The same bird was not announced dead. For it to become permissible to eat, it is to be slain in the future.

To this day, in the camp the word "origin" is used as a tense. In those distant and near origins, time pronounces its face in the absence of a body.

It is the camp that makes Palestine near. When we say the camp, we say what it is that is not a camp.

To become a camp is to come and become simultaneously.

In poetry, the wound is continuously postponed.

28

Poem for the One Who Has Just Arrived

Bhanu Kapil

Write a sentence on a windowsill
with your fingertip,
articulating dust.

Is it raining in a book
you haven't written yet?

Write a sentence
on the glass,
in January, when the heat
in the room
combines with your breath
to make steam.

Are you waiting
for someone?

With your back
to the camera,

write a sentence in pencil
on the table,
so lightly
it doesn't leave a mark.

There's no book.
Now it's June.

Write a sentence
on the stem
of the lime-pink reed
poking up
from the fountain.

Who is this writing
for?

A light blue line
in an exercise book
belonging to a child
resembles a vein,
stabilizes script.

Keep writing.
Stop.

Write a sentence
on your arm, your leg,
your torso,
the sole of your foot
with a borrowed pen.

Then hold the page up
to the light.

As if the sun
has a memory
of you.

And not the other way around.

29

Mishearing: A Traversal

Amit Chaudhuri in conversation with Subha Mukherji

SUBHA MUKHERJI: Amit, as I've thought of "sound crossings" in the context of migrant forms, your "Misheard Tunes" have repeatedly come to my mind and reverberated. Tell me: what's the idea behind this project?

AMIT CHAUDHURI: The project on "mishearing" comes out of a series of fitful reroutings in my musical life, turns which I would never have predicted. It also comes out of growing up in metropolitan Mumbai in the 1960s and '70s, and, of course, travelling to England, which made me aware again of so many things without me being aware that I was becoming aware, including the English language itself.

SM: Would you say that your musical and linguistic or literary turns are parts of the same imaginative movement?

AC: Yes! I've written about this in my novel *Odysseus Abroad* (2014), where the main character, a young Bengali student, looks at Shakespeare's "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" again when he is in London, especially the words "summer" and "fair," which had no meaning for him earlier, any more than the

justice of "temperate" did. Alongside language, I began to think about musical reroutings too. My mother was a great singer of the modern Bengali art song — songs by Tagore, Atulprasad, and Nazrul. I had heard her ever since I was a child, but I had no interest in Indian music then. However, I was drawn to the songs of a film called *Sangam* when I was three. By the time I was six or seven, we acquired a hi-fi and a couple of LPs which included *The Best of The Who,* through which I got into pop and rock music. That consumed me. Ma tried to teach me Tagore songs: I would sit and learn, and then run away.

In the '70s I developed an interest in American folk music, and in the singer-songwriter as a model: not so much Bob Dylan as Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, and James Taylor. Around the age of sixteen, I began to compose songs on the guitar and broadcast these on the radio as well. At that time, however, I also became interested in Hindustani classical music. So when I had just got into Junior College, my mother began to be taught *bhajans* and *ghazals* by a new teacher, Govind Prasad Jaipurwale. Listening to him, I was very struck by the way he could modulate his voice to do various things. He could — in what we call improvisation — add and change a phrase. The same phrase would be sung, but the next time he sang it in a slightly different kind of way. Around the same time, I also began to listen to *raag*-based songs (or "raga," the term used in the West), making discoveries. I continued to play the guitar, compose, and sing, on my quest to be a Canadian singer-songwriter! But this other thing was taking over, and with it an almost religious vision of Hindustani classical music as somehow being connected to my universe in a way that Neil Young, say, wasn't. This was accentuated by my discovery of Indian music's peculiar relationship to the universe in the sense that raags are sung at particular times of day and during particular seasons. That made me think of this music and its relation to the sounds and the times of day that I had experienced as a child, and later, as a young man, in the twenty-fifth-story flat in Maker Towers in Mumbai.

I rethought and rearticulated these experiences in a different way in the light of my discovery of the *raag*. And I began to

gradually give up the guitar. At Junior College, I planned, instead, to do A-levels in order to go to England and develop my career in poetry. In fact, I gave most of my time to Hindustani classical music *riyaaz* (practice) and stopped socializing. My only friends were the family that taught me music, who played the tabla and the harmonium, and my parents — till 1983 when I went off to England.

By then, I had begun to shed my records — selling some of my rock collection. When I arrived in London, the rock phase was over in the world, or seemed to be, as was the singer-songwriter phase. A new kind of music had come into being in the 1980s, one that I felt no connection with; the same with disco. Instead, I got deeper and deeper into Hindustani classical music. From 1983 to almost 1999 when we officially came back to India, I didn't listen to Western music at all. My daughter Radha, born in '99, was about six months old when I decided to investigate my old record collection, because by this time I had lost that earlier zeal of the convert. Another thing I did was buy a cassette of Jimi Hendrix's posthumously released blues collection. I remember sitting and listening to this cassette and realizing something obvious which I had never realized before: that the blues is a five-note or pentatonic scale which is identical to certain well-known raags. The other thing is that the blues guitarist employs "bent" notes: instead of going from one string to the other down the fret, which is what classical guitar is all about, the rock or blues guitarist sometimes pulls the string sideways to create that *meend* (or glide).

SM: Can you tell me more about these "bent" notes?

AC: So you can produce a kind of slightly anodyne version of the glissando by going up the fret. But a far more expressive way of moving from one note to another — a neighboring note — is by creating a bent note and pulling the string. Sitar players have developed the technique after Vilayat Khan, who was pulling the string to an incredible degree of complexity to produce the embellishments of the voice on the instrument, stretching one

note into other notes. The bent notes produced by Hendrix cannot do what the sitar has achieved in Indian classical music, in keeping the example of the human voice. The guitar is not equipped for that. However, it produces some bent notes, and those bent notes reminded me of the meend. As I was listening to that, I began to hear one thing in another. A week or two later, I was singing this raag which I sang right now, and some of the notes I was singing reminded me of the riff to "Layla" by Derek and the Dominoes, Eric Clapton's 1970 band; I heard the overlap because I'd been listening in that new way. And I must have been listening in that new way because I'd had such distance from that music which I'd once grown up with.

SM: That's the distance where metaphor is born. And without that distance, there can't be a crossing, right? Can you tell me a bit about sound crossings in your music — the music you hear and the music you make? What knowledges and memories play into it? And what *forms* are forged in this interspace?

AC: A particular space in which two different musical sounds and musical systems come together unexpectedly: that spatial continuum is what I find generative. A kind of simultaneity that exists in a present moment, a specific temporality, but one which also involves a sense of the spatial. An encounter rather than a recollection; an act of coming upon — like the old man in Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries,* stumbling upon his past self. A space and a moment where I began to see similarities and possibilities which could not be researched or looked for through an act of the will.

SM: Would you say this music is more found than made?

AC: Yes, it is found, which is why I call my second CD *Found Music.* So many things happened when I moved back to Calcutta in '99. I'd had enough of Margaret Thatcher's and Tony Blair's England. And I thought: there is nothing for me here, I want to go back to somewhere where, even if it's a backwater, there are

some discoveries for me to make. Then I also felt the huge constraint of being a novelist, and being known as a novelist. This is an extremely artificial paradigm created by the market, where one declares oneself a novelist by producing novels periodically, and I wanted to break out of that. I began to write short stories and essays. On some level I must have opened myself to the idea of formal experimentation, of being released from the very professionalized constraints that had been imposed on artists. The free market seemed to want to weed out the untidiness of creativity, the unpredictability of it, the way it is often governed by chance.

SM: That's another question I wanted to ask: what role is played by chance in these mishearings? There seems to be a quality of unplanned happening about them. When you first became aware of this as a concept — as you say — while not being aware of it, did it strike you as something you could control in some way? Or do you just stay open and let it happen to you?

AC: As I began to create the repertoire, I became aware of the potential for rediscovering and reusing found material (though I was blissfully unaware of the term "found object"). Around 2004 I began to meet with musicians in Calcutta to put together something, and I began to explain to them what I had in mind. Of course, what I had in mind at the beginning was hearing Eric Clapton's "Layla" riff in the raag "Todi," and how that became the basis of a composition. But then the second mishearing happened in the foyer of the then new ITC Sonar Bangla. Emerging into the lobby where the *santoor* (a Kashmiri musical instrument) was playing as it often does in hotel lobbies, it seemed to me suddenly that the santoor had begun to play "Auld Lang Syne." Now that happened because the santoor was playing a folk major pentatonic, found in raags "Bhopali" and "Pahari"; and "Auld Lang Syne" is based on the same structure.

SM: Are these heard affinities about discovering a pattern which already existed, or about accident?

AC: Accident and chance and found material became very important to me, beginning with "Layla" and "Auld Lang Syne." "Summertime" came into existence because I could hear raag "Malkauns" in it and I told my accompanying musicians that this is how I wanted to structure it. Then one day I was walking on Park Street and I began to hear the theme to All India Radio but played in a different raag in my head. And I thought, I would like this to be heard in a jazz context where I can improvise on this theme tune.…

SM: You became aware of this possibility, but you were also aware that all you can do is be receptive: it had to come to you. You can't do a misheard song by commission, can you? But did it induce a different attention or attunement, did it change you as an artist or in the way you hear things? Is there a conceptual connection between your musical migrations and the way your imagination works as a writer?

AC: It brought out things in me as an artist which were latent. One of them is that creativity and thinking are not two different things: the imagination and the critical faculty are the same thing in many different ways.

SM: Do we mishear in the same way as we misread? Is there something specific, or maybe somatic, about mishearing that sets it apart? We all read with an intertextual awareness, but somehow we don't necessarily do that with music. Do you think that there's a kind of influence one way or the other? Because you've just said that the two are not separate things and yet there seems to be something quite specific and minute about the act of mishearing which seems new in a way that making connections between writers doesn't.

AC: I realized that receptivity was always important to me, as was listening. I'm a writer of non-narrative fiction, which is a paradox, and I look to a form of receptivity which allows one to find excitement in the unnoticed. That creates an energy una-

vailable in narrative. For me narrative is dead, it's a synonym for a static construct. And it's only what is on the edge of narrative that, for me, is exciting. Listening is similar, and in India we're listening all the time … which means that our worlds are only very partially visible. The ear is registering what is invisible and its ongoing transactions all the time. I realized this especially, again, after being in a closed space in England where the lifting up of the window was a letting in of something else. Coming to India after living in that kind of space, I found that to be conscious is also to be distracted.

SM: So it's partly about capturing the poetic life of distraction! But also about the role of an amphibian life — living in, or between, two places — in this kind of receptivity. Would you say that having lived and worked in the UK as well as in India, across different phases of your life, is also a vital crossing that enables the attunement you need to mishear creatively?

AC: I doubt that the "moment of mishearing" would have occurred had I not spent all those years in England during which I deliberately proscribed the music of my childhood and early teens (rock, pop, and American folk), dwelling only in the music I discovered from when I was sixteen years old (Hindustani classical, Tagore songs sung by my mother and Subinoy Roy, S.D. Burman's early recordings of Bengali *raagpradhan* or raag-dominant compositions, and Hindi film songs from the 1950s to the 1970s). There are many answers to your question, but this is the simplest one.

SM: I was asking you earlier about the relation between your literary reading and writing, and your musical mishearing. Do we mishear in the same way we misread?

AC: What I'm increasingly aware of is my interest in the blurring of the boundary between life and its representation — I discuss this in my seventh novel, *Friend of My Youth* (2017). This has always been of interest to me both in writing and in

art, and especially in music. The *khayal,* in that it's not *about* a time of day (like morning or evening) or *about* a season (like spring), but *of* the day and *of* a season, dismantles whatever it is that separates an artifact from day-to-day existing. Our day and year and their specific periods (and, therefore, by extension, our life) is part of the raag's text rather than being exterior to it; that is, the time of day is not an *object* of representation as far as the raag is concerned. My inability to distinguish between "East" and "West," musical and non-musical sounds (I misheard the tune of a Vengaboys song in the tonal registers of a homeless person selling a newspaper in Berlin, resulting in the song "Motz"), means that, for me, the distinction between art and life is constantly becoming irrelevant. When you have narrative, you have a clearer sense of formal demarcation between what's represented and the representation itself. This is what I realize I have all along been questioning. Music from the Hindustani tradition taught me that music need not be mimetic, and that writing is not about life but a form of living.

SM: With the blurring of this distinction, does mishearing offer an alternative episteme? In our project, we've been thinking of the migrancy of knowledge, migrant knowledge, and the knowledge that migrants bring. Migrancy seems to us to be at the heart of the perceptual, creative act that constitutes your project too. Do you think that this makes musical knowledge different from the way we normally think about knowing? Not structured, generic, or representational…? There are knowledges in our heads — about contexts, traditions, and grammar — which are suddenly coming together and clicking into place in a particular relationship. As though one hadn't thought about it before, but suddenly one hears them speaking to each other, sees them within the same frame. A kind of Shakespearean double-seeing. You knew all the rock music and then you got into Hindustani music, and you resist narrative, but there *is* a narrative in that story, which is essentially an odyssey — a journey, a return, and a discovery and recognition — in a kind of cognitive event that you call a "moment of mishearing." What kinds of knowl-

edge transactions are going on here? If you didn't, for instance, have the knowledge of Hindustani classical music the way you did — because you've studied it deeply — would you have heard the pentatonic affinities? Can *any*body "mishear"?

AC: In those moments where things open up, one begins to reassess one's thinking at a certain point of time. Hindustani classical music is not so much a form of knowledge to me as a form of reassessment. When I encountered it and began to learn it, there were certain questions which came to me. The first had to do with the lack of the composer as a central figure and the other had to do with the nonrepresentational quality of the raag. And yet it's embedded in, and related to, our everyday life. So in what way was it related if it was not in the single way that we had been told things are to be related through art, which is through representation? Even then I had to begin to rethink, without thinking I was rethinking, the concepts and knowledges that had been handed down to me by the European Renaissance's ideas of representation, and to an extent the Enlightenment's.

SM: Do you mean the mimetic theories of the period?

AC: Mimetic theories, and also what the images in Renaissance paintings were doing.

SM: I was thinking about images, because when we were talking about distraction I was thinking about all the little animals, the dogs and cats and also the servants and loaves of bread that you see in the margins of Renaissance classics — momentous Christian events like the Last Supper. They completely decenter the painting and scatter your attention, and you see differently.

AC: I suppose this long relearning through Indian classical music — becoming aware of fissures in the so-called Western tradition itself, and registering my primordial recoil against the Renaissance and its legacy — does have to do with centrality. The idea that this is the main figure in the painting, the rest is

the background or in the margins. And with expression — faces expressing emotion. All this had to be thrown out. Even as I was writing my first two novels, I was giving much more time to the background than to the foreground, and I would have been aware of the prejudice all around me against privileging objects above writing about the emotional life of the human being.

