Sombe*, in particular, is considered by Congolese people to have a powerful nutritional effect. It is a "strong" food, I was told, "good for the blood," a dish of superior taste and nutritional value. Moreover, *sombe* was an important dish for ritual purposes: it was present at every significant event I attended (engagements, weddings, birth celebrations), and the taste of the *sombe* that had been brought to these events was always a keen point of interest and discussion among attendees, who told me they could tell from the taste of *sombe* whether the cook had taken "care" or "pride" in its preparation. For instance, at a Congolese engagement party in Australia, a controversy broke out when the mother of the bride claimed that there was "no salt" in the *sombe*, which was, I gathered, an encoded way of accusing the mother of the groom of being unwelcoming to their daughter. But *sombe* (and *matembela*) were also eaten in everyday contexts. When I would first meet a new Congolese family, particularly one who had been resettled in Australia, they would make a point of preparing *sombe* for me. To be considered a close social connection, I had to eat a dish of *sombe* that they had prepared. These dishes made from the leaves of tubers are foods that actively create sociality, signal vitality, and symbolize an enduring connection to place, a connection to being "Congolese" even without being physically proximate to the DRC.

This sense of being Congolese was most visibly expressed on the afternoons when I would sit and talk with Mama Patrick as she prepared *matembela* or *sombe* in the communal courtyard of our apartment compound. Sitting on a stool with her legs wrapped around a large kino—a Congolese mortar carved out of wood—Mama Patrick would pound the leaves she had either collected from her garden or bought in a local market for at least twenty minutes, crushing them until they formed a watery paste in a lurid shade of green I have never seen replicated in another setting. Pounding the leaves is physically demanding, and sweat would drip from her brow as she

Figure 9.2. Grinding cassava, Kampala, 2013. © Georgina Ramsay.

worked, yet her expression throughout was that of determination. Mama Patrick looked deeply satisfied by the process of preparing these foods. One afternoon in between hits of the wooden pestle against the leaves she told me, "This is hard, but it is the work of the Congolese. This is our food."

The garden that Mama Patrick was tending to in Kampala represents more than just an additional source of nutrition. The garden is an example of what Ma (2018) refers to as "sensorial placemaking," whereby it is through taste and ingestion that a person forges a sense of connection with place. In Ma's (2018) account of sensorial place-making in regards to Puer tea in China, a sense of place is expressed through the specific flavor of a tea, which embodies characteristics of the soil it is grown in: drinking the tea, then, connects the drinker to the place it was grown and imbues what might otherwise be seen as an overly simple act of drinking tea as a ritual means of symbolically experiencing an assumed connection to nature

and rural tranquility. For refugees (and other migrants) like Mama Patrick, however, such sensorial place-making takes on some of the diasporic conditions of their own life trajectories. The place-making power of the food is as much about the memories of an elsewhere and a sense of identity that is triggered by its taste as much as it is about the specific locality in which the food is grown and sourced. Describing a similarly diasporic process of place-making for refugees resettled in the United States, Jean (2015) documents how refugees grow foods they were familiar with from "home" as a means for refugees to simultaneously retain a sense of cultural identity that is connected to a place elsewhere *and* a means to forge connection to the new place in which they reside. Farming and growing food is itself an act of place-making, a process of "investing labour to become acquainted with new land" and "making new landscapes legible and familiar" (Jean 2015: 54). What Jean's (2015) work and my own observations from working with Congolese refugees like Mama Patrick shows is that growing food is a means of place-making that is grounded (literally) in connecting to the ecology of place, whereby learning the specificities of the local ecologies is a way to develop a sense of attachment to it.

I interpret Mama Patrick's attempt to grow a garden even within the most constrained of spaces in Kampala as an attempt to remake a sense of connection to place—one that can be literally imbibed and embodied—within the context of protracted displacement. Her life in Kampala was made difficult by her externality as both a refugee and a Congolese person. She and other members of her household lived very precariously without a stable income, in part because there is only a limited system of humanitarian aid relief to refugees available in Kampala—Uganda has long approached humanitarian assistance through a "self-reliance" model that promotes farming and entrepreneurship over aid (Sharpe and Namusobya 2012; Betts et al. 2017)—but also because their ability to enter the labor market was insecure. The only work available to them was menial and low paying, and they often faced discrimination from Ugandan employers who did not look favorably on Congolese refugees. Mama Patrick's son had been the victim of two assaults on construction worksites, and he claimed that the perpetrators were disgruntled Ugandan workers. Like so many others, to live comfortably in an apartment, Mama Patrick and her family relied on remittances from family and friends who had been resettled as refugees outside of continental Africa—in the United States, Canada, or Australia, primarily—but these sources of money were unreliable. As such, they faced ongoing economic precarity, struggling to make rent each month and provide enough food for the family. In addition, they held ongoing fears that members of the militia group they had fled from in the DRC would find where they were living and pursue them. Like other refugees I met in Kam-

pala—many of whom did not have the resources available to live in apartment compounds and were instead residing in overcrowded, piecemeal neighborhoods built out of temporary material, facing physical dangers and chronic outbreaks of cholera and dysentery—insecurity was the norm.[5]

Throughout these hardships, Congolese refugees I met in Kampala were still attempting to create a sense of connection to place through their gardens, which they established in even the smallest and most out-of-the-way patches of soil close to their residences. These gardens enabled a visceral attachment to place, a literal connection to soil, but the foods they sought to grow were often those that invoked a specifically "Congolese" sense of personal identity and collective community: a simultaneous process of immediate place-making and expression of cultural specificity that is similarly described in Jean's (2015) work on refugee place-making in the United States. What was interesting was that, for the Congolese refugees I worked with, this sense of a Congolese identity was not necessarily tied to a deep desire to return "home" or to an idea of their ancestral legitimacy to identify with that place. Rather, for them, "Congolese" did not invoke so much a sense of coherent collective identity but rather expressed an attachment to place: an autochthony with the physical sites and socialities of the eastern DRC, in particular.