Fusion comes out of ideas which have exactly this history. For example, Western music can have background and foreground. The chords can provide the harmonic setting for the melody in the foreground, and form part of "modal harmony" — an usually linear progression of chords, like clothes hung on a clothesline. Now we've already entered the domain which one is trying to break out of — a humanist domain where we're giving centrality to something and making assumptions about its integrity.

SM: So is non-fusion the resistance of integrity?

AC: It's resistance to various things of which this is one instance. Generally something has to be in the foreground and we identify it as the central thread or thing. Western classical music is governed by one particular standard, the natural C on the piano. Against it, you measure all the other notes and scales and compositions, whether it's an F sharp or C minor. There's no such thing in Hindustani classical music. The tonic is very important but it could be in any scale. Singing a raag is based on your awareness of the tonic and the interval and all the other notes, which form a constellation. You're also aware of everything you're hearing as you sing and how it connects to those notes, whether it disturbs them or not. A phone ringing could be ringing at *gandhaar* (the third) and an air-conditioner could be humming at *tivra ma* (the sharp fourth) or *ma* sharp, and if there is a *teevra ma* in the raag, then its fine, but if there's none, then it is a disturbance.

SM: This reminds me of your track on the Berlin U-Bahn!

AC: Yes — and it is already there in Hindustani classical music. Bharata (in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*) tells us about all the animal sounds — the peacock's cry, the elephant's trumpeting, the mooing of the cow — that have led to the seven notes, and so everything is alive and everything is text. That distinction between world and representation breaks down again! This is key to the mishearing project. Everything is music, and it goes back to the "found" object. If your mind has begun to listen to the world in that way, it is not surprising that you would hear the lower tonic to the upper tonic as the U-Bahn is moving into the station, and the sound that the doors make before they are closing — *ma* and *pa,* the fourth and the fifth notes.

SM: In the current political situation of the world, not just India, is there a particular potential and power in tuning ourselves into these mishearings, given how the project is rooted in the plural legacy of our musical tradition?

AC: I would, rather, like people to become more aware of the value of beauty. Of the traditions in modernity including Bangla, and the ones in Europe, including French and German, which accommodated the search for the beautiful and tested our capacities for enjoying it. At a certain point in time, a hostility to beauty came into existence. I used to notice this in the '80s: a kind of derision towards beauty, and a pointed glorification of the grotesque, a marginalization of the finer ways of listening and experiencing. This has now gone on for years, till we have almost forgotten how to listen, to read. And that leaves a great moral vacuum, I think.

SM: And a discursive embarrassment?

AC: An embarrassment that has led to an impoverishment of human experience. A vacuum in which there is no experience of delight.

SM: We have been thinking about physical crossings as a traumatic happening in the world. But your music taps into the play and joy in crossings inherent to certain art forms.

AC: I think the twentieth century (or maybe even from the Romantics onwards), despite all its traumas, really celebrates the delightful. Modernism itself is about delight. Once you shake it free from the narrative of its mimetic obligation to represent the traumas of the twentieth century, especially in Europe, you realize how much of its formal disjunctions have to do with play and liberation and joy. We have subsumed the narrative of modernism and its experimentations under the narrative of angst and abjection: this is not correct.

SM: So does a crossing over from the mimetic to the nonrepresentational find an embodiment in "mishearing" then? Thank you for the provocation, and the reminder that such a rerouting of the imagination leads to freedom and beauty, so that art's traversal becomes a principle of delight!

30

A Lot of Dirt

T.M. Krishna in conversation with Subha Mukherji

SUBHA MUKHERJI: I have a confession. I had never actually heard your music until the summer of 2019, as I was co-organizing the event Migrant Knowledge, bringing together artists, activists, and scholars to think about the condition of migrancy and its relation to forms of imagination and ways of knowing. It was like a miracle. Your music pierced me and spoke uncannily to the issues I was trying to think through. It was also, for me, a way of going back, of coming home. I wanted to begin the event by playing your rendering of "Dhano dhanya pushpe bhora." But most of the assembly didn't know Bengali or Tamil, so I hesitated. Then I thought: that is exactly the kind of crossing we need now, in the world we are living in. You were singing a patriotic Bengali song, familiar to us and dear to our hearts, in a style all of your own and in a language that was not your mother tongue, gloriously unconcerned with regionally specific musical *gayaki* (style). That defiant anti-grammar really spoke to me, because we Bengalis can be very parochial about our culture. Hearing you sing this song in the aftermath of India's revocation of Article 370 (which had, by constitution, granted Jammu and Kashmir special status and autonomy for some seven decades), it felt as though this was music finding its secular voice amidst

the cacophony of Hindu nationalism. The way you claimed the song — it was an assertion of the intrinsic, inextricable braid which is our aesthetic legacy, a braid that our Hindu-supremacist government is trying to separate into strands artificially. But there was no arrogance about the act of claiming. Rather, there was a kind of love, a sweetness that seemed to come from the very act of crossing boundaries of state, politics, language, and religion: a sweetness that is in real danger of turning to gall in Narendra Modi's India. If there's a question here, it's about music and democracy. You have written about how your music breaks away from entrenched casteism and social hierarchies. Are these other "crossings" also part of the activism of your art, or is the art a more affective happening?

T.M. KRISHNA: I don't see any difference between art and activism, actually. The problem is in perception. To me, art and activism are about responding to that which is within and that which is outside, in a non-passive fashion.

SM: So it's an active response to the world?

TMK: That's all it is. Art is a human act, not something found in nature. We call some sounds music, but nature never categorizes. So music, or movement, or color, are an interesting recognition by the human species. In that recognition lies the possibility of change, of movement through deep feeling. It can be defiance, it can be a question, it can be a cajoling, it can be a nuance, it can be reinterpretation. The core is that it does something to our inner self; the beauty of art is its ability to induce a possibility of non-selfishness.

SM: The possibility of being "out of the self"?

TMK: Exactly! And I use "self" not just in the sense of the individual but also in a societal context, because the self is created by society. So, somehow a musical phrase or passage provides

us the possibility of release from parochialism. Democracy also seeks to move us away from a reiteration of individual identity.

SM: Are writing, singing, and speaking different facets of the same act for you?

TMK: They are. But music is my tune, my window to life.

SM: But you have to tune in and listen, right?

TMK: I completely agree. I *think* musically in a fundamental fashion. Sometimes it's beneficial and sometimes it's a hindrance, because one of the problems of thinking musically is always remaining in the abstract. At times I am not tactile enough when writing, so I have to read it and acknowledge that it's not going to make sense or reach the reader in a comprehensible way — because I'm trying to make sense of it intellectually. Most of these understandings come only ex post facto. Democracy is at the base of all this for me — whether we are talking about caste, or religion, or transference. It took me time to recognize it as a conversation about democracy.

SM: Tell me a bit more about what you mean by "democracy"?

TMK: When I started singing in styles that were questioned, or with content that was questioned, or when I was asking questions about the world and the identities I inhabit, these were all acts of democracy. For long I struggled with the fact that most aesthetic conversations remain segregated from political dialogue. We very rarely recognize that the notion of ugliness, for example, comes from a very undemocratic impulse, and it slips through the conversations on equality. Maybe because I'm a musician I found that muddling the world of aesthetics was very important.

SM: And muddying it? Messing it up?

TMK: "Aesthetics" is a word that is rarely challenged, and that creates a hierarchy of aspiration which we never examine as being discriminatory and undemocratic in itself.

SM: Exactly, and the assumptions of superiority and refinement and vulgarity! I have, for instance, heard the term in Kolkata, doing wedding trousseau, "oh that's a crude green, a Muslim green." It's just a particular shade, but you're giving it an affiliation.

TMK: Yes, one of the problems is that so many things are taken to be sacrosanct and self-evidently sophisticated. For me the challenge is first to question the notion that there is something intrinsically special about anything we do: the world of Carnatic, or Hindustani, music, or whatever. We also need to find a way to hear from voices not normally heard. It's very easy for me now to step outside this world but I feel that it's very important that I remain in it. At the same time, being able to have conversations which are beyond this world will also empower other voices and enable many other aesthetics and sound worlds to emerge.

SM: That absolutely goes to the heart of it. The politics of it was, for me, the more expected bit. Given the timing of the particular performance of yours which we started with, of course it felt like a deeply political moment. What took me by surprise was the rawness of the emotion. It felt — and this may sound strange — almost like an act of faith in a world structured by rationalist hierarchy. As I played it, I choked up at one point. I wondered where that was coming from. My first feeling was embarrassment: "Oh my goodness, there are all these people in this room, and I'm choking up, *shit*." Then it did something electric, because it proved contagious. Suddenly it brought everyone together because it gave the audience permission to feel together. There's a discursive embarrassment about emotions, certainly in academia. I said to my friend Gil Harris who was in the room, and is in the little room of this book, "I messed up." And he said, "No, don't worry about it, because it actually broke down some

barriers." And he added that he had, just a few days before, broken down giving a talk because he was — we all were — affected by Article 370, by what was happening in and to India. That moment was precious for me. That sense of community, and the way it grants permission to feel, resonated with what we had just observed: a kind of knowingness in your relation with your accompanists. In the video I saw and showed, the camera focused on the faces of the mrdangam-, violin-, and tanpura-players — who just stopped when you choked up and paused, looked at your face, took the cue from your expression and kept the bassline going as you were recomposing yourself. The distance between the soloist and the collective craft of music dissolved at that moment. To what extent is your music a communal practice and to what extent is it solitary? Who owns your music?

TMK: Ownership is very difficult to pin down. Any kind of single ownership is what I have tried to challenge. In any Carnatic concert there are four co-musicians. I changed the seating pattern first. We used to sit with the main performer — me, a vocalist — sitting right in the center; the violinist towards the left, mrdangam artist towards my right, both not facing the audience, instead facing me. The other instrumentalists were usually behind me. I decided one day to question how we sit on stage. I started arranging us much like a jazz quartet, in a "C" formation. It instantly moved me out of the center and I discovered how difficult that was for me. I had been so used to being at the center — its visual impact, its control, its power! The moment you twist, turn, and trouble power, something magical happens. And to question power is to question performance itself. The realization in such specific moments opens up to questions as huge as India, or Article 370.

SM: And this takes me to a question that came up for me — about vulnerability. The vulnerability I felt when I choked up was responding to yours — that moment in the concert which took away your power and opened you up.

TMK: I was going to use that word myself — "vulnerable." Until we become vulnerable, we don't do serious work, we only perform. Many great performers will tell you that art is an epiphany, but they are still in control. It's a paradoxical statement — fraudulent, even. The possibility of something profound happening opens only when you give up control, a fundamental condition for having a real conversation.

SM: Because conversation is about letting the other in.…

TMK: That's where the meaning of a song lies, because that's where magic happens.

SM: The word "happen" is interesting: it's almost a passive thing. When you were caught in the raw in the middle of singing, that *happened* to you, unscripted. Are you in fact saying that the artist needs to surrender disbelief for magic to happen, that art is a form of dispossession, not possession?

TMK: Exactly.

SM: For me, listening to that song was a very embodied reality. I was moved by the way you move your hands, for instance. I felt that there was something in those gestures that was turning an act of resistance into a caress, as if you were gently pushing the music over and across a cultural border and letting it spill over an artificial dam. That made me wonder about the different boundaries that are crossed when art becomes a visceral experience. Working on drama, I'm very aware of the fourth wall — theater's broken when that wall isn't. How does the ecology of the musical event work for you? Do you traverse the fourth wall more easily than a professionalized singer? It struck me that so much of it was about presence, about being together, watching, and somebody engaging with their whole body. It's like the way Jacqueline du Pré used to play the cello. She threw her whole body into the playing, and it was such a generous act.

It also makes me wonder how you found the migration to online performance in the strange years of COVID-19?

TMK: The position that I write from in my book *A Southern Music* (2013) may be relevant here. There, I ask about the role of text in music; I discuss art music, how important semantics is, the meaning of the words, and meaning beyond semantics.

SM: What do you mean by "art music"?

TMK: For example, it's what I would call jazz, Carnatic, or Hindustani music. It's an old term and has been used in musicology for ages. The idea is that every form of art has intentionality. The intentionality is related to a cultural context, but it's also about form, structure, history, and aesthetics. I'll give you an example. If you look at Qawwali, Gospel music, and Hindu religious music, they all have the same intentionality: to make you feel divinity in a collective trance. The aesthetic structuring of these forms is similar, with repetition of certain lines, words, and tunes for congregational singing, and a lot of the "calling of the Lord." Now, how do you categorize Western classical music or Carnatic music? These forms do not have this kind of intentionality. Can we abstract literal human experience, beyond the literality of the event? Like a Pablo Picasso painting, say? The event may have inspired the context of the painting, but the painting takes you beyond the event, so art music will fall into that category. The difficulty in understanding or accepting this vis-à-vis Carnatic music especially is the fact that texts in nearly all our compositions are religious in nature. We forget that the texts also have an inbuilt syllabo-melodic aesthetic function. In India, post-1857, a lot of nationalistic conflations collapsed aesthetics into semantics. I argue in *A Southern Music* that the semantic meaning is irrelevant to art music. I can show you different examples of the same words sung in different tunes and different registers and ask you whether it's the same experience. It isn't, even if you know the meaning of the word. The question is "why do you have a different experience then?"

Although I still broadly stand by this view, I realized that there are some functional and structural issues that the argument didn't address — which boils down to the fact that the only way we understand the world is through the semantic. How do you get a person to move from word meaning to sonic, or abstract, meaning? That's when I started changing the lyrical content in Carnatic music. Suppose "Rama" gives you a profound experience, can we complicate that by making you respond with similar depth to things that you don't normally feel profound with or about? Then you create the possibility of profundity emerging from something else. That's when I started singing Islamic texts, Christian texts, and atheistic texts.

SM: Didn't some temple in Maryland cancel an event when you claimed Christian hymns as your own?

TMK: Oh yes, they cancelled my concert. I had security for that whole tour of the US, because there was a fear that I would be attacked.

SM: And you responded by saying you'd release a song on Jesus and on Allah every month! Did you?

TMK: Yes, I did it for eight months. It wasn't just a religious conversation; it was also about the hierarchy in dialect. For the first time in the history of Indian classical music, we sang a song that used the contemporary dialect of the common person. I had started working with writers to create content in dialects that are not usually part of this uppity world. It was a journey into multiplicity and diversity.

SM: Even the way you were turning a particular word when you were singing a familiar Bengali song — the very pronunciation, the rolling of a word slowly on your tongue, created an affective estrangement which opened up a whole new world. When you use that to dislocate music from its class and caste context, that's even more radical.