As the second largest country by area within continental Africa, the concept of a unified and nationalized "Congolese" identity does not generally coincide with how Congolese people themselves think about and identify with that category. For people I worked with, to claim to be "Congolese" is not to identify with a nationality but to assert a formative connection to place in the DRC: places where claims to autochthony are often contested and delegitimized, and further exacerbated by tensions over the establishment and expansion of key extractive industries in the region. The Congolese identity being articulated by people I worked with seemed less about historical legitimacy and more about formative consubstantiality: a sense of themselves as being inextricably connected to the materiality of the DRC by virtue of their own formation within and relationships to the local ecologies of the DRC.

They could continue to "be" Congolese outside of the proximate location of the DRC by continuing to reaffirm their activities of daily life as being specific to Congolese people.

This diasporic identity and its material manifestations in the gardens and foods of Congolese people outside of the DRC can, in a way, be seen as a kind of productive effect of global frictions, echoing the forms of collaboration across difference that Tsing (2005) describes among various parties who are invested in the forests of Kalimantan in Indonesia: from the collaborations between Indigenous locals and global activists to the local

bandits and international corporations. Where only a few short years previously they had been focused on surviving conflict that was often organized or at least enacted along the lines of ethnic group affiliation, during the time of my fieldwork I witnessed how being pushed into new cosmopolitan contexts enabled forms of recognition or assemblage—perhaps falling short of Tsing's (2005) collaborative relationships—across what had previously been important forms of difference, a phenomenon that Liisa Malkki (1995b) similarly documents among people from Burundi who migrated to cities in Tanzania following outbreaks of conflict. In my own work, I saw how Congolese people from different parts of eastern Congo created new and emergent forms of sociality—what Escobar (2008) might call "assemblages of social ontologies"—through corporeal acts of cooking and ingesting specific foods, like *sombe* and other leafy greens. Place-making and being Congolese was not just a human condition; it was a condition, or an assemblage, continually being produced and affirmed through human and plant interactions. Congolese people mediated their displacement through this ecological fix rather than attempting to create a sedentarist connection to the territory on which they had come to settle or transit. These plants and foods formed them as Congolese, and continuing to grow, cook, and eat them was a means of reproducing connection to place that transcends attachment to geography and sedentarist logics of place-making.

Frustrated Place-Making

"That one," Nyomanda told me, pointing at one of her children, who at that time was approximately seven years of age. "That one is my Australian baby." When I asked her to explain, Nyomanda told me: "She only likes to eat Australian things. Chipsies [fries]. Her favorite is pizza." After a pause, Nyomanda added, "She does not like to eat *sombe*." In contrast, Nyomanda told me how one of her other children is "Congolese," because "she loves *sombe*, every time she is asking, "Mama please, Mama make *sombe*.'" Knowing that the child she was talking about had, ironically, been born in Australia, I commented, "She hasn't even been to Congo and she is Congolese!" Nyomanda agreed.

What was at stake in this conversation was more than just conflict over what to prepare for dinner. What concerned Nyomanda most about her child not consuming the foods that make Congolese people "strong" was that, in rejecting these, her daughter was rejecting being Congolese. It was as if Nyomanda's "Australian" daughter was risking familial alienation by rejecting the foods that formed the basis of Congolese identity and sense of being. A few weeks after confiding in me these frustrations, I came to visit

Nyomanda again and, after calling out through the house and not finding her there, eventually came upon her sitting on her knees in front of an almost empty garden bed. Beside her on a towel were laid out the deadened stalks of a plant I did not immediately recognize. When I asked Nyomanda what she was doing, she did not look up from her work but instead told me, angrily, "Every time they have died. Dead. Finish." She threw her hands up in exasperation. "Like everything in this country."

The dead plants that Nyomanda was pulling out of the ground were the remains of cassava plants that she had cultivated in the hopes of establishing a small crop. But the cassava had failed to thrive, eventually dying off under the temperate seasons of southeastern Australia. The loss was devastating to Nyomanda, but not just because the plants were not viable. The inability to grow this food, such a significant source of vitality for Congolese ways of being, was interpreted being symbolic of a broader problem of the perceived hostility of life in Australia: a frustrated sense of place-making that manifested not just in the garden but in other aspects of life. I was struck by the irony of witnessing Congolese refugees in precarious situations in Uganda expressing optimism in relation to their small but thriving gardens, compared to the seeming stability of Congolese refugees resettled in Australia expressing frustration and distress at their garden's failure to thrive, which Nyomanda at least took as a material metaphor for her own sense of alienation. At stake in these frustrated attempts to create a sense of place through gardening familiar plantfoods was not a physical dislocation but a deeper—and more distressing—sense of alienation from familiar ecologies. Being unable to grow familiar gardens produced an emotional state in women I worked with, like Nyomanda, akin to grieving. Sometimes a similar sense of lamentation accompanied how they described their "Australian" children, a kind of acknowledgment of changed place-making and irrevocable alienation from Congo.

As Nyomanda went on to tell me after pulling up the cassava husks from the garden, "Oh, it is hard here, that is all." Sighing defeatedly, she went on: "The life in Australia is very different. Here it is all about work, and school and job, and medicine, and house. Blah, blah, blah. Every day. There is no life."

"What do you mean by no life?" I asked Nyomanda.

Angrily, she gestured sweepingly to the houses of neighboring properties. "The people, living here. I do not even know these people."

I asked her, "In Congo, would you know your neighbors?" to which she responded, "Yes, of course. There, every day—*every day*—we are eating together. But here, no." Of course, Nyomanda was recalling a nostalgic frame of reference for everyday life in the DRC, a frame that effectively erases the sorts of tensions and disturbed ecologies that led her to have to leave.[6] But her nostalgia points to a sense of displacement that is more than just phys-

ical dislocation and ruptured social relationships. Nyomanda is expressing a sense of alienation that is experienced at an ecological scale, in that she is dislocated from the social and material contexts of everyday life that bring meaning and vitality to existence, in her view. Nyomanda then told me about how, when she first arrived in Australia, she had gone to knock on the doors of neighboring houses to introduce herself. Few had been home to respond to her knock; perhaps they had just not wanted to answer the door. Others had smiled at her and been kind, but never taken up the offer to visit. Nyomanda clearly felt an acute separation from a social ecology grounded in consubstantiality; of sharing food, particularly the plant foods that Congolese people value most.

Staring down the husks of the cassava between us, Nyomanda sighed and said, "Nothing is the same here."

But these were acute instances of alienation, moments of especially frustrated place-making that descended into outright feelings of failed connection to place. But these feelings of *dis*placement did not wholly define life in Australia for resettled refugees. At other times, women like Nyomanda lauded their "Australian" children, seeing their cultural hybridity as a source of pride. And, eventually, she and others were able to cultivate thriving gardens, just not necessarily containing the plants from Africa that they most cherished. Instead, they successfully grew beans, potatoes, and—thankfully—sweet potatoes; allowing them to eat freshly prepared *matembela*. The Congolese refugees I worked with in Australia eventually came to experience their gardens as a way to reconnect with a Congolese sense of being *and* a connection to the specific context of life in Australia, reflecting the similar meaning of farming described by Jean (2015) in relation to the place-making practices of refugees resettled in the United States. Becoming familiar with Australian ecologies was a platform of their emplacement.

Conclusion: Cumulation, Migration, and Scales of Place-Making

What Congolese refugees like Nyomanda experience as displacement is a deeply felt rupture within the ecologies that make it possible for vitality—material and social—to flourish. When analyzed from this lens of political ecology, which accounts for a co-constitutive relationship between political processes and ecological effects, it becomes possible to see the situations of forced migration that are experienced by Congolese people in the contemporary period in a more expansive frame: as instances of ruptures in the relationships between people and place that result in long afterlives of colonialism and its extractive impulses that have encompassed systemic forms of dislocation. I have shown how theorizing the materiality of migration at

an ecological scale can bring attention to these broader patterns and enable us to think more critically about normative frames of forced migration that are predominant in scholarly work.

What has emerged consistently throughout the fieldwork that I have conducted with displaced Congolese people—from those experiencing internal displacement to those in protracted refugee situations in Uganda, to those who have been resettled in Australia—is how essential the materiality of place is in shaping how they experience and understand what it means to be displaced—and, conversely, how it is possible to feel and create a sense of emplacement. People do not flee vague situations of rupture, whether these be conflict, war, political persecution, environmental damage, or general insecurity. Rather, they flee the material risks, volatilities, and disruptions to ways of living—and risks to the corporeal viability of life—that these situations produce. But they are also not defined by these. Indeed, the people I worked with were always attempting to remake a sense of place that would revitalize their Congolese sense of being-in-the-world wherever they ended up, and even in the most out-of-the-way places. For Congolese people, the most salient form of place-making I witnessed involved growing plants and preparing foods that were considered to be distinctly "Congolese." Plants, cooking, and sharing food had a consubstantive vitality for Congolese people that is only recognizable when analyzed from a lens of political ecology (Escobar 1999), seeing the intertwining of history and biology as comprising the broader context of place-making, and ultimately dis- and emplacement.

Most importantly, the diverse experiences of displacement and place-making that I have described in this chapter point to the need, as the editors of this volume similarly urge, to "think against singularity" when examining the lives of migrants—that is, to think about migrant trajectories outside of the binary of migrant origins and migrant destinations. What becomes clear from the perspectives of Congolese people I have gotten to know throughout my fieldwork is that they embody the cumulative arc of their migration experiences: they cannot be reduced to the historical context of their origin place, yet they do not enter into new spaces or nodes of life without the context and influence of the places they have left behind. This became most clear from the ways that people I worked with who saw themselves as indelibly Congolese by virtue of the material and social ecologies within which their early lives had been formed, yet they also saw the necessity of revitalizing these in new contexts of migration. In short, their sense of being was not static but cumulative. Here again, a political ecological lens is informative, since the mutuality of historicity and biology that political ecology foregrounds also parallels the cumulative basis of embodied place-making as I have described it in this chapter.

Recognizing migration as a cumulative process with no linear starting point or end point illuminates the contingent social, political, and historic context of place-making, which is not exclusive to migrants but which is a reality for all those whose relationship to place is threatened by various forms or patterns of ecological disturbance. Migration is a cumulative process, and displacements—historic and contemporary—are often undergirded by and produced through systems of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2003) that work to expropriate land and transform the viability of place from a site of social vitality to inert resource extraction. A political ecology view of migration and displacement illuminates these extractive global systems and situations of forced migration as not only linked but co-constitutive: as forms of "friction" (Tsing 2005) through which global asymmetries are illuminated and reinforced. The viability of places and the possibility of emplacement is not only mediated at the scale of individual migrants in the various places through which they pass through and dwell in, but is reflected in the need to transform the systemic forces of uprooting that produce displacements in the first place.