TMK: That's the most important part for me — that meaning is embedded in utterance. We unlock that every day; the way we say "ok" can mean a hundred things. Now imagine an aesthetic body through which you can celebrate that possibility. It starts moving, and in any direction, and I can almost taste sound on my tongue. The moment you allow for everything to *move* … that is grammar.

SM: And isn't it lovely that the etymological Latin root of moving — as in "emotionally moving" — is *movere,* which is to actually cause movement?

TMK: Yes, I think grammar gives you everything possible to feel, but we never think of grammar that way.

SM: We think of it as a collection of rules, but you are saying that it's an affective tool?

TMK: Of course: when you're astounded by a passage, it is profound grammar. Anything we have experienced in seriousness, like a conversation, is so profoundly filled with form. For form is all grammar is. We make the same mistake in grammar and music as we do in literature — thinking of it as a dry toolkit. We have partitioned grammar and imagination into binaries. But it doesn't work that way. People ask me, "Are you traditional or radical as a musician?" I say I'm extremely traditional as a musician. Because I use "tradition" in its most profound sense, to mean connectivity. Besides, art need not always be pleasurable.…

SM: Apropos, I wanted to come back to the matter of *mess* and disturbance and not just beauty. Remember that incident with the Carnatic singer who was barred entry into temples in Kerala because he had sung a hymn to Jesus? But Christian and Muslim participation in Carnatic music goes way back. I remember him saying he could have gone in if he were an insect — a housefly, for instance. I wonder, can music be an insect now, or even

art more generally? Might a space be opening up for different forms of art to cross the thresholds between them and speak to each other, and to the inherent migrancy of forms? When we cross borders physically a great deal can be stripped from us. Not only our possessions but our language, our clothes, our baggage. What remains? What is ours that is inalienable? Imagination, stories, bodies perhaps; can this be collected and brought together to shore against our ruins in some ways?

TMK: I don't think we have a choice right now, do we? We have to find a way. And we need to resist the impulse that directs us towards immediate reward and prepare for a marathon which aims at longer-term, intangible rewards.

SM: We have never mined that potential, have we?

TMK: We have never respected the migrancy of people. We accepted it but we didn't respect it, and I think that is one of the big gaps that has allowed this right-wing, absolute, violent noise to emanate and almost establish itself as the identity of India. This is an important moment for shedding a lot of those accretions.

SM: And I think you'll find the migrancy of form meeting the migrancy of people, because there is something inherently mobile about certain forms. Think of ballads, or songs, or stories: they slip across borders no matter how rigorously you police them.

TMK: Absolutely. Carnatic music itself is completely migrant. But the question is: Am I going to acknowledge and respect its migrant nature? Am I going to actively work with it? The latter is crucial. And within that conversation lies those words that we use: vulnerability and surrender, disparity and dialogue. For instance, we have a project with the Jogappas — a small, transgender community living between the Karnataka–Maharashtra border, hugely marginalized and discriminated against. We are collaborating with them on a performance which taps into their

ancient mythology and their goddess Yellamma. This migrancy, this vulnerability, has to be preserved and translated in the way we're engaging with the sounds the colors, the words, and the movements. In the long-term idea of a democratic India, this is the only way we can actually create a serious, aesthetic, social, political conversation.

SM: In the bleakest moments of this year, when you sang "Hum Dekhenge" — the song which had become the theme of the protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens — in four languages in Shaheen Bagh, where there was a vast but peaceful sit-in protest, mostly by working-class Muslim women, it was electrifying and contagious. It made me go to a protest march outside India House in London, and everyone burst into this song.

I noticed, when I saw the video of you at Shaheen Bagh, that you paused at one point and spoke to the audience: the wall broke and it became participatory. Given what you have done with the event of musical performance, can you ever go back to the proscenium stage, or do you need to reconfigure it?

TMK: What I do is try and find as many spaces as possible, all kinds of spaces — whether it's a bus, or a beach, or indeed the proscenium stage — and then let one seep into the other. Then the proscenium becomes easier to break down. When a person enters an opera house, the experience is already given, pre-known. Now suppose you mess up the fundamental notion of what should be experienced: everybody is lost and that's probably the best place to start.

SM: You want to get lost together! Now, I wanted to ask you a question about your book *Sebastian and Sons,* where you have written about the history of the mrdangam — made by Dalit ("untouchable") artisans. You've opened our eyes to how it originates in a field of violence. An animal is killed and its skin is flayed and cleaned to make the instrument. The association of music and its pleasure with violence and pain, of course,

goes all the way back to ancient Greek mythology, hauntingly depicted in the Renaissance by Titian in his famous painting, *The Flaying of Marsyas.* Marsyas was a satyr — half-man, half-goat — who challenged the god Apollo and his skills at the lyre, boasting of the superiority of his rustic musical instrument, the AULOS, a kind of reed pipe or flute. Apollo won the musical duel and punished Marsyas for his hubris by flaying his skin from his body. Titian's painting shows a figure who is either Orpheus or Apollo — we're not sure — playing the lyre, creating beauty as Marsyas is being skinned. Marsyas's expression is strangely serene and detached. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (VI), he actually asks the question "why do you peel me out of myself?" He is the chosen one, in a sense, as well as the kill. This mythical moment has been interpreted variously as savage, transcendental, or a victory of the clarity of form over chaos, or of art over craft, *or* as a purification ritual which expunges the ego. But as the novelist Iris Murdoch is known to have said in many conversations, interviews and indeed, directly or indirectly in her novels, it is about anything *but* purity, it is about the hopelessly mixed condition of human life. Now this is one of the forms that the peculiar migrancy of music or indeed art takes. The way it travels between the slaughterhouse and the concert hall, the artisanal and the aesthetic, the material and the ethereal; the way it does not shy away from discomfort and messiness. Art abjures sanitization. Do you feel this impinging on the way you practice?

TMK: The realization of art is the realization of ugliness. It is not something outworldly, but grounded in the dust and the dirt of reality.

SM: You once said in an interview (in 2014) that there's "a lot of dirt" in Carnatic music.

TMK: Not just Carnatic music. There's dirt everywhere. I think *Sebastian and Sons,* apart from obviously engaging with the craft and the work, also engages with the impurity of life as its essential purity. To be able to grapple with the fact that you can't

reconcile this, and yet you still seek a way of engaging with it with humanity and empathy.

SM: I have a personal childhood memory with a very literal association of dirt and music. Very near where I grew up in Kolkata there's a little shop called Hemen & Co. It's a tiny shop on a corner. I remember always seeing — I don't know what the technical term is — the swollen part of the sitar, of the tanpura resting on the dirt outside, at one stage in the making.

TMK: Oh I know the company, they make lovely tanpuras.

SM: They are still there. They have made thousands of instruments for famous musicians, and also for less famous singers like my mother! We always used to take our harmonium to Hemen & Co. It just makes me wonder at how ubiquitous the odd mixture of dust in Indian musical traditions is, and the contrast between the verticality of musical performances and the radical horizontality of the process of its making.

TMK: That's the great struggle, isn't it? Not just performance but the notion of the great artistic tradition itself is so vertical. When you look at the fundamental creations, they're all horizontal. There is something interesting that happens with instruments that are made of skin. As you come down the caste ladder, the difference between the maker and player keeps reducing. All Dalit percussionists make their own instruments … who will make it for them? They have to be the performers and the makers.

SM: That's fascinating. To slightly shift the focus, have you consciously thought about translation as an act of reclaiming and sharing? So much of the beauty that you brought into the grit, the mud, the sweat, the congestion, the physical tribulation of that gathering at Shaheen Bagh lay in the fact that you were opening it up into these "impure" spaces. And in the way you

said "now I'll sing in Malayalam." The audience were just rapturous.

TMK: I think translation is an act of defiance, it's an act of recreation, it's an act of selflessness. It challenges power, it challenges ownership, it challenges time, it challenges space.…

SM: It challenges history.…

TMK: It challenges everything. That day as I landed in Delhi I suddenly thought, "there have been translations of the song 'Hum dekhenge'.… Why don't I just sing each verse in different languages?" I quickly rallied and got them all together and, in a way, it became a song by itself. So it was not just tied to a single location — translation widened its ambit and made it about every person, irrespective of where you were, what language you spoke. It was impossible to tell whose form it was.

SM: Ha — so translation evacuates authority out of the text and almost forces it to be generous? That act of being able to give up ownership, of being able to say, "OK, now it belongs to the world, you do what you want with it."

TMK: This is very important when discussing democracy and politics today, because we have lost this giving. We are still talking about the original now, in this country and around the world — whether it is about immigration, or about Hindu identity, or whatever. But there is no such thing.

SM: It's also tied up with that spurious notion of the *pure,* isn't it? Since COVID-19 the word "migrant" has taken on resonances in India that were previously unknown. The image of migrant laborers walking hundreds of miles, thirsty, hungry, dropping dead, trying to cross borders between states to get home, will haunt our sleep forever. Now in the face of the humanitarian tragedy triggered by all these theatrical, unplanned and yet at the same time culpably late lockdowns, how can art take on the

right kind of migrancy to meet this reality, to give it form, to speak for it? What artforms are created by the phenomenon of migration, by our encounters with it, and in what forms do displaced people themselves find a voice? Crisis can energize aesthetic imagination, but how do we avoid parasitism and ensure synergy?

TMK: We don't realize that 98% of artists are not very different from daily-wagers or from agricultural laborers. They live on the margins and off that day's little performance. So their lives are usually culturally limited to certain geographical contexts, but they still have to travel to various villages to perform. Everything got shut down from March 2020. Migrant workers were stuck in their place of work, unable to go home, and moving artists were stuck in their homes, unable to move for work. This inversion was astounding, because we were listening to both voices. One of the things this has also shown us is that none of us have recognized every human being as a cultural being. Have we talked about migrant workers' cultural inhabitation? Have we talked about their cultural expressions? Have we cleared a context within their workplace for them to celebrate their being, their language, their sound? We've done nothing. They have just remained tools that we use. The migrant workers as a collective are merely instruments. This has to be broken.

I'm really interested in artforms that are coming out of a recognition of the inalienable hybridity of our lives of labor and art. This has been wonderful, thank you.

VII.

Gazing Across Borders

31

The Lost Country

Dragana Jurišić

> "Once upon a time, in a faraway part of Europe, behind seven mountains and seven rivers, there was a beautiful country called Yugoslavia."
>
> — Slavenka Drakulić, *They Would Never Hurt a Fly*[1]

On September 15, 1991, I went for a walk with two of my closest friends down by the banks of the river Sava that flows through my hometown of Slavonski Brod. It was Sunday; we were bored after a three-month-long summer holiday and very excited about going back to school the next day. We were sixteen years old. The usually busy river promenade was eerily empty of people that day. However, we did meet a group of mustached men. It was immediately clear to us that they were army officers. It's strange how you can always recognize policemen and military even when disguised in their Sunday best. They told us to go home immediately, and stay there. Under my breath, I muttered where they could go. As we ran off giggling back to our own homes for lunch, one of my friends, I forgot which one, shouted

1 Slavenka Drakulić, *They Would Never Hurt a Fly: War Criminals on Trial in The Hague* (Viking, 2004), 1.

back towards me, "It's soooo boring, I wish something exciting would happen."

My family's apartment was on the eighth floor of a building positioned right on the town's main square. The windows of the apartment looked at the large Yugoslav National Army (JNA) garrison. I remember my mother cooking Sunday lunch and then the doorbell rang. Outside our front door was a group of Croatian soldiers. They told us to put all of our valuables into the hallway and go down to the basement. And then it started. They attacked the JNA compound.

I remember thinking it all must be some sort of a joke.

I remember being excited and scared at the same time.

I remember how I put all my LPs into the hallway so they wouldn't get damaged by the crossfire.

I remember that my father and my brother were out that afternoon.

I remember bullets spraying the front door of our building.

I remember hearing what sounded like someone trying to get in.

I remember my mother screaming "it's them" and running towards the door.

I remember grabbing onto her until all my nails broke.

I remember meeting my neighbors for the first time in the basement of our building.

I remember thinking "pity I've met them only now when we are all about to die."

I remember the building burning above us.

I remember being sad about all those books my parents bought through the syndicate and never read . . . only consumed by me and the fire.

I remember being pissed off that I would die a virgin.

I remember when they came to pull us out.

I remember how I learned to zigzag run in order to escape snipers' bullets.

I remember taking shelter in the local supermarket.

I remember falling asleep on bags of washing powder, next to a boy I had a secret crush on (he was our local basketball star).

Fig. 31.1. Belgrade, Serbia. Photo by the author.

I remember him waking me up at 3 a.m. and whispering: "What can I get you, Madam?"

I remember asking for ice cream and champagne.

I remember captured Yugoslav army soldiers sitting, scared shitless, opposite us.

I remember Croatian soldiers handing them boxes of sweets.

I remember walking into our burned down apartment the following morning.

I remember feeling relief that all the mess was gone and I would not need to clean up my room.

I remember that everything melted except for a big orange gas bottle, lying in red crackling "coals," waiting to go off like some post-apocalyptic witch's cauldron.

Fig. 31.2. Starigrad, Croatia. Photo by the author.

I remember the soles of my red converse shoes melting.
I remember walking out.

The story of me as a photographer starts on the day when our family apartment got burned down together with thousands of prints and negatives my father, an ardent amateur photographer, had accumulated. On that day I became one of those "refugees" with no photographs, with no past. Indeed, my memories of the events and people I encountered before that Sunday in September 1991 are either nonexistent or very vague. I learned then the power photography has over memory. The day after the fire was the last time my father took a photograph, a perfunctory snapshot to record the damage for the insurance company. Where he

Fig. 31.3. Split, Croatia. Photo by the author.

stopped, I started. The act of photographing, of looking at the world through the camera lens, helped provide a semblance of control over an otherwise unpredictable world.

Rebecca West wrote, "Violence was, indeed, all I knew of the Balkans: all I knew of the South Slavs."[2] Yugoslavia was a short-lived country in both of her reincarnations.[3] The name Yugoslavia was first used in 1929, then abolished fourteen years later, reestablished in 1945 as a Socialist Federation, and disintegrated once more in 1991.

2 Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia* (Canongate, 1993), 21.

3 In the Serbo-Croatian language, the word "Yugoslavia" is of female gender.

Fig. 31.4. New Belgrade, Serbia. Photo by the author.

Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslavia enjoyed its golden age between the early 1960s and the early 1980s. It had a relatively high standard of living, a fast national growth rate, low unemployment, equal pay for women, free medical care and education, subsidized public transport and property rents, etc. Tito famously described himself as the leader of one country with two alphabets, three languages, four religions, five nationalities, six republics, surrounded by seven neighbors, a country in which live eight ethnic minorities. Yugoslavia, a socialist federation composed of six republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia) and two autonomous provinces (Vojvodina and Kosovo), started falling apart at the seams after his death in 1980.

Fig. 31.5. Govedarov Kamen, North Macedonia. Photo by the author.