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NOTES

1. All names are pseudonyms selected by research participants to prevent them being identified.
2. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR]. The resettlement program is a UNHCR "durable solution" to protracted displacement, in which people living in a refugee situation with little chance of resolution apply to be resettled to a third country where they receive permanent refuge.
3. It should be noted that many scholars are also critical of the "resource wars"/"conflict minerals" narrative as the dominant driver of conflict in the eastern DRC, arguing that a direct link between mining and conflict is an oversimplification of a complex social, political, and economic issue (e.g., Smith 2021; Vogel and Raeymaekers 2016).
4. While I was working predominantly with people who had decided to move away from mining regions, it should be noted that towns and villages located near mining sites, even those under militia control, also attract migrants, who see the increase in economic activity as a livelihood opportunity, including some women who may move to participate in sex work (see Bashwira and van der Haar 2020) and men who may seek to work in the mining operations (see Smith 2021).

5. I discuss the specific insecurities of asylum in Uganda among the refugees I worked with in Ramsay (2019), which provides more insight into this disjuncture between Uganda's progressive "self-reliance" model of humanitarian care and the economic vulnerabilities that can nonetheless persist for refugees living there.
6. In contrast, refugees with whom I conducted fieldwork in Uganda were very hesitant to share food among their neighbors and highly suspicious of those who tried to invite others to share meals. While in Uganda there was certainly a more substantive sociality going on between neighbors and Congolese families living in proximity to one another, this did not extend to sharing food. I detail these situations in Ramsay (2016).

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AFTERWORD

About Etchings, Place Acrobatics, and Spatial Fixes

Rethinking the Relationship between Place, Marginality, and Mobility

Annika Lems

On a windy and treeless ridge in the Austrian Nock Mountains, at an elevation of about two thousand meters, a strange monument towers over lake Millstatt and its surrounding villages. Made up of thousands of stones collected from the surrounding environment, the pyramid-shaped sculpture can be seen from miles away. Locals have named it *Stana Mandl* (stony little man). In the summer months, when the snow has melted, hundreds of tourists and day hikers climb the steep and winding path leading up to the mountain ridge and toward the highest point, the Kamplnock. Every now and then hikers stop by the stony man sculpture to catch their breath before continuing on to the peak. Besides these occasional visits, however, the place is deserted. No plaque or signpost explains the presence of this odd monument. It is located in a place so remote that one cannot but wonder who on earth has gone into the effort of creating something so visibly present there.

As a teenager, I often asked myself this question. Growing up in one of the mountain villages close by, I renamed the figure *einsames Mandl* (solitary little man). For me the presence of the stony man monument on top of the deserted mountain ridge was a signifier of the remoteness of the area at

large. The region I grew up in is often typified as a rural outpost, a backwater place that never quite managed to adjust to the demands of a cosmopolitan world order. It is what this book's editors so poignantly describe as an "out-of-the-way" place (Drotbohm and Winters in the introduction). It is a place that is not just geographically removed from the urban centers of power but has, over the centuries, been ascribed a position of being politically, culturally, and ideologically "out-of-the-way."

When I left my small village of five hundred inhabitants to study anthropology in Vienna, I was confronted with the social consequences of being from a place that is labeled remote or, indeed, left behind. When fellow students detected my Carinthian accent, I often received pitying looks. These expressions of disapproval were followed by the remark that I must be one more Carinthian in exile (*Exilkärntnerin*), a commonly used phrase in Austria to describe people who have migrated from rural Carinthia to urban centers. It is based on the assumption that any broad-minded person must have the urge to escape the boredom and narrow-mindedness of the Nock Mountains in exchange for the openness and excitement marking life in the city. In the public Austrian imagination, Carinthia's social landscape is characterized by a small-town and backward mentality, a worldview fed by the place's supposed geographical and cultural isolation. In media commentary, cartoons, and comedies the figure of the slow, left-behind, and reactionary Carinthian is widespread—a pathetic country bumpkin who clings to antiquated ideas about place and belonging that the rest of the world has moved on from ages ago.

I have long struggled with the weight of these ascriptions. While the decision I took several years ago to return to the Nock Mountains and embark on an anthropology at/of home has enabled me to critically interrogate the ways ideas of remoteness are actively produced and reproduced, I have never been able to completely rid myself of the "place stigma" (Brigden in this volume) attached to my home region. While I can clearly see that centuries of being belittled, ridiculed, or simply overlooked by political and cultural elites has created an oppositional stance toward city people in the inhabitants of rural Carinthian mountain villages, I struggle to empathize with the social and political effects of this stubbornness. It has led to widespread support for right-wing parties and to the adoption of static, exclusionary ideas of belonging to place. Fed by racialized narratives about tradition and identity, many inhabitants of my home village are convinced that theirs is one of the last "authentic" places of Austrianness. This authenticity is based on the idea that the land they live on has always belonged to them, an indigeneity that is now believed to be under threat by the influx of foreign people and ideas. Given the prevalence of portrayals that inscribe Carinthia with a sense of sociocultural stasis—both through the trope of backward-

ness deployed by city dwellers and through the narratives of authenticity circulating among the local population—it is not an easy task to develop a new, critical lens, able to pierce through these powerful imaginaries.