Tito's death coincided with another destabilizing factor: the collapse of communism and the awakening of nationalism in Eastern Europe. Emerging political parties and their leaders used nationalism and the accompanying rhetoric in order to develop a culture of fear and mistrust between different ethnic groups in Yugoslavia. Misha Glenny, possibly the best-known writer on Yugoslavia, filed a report in February 1991 to the BBC, in which he wrote that the leaders of Yugoslavia "were stirring a cauldron of blood that would soon boil over." He was reprimanded by his supervisors at the BBC for being an alarmist and told that "this is the end of the 20th century, not the beginning

[. . .] there would be no war in the Balkans."[4] Unfortunately they were wrong. As well as creating a culture of fear and mistrust, the obliteration of the Yugoslav identity, common to all ethnic groups, started in earnest on all sides. Describing how this process worked in Croatia, Dubravka Ugrešić wrote that it took only five years of repressive measures "to create the first precondition for the final idiotization of the nation." That precondition, she said, was a collective amnesia which caused its citizens to forget both their personal history and history in general.[5]

The Yugoslav conflicts started in 1991 when Slovenia decided to leave the Yugoslav federation. This provoked a ten-day military intervention by the JNA. Due to its short duration, the number of casualties was relatively low. The Slovenes came out of this fight victorious. Considering that the JNA was one of the largest European armies at that time, Slovenia's victory can be attributed to their geographic position (it bordered three EU countries: Italy, Austria, and Hungary) and the fact that Croatia, the much larger republic holding the majority of the Yugoslav coastal waters, declared independence on the same day as Slovenia.

Unfortunately, Croatia was not to be as "lucky" as Slovenia. Frightened by the new and extremely nationalist Croatian government, the large Serb minority in Croatia, supported by the JNA, rebelled against the new Croatian state and took control of over a third of Croatia's territory. This independent Serbian territory within Croatia's borders was named Srbska Krajina. The campaign of ethnic cleansing started in the occupied parts of the country, and the JNA, supported by the Serbian paramilitary forces, also began a campaign of the systematic shelling and destruction of cities such as Vukovar and the ancient, UNESCO-protected city of Dubrovnik. In 1995, tables turned — in two major military offensives called "Storm" and "Flash," the Croatian army reclaimed most of its lost territory. This triggered an exo-

4 Misha Glenny, *The Balkans, 1804–1999: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers* (Granta, 1999), 634.

5 Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Culture of Lies: Antipolitical Essays,* trans. Celia Hawkesworth (Phoenix, 1999), 210.

dus of ethnic Serbs, as well as a series of war crimes committed by the Croatian army against Serbian civilians.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, the most ethnically diverse republic in former Yugoslavia, was almost completely devastated in the war. Both Serbia and Croatia had strategic interest in Bosnian territory and, as it is now known, Croatian president Franjo Tudjman and Serbian president Slobodan Milošević met secretly in 1991 and carved up the country between them. The Bosnian government unfortunately placed their faith in the international community, as they believed that the international community would not allow a United Nations (UN) member state to be wiped off the map. The population of Bosnia learned over time that peaceful negotiations with their Serb and Croat counterparts had brought them only defeat. So they started to fight back. War then turned into a vicious three-sided battle. The Bosnian government pleaded with the UN Security Council to lift the arms embargo so they could defend themselves. This was refused with the argument that this would only cause more lives being lost. More honest reason was provided by James Baker, the Secretary of State under US President George Bush, when he said: "We don't have a dog in that fight."[6] As a consequence of not lifting the arms embargo, Bosnian Muslims were exposed to a merciless ethnic cleansing from both the Serbian and the Croatian side.

It is difficult to estimate the exact number of people who were killed in the Bosnian war. What we do know is that half of the population, approximately two million people, either fled, were killed, or were expelled. Thousands of women were raped; concentration camps were resurrected and mass murder on a scale not seen in Europe since the Second World War took place in the town of Srebrenica in July 1995. More than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim boys and men were executed by Serb forces under the command of General Ratko Mladić within a space of just a few days. Srebrenica, declared a safe area by the UN and under

6 Cited in Laura Silber and Allan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation* (Penguin, 1997), 29–30.

the guard of Dutch peacekeeping forces, was "cleansed" of Muslims in less than a week, while the UN peace forces powerlessly looked on.

While the international community tried to decide on how they should act, the Bosnians were thrown into turmoil. The feeling of helplessness amongst Bosnian Muslims was especially vast, and echoed very well in Slavenka Drakulić's book *Balkan Express: Fragments From the Other Side of War* (1993) when she described her reaction to the first air raids. Even though Drakulić describes air raids in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, the experience is recognizable to the majority of the people who find themselves under attack:

> At that point, I understood exactly the meaning of destiny. It is when you know that this is it: there is no choice any more, no solution, no escape, and you are not even horrified, not even tempted to resist, but just ready to take whatever the next moment brings. Even if it brings death.[7]

When reading this, it is hard not to think of video footage that resurfaced in 2005, which showed Muslim boys who were executed a decade earlier, by their Serbian captors in Potočari. In this video footage we see a beautiful sunny day, we see Serbian soldiers chatting to each other in a field of tall grass and wildflowers about what they are going to do that night, whether they are going out for a drink or off to meet their girlfriends. The teenage Muslim boys are being brought one by one into the field, where these same "benevolent" soldiers gun them down, as a comma perhaps to their conversation. The Muslim boys don't plead for their life, they do not protest, they are not crying. They step calmly in front of their executors and their young lives are taken away from them in an instant. Death is silent.

The Srebrenica massacre changed NATO's policy of non-involvement. Soon after the events in July 1995, a major airstrike

7 Slavenka Drakulić, *Balkan Express: Fragments from the Other Side of War* (Hutchinson, 1993), 24.

Fig. 31.6. Govedarov Kamen II, North Macedonia. Photo by the author.

offensive started against the Bosnian Serbs and together with a joint Bosnian and Croatian offensive, Bosnian Serbs were pushed back from a third of the territory they occupied. Subsequently, more than 60,000 NATO troops were deployed in the area.

Still, this was not the end. In 1999 the war moved to the Serbian province of Kosovo, where the Albanian population sought independence from Serbia. The Serbs attacked Albanian towns and villages, targeting predominantly the civilian population and forcing them to flee. After peace talks failed, NATO went on a seventy-eight-day airstrike offensive against Serbs both in Kosovo and in Serbia. According to the International Criminal

Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), an estimated 750,000 Albanian refugees returned home, while around 100,000 Serbs fled Kosovo in fear of retribution. Twenty years on, the situation today is still very tense and unresolved.

Montenegro — which was part of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro until 2006 — was considered to be partly responsible for all the events mentioned above, especially Kosovo.

North Macedonia — or as it is formerly known, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (FYROM), due to its name dispute with Greece — still manages to avoid conflicts, although the tension between Macedonians and Macedonian Albanians is a tinder box waiting to go off. If this happens, the war might spread outside of the borders of former Yugoslavia, and pull in Albania, Bulgaria, and Greece.

The term "balkanize" (meaning to fragment and revert back to "primitive" and "hostile" states) became firmly associated with Yugoslavia around this time. The media coverage of the Yugoslav wars was based on generalizations about the people and their history. The clichés about the Balkans, which became outmoded long ago when reporting from non-Western areas, were circulating freely in the majority of the news reports on the conflicts. As Glenny commented, "the Balkans apparently enjoy a special exemption from the rules against stereotyping."[8] The West saw the Yugoslav conflicts as unfathomable, and its people motivated by mysterious ancient hatred and congenital bloodthirstiness, something that Glenny argued "is always invoked when the great powers seek to deny their responsibility for the economic and political difficulties that the region has suffered as a consequence of external interference."[9] The Balkans were constructed as the other within Europe. In the words of Slavoj Žižek:

> In former Yugoslavia we are lost not because of our primitive dreams and myths preventing us from speaking the en-

8 Glenny, *The Balkans, 1804–1999,* xxi.

9 Ibid., 661.

Fig. 31.7. Kosovska Mitrovica, Kosovo. Photo by the author.

> lightened language of Europe, but because we pay in flesh the price for being the stuff the Other's dreams are made of […]. Far from being the Other of Europe, former Yugoslavia was rather Europe itself in its Otherness, the screen onto which Europe projected its own repressed reverse.[10]

At least 1,500,000 Yugoslavs vanished together with their country. They disappeared, like Atlantis, into the realm of imaginary places. Ugrešić called this the biggest atrocity in modern day Europe, yet not many have gone looking for these lost people.

10 Cited in John Taylor, *Into the Heart of European Poetry* (Transaction Publishers, 2008), 132.

Fig. 31.8. Skopje, North Macedonia. Photo by the author.

Today, in countries that came into being after Yugoslavia's disintegration, there is a total marginalization and denial of the Yugoslav identity.

The project *YU: The Lost Country* was originally conceived as a recreation of a homeland that was lost. Following Roland Barthes's assertion that photography is more akin to magic than to art, I was on a journey in which I would somehow draw a magical circle around the country that was once mine and resurrect it, where I would reconnect with "my" people, a place where I would be understood. Instead, it became a journey of rejection, displacement, and exile that was stronger back "home" than in the foreign place where I chose to live. The realization that the whole world is a foreign land became pervasive for me.

Fig. 31.9. Kosovska Mitrovica II, Kosovo. Photo by the author.

When in exile it is imperative to hold onto your memory the fragments of the place you have left, as these fragments house the self, and without this imaginary home one's very identity is in jeopardy. What happened in the area that was once Yugoslavia is the repeated exile and exodus of its people throughout history. What I personally learned from the war is that once the country is no more, the streets that you grew up on are renamed, the borders you knew are redrawn, and the history books you learned from are rewritten. As Peter Osborne says, your existence,

> has become a non-possibility, for all points in which memory is anchored, through which the lines of life's narrative are

> threaded, have vanished. Not only have the exile's claims on a place in reality been denied, their access to the processes in which human identity is made has been blocked. To be deprived of one's space is to be deprived of the right of memory and thus the right to selfhood.[11]

There are a significant number of well-known artists who are exiles and émigrés. Once a person loses their original world, they realize how fragile all the other worlds are. The fragmentation that occurs as a result, in return, provides a wealth of material to be explored through artistic means. Photography, in particular, contains elements such as fleetingness, which allow it to capture that sense of rootlessness and dislocation with relative ease. Both exile and photography intensify our perception of the world. In both, the memory is its core. Both are characterized by melancholy. As Salman Rushdie said, exiles live "more comfortably in images, in ideas, than in places."[12]

11 Peter D. Osborne, *Traveling Light: Photography, Travel and Visual Culture* (Manchester University Press, 2002), 125.

12 Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991* (Granta, 1992), 184.

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32

Trade Winds

Susan Stockwell, with a response from Carla Suthren

SUSAN: *Trade Winds* is a sculptural installation made up of many small boats crafted from international paper currency, maps, and travel tickets that float on top of a mass of copper coins. The flotilla of boats, as if on a journey to elsewhere, weaves its way across the coins, that resemble both a sea and a continent. Are the boats contained or free? Is the money enabling or restricting?

Concerned with issues of migration and borders, trade, colonial and social history, geo-politics, ecology, mapping, and material culture, this artwork asks pertinent and open-ended questions that are especially relevant to our current and future world.

The work provides a quiet space for reflection in which to enjoy the playful, tactile objects while also provoking questions about our relationship to money and how it shapes our fragile world ecology. In the context of this beautiful, tiny chapel, *Trade Winds* acquired a reverential, intimate feeling with added meanings provided by the Norman origins of St. Peter's Church at Kettle's Yard and his status as the patron saint of fishermen.

Fig. 32.1. Trade Winds © Susan Stockwell, 2019. Photo by Paula Beetelstone.

As part of the Migrant Knowledge event this artwork added a different voice. Visual art can have a rich multiplicity of meanings and readings, which are often difficult to articulate and are best seen and felt. Perhaps this piece acted as a mirror for the viewer's own experiences and stories. People were protective towards the small, fragile paper boats, reading meanings into the combinations of currency, text, and maps and asking what shape or continent the coins formed. The irony of money as artistic material placed within the context of a church invites many questions: for instance, do we worship money as we worship art? What is our relationship with money? Are we ruled by the power of money and is this destroying us?

Fig. 32.2. Trade Winds © Susan Stockwell, 2019. Photo by Subha Mukherji.

Global warming, too, is largely a result of colonial trade and colonial behaviors. The future of migration and the inevitable displacement of peoples are, in turn, bound to be inflected by climate change. We are all citizens of the world and yet we divide it up and claim areas as our own — colonizing. It is these places of irony and interrogation from which the ideas for my work come. Being involved in the Migrant Knowledge event brought this into sharper focus and has inspired new ideas and work.

CARLA: Carved into the heart of the tiny, picturesque church of St. Peter's in Cambridge is a tale of migration. The building has been altered and reduced and reconstructed over the centuries, but the oldest element that remains is the distinctive square font, decorated with a series of stone mermen, each holding the tails of his neighbors in either hand. This dates back to the mid-twelfth century: era of crusades, cathedrals, and the rise of the Plantagenets. As the guidebook to St. Peter's observes, "Mer-

men and mermaids grasping one end of divided tails are a fairly common motif in French Romanesque churches but rare in this country."[1] This striking and unusual feature hints at the movement of people, ideas, and skills in the Anglo-Norman world.

As a setting for *Trade Winds,* it could hardly have been more evocative. Copper coins were spread and heaped like a dragon's hoard across the stone floor, trailing up to the doorway and past the altar, and lapping fortuitously around the font. The tiny boats nestled in dips and troughs, or perched precariously on the crests of coppery waves. Driven by imagined winds, some shoaled together, while others crisscrossed one another's paths or ventured off alone. The tonal variation among the coins, from those crusted over with age to the shiniest new pennies, transposed the infinite variety of the sea into a strange new palette. And yet, change your perspective, and the massed coins become the continent, shaped by an invisible sea. Skirting around the edges of the church, treading carefully, you could walk all the way around the installation, experiencing it from every angle. Being able to reposition yourself spatially in relation to this multifaceted artwork offered embodied ways of re-knowing.

This physical engagement extended further still. As visitors flowed in, they began to add their own coins to the work spontaneously, some tossing them in as if it were a wishing well, others carefully shoring up coastlines or building little promontories. Adults as well as children added their contributions with consideration and delight. Some instinctively wanted to repair "damage" caused by coins being displaced by a careless foot here and there. One small girl very solemnly and carefully picked up the tiniest boat which had been knocked over, and nestled it back into a bed of coins. Meaning was continually created through this collaborative curatorial enterprise by strangers, just as it was created through the interaction between the work and the space of St. Peter's Church, and recreated through the

1 Lawrence Butler, *Church of St Peter off Castle Street,* Cambridge, https://cdn.visitchurches.org.uk/uploads/images/Churches/Cambridge-St-Peters-Church/Cambridge-St-Peters-Church-Guidebook.pdf.

personal histories and perspectives of each person who encountered it. Transforming the paraphernalia of the everyday into an imaginative provocation, *Trade Winds* shaped alternative and mutable forms of knowing, across space and time.

VIII.

Refuge and Refugees, Human and Other

33

Kudzu in the Patchy Anthropocene

Yota Batsaki

Invasive plants are a scandalous case of migrant knowledge. Often introduced into their new habitats by the deliberate or accidental agency of humans, they occasionally escape containment and proliferate wildly, displacing native species and disturbing local ecological relationships that evolved over thousands of years. Their success is an unwelcome reminder of our partial or misplaced knowledge of living organisms and ecosystems. Having eluded our control, invasives are branded "noxious weeds": regulated, criminalized, ripe for extermination. Yet our desire to eradicate them is predicated on the erasure of other kinds of knowledge about them and their travels — perhaps even on willful forgetfulness. Kudzu, known in the United States as "the vine that ate the south," is one of the most notorious and recognizable. Although its name reveals its foreignness, kudzu has become emblematic of a certain kind of Southern landscape.

Kudzu's conquest of its adopted territory is rendered iconic by the art of William Christenberry (1936–2016), a pioneer of color photography whose works are in the collections of the Getty, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), and the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Christenberry's family hailed from Hale County, Alabama, the heart of cotton (and later

Fig. 33.1. High Kudzu, near Akron, Alabama, 1978. © William Christenberry. Source: Adamson Gallery / Editions

kudzu) country, and he spent his childhood summers there. Although he eventually settled in Washington, DC, he returned to the south every year to record its gradually overgrown landscapes and decaying structures. Christenberry's saturated palette of greens, reds, and browns captured the verdant luxuriance of kudzu, a vine famously capable of growing a foot per day; he found it "rather beautiful in the way it envelops things […] and forms these very fascinating topiaries."[1] Yet the photographs also hint at a more sinister creep, an uncanny sense of menace underlying the roadside canopies of unrelenting greenery (fig. 33.1). Kudzu's present harm is well-known. As it climbs, envelops, and covers, it crowds out native plants, smothers mature trees, and is a nuisance to ecologists, farmers, loggers, and utility

1 William Christenberry, interviewed by Jarrett Gregory for the exhibition *After Nature,* New Museum, July 17, 2008–October 5, 2008, https://archive.newmuseum.org/sounds/7278.

companies alike. Yet, while rooted in the local, Christenberry's seemingly modest photos of kudzu open up a broader window into the Anthropocene: the period defined by the impact of human activities — including plantation monoculture and the burning of fossil fuels — on the planet's life systems.

Kudzu (*Pueraria lobata*) is native to China, Korea, and Japan. Now considered a pest in the United States, it enjoyed a more dignified debut. Its first appearance was in the Japanese Pavilion during the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial International Exhibition, a stage for the competitive display of technological ingenuity, natural resources, and cultural capital. Originally prized as an ornamental exotic, kudzu was subsequently grown in the US South as fodder, and later adopted by Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration as a remedy for soil erosion. The early-twentieth-century environmental crisis brought about by settler colonialism and maladapted agricultural practices is better known through images of the Dust Bowl in the Midwest. However, the South was also experiencing massive soil loss in this period as a result of land exhaustion brought about by the plantation system and the sharecropping practices that followed it. In the 1930s, erosion came to be considered a national menace and an environmental disaster of global proportions.[2] Kudzu was grown in nurseries and widely and deliberately planted by the Soil Conservation Service to hold together the ravaged soil. The vine proved more successful than its promoters had ever imagined and over the decades began to carpet the fields and smother the abandoned structures of the South.

Like so many migrants, kudzu did not arrive on a previously pure and untouched land.[3] When the first Europeans arrived in what is now Alabama in the early sixteenth century, they found a region of thick forests and central prairies inhabited by the

2 David R. Montgomery, *Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations* (University of California Press, 2007).

3 On the similarities between the rhetoric of biological invasions and xenophobic tropes deployed by nativist ideologies, see Banu Subramaniam, "The Aliens Have Landed! Reflections on the Rhetoric of Biological Invasions," *Meridians* 2, no. 1 (2001): 26–40.

Choctaw and Chickasaw. The arrival of the Spanish was followed by French and English colonists. The latter prevailed in the early 1700s. In 1802 the first cotton gin was constructed in Alabama; white settlers began pouring in, ignoring treaties and displacing Indigenous peoples. The Great Removal of 1838 initiated the mass deportation of Indigenous populations to Oklahoma, opening the way for cotton cultivation. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Alabama was the center of the Cotton Belt. By then, many of the original white settlers were also driven out by moneymen with large plantations supported by the toil of Black enslaved people. Their coerced labor had, by the 1850s, made the planters some of the richest in America, but they were brought low by the Civil War and Confederate defeat, followed by the ravages of soil erosion and the invasion of the boll weevil, a pest that decimated the South's cotton economy. The plantation owners turned to poor whites to supplement the flight of formerly enslaved labor, leading to new forms of exploitation of both Black and white workers through sharecropping and tenant farming practices. By the early twentieth century, cotton cultivation in the South was becoming less and less competitive; the final blow to the region's rural workers was dealt by the introduction of mechanization in the 1950s.[4]

Invasive weeds have accompanied the different waves of migration to the American continent for centuries. The earliest European settlers brought with them plants that often overtook them and surged ahead of their advance and biological attack — often to the point of extermination — on native organisms, including the continent's Indigenous human communities. Weeds thrive on human disturbance: deforestation, overgrazing, the abandonment of traditional forms of agriculture, and the rapacious folly of monoculture. Alfred Crosby has argued that migrant weeds played an important role in protecting the soil laid bare by settler colonialism, shielding it from water and

4 Dale Maharidge and Michael Williamson, *And Their Children after Them: The Legacy of* Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, *James Agee, Walker Evans, and the Rise and Fall of Cotton in the South* (Pantheon, 1989).

wind erosion and from baking in the sun: like "skin transplants placed over […] abraded and burned flesh [they] aided in healing the wounds that the invaders tore in the earth."[5]

But while many of those earlier human introductions of foreign plants were accidental, the deliberate planting of kudzu in the South was driven by scientific thinking and supported by technical expertise. The chief proponent of soil conservation in America, Hugh Bennett, was confident that the plantings were "based on the best information in the possession of scientific agriculturists: agronomist, forester, range specialist, soil specialist, erosion specialist, agricultural engineer, economist, extension specialist, game specialist and geographer."[6] In the prevailing climate of scientific confidence, environmental disaster, and national emergency, early warnings about kudzu's potential threat were dismissed. A 1939 pamphlet by the Department of Agriculture acknowledged the "rather prevalent belief that kudzu is likely to become a serious pest" but concluded that "belief is unfounded."[7] The vine was practically coaxed into becoming an invasive plant in the American South.

This failure to appreciate kudzu's growth potential exposes our tendency to simplify plants by ignoring their relationships to other species and to their environments. Since the beginning of modern botany and its gradual divorce from medicine in the early modern period, Western knowledge of plants has relied on the study of the singular specimen, preserved in the herbarium or depicted in a scientific illustration. Colonial botany favored this approach because it rendered foreign plants stable, transportable, and exchangeable: modular things that could be experimented upon in the botanical garden and scaled up in nurseries or plantations. Both our scientific study of and our technological mastery over plants have long required that we

5 Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 170.

6 Hugh H. Bennett, "Soil Erosion — A National Menace," *The Scientific Monthly* 39, no. 5 (1934): 385–404.

7 R.Y. Bailey, "Kudzu for Erosion Control in the Southeast," *Farmers' Bulletin* no. 1840 (US Department of Agriculture, 1939), 31.

treat them as discrete units amenable to transplantation, following their extraction from the web of multispecies relationships, land management practices, and particularities of climate and soil that make up their ecosystems. This concept of the plant as a unit that can be managed is key to the maximizing imperative of monoculture and capitalist production. The same logic of plantation monoculture that ravaged the land and people of the American South was applied to the remedy. Ironically, kudzu scaled beyond its promoters' wildest expectations, eliding the bounded and controlled deployment of its growth potential. Kudzu's legendary pace of growth debunks the notion of the plant as a passive resource. Kudzu is uncontainable, the speed with which it grows akin to a predatory animality: "You keep still enough, watch close enough," Southerners will tell you, "and damn if you can't see it move."[8]

Migration reminds us of the inevitably contextual and precarious nature of knowledge and its transmission. What is often lost in the translation of the plant into a new context is its rich and multidimensional being. Kudzu has been, for millennia, a valued plant in the East. A nineteenth-century Japanese treatise on kudzu, *Seikatsu Roku* (Account of processing kudzu starch), records the manifold characteristics of the plant and its ecological, economic, and cultural importance. Written by the agricultural innovator Ōkura Nagatsune (1768–1860) and illustrated by a student of the famed printmaker and painter Hokusai (fig. 33.2), it celebrates kudzu as a "useful thing […] in useless places," a hardy and resilient ally against famine that can grow in depleted soils and steep mountainsides.[9] While fulfilling basic needs of ecosystems and humans, kudzu is also part of a culture of refinement that has included, through the centuries, the production of paper, fine textiles, and delicate food concoctions. Ōkura's work falls within the genre of agricultural improvement and deploys techniques of meticulous description, artful illus-

8 Michael Pollan, *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991), 104–5.

9 Ōkura Nagatsune, *Seikatsu Roku* (Bunshodo Fujii Uhei, 1828).

Fig. 33.2. Ōkura Nagatsune and Arisaka Hokuba, *Seikatsu Roku* (Kyoto: Bunshodo Fujii Uhei, 1828). The first illustration of kudzu in *Seikatsu Roku* labels each anatomical component of the plant from root to leaf, including flower, stem, and pod, and summarizes its nutritional, medicinal, or ornamental functions. Photo by Joe Mills.

tration, and mechanical reproduction to disseminate information for growing and processing kudzu. The treatise also refers to kudzu's medical properties through the tradition of Chinese *materia medica* (materials used in medicine), a reminder of the perennially migratory nature of knowledge that recasts the vine's putative origin, Japan, as just one more stop along the itinerary of transmission and adaptation.

In *Vibrant Matter* Jane Bennett teases out the recalcitrance of things that refuse "to dissolve completely into the milieu of human knowledge"[10] and identifies them across a continuum that may extend from the living organism to minerals, landfills, or electrical currents. She borrows Bruno Latour's concept of the "actant" to describe a form of agency devoid of what we would

10 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

recognize as intention or will, yet capable of producing real and palpable effects. Christenberry's photographs of kudzu confront us with our precarious control and inadequate knowledge, the unexpected triumph of a thing that appears indifferent to intention, sinister in excessive proliferation, and relentlessly resilient. Bennett argues for an attitude of methodological naivete in our encounter with the non-human other, a moment of epistemological humility and ontological uncertainty held long enough to "render manifest a subsistent world of nonhuman vitality."[11] Without personifying and ascribing agency to that other thing that "thwarts our desire for conceptual and practical mastery,"[12] such naivete may nevertheless open us up to a more inclusive ecological ethic.

In its extraordinary success coupled with its noxious effects on other life forms, kudzu reenacts the dominant model of human activity in the Anthropocene. Invasives have been defined as the plants that elicit the most anthropomorphic description: They are aggressive and opportunistic, ecological imperialists second only to humans.[13] Among kudzu's strategies for survival is reproductive ingenuity. The extraordinarily beautiful and fragrant flower only matures on a climbing vine, but the plant can eschew sexual reproduction in favor of putting out roots and cloning itself when forced to lie low. Kudzu husbands its resources, using other plants as climbing structures and therefore eschewing creation of a woody mass in favor of energy production through its leaves. Human-induced climate change appears to favor kudzu. The vine thrives on increased levels of carbon dioxide and the warmer temperatures brought about by our fossil-burning activities. One of the frequent charges brought against invasive species is that they lack the mutualistic relationships with native species — other plants, pollinators, animals, human communities, etc. — that support and enrich local ecosystems. Kudzu's lack of reciprocity and perceived inability to coexist

11 Ibid., 17.
12 Ibid., 15.
13 Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism,* 150.

harmoniously with other life forms in its new habitat holds up a mirror to imperialist, capitalist, and extractive attitudes towards the earth's ecosystems.

We need to recognize the rich personalities of plants, the ways in which they resist the categories in which we seek to contain them. Yet Christenberry's fascination with kudzu throughout his career stemmed from the sense that the vine's dominance distilled and clarified something important about the landscapes of his childhood: "I think that everything I've been about for a number of years has been simplification, simplification. Getting down to the essence of something."[14] Peeling back the layers of landscape and cultural history concealed beneath the kudzu patch reveals what Anna Tsing has called the "patchy Anthropocene." With this concept, she connects the ecological simplification of plantation monoculture and the feral proliferation of pests or invasives as two sides of the same coin. Tsing gives the example of coffee rust, to which coffee plants are fairly indifferent in their natural habitat, but which has become an epidemic in far-flung plantations.[15] Whereas plantations are the prime example of "modular simplification," the pests or invasives that proliferate in monoculture's aftermath are "feral proliferations." Their intersection is the space where kudzu thrives and migrant knowledge falters, for "Anthropocene patches emerge in the relationship between simplifications and proliferations."[16]

The patchy Anthropocene is intimately linked to the legacy of the plantation and the trauma of monoculture: "the slave plantation system was the model and motor for the carbon-greedy machine-based factory system that is often cited as an

14 Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, "William Christenberry (1936–2016)," *American Art* 31, no. 3 (2017): 112.

15 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Andrew S. Mathews, and Nils Bubandt, "Patchy Anthropocene: Landscape Structure, Multispecies History, and the Retooling of Anthropology: An Introduction to Supplement 20," *Current Anthropology* 60, no. S20 (2019): S186.

16 Ibid., S187.

inflection point for the Anthropocene."[17] The plantation is designed to maximize the yield of both plant and human labor through coercion and the preponderance of one organism at the exclusion of others in the pursuit of an economic product. To exist, the plantation displaces Indigenous communities and native species while generating forced migrations of plants and people. In turn, this modular simplification creates the radical disturbance that erases natural diversity and previous land management practices, and renders a landscape ripe for feral proliferation. Invasives and pests then ripple through a landscape prepared by the ravages of ecological simplification. While colonial and capitalist interests and planning create the conditions for the emergence of these landscapes, however, they "do not fully determine the results."[18] Invasives may thus disrupt both capitalist productivity and the economistic understanding of biodiversity as the provision of "ecosystem services" within a market of more-than-human entities.