Social reality is, of course, much more complex, layered, and fragile than any of the ascriptions and discourses surrounding out-of-the-way places such as my home village. The stony man sculpture is a powerful visual reminder of this. Throughout my fieldwork, the stony man kept surfacing in people's stories as the remnant of a peasant past marked by hardship, exploitation, and serfdom. Rather than reveling in an idyllic past of static and authentic belonging, the monument opened the window to a different, much more mobile understanding of out-of-the-way places and the people inhabiting them. I learned that the monument had been erected by workers of the garnet quarry in the Lucknergraben, a valley close by. In the nineteenth century the garnets from this area were highly sought after by Bohemian jewel cutters, who turned them into valuable gemstones. Because of their deep red color, inhabitants of the Nock Mountains call these stones "blood drops" (*Blutstropfen*). As the mines were located in a remote, unpopulated rift, the workers had to walk long distances across the mountains to get to their workplace. They often had to deal with dangerous weather conditions, wading through deep snow or seeking refuge from summer storms. To create a signpost that would help comrades find their way, the workers walking past there erected the stony man sculpture. They did not do so in one go. It evolved bit by bit, with the workers adding a few new stones every time they crossed the ridge. The "stone carvers" came from all walks of life. While some stemmed from the surrounding mountain villages, others came from faraway valleys and countries. In people's stories they appear as nameless "*Kanaltaler*" (people from the Val Canale in Italy), "*Laibacher*" (Slovenians) or "South Tyroleans"—poor and adventurous young men who flocked to the Nock Mountains in search of a better life. Many of them settled down in the area, founded families, and eventually became part of the communities. While the stories of these migrants have largely been erased from collective memory, they have carved their presence into the landscape through the stony man. They have, to use Wendy Vogt's powerful metaphor, "etched" themselves into place, turning the sculpture into an archive of the stories each stone has to tell about the man who carried it up the ridge almost two centuries ago and placed it in a carefully balanced equilibrium.

The stony man sculpture harbors a different historical perspective of my home village and its supposed out-of-the-wayness. It allows for stories to emerge that do not picture the Carinthian mountains as geographical and cultural barriers but as crucial nodal points, as gateways for mobility and cross-border exchange. It is often via the presence of the stony man that people tell me stories that unsettle dominant depictions of my home village

as a static place of ethnic uniformity or backwardness. Consider the story Walter, a man in his eighties, told me one afternoon as he took me on a tour through his vegetable garden. He had spent the past six months portraying himself to me as a "true local," often complaining about newcomers disturbing the historically entrenched relationship between locals and the land. This afternoon, this static portrayal of the place and his own position within it started to sway. As I reported what I had learned about the stony man sculpture's history, Walter acknowledged the imprints migrant workers had left on the community by explaining to me why so many people in the village carried Italian family names. He also pointed out names that had originally been Italian or Slovenian but, over time, had become Germanized. The villagers carrying these family names were the descendants of people who had crossed cultural and geographical boundaries to settle down in this area. In Walter's stories a picture emerged of the village as a continuously moving web of sociocultural relations, of a place that, at times, had been a highway for migrant mobilities. Tales about the quarry workers led to stories about women who had migrated to the village from faraway mountain valleys to work as maids, farm hands, or cooks. Gauging my interest in these mobile histories, Walter delved deeper and deeper into his repository of stories, eventually reaching into his own life story. He revealed that his parents were not born and bred in the region but had migrated there from Slovenia. The ensuing stories about their struggle to become accustomed to the new place, learn a new language, and establish an economic foothold created a more complicated picture of his own emplacement in the village. Rather than confirming static ideas of home and localness, it infused the entire place and the people inhabiting it with movement.

The stony man, far from being a signifier of loneliness and isolation, encapsulates all these stories about movements and encounters. It stores the mobile history of a so-called out-of-the-way place, making visible that it is and has always been connected to the rhythms and movements of the rest of the world. The monument is also testament to the relationships emerging along mobility pathways. A product of collaborative efforts by local and migrant workers, it shows how social landscapes are literally set in motion.

Anthropological Waymarks

Similar to the stony man monument, I see this book as an important anthropological signpost, an epistemological waymark amid an academic landscape that, over the last decades, has largely overlooked the role of marginal or transitory places in global transformation processes. Ideas of movement,

speed, and cosmopolitanism have mainly been written into the domain of the metropolis (Herzfeld 2015: 239; MacClancy 2015: 2), but this book allows us to see otherwise. It helps us see the multilayered, complex, and often deeply ambiguous social relationships that emerge in places labeled as transient or marginal. Like the stony man monument, the book can be described as an archive of the often-overlooked stories, histories, and experiences of movement and interconnection making up such out-of-the-way places. It brings to the fore the twofold role of movement in their everyday (re-)shaping: the marks that passersby leave on places and the people inhabiting them, as well as the ways the presence of migrants—however fleeting—manages to destabilize static and simplistic understandings of place. In tracing the materiality and sociality of places that are marked by fluidity and precariousness, the book demonstrates that migratory movements do not occur in a spatial lacuna. They are inextricably linked to the historical, social, and material particularity of the places that migrants move through.