William Christenberry's photographs of kudzu exemplify this Anthropocene landscape, emerging from colonial and capitalist-driven ecological simplification, imbued with the past horrors and contemporary after-effects of slavery and exploitative labor, and giving rise to feral proliferation. The images capture the uncanniness of the Anthropocene: the ecological and human trauma concealed under the kudzu patch. This uncanniness is rendered more haunting by the absence of people: the human communities that have abandoned or been driven out of the ravaged land following successive waves of forced migrations and displacements. Ultimately, what may be most unsettling about the kudzu patch is the way it mocks our rhetoric of resilience, which can perpetuate problematic structures of exploitation and extraction under the guise of crisis management.[19] Kudzu landscapes, despite attempts to render them pro-

17 Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin," *Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2015): 162.

18 Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt, "Patchy Anthropocene," S190.

19 Mark Vardy and Mick Smith, "Resilience," *Environmental Humanities* 9, no. 1 (2017): 175–79.

ductive, resist the enframing of nature as inexhaustibly available to human consumption and the potentially totalizing discourse of sustainability that risks subsuming differences (social, political, economic, ecological) under the appearance of consensus — that nature must be brought, one way or another, to serve human ends. Ultimately, kudzu's runaway success confronts us with the unwelcome possibility that a resilient nature may, rather, be indifferent to our needs and oblivious to our absence.

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34

Small Things, Strange Shores: Poems

Mina Gorji

Psittacula

Flash of green! — up in the silver birch —
neon, squawking
almost gawdy green —
against the dappled quiet
of suburbia, its lawnmowers
and distant radio.
They say that captive parakeets
can learn to speak —
what might they tell us
of ancestral green,
bright days wild
in Himalayan trees?

Waiting for Snow

we feel instead
the emptiness of rain.
Inside the house it's cold.
We have been waiting
for the world to be forgiven
(for a moment) into white.
The pavement glitters
crystalline with ice.

Grandmother had never felt
the snow before;
she knew the touch
of monsoon rain,
humidity so thick
the body slowed,
before the shock
of Edinburgh rain,
soaking her saree
with its cold and grey.

Reeds

Listening to a reed-flute, the Persian poet Rumi heard a lament. Cut from its bed, the reed sings of longing, of the pain of separation, of being distanced from our roots. In so many ways we are distancing ourselves — from the natural world, from our home. Losing our sense of place. The reed's song is a lament.

Wicken Fen. Listen to the sound of the wind in the reeds. The reedbeds here are full of life, much of it beyond the frequency of human ears. We cannot hear the sound of wainscot moths emerging from the hollow reeds — the sound of their wings against the night. What other sounds are beyond our hearing?

So many moths are calling, flying, landing, feeding, pairing, dying, in these reeds. Their names have a music of their own: *Muscosella, Willow Tortix, Bordered Sallow, Silver Barred, Scallop Shell, Small Seraphim, Brown-tail, Reed Dagger, Flame wainscot. Webb's wainscot* moth is resting on a reed stem. Its larvae are nocturnal, feeding on the reeds at night, hiding, by day, inside its hollow stem. This moth can be found in reedbeds all across the East of England, and also in Iran, hiding at night inside the hollow stems. Listening.

The Wasp

who makes no honey gave us ink.
In early spring oak galls appear:
darkening in autumn
they gestate.

Emerging into English light,
this tiny emigrant
was smuggled in Aleppo oak—
an alien acorn.

IX.

Migrant Food

35

Exile and Food

Claudia Roden in conversation with Subha Mukherji

SUBHA MUKHERJI: Your account of your childhood in Cairo is so wonderfully redolent. Can you tell me about what food meant to you then, and whether you knew what it meant to you? Did migrating to Britain change or develop your relationship to Mediterranean food and its culture? For me, food means so much more when you are leaving a place or realize that you have left it, physically at least.

CLAUDIA RODEN: I grew up in a very extended family on both sides, the Doueks and the Sassoons, with three grandparents from Syria and my maternal grandmother an Alphandary from Istanbul. My Syrian grandparents came to Cairo and went to live in a new area called Sakakini that had just been built on drained marshland. A lot of people from Syria, especially Jewish merchants, settled in this quarter which is still known as the Syrian quarter. There, my relatives continued life as it was in Aleppo, and that included cooking all the things they remembered from their life there. My parents moved to a little residential island called Zamalek when I was small. As we had a very large extended family, our life was very much about visiting each other, and

visiting always meant food. And so food was something that I associated with people and hospitality.

SM: Reading the introduction to your book, I got a vivid sense of Egypt's cosmopolitanism. It sounds as though there were two parts to it, the older Arabic part and the Parisian cosmopolitan Cairo which kind of reminds me of what I've heard of Beirut. Did food cross this divide freely, or were there two worlds of scents and tastes and flavors?

CR: We were indeed like Beirut, and French was the lingua franca of the country. If you went to the cinema, you got your ticket in French, and if you went to the big stores, you spoke French, not Arabic. You did speak Arabic if you went to the butcher, and Greek if you went to the grocer — our cheeses like feta and halloumi were mostly Greek — and my mother spoke Arabic to Awad, our cook. I went to The English School Cairo, and on the first day the names were read out in class and we had to shout out what religion we were. "Muslim!," "Copt!," "Jewish!," "Greek Orthodox!," "Christian!" Teachers kept telling us "only English, only English" because we all spoke many languages with each other. You'd say some things in French, then you'd speak in English, then sometimes in Arabic or Italian. In my family, at home we spoke French. Growing up, we ate mainly French and Syrian food and some Judaeo-Spanish food. Our nanny, Maria, cooked for us her Slovene/Italian dishes when we were small. Many of the recipes in my book are from my family and other people who were leaving Egypt, expelled after the Suez Crisis in 1956. They were in a state of trauma, heading for different countries, thinking they would never see each other again. Exchanging recipes was a way to remember each other by.

SM: When everything else is stripped from you, the memory of food becomes a way of holding on, doesn't it? You say they were exchanging recipes. What form did this exchange take? Were the recipes remembered or written down?

CR: There wasn't a single cookbook in Egypt, not one. And there weren't printed recipes. Some people had little handwritten notebooks, but most didn't — they kept their recipes in their head. They were passed on from mother to daughter down the generations and taught to cooks who came from villages.

SM: Which means, does it, that each family has their way of cooking the same dish?

CR: Our community was a mix of Jews from all over the old Ottoman lands and around the Mediterranean. Many had come to Egypt at the turn of the century when the Suez Canal had opened and Egypt had become the trading hub of the region. When I started collecting recipes in my early twenties, women who gave me recipes — they were always women of my mother's age — said "it's from Aleppo!," "this is from Izmir," "it's my grandmother's from Salonika," "from Tunisia and Livorno!" It made me realize how very diverse we were.

When I was fifteen, I went to Paris for three years. I was a weekly boarder in a French lycée. I got to know French cuisine and also enjoyed eating all kinds of foods with the families of girls I met at school from places like Algeria, Morocco, and Vietnam. There was one cousin from Egypt who had been arrested as a communist in Egypt and then became a journalist in Paris. I would have lunch with him and his wife every Sunday. He made something that was a "poor dish" in Egypt, *ful medames,* out of tins of dried broad beans. He dressed them with olive oil, lemon juice, and garlic, and accompanied them with hard boiled eggs and salad. This meal embodied our nostalgia for Egypt. Then I came to England to study art. I spent two years at St. Martin's in Soho in the '50s. The food in cafeterias, self-service eateries, and affordable restaurants in London was horrible then. I lived in a flat with my two brothers and I cooked all the time for them and for the friends we invited. I made things like stuffed vine leaves and vegetables and filo pies. When we ate at our friends', we got spaghetti bolognaise or mushroom omelet.

SM: The friends who came over when you cooked — were they mostly British?

CR: They were British. I also discovered Indian food because one of our neighbors was an Indian painter called Avinash Chandra. I met him and his wife Prem on the night bus. They invited us to dinner often. The house where we rented a flat was owned by an elderly Jewish couple. The wife — everyone called her auntie Janey — treated us like her children. When we came home there was always something she'd leave on our kitchen table — like chicken soup or a cheesecake. That is how I got to know Ashkenazi Jewish food.

SM: Your story about cooking as a student reminds me of my father's story of when he was in Oxford in the late '50s. He had never cooked at home, because Indian men never cooked in those days. But when he was in Oxford, he learned to cook. He rented a room in a Polish woman's house. She was a bit like the kind of woman you were talking about, because she would occasionally cook something and put it on the table. There my father had enough space to cook for four people and he would make a chicken curry or something vaguely Indian and people loved it!

CR: In those days there were no Lebanese restaurants, no Turkish restaurants, nothing. You couldn't buy filo, you couldn't buy bulgur, chickpeas, couscous, anything. It seems funny now to think that some years after my first book came out supermarkets began asking me what they should stock and gave my recipes to their producers to use. In the first edition of my book I wrote "a courgette is a baby marrow"! To buy aubergines you had to go to a market in Camden. It was a total desert here in the way of food.

SM: Even the change since I first came to Oxford as an undergraduate in 1988–1990 has been stunning. We had a Chinese restaurant, a chippie, a Jamaican restaurant — which was the "coolest" — and an Indian restaurant in our neighborhood, but

nothing remotely as cosmopolitan as now; so I can just imagine what it was like in the '50s.

CR: People weren't talking about food because it was seen as frivolous. And it was not considered polite. I remember Caroline Waldegrave (who ran Prue Leith's Cookery School) telling me that when she got married her mother told her, "When you get invited to dinner you must write a letter of thanks — but don't ever mention the food!"

SM: Because mentioning food was vulgar?

CR: Yes. I would ask everybody what they cooked and what they ate when they travelled because I was researching recipes. They were embarrassed. I started collecting recipes when people left Egypt in the expulsion of 1956–1957 in the last stages of the Suez crisis. For several years I was completely immersed in the world of Jewish refugees from Egypt — they were Arab Jews (now called Mizrahi) and those whose families originated from Spain and Portugal and had migrated through the Mediterranean and Ottoman worlds. I got the recipe for the Orange Cake which went viral and became famous all over the world from "Madame Galante" from Aleppo. I was intrigued because no one else from Aleppo had the recipe for the cake. It turned out that the recipe had originated in Spain and migrated with a few families through Portugal and Livorno. As I took down all these recipes, I realized that everybody — from Iran, Iraq, Greece, Syria, Turkey — was claiming the same dish as their own: "this is our *Baklava!,*" "our stuffed vine leaves!" So I really wanted to find out where it was all from originally. When I went to the British Library looking for Arab cookbooks, there wasn't a single contemporary one. I asked the librarian and he gave me a list of items relating to medieval Arab cookery, including three thirteenth-century medieval culinary manuscripts, an English translation and commentaries about one from Baghdad, a Spanish translation of an Al Andalusi/Maghrebi one, and a sociological study by a French Marxist Orientalist called Maxime Rodinson of one

found in Damascus. I was enthralled to see that you could find out what happened in a place through food.

SM: One of the things that struck me while we were talking is that we think about food as a kind of home. Even if you are not politically in forced exile, you can feel uprooted — exile is a state of mind. And because memory is so sensory, remembering food is a powerful trigger: remembering smell can bring a whole world back. Is food both home and un-home? Do we carry home or exile when we carry our food in our memories and our senses across borders? Is food the ultimate migrant object, inherently mobile? Or would you say that the migrations of food are more specific to the history of particular communities, their roots and their uprootings?

CR: For all immigrants and exiles, food is the one thing from their homeland that they can hold onto which gives comfort and joy. What we call "Jewish food" is really the food of countries where the Jews once had stable communities and adapted local foods to fit their dietary laws. Because Jews moved, their food is often a hybrid from two or more homelands. The various Jewish foods of India, for instance, have influences from Iraq, Syria, and Portugal with the flavors of India.

SM: A couple of winters ago I did a tour of old Kolkata, and visited the Synagogue, which is exquisitely preserved. But there are very few Jews left in the city — you could count them on your hands. The man who takes care of the Synagogue is Muslim and has a deep understanding of Jewish architecture and culture. I wondered whether food has served as a kind of bridge between not just cultures and societies but also religions? Because Jewish and Islamic cultures in India are traditionally thought to be opposed.

CR: Throughout history Muslims and Jews have mostly been in an interdependent relationship. For instance, in Spain where the Muslims conquered the Iberian Peninsula, it was the Jews who

had been persecuted by the Visigoths who helped them in and opened the doors. Muslim Spain was for the Jews a golden age.

SM: I completely felt that in Córdoba. I remember sitting in the Jewish quarter and I could smell cinnamon, I could smell cumin, I could smell Islamic as well as Indian spices, and I had just come from the *Mezquita* —

CR: Toledo is known as the city of three cultures because Christians, Muslims, and Jews coexisted there for centuries. The nuns who sell pastries in churches and convents say their almond specialities are both Arab and Jewish. At the time of the Inquisition, when the Jews were banished from Spain in 1492, a great number of mainly rich families chose to stay and convert to Christianity. Some who had unmarried daughters sent them to convents as was true also for old Christians. The nuns came with their little maids whose families were usually Moriscos (former Muslims) and these young girls cooked and made pastries. Spanish cuisine has Jewish and most obviously Arab influences, yet a lot of Spaniards are still in denial about the influence of the Jewish and Arab culture.

SM: I have seen that myself in Spain. To pick up on the theme of trade and merchant cultures, something I discovered recently is a kind of weird generic mobility about recipes in the Indian tradition. There is a paradox about the genre there. Although the earliest cookbooks go back to 1831, in day-to-day life it was largely an aural tradition passed down the family line, usually through women. I wanted to show you the only cookbook that I bought with me from India. It is in tatters and there are practically no pictures. It was written by a wonderful writer of children's books called Leela Majumdar and another woman called Kamala Chatterjee. This was the only cookbook I had seen when I left for the UK to do my undergraduate degree. The following year I got married and received it as a wedding present.

CR: What year did it come out?

SM: 1979. It went through seven reprints because it became so popular. The first Bengali cookbook, which is also India's first printed cookbook — the one from 1831 — is *Pakrajeshwar*. There's another one, *Byanjanratnakar,* that is also from the early nineteenth century. But the first proto-recipes book or proto-cookbook was buried in a thirteenth-century book of folk poetry in Bengal. It is called the *Mangalkavyas,* which is a book of poems of benediction which, in the middle of singing praises to Indigenous Hindu/Bengali deities, embeds poems and songs of praise for the food cooked by the women of that region and of that time. We get a vivid glimpse of the differences in the cuisine of the east and west of Bengal, which of course became much more pronounced and political after the Partition of Bengal. But we also get vignettes of the differences between culinary traditions of the farmers, the hunter-gatherers, and the rich merchants for whom hospitality and its style were among the intangibles of class. Have you come across such generic mixing or grafting in the Mediterranean cultures of cuisine? And is there a tradition of the poetry or music of food?

CR: These thirteenth-century Arab recipes were written by people who were part of the courts — the cooks could not write! In the caliphates of Baghdad and Córdoba, where there had been a big explosion of interest in gastronomy, courtiers and princes wrote songs and poems about food. Much of the refined culinary culture of Baghdad was adopted from ancient Persia — that is, Iran — as you can tell from the names and tags of the recipes. You find echoes from there in Sicily, which was occupied by Arabs, in countries like Morocco and Tunisia, and all the way to Barcelona. A hybrid Hispano-Arabic cuisine that developed in Spain caused a revolution in North Africa with the arrival of Muslims banished from Spain. An example of the mixing and sharing of cultures is the pigeon pie called *bstila,* said to be Andalusian in Morocco and Moorish in Spain.

SM: Ah yes — the *bstila!* I kind of assumed it was Spanish-Islamic. So it's such a shared heritage that it is difficult now to tell the direction of influence of migrancy if you like!

CR: There's also the cuisine that developed in Constantinople — now Istanbul — when it was the capital of the Ottoman Empire, from all the different occupied territories and the steppes of Central Asia where the nomadic Turks came from, which went on to spread throughout the empire over most of the Middle East, the Balkans, part of North Africa, and beyond. That is why you get pilafs, rice pudding, baklava, and *kadaifi* in most countries that were Ottoman. The British Empire didn't spread its cuisine in the same way all over the world.

SM: But in Calcutta we do have these colonial clubs like they have in Cairo, I believe. And they have some British recipes, Indianized, of course. So you get dishes like mulligatawny soup. And the really recherché thing hardly anyone makes so well these days as the Indian clubs is prawn cocktail: a genre by itself. And for me, the most exquisite cucumber sandwiches are to be found in Calcutta rather than Britain.

CR: Go to Claridge's — they still have them, along with specialities that people from all over the world go to for a taste of something essentially "English." I went to an English club in Bombay for tea. And of course we had English clubs in Cairo — sporting clubs. But when the English were there, they didn't allow the locals to become members unless they were hugely wealthy or important.

SM: When I was growing up it was just the same, these restrictions. But it wasn't just about being rich, it was about social clout. For instance, my parents are members of a couple of clubs and they're not rich. But they are from a distinguished academic family, and that was their passport. Women couldn't become members but could only enter as daughters or wives. So of course I shunned that whole world. But now I'm interested

in it as a sociological phenomenon. Talking of food and class and "taste" in a sense that straddles the two, and how migration plays into this tangle, let me tell you about my experience as a child. My mother was a very gregarious person, who married into a sedate, scholarly family, so she felt very deprived. Her family were refugees from what was East Bengal and is now Bangladesh. They moved to West Bengal during the Partition of Bengal and, like other refugees, they brought with them East Bengali cuisine which was, at least in those times, significantly different from West Bengali cuisine. My father's family was solidly West Bengali — she felt that not only were they scholarly and sedentary, but their daily food was subtle to the point of being dull and soul-killing. My mother, who was more like a friend than a parent when I was growing up, told me that the food of her marital home — where she lived with her husband and his parents and brother — felt symbolic of a change in the texture of her life when she arrived after a 90% arranged marriage. Apparently, lunchtime was a time of tragic epiphanies when she would often lock herself in the bathroom and have a cry: The fish were so bland and insipid in their stew that it was as if "they stared at you." She came from a large family where she was one of eleven children and where the food was plentiful, spicy, and robust in a way that West Bengalis would call unrefined and vulgar. Eventually she decided to take things in hand and give my father a touch of a raucous excess. And then there was a sea change in the cooking of our house, and I witnessed it. But the cultural registers of culinary difference that were a legacy of the political Partition of Bengal remained, largely as a matter of humor. Did you see anything like this in your childhood?

CR: Yes, in most countries you find upper class food does not have very strong flavors. In Turkey, the classic food of Istanbul is very delicately spiced, and has little garlic and no chili. At a conference dinner there several years ago, when local academics had been asked to greet us foreign gastronomes and food writers, I was sitting next to a sophisticated Turkish woman. When we were served food from Gaziantep (near the Syrian

border and Aleppo) she was very embarrassed. It was very hot and spicy, full of chili and garlic. She said, "We never eat this!" She saw it as vulgar. And now UNESCO has chosen Gaziantep as a City of Creativity for its gastronomy! Migrants are terribly important in bringing new foods to countries. They're usually cheap foods that can be made without significant capital or material resources and can be sold in the street. And then, in a weird way, they become "national dishes" sometimes in their new habitat.

SM: A whole world, then, of the paradoxes of migrant life and the politics of food, contained in a dish and served on our tables.

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A Journey in Taste

Faraj Alnasser in conversation with Subha Mukherji

SUBHA MUKHERJI: I wanted to start by asking you an obvious question: Did migrating to Britain change or develop your relationship to Mediterranean food and its culture?

FARAJ ALNASSER: The Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish writes that "the further we move away" from our past, our home or our homeland, "the closer we come…" ("The Hoopoe"). I was Syrian when I left Syria. Leaving made me want to learn more about my roots. Being away from home made me miss so much, like my family gathering at the table, the farm, the type of food, the vegetation, the weather. The beautiful thing about food, though, is that it goes beyond borders. For example, hummus is made in Syria but they also make it in Lebanon, in Egypt, in Palestine.

SM: What I'm hearing is that there's an entire way of life that food has come to stand for: the farm, the seasons, the cycles of life. Would you say that food stands for all of that much more perceptibly once you have left?

FA: I find I'm in a more romantic friendship with food. When I make a dish from home it's not just a dish, but a healing, a remedy.

SM: You mentioned hummus. I notice that, yes, my Lebanese friends say, "We make the real hummus" and when I went to Israel, people said, "It was born in this place, in this shop in Jerusalem." And then I had *your* hummus and thought, "Wow, this is the best hummus." When you have become a citizen of the world in some ways, does that intensify your sense of ownership of a particular food, or does it make you more relaxed about it?

FA: Sometimes I feel that things should be made in a particular way. At the same time, I also think that, like us, food crosses borders. For example, tomatoes were introduced to Syria in 1750 and became part of our cuisine. Now lots of our dishes, like *shakshuka,* have tomato in them.

SM: Once you start thinking about the history of ingredients, you realize that there's a paradox about food. We identify food with what home means to us, but it has always already brought the world home to us. No?

FA: Yes — food is like a free bird. It travels all over the world and you cannot control its migrations.

SM: Lovely thought! Yes! On to your own history: Whenever you've talked about your childhood in Aleppo, it's been so vivid, so evocative. Can you tell us a bit about what food meant to you then and perhaps more importantly, did you *know* what it meant to you?

FA: My grandmother had a farm and grew her own vegetables. She had her own pistachio trees, fig trees, pomegranate trees, and olive trees. I couldn't wait for late summer each year to climb the fig tree and eat them. I would go to the market with my mother and grandmother and aunts. I used to love sneaking between

them and hearing them gossip and seeing what they were doing. It was only after I left that I started to realize how important food is to us. I called my grandmother in Aleppo last week and asked what she was up to, and she said, "Well, I have fifty kilos of tomatoes, I have to peel them, squeeze them by hand, and dry them to make paste. Your aunt brought me fifty kilos of red pepper and I have to clean and dry them to make chili flakes." It made me wish I were with her. When I came to the UK, cooking helped me to express my sorrow, my homesickness —

SM: Your longing.… What was the first thing that you cooked and when — do you remember?

FA: Yesterday was my sixth anniversary in the UK. I was writing about it, and going through photos that I captured in the journey. I captured the first dish I cooked when I arrived in the UK, it was *mujaddhara,* salad, and chips. That was the first dish I made in two-and-a-half years for myself, after being homeless. It felt to me like time to start again.

SM: Did you have a kitchen where you were staying?

FA: When I came to the UK to seek asylum six years ago, I was under the protection of the government. I was sent to stay in temporary accommodation in Huddersfield which had a kitchen, and I lived there for a few months before I got my refugee status.

SM: And you were able to create again — cooking is about self-expression too, isn't it?

FA: Exactly.

SM: I'm curious about the form in which recipes travel. Where I grew up, in West Bengal, the earliest cookbooks go back to 1831, but there are very few of them. In day-to-day life it's largely an oral tradition, not recorded in writing so much as passed down

through the family line. What was it like in the Aleppo of your childhood, and in what form did you bring recipes over when you left?

FA: My grandmother from my mum's side is a great cook, but she cannot read or write. When my mum got married, she needed to learn how to cook. So my grandma recorded all her recipes on a tape. And she would say, "If it's too salty, it's fine, if it's overspiced, it's fine, if you're afraid of something, go ahead and face it." She gave it to my mother and my mum started to follow these recipes and later became a better cook than her mother. Because my mum came from a poor family, she didn't want to see her children have the same experience. She wanted us to go to college and be educated, and she wouldn't let me help her in the kitchen. But when she went out, I used to sneak into the kitchen and do some cooking. Sometimes the food would get too salty and burn, but one time it worked: she tasted it and said, "That's delicious, Faraj! Ok, you can help me in the kitchen." I learned a lot from her.

SM: The way your grandmother framed cooking as trial and error makes me think of how you and I cook. We don't cook with precise measurements. But of course, if you want to write a cookbook then you need to put in measurements. Have you thought of writing a cookbook? Being such an intuitive creator, how would you go about it?

FA: I struggled when I worked in a kitchen and they gave me recipes to follow. When I cook, things taste different each time. So I think writing a cookbook would be a big challenge for me. I also think that people who want to cook need to be less afraid of recipes. As my grandmother said to my mum, if you make a mistake, it's fine.

SM: You recognize that food needs to have a kind of grammar to be written down and transmitted but we need to find a grammar that is not constricting, a grammar that allows space for error,

experiment, improvisation. I find that when I tell people how I've cooked, say, a particular Bengali dish, I always say, "Look, grasp the basic concept. You flavor with seeds, you sauté…." If you've got the ideas, then the details are a moveable feast.

FA: Yes, you need the foundation, you need to understand certain things, and then you do what you like to do. You play.

SM: Every time you've cooked for me you've told me stories about the item you've cooked. It seems to me that there is an inherent migrancy about stories. Stories slip through borders; nobody can keep them in. Perhaps there's also a migrancy about food: food is the ultimate migrant object, as you're presenting it. What role have food stories played in your own journey from Syria to the UK?

FA: It's not just that my body left Syria to come to the UK, it's that Syria itself moved with me. Aleppo is inside of me. The souk's inside of me, my mother's kitchen is inside of me, the farm, the summer days, the spices, the water, the air, the memories, and the stories. The other day I saw these damask rose petals, and it reminded me of the April and May time when we'd go to the market and see it full of damask rose for making rose water or rose jam. My grandma used to make that jam for us. I called my grandma and she told me how to make it. I made the jam, and I gave some to my neighbor and she said "Faraj, how beautiful it is to imagine these petals which are in Cambridge but used in a recipe that travelled miles across the ocean from Aleppo towards Europe to England." She started to ask me about the story of the jam and how it's made. Each dish has its own story. For example, each Friday we'd go to *hummusji,* the shop that sells hummus. Some of these shops are 200 years old, and they are inherited by generations of the same family. We'd never make hummus because we only ever bought it from them. When I eat that, I remember the gathering and my mum making things in the kitchen and someone buying fresh bread and bringing things together.

SM: The way you're describing it, it's like a scene from a play, it's theater. It's brought alive by stories. That seems to be your way of linking your past with your present, of telling people what your life was like. And that eyewitness evocation, that vividness, relates to some of the work Natalya and I do on the rhetoric of the Renaissance. It's almost as if food not only comes with narrative, but demands and provokes it. It is itself an impulse to tell, an impulse to recreate, an impulse to stage.

FA: I still remember what my neighbor said: "Faraj, I haven't been to Syria, but I feel like I have now." Similarly, I haven't been to India, but I feel like I've been through the beautiful dishes you make for me.

SM: It's like a spot of time when you inhabit another world, another land, in your senses.

FA: Especially smell. You smell things and you go miles away.

SM: You mention that your mother didn't want you in the kitchen. What was the relationship between gender and cooking in your childhood? If you had stayed, do you think your class and gender position would have meant that you would not have done what you do now?

FA: In Syrian restaurants the chefs are mainly men, but culturally, men don't cook at home. I'm not sure if I'd be a chef if I were in Syria. And if I were, I wouldn't be respected in the way I'm respected now. My hummus wouldn't mean what it means here. If I were there and tried to tell them about their rose jam … I mean, every mother in Syria makes rose jam!

SM: Ha — so the migrant nature of food allows it to become an art, as it were! As you say, if you cook hummus or rose jam in Aleppo, what story would you tell? Now, I came to the UK much earlier than you did and I have witnessed the transition of migrant food from the strange to the trendy. Does this transition

map onto the trajectory from exile to cosmopolitanism that someone like you, who came as an exile but then ended up being a chef at Honey & Co., experienced?

FA: It does sound like it has changed a lot from what it was like in the '60s and '70s, or even the '80s. When I came to Cambridge, the first thing I worried about was whether or not I'd be able to find Middle Eastern shops and the ingredients I use in my kitchen, but when I came and walked around on Mill Road and saw Pakistani, Turkish, Indian, and Chinese shops which sell everything, I felt I was at home.

SM: The culture has become more hospitable, perhaps. Is there any sense in which it also poses a bit of a challenge because Mediterranean Arab cooking is now all the rage in London, if not the whole of the UK? Does it put you under extra pressure to bring something new to the scene that is distinctive, that is all yours? What are you going to bring to it that is all yours?

FA: My philosophy in the kitchen is to bring alternatives to meat dishes. When people think of Middle Eastern food, they think kebabs. But what about making it vegetarian and more sustainable? We have a lot of dishes called *bi zeit,* which are cooked with olive oil instead of meat. For example, you cook spinach with spices and mushrooms and olive oil. You cook the green beans with red sauce, and chopped tomato with garlic and coriander and olive oil. This is what the working class usually eat because they often can't afford meat. These dishes are delicious and nourishing and have interesting stories, but you don't often find them in Middle Eastern restaurants.

SM: So it's not only about opening up the diversity and range of the cuisine, but also about tapping into the culinary culture of a particular place vertically, across classes. We've talked about how food travels. Food is also one of the most synesthetic experiences. How much of the *total* experience can migration carry

across, and are there elements that are irreducibly local and located, and which cannot be translated?

FA: One issue is vegetation. For example, growing figs in this country is not the same as growing figs in Syria. You might get a few good figs but it's not the same as the ones that I have at my grandmother's farm. The tree is smart enough to understand that this is not the same soil, not the same water, not the same sun. Maybe we cannot hear trees, but they have much to tell us and to teach us, especially with global warming.

SM: It's interesting that you relate it to the climate crisis. What role might food have to play in our futures?

FA: Will we be able to have the same things because of drought? What will we lose? Will we have the same trees or same flour or same wheat as we had before in, say, fifty years' time? This is the reason I'm thinking about vegetarian alternatives and what we can use instead. It's related to the climate crisis on the one hand, but on the other also how people lived before, in the ancient time.