Even though some of the places the book focuses on are located in relative distance to urban centers of power, their sense of remoteness is not defined by geographical coordinates. The out-of-the-wayness of the places represented in the chapters is actively produced through their social, historical, or political marginalization vis-à-vis domains of power and influence. A refugee hostel in an eastern German town, a migrant shelter in Oaxaca, a bus station in Accra, a hopelessly overfilled refugee vessel, a gym in a fenced-in (and -out) El Salvadorian neighborhood, a tiny vegetable patch amid Kampala's densely built-up suburbs, a migrant vendor on a street in Rome, an asylum courtroom—the places the book zooms in on are marked by a sense of temporariness, edginess, and nervousness. Like the stony man monument, they are often not places at which people choose to be. Rather, they can be described as thresholds, as in-between places, which bear the promise of catapulting the people occupying them someplace else. By taking the particularity of such threshold—or, as the editors put it, "along-the-way" (Drotbohm and Winters, introduction to this volume)—places seriously, the chapters make visible the "sociabilities of emplacement" (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2016: 21) they can give rise to, as well as the many dead ends they can create for newcomers who are excluded, stigmatized, or pushed out-of-the-way even further. In keeping the focus on people's everyday engagements with place, the book highlights that the social ties created in such an environment can be deeply unstable. At best, the relationships formed there can be a source of communality and solidarity. At worst, however, these relationships can be marked by friction, distrust, and hostility, thereby exacerbating migrants' precarious emplacements.

Creating anthropological waymarks that allow us to see these complex dynamics is not an easy undertaking. It involves a conscious act of "unlearn-

ing" dominant ideas about mobility and place that have marked anthropological debates since the 1990s. As Schapendonk and Davids point out in their chapter, to be able to take notice and make sense of the interplay between mobility and place in an academic environment that has treated them as oppositional conceptual entities for so long necessitates a large degree of epistemological and theoretical flexibility. After more than two decades of theoretical fixation on global interconnectivity, hypermobility, and social fluidity, it has become increasingly difficult to locate the transient character of social life, to literally see it *taking place* somewhere. While mobility is commonly conceptualized in terms of excitement, progress, and acceleration, place has come to be associated with boredom, uniformity, and stasis. It has opened up an analytical fissure between place and mobility that has been so consequential that it has become incredibly difficult to think beyond it.

This analytical opposition has been the result of two interconnected developments. On the one hand, it is linked to the mobile turn that swept through the humanities and social sciences from the early 2000s with great force, leading to a focus on the inherently mobile character of social life (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006). It has led to a fascination with fluid, dynamic, and instable ways of life, epitomized in the important epistemological role the figure of the migrant has come to occupy in anthropological research and writing. But the relative absence of place in mobility research can also be linked to wider processes of postcolonial reckoning, resulting in a skeptical view of place-based prisms. Propelled by critiques of the colonial ordering of knowledge systems, anthropologists came to question the ways they had fixated the people they studied in "authentic," "native," or "traditional" places, turning them into prisoners of bounded, static, and immovable identities (Appadurai 1988: 37). As a result of these debates, scholars began to question the spatial politics marking ethnographic fieldwork and let movement become an intrinsic part of their self-understanding (Malkki 1995; Gupta and Ferguson 1997). This step was of crucial importance for the decolonization of anthropological knowledge production. However, as I have pointed out in more detail elsewhere (Lems 2018), these efforts of de-essentializing place by bringing movement into the picture did not lead to more complex readings of the links between place and mobility. Instead, place nearly receded from anthropological view altogether. Rather than thinking of mobile people as moving through historically, socially, and politically specific places, they came to be conceptualized as "space travelers" (Lems 2018: 14)—as hypermobile subjects moving through boundless, fluid, and open-ended space. Wary of the racist, exclusionary, and colonial historical baggage attached to place-based frameworks, anthropologists (and scholars from other disciplines) opted to focus on movement in and of itself.

The mobile turn has brought about important theoretical advancements in anthropology and the social sciences. It has allowed anthropologists to move beyond simplistic understandings of belonging, tradition, and authenticity, instead foregrounding the complex globally entwined transformation processes that constantly reshape people's sense of who they are. It has also enabled anthropologists to question their own role in the production of knowledge and highlight how people come to be labeled as different, exotic, or other. Yet, as important as the critiques of the place-centrism and stasis marking classical anthropological texts were for the discipline, they had the side effect of creating a conceptual divide between mobility and place. This divide is not a new or overlooked theoretical impasse. It has been noticed and commented on by many mobilities scholars, including key proponents of the new mobilities paradigm (e.g., Creswell 2006; Sheller 2014; Sheller and Urry 2016). In this vein, David Bissell (2007: 278) stressed that a one-dimensional focus on mobility often reproduces productivist models of subjectivity, whereby speed and acceleration are presented as ultimately positive attributes. This creates an opposition between "productive" modes of being marked by mobility and "unproductive" modes, which are marked by stasis. He noted that in many contemporary social science texts it appears "somehow 'better,' culturally, economically or politically, to be mobile than immobile" (Bissell 2007: 279). As a result, being immobile and in situ has come to be treated as a form of being left behind in a world marked by speed and accelerated change (Xiang 2007). Other scholars have noted the obsession with "flow speak" (Bude and Dürrschmidt 2010: 482) provoked by the mobile turn, called for a more nuanced understanding of people's balancing acts between mobilities and moorings (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006: 2), or urged for a political economy approach to transnational movements in order to capture the "regimes of mobility" (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) that enable the mobility pathways of some while violently blocking those of others. Yet, even though these critiques have marked the field of mobilities research from early on, they have not managed to undo the conceptual divide between mobility and place. The absence of place in mobilities research does not just make visible the dominant role mobile tropes have come to occupy in social theory. It illustrates the grave difficulty to think beyond modern analytical categories in which movement, acceleration, and progress lie at the very heart of the world as we know it (Savransky and Lundy 2022).

In recent years, however, the scattered critical remarks and periodically reappearing doubts about academic mobile imaginaries have started to accumulate and gain momentum, growing into a recognizable sense of unease among anthropologists and mobilities scholars. This is expressed in ongoing engagements with the racialized inscriptions accompanying the

academic production of knowledge about "key figures of mobility" (Salazar 2017), such as migrants or refugees (Ramsay and Cabot 2021; Dahinden 2017). This sense of unease also finds expression in the increased scholarly interest in people whose everyday lives are not marked by speed, excitement, and dynamism but by boredom, stuckedness, and existential vertigo (Knight 2021; Salazar 2021; Bachelet 2019; O'Neill 2017). Leading on from feminist and intersectional critiques (e.g., Conlon 2011; Sheller 2015), the field of mobilities studies has come to redefine itself as one of im/mobility studies, thereby making visible the tension between movement and entrapment characterizing our time. Three decades after the de-essentialization of place became a prominent feature in the theorization of migratory movements, a growing chorus of scholars now stress that it is high time that mobile concepts and categories are subjected to the same level of critical scrutiny. They question the uncritical (re)production of mobile figures such as the migrant or refugee, arguing that they might have allowed migration scholars to move their research beyond the village and into boundless global space. However, it has (yet again) led to forms of othering and exoticization and to the incarceration of groups and people labeled "mobile" into (racialized) identities, such as "migrant" or "refugee" (Ramsay 2020).

This book is situated in the midst of this buildup of unease. Its editors and authors are deeply critical of the divide between mobility and place that has been the side effect of a one-dimensional focus on mobility in terms of progress and forward movement. They make visible the tensions between movement and stasis inherent in their interlocutors' struggles and experiences of out-of-the-way places. While recognizing the importance of displacements in a world marked by global inequalities, they question the conceptualization of mobility as a one-way street that only affects (racialized) migrant bodies. Building on recent critical ethnographic research that highlights the dispossession, disempowerment, and marginalization that affects the lives of both migrants and non-migrants (Çaglar and Glick Schiller 2018; Ramsay 2021), the authors look for the social relations that can be found in the nooks and crannies of globalized capitalist societies. Far from being inconsequential or parochial, these nooks and crannies turn out to be fruitful empirical and epistemological points of departure. The conscious decision to start their work of theorization from a peripheral perspective (see Drotbohm and Winters, introduction to this volume) allows the authors to disentangle hardened mobility biases, thereby creating a new analytical repertoire to assess the relationship between mobility, immobility, and place(-making). I therefore see every single chapter as a waymark directing the reader beyond well-trodden theoretical paths. Like the stony man sculpture, they unearth stories and experiences that require effort on

the side of the ethnographer in order not to be overlooked or overheard. Taken together, the waymarks scattered throughout this book point the direction to a theoretical horizon in which emplacement and mobility no longer contradict each other but constitute and, indeed, condition each other.

Theoretical Horizons

This book shows that, when approached from a peripheral perspective, new and unexpected dimensions of social life in a globalized world order come into view. In what follows, I want to draw out some of the most inspiring, interesting, and innovative waymarks I have found along the way.

One such waymark is the relationship between place, mobility, and temporality. A recurring theme in many of the chapters is the stubborn refusal of marginal places and the people occupying them to be relegated to positions of insignificance. This is powerfully captured in the efforts people invest into bestowing transitory places with meaning, to carve, or "etch" (Vogt in this volume) their presence into place. The two chapters focusing on migrant shelters bring to the surface the crucial role of temporality in such stubborn acts of place-making. In Eichner's case, it is the conscious attempts by shelter staff to give a history to a rundown and unattractive place designed to be a short-term solution for young asylum seekers. By decorating the walls with the handprints and names of former residents, by documenting the activities taking place there, and by creating an annual event commemorating the opening of the shelter, the staff try to establish a sense of temporal continuity. In giving the shelter a history, the workers do not just refuse to accept the place's out-of-the-wayness. They also refuse to forget the stories of the people who have passed through there, instead valuing them as building blocks of the shelter's story and identity. Vogt introduces the metaphor of "etching" to capture the dynamics whereby out-of-the-way places and the people occupying them refuse to be disappeared. By starting from the decidedly place-based angle of a shelter housing Central American migrants on their way to someplace else, she highlights the social connections, memories, and stories that stick around, even if the people who brought them there have long since left. In this reading, the material and story traces left behind in migrant shelters (such as the hands of former residents decorating the walls of the German refugee shelter) are not insignificant. They carve the presence of people who found themselves there along-the-way into place, thereby turning transitory landscapes into repositories of accumulated knowledge and experience.

Another waymark the book creates is to treat place-making as an intersubjective effort. Rather than solely focusing on mobile figures such as

the migrant, they take into account all the actors occupying out-of-the-way places and the ways they interact with one another, thereby shaping the place's ever-shifting identity. The authors are careful not to fall into the epistemological trap of equating intersubjectivity with harmonious and conflict-free relations. They show that place-making can involve acts of solidarity and collaboration but that it can also be steeped in conflict, hostility, and exclusion. In Gutiérrez Rivera's chapter, the relationships forged between asylum seekers and their legal advocates are fragile. While the lawyers' work is motivated by a sense of solidarity with their clients, they have to work within the constraints of a migration regime that requires them to fix mobile people into particular identities through "strategic acts of place-making." As is also visible in Eichner's chapter, such fragile relationships can simultaneously engender two seemingly counterintuitive moves. On the one hand, the social bonds formed in transitory places can function as a springboard to emplacement. On the other hand, they can be experienced as forms of restraint, propelling migrants to rebel against the straitjacket of identity they are forced into by engaging in acts of spatial disobedience. Stasik's ethnography of a bus station in Accra is a remarkable example of how the sociabilities emerging in a transitory place can act as door openers for emplacement. The interactions he details between newcomers and long-term occupants show how important intersubjective dynamics are in people's place-making efforts. The social ties established in a place as fleeting as a bus station create spatial, material, and social coordinates that allow newcomers to find their way in unknown territory and eventually build a life for themselves. Similarly, Brigden's chapter shows how the residents of a heavily stigmatized neighborhood work together to create a place of respite, a place they co-own. At the same time, the example of the gym is also an important reminder that the relationships forged in out-of-the-way places should not be romanticized as harmonious or equal. Rather, marginalized places are often occupied by marginalized people—a marginalization that is produced along gendered, classed, and racialized social coordinates. It creates unequal relationships to place: while some people can navigate places effortlessly, others are confronted by roadblocks that keep them from laying a claim on them.

Building on this thought, another important waymark emerges: the political economy of place-making in transitory environments. Many authors approach this question by shedding light on their own emplacements within the transitory social landscapes they study. By making her own presence in the Romero community and in the gym a subject of investigation, Brigden shows how important it is not to overlook the ways structural racism and disempowerment affect the places anthropologists declare to be their field sites. It means that the opportunities for place-making in transitory places

are not distributed equally, just as the opportunities for movement or for staying put are not the same. To make the political fault lines of out-of-the-way places visible in our writing, Brigden suggests that it is necessary to continuously "trespass across writing *about* place-making and writing *in* place" (Brigden in this volume). As Schapendonk and Davids show in their chapter, this heightened sensitivity can appear in the form of an uneasiness or impotence in the face of the systemic injustices marking contemporary regimes of im/mobility. It creates radically uneven place experiences, for while anthropologists of mobility occupy a position of privilege and can navigate the places they study with relative ease, the people they work with often have to invest an enormous amount of energy and skill to overcome the legal and social hurdles that are put in their way. Schapendonk and Davids therefore argue that it is important to make visible the distinct experiences ethnographers have of places compared to the people they encounter because of the different positions they occupy in regimes of im/mobility. Ramsay's unsettling discovery that components of the mobile phone with which she recorded an interview with Congolese refugees had been sourced from the area they were displaced from is a poignant example of the layers of displacement anthropologists might find if they take the political economy of place seriously. It also makes visible the unequal terms migrants' movements and halts are based on, thereby echoing feminist debates about who has the capacity to become mobile or stay put and at whose expense (Ong 1999).

An important fourth waymark is the historical and political production of out-of-the-way places and people. In this vein, Ramsay's chapter shows that the out-of-the-wayness of the people who find themselves in transitory places such as migrant shelters or refugee camps is not inevitable. Rather, their displacements are often the predictable outcomes of capitalist modes of extraction, which consciously produce marginalized people and places. She makes the important observation that it is paramount to acknowledge the politically and historically charged nature of both mobility and place: while we need to capture the existential importance of place attachment in mobile people's lives, it is equally important not to overlook the fact that their movements are often not the outcome of a human urge for freedom or boundless mobility but of historically entrenched patterns of dispossession. This is also echoed in Missbach and Hoffstaedter's chapter. They show that some of the places refugees get pushed into are so out-of-the-way that they do not allow for place-making to occur. By confining Rohingya and Vietnamese refugees to boats for long stretches of time, making it impossible for them to disembark, they are confronted with a consciously created situation of strandedness or out-of-the-wayness. The "non-places" refugees are banned into disallow the creation of social ties, making it impossible for any form of place-making to occur.

The key theoretical insight I take away from this book is that we should no longer look at places in opposition to mobility, or to use Schapendonk and David's words, that we need to move from a "mobility-*versus*-place" lens to a "mobility-*with*-place" lens. The example of Abdoulah, the street vendor in Rome, whose presence was vehemently questioned by a local waiter shows that the "place acrobatics" (Schapendonk and Davids, this volume) occurring in the places migrants and refugees move through should by no means be romanticized. In a political landscape marked by the rise of right-wing parties and nativist ideas, migrants increasingly are confronted with the hostile reactions of people who declare themselves to be the sole owners of the place. To navigate such vexed relationships, migrants are often forced to engage in place acrobatics rather than choosing to become involved. By looking into the nooks and crannies of a globalized world order, the book reveals that the relationships people form with marginalized places do not occur through grand gestures or transformative actions. They appear in the form of everyday acts of repair—through spatial "fixes" (Ramsay in this volume) that create small moments of respite. Mama Patrick's attempt to grow a vegetable garden amid the alienating surroundings of urban Kampala is one example of how people attempt to fix their relationship to place. The utilization of the gym membership card as a local passport facilitating the movements of people whose mobility is stigmatized as dangerous or unruly, is another one. In doing so, gym members attempt to repair a system directed against them.

None of the spatial fixes presented in the book appear as ultimate solutions to a world marked by histories of structural inequality and dispossession. Yet I believe that we need to cherish them. Like the workers who assembled the stony man statue in my home village two centuries ago, these spatial fixes show the steps people take to repair the out-of-the-wayness of their situation. In doing so, they put to the test hardened academic stereotypes that relegate mobile people to a position of marginality and that treat certain places as peripheral.

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