SM: Perhaps food has undiscovered, untapped resources that'll help us adapt to the challenges and shape our future in a way that might be better for the world.… Teach us more sustainable ways of living.… It can be a bridge in so many senses — from our past to our future, as you hint. I wonder if it can also do social bridging, especially when it is immigrant cooking. In every country there's a high and a low culinary culture. Does migrant food help to bring the two together in its adopted country?

FA: When I talked to my mother the other day and told her that my friends came over and that I made *mujaddhara* and hummus and salad, she said, "Faraj, aren't you ashamed of yourself?" Her understanding is that to be hospitable and generous one has to make a great dish with meat. But here it's different: refugees brought the food of different classes together on one table.

SM: Perhaps in a migrant context, those class barriers, and ideas of register, break down more easily. I remember the first time Rowan Williams, coeditor of this volume, came to lunch or dinner. My mother asked what I was cooking and I said, "I'm making daal and rice." And my mother said, "Is this how we brought you up?! You are feeding a guest, and not just any guest but the ex-Archbishop of Canterbury, *daal* and *bhat*?!" I revised the whole menu! I had thought nothing of it but for my mother, I was violating the first principles of hospitality and getting the register of food wrong in making such a modest meal. Claudia Roden, who is also interviewed in this book, described Middle Eastern cuisine as "rich in variations and poor in precision." Is freedom from culinary grammar a luxury we cannot afford in immigrant situations, or should we be assertive of it?

FA: Food writing is often not very precise. For example, I have got an Arabic cookbook from ninth-century Baghdad. There are many ingredients they did not have at that time: no tomato, no potato. The recipes describe just what is inside of the dish, they do not say how much. They just say, "a bit of that, a bit of that." When the dish travelled, everyone started to make it the way they heard of it.

SM: Interesting — so imprecision becomes a way of preserving a space for diversity, particularity, variety! You mention that in the ninth-century that they didn't have potatoes and tomatoes. Can you tell us a little bit about the trade routes?

FA: The interesting thing about that Arabic book, written during the Abbasid caliphate, is that some of our contemporary dishes already existed then — baklava, *mujaddhara, freekeh,* lamb stew with quince and pomegranate molasses, etc. They used lots of dates, olives, and olive oil. Lots of recipes came via the Silk Road at that time. But some went back to more surprising places too; the other day an Aleppo chef was talking about a recipe that goes back to Korea, and had travelled via the Silk Road to Alep-

po. We've slightly changed it and now use orange blossom so it's more Middle Eastern. It's fascinating.…

SM: We have talked about how food unites. But migrant food can also divide. A long time ago, I had weevils in the kitchen of my college flat, the kind that come out of flour. A college official came to inspect, opened my cupboards, and said, "Oh it smells, it's full of strange spices." Quite apart from the fact that that's how racism operates, it made me feel that there are boundaries created by the senses, by smell especially. Do you have any perception of how food defines otherness rather than belonging and blending?

FA: Sometimes people are afraid of things that are new to them.…

SM: I can understand the unfamiliarity but the notion of strangeness can tip over easily either into wonder and fascination or into repulsion.

FA: Some people might find foreign food difficult. We need to understand this mentality. I think about myself: I came from a culture in Syria where the food is only Syrian food. You'd never, ever see a foreign food shop in Syria. So the first time I tried Indian was when I came to the UK, the first time I tried Italian was when I came to the UK. And it blew my mind.

SM: Yes, there's a sense in which differences are resolved. But is there a danger in thinking that way about food, in that people do tend to homogenize migrants? This brings me to a memory. My friend Nadina, who's also in the book, cofounded the Melissa Network for Migrant and Refugee Women in Greece. I attended a cooking workshop organized by the network in a restaurant in Athens which had opened its doors to Nadina's group of migrant women from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Syria for the day. What struck me there is that they had a very playful, joyous, mischievous attitude towards difference. But there were

some American food historians who were hierarchical and categorizing and completely out of tune, saying to the Iranians, for instance, "Learn how to make dolmades from the Afghans, this is the right way of doing it, not that." Because they make their dolmades in a very delicate, thin way. And there was this Iranian woman who was really strong and funny; she just winked at the other women and said, "Let's show them how to make fat dolmades!" It's this prescriptive thing, whereby dolmades became a symbol of Middle Easternness, while all of these women were having fun with their understanding of Middle Easternness: Yes, there is something, but it's not one thing, it's made of lots of strands and it's fun to compare and have differences. It was a really interesting event where I felt that there were two very different approaches to internal difference and discrimination.

FA: Yes, to preserve it and enjoy it. When I cook with my Turkish friends or Lebanese friends, we also make vine leaves and I say, "Everyone makes it in his own way, this is how I grew up with it and I stick with it and love it. But you make it in your own way, and we'll see how it looks."

SM: How do you think Brexit will affect the migration of food and recipes?

FA: It's affecting finding ingredients, to be honest. Now when I go shopping, there are lots of brands I can't find. That's because things used to come from, say, Turkey and go through Europe and then come here. And everything's doubled in price. It means I have to think about alternatives.

SM: Perhaps this will open up a space where we can all begin to think of food a little differently; not in terms of mechanically putting together ingredients, but in terms of principles?

FA: A friend of mine was born in Venezuela but his grandparents migrated from Syria to the US, the US to Venezuela. And he grew up with Aleppo food there at that time. But they didn't have any

Middle Eastern ingredients there: say, pomegranate molasses, or bulgur wheat. Just rice and lentils. He said his grandmother struggled a lot at first but then she started to be creative — if she could not find a specific thing, she would find the closest thing and tweak the recipe. In the face of climate change, now, will we be able to find things from the same sources, the same places, in the future? Can we make food resilient and adapt to a new diet? Think back to ancient Egypt — how they used to cool their food, how they stored their food for years and years.…

SM: There is something communal or group-based about cooking. Is that quality possible to preserve during migration, or does it change into a solitary act of remembrance?

FA: Cooking is something that makes me feel connected to others. But even when I am on my own, I love to cook for myself. When I make a dish, I feel that I never left home, like I never experienced exile.

X.

Moving Things

Fig. 37.1. Photo by Faraj Alnasser.

Faraj Alnasser

I left home as a refugee searching for new land, as I have no land. I locked doors with padlocks as I locked my heart, scared of the unknown future. I contemplated the engravings that my uncle had drawn elaborately while he was sculpting the keys, with tales etched into their corners. Long nights were spent telling stories. Maybe the keys are older than me. How strange it is that they carry more secrets than me, and perhaps hold more hope than I can hold within myself, so they do not change with circumstances, but remain steadfast. When we returned from a long journey, we took out the keys with glee, filled with joy at our return! Returning from school every day, I pulled out the key to the house. "He who loses the key loses the house," my grandmother used to say. When you lose your house key, you lose the possibility of return, you lose your bed, your library, your kitchen, your mother, your dinner table, your safety, your family's place, and your birthplace (for I wasn't born in the hospital). I hold on to my keys. I cannot afford to lose them.

Fig. 38.1. Photo by Dragana Jurišić.

Dragana Jurišić

When Croatian snipers came into our apartment on September 15, 1991, and gave us two minutes to gather a handful of belongings to bring to the shelter, I acted automatically without much thought and threw a pair of large scissors, army boots, and an oversized leather-bound Bible into my red rucksack. The army boots and large scissors, which were a useful tool and a weapon, made sense, but for years I wondered about the Bible. In my memory, sixteen-year-old me had no interest in God. Why would I pack a large heavy book to weigh me down while I fled, trying to escape the Yugoslav army's sniper's bullets, is still unclear to me. Did I bring it with me as some kind of a lucky charm or perhaps to bargain with the Almighty, promising that if I was spared, I would do my best to become a better person? I really do not know.

I left Croatia in 1999 with no memories of interacting much with the book in the years preceding my exile. When I came back home in the Summer of 2021 and opened the Bible, I was surprised to see that I underlined a number of passages. I must have made the marks during the period when we ended up homeless, refugees in our own country, being shuffled between different emergency accommodations. I was an avid reader and

this was the only book I had in my possession during the period of homelessness. When I opened the Bible on the bookmarked page, I could see in my teenage handwriting, above Psalm 91 which I underlined, written in capital letters, "WHEN IN DANGER," and recalled reading the psalm over and over again like a mantra during endless bombings and airstrikes:

> He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.[1]

1 Psalm 91:4–7, New International Version.

Fig. 39.1. Source: Subha Mukherji.

Subha Mukherji

This drab, beige View Master (Model J), on the left, made in Belgium in the 1970s, was the "coolest" thing I grew up with in a middle-class Kolkata household — a special-format stereoscope invented in 1939. Its twin (second from left) was a cardboard reel, with seven full-color 3D slides of "Kashmir, India" — a "wonder of the world." To my child's mind, it was an object of pure magic that brought the world home: Belgium, only known to us through *Tintin,* and Kashmir, paradise on earth, a place proximate yet other-worldly, which I had seen in Bollywood films, dreamt of going to through many nights when I lay unsleeping, and eventually, one day, did visit. Its muddy exterior only intensified the miraculous iridescence of the world it gave me access to. I left this wonder of ingenuity behind when I came to the UK as a student, but I brought it with me in 2000 as it was dawning on me that I had perhaps become a settled, if accidental, immigrant and a citizen of the globe. It opened up a secret world of mystery and beauty which now brought home to the world. But in that age of innocence, neither I nor the view-finder knew what a palimpsest it was to become. Now, Kashmir is no longer a habitable fantasy; I am unlikely to be able to return, ever, in my life-time. Here in Cambridge, as I gaze at those images — snow-

capped hills, the farmer looking across the peaceful valley, and the rider riding into the deep woods — the landscape shimmers into what Louis MacNeice would call "green improbable fields," where unhome momentarily becomes home again, where an idea of India, fading into the fogs of communalism and state violence, shimmers in outmoded Kodachrome and yearns for a local habitation and a name.

Fig. 40.1. Photo by Jonathan Gil Harris.

Jonathan Gil Harris

In early 2020, just before COVID-19 left most borders bolted and padlocked, I found my mother's British alien registration card — folded alongside other official papers from another life, another hemisphere, another universe — at the bottom of her Chinese tea chest in New Zealand. I brought it back home with me to India. Its makeshift emendations showed how my mother had been repeatedly named and renamed, through the multiple self-reinventions forced on her by war, deportation, death of her parents, adoption by her uncle, migration, and marriage. "Hebrew" derives from an ancient Egyptian word that refers, not to a nation, an ethnicity, or a language, but to a condition of perpetual unrootedness. Despite the modern state of Israel's efforts to root "Hebrews," my mother was a "Hebrew" in that archaic sense, for better as well as for worse. Forged through too many traumatic dislocations, her multiple identities nonetheless display unexpected deliverances, transgressive connections, small resistances to the ways in which states capture and control their subjects. The project of identifying citizens with finality is always doomed to failure: I love that my mother's multiply rewritten card, which was meant to root her, ended up doing the complete opposite.

Fig. 41.1. Photo by E. Fiddan-Qasmiyeh and Y.M. Qasmiyeh, 2021.

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh

Out of a tin box full of needles, of different sizes and shapes, with wonky and straight eyes, alongside loose and rolled-up threads of subdued colors, I picked it up. Without even looking in her hardly open eyes to seek consent, I snatched it, to see it at close range and in the company of my tears: a photograph of my mother's face wandering alone in her ever-shrinking pastures. I first put it in my pocket, then moved it to my wallet alongside my ID for Palestinian refugees and the draft of a love letter I once wrote for my brother to his lover in graphite and traces of ink to give the impression of age. The letter reached the lover but my ID and my mother's picture are still in the company of one another.

An eye for an eye so both my mother and I could see in each other's eye what it is to be seen: dissipating edges; black and white losing their blackness and whiteness for the sake of a third tinge of a color; speckled surfaces; eyes looking at the camera and seeing themselves as serenity for the constantly unsettled in their present. I so want to imagine that it was just fine for her, then, to come from the camp to the city, carrying her dialect on her back and knowing that, as a refugee, being photographed

can be done beyond the question of aid, for the sole reason of being photographed—a fresh topography for a photograph which would leave Baddawi camp in my wallet secretly so as to be archived alongside my moments with my mother, as the son who has always feared her absence to the extent that I, as a child, would hide within the folds of her dresses, to accompany her from one camp to another, always in our time and through a no-place which never belonged to us.

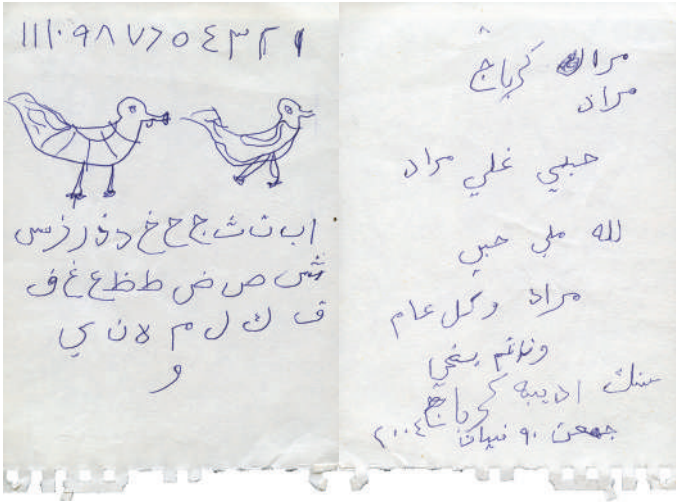

Fig. 42.1. Front: A handwritten note by my mother to my son Mourad; back: "Arabic" numbers (1–11), Arabic letters, and drawing of two birds. Source: Issam Kourbaj.

Issam Kourbaj

As a child, I was a keen learner. I started to go to school when I was five, but had so many difficulties learning to write the alphabet of my tongue, particularly the first letter of my name, I. The sound of the initial of my first name, both in Arabic and in English, had mystical echoes; "I" is pronounced /aI/ and it means "eye" in English. In Arabic, ع is pronounced /aIn/ and that means an eye too. My mother, then well into her forties, had hardly any schooling, but set out to help me forming the first letter of my name. She asked me to show her my ع and I did. She held my hand in her hand and together we "drew" that letter. She asked me to do it again. She was very generous, made me understand that this was not just a letter, part of a word, a fragment of a whole language, but a picture. It took me many attempts, with and without her hands, and then I drew it, not very well, but I did; ever since, I started to learn how to form my "eye."

Many moons later, my mother was living alone, my father having died. We had all left home. I thought I must teach her how to read and write. I started to teach her. Of course, she had many difficulties learning to write the twenty-eight letters of our alphabet. When we arrived at forming the eighteenth letter, the

"ع," I held her hand and reminded her of the way she held my hand when I was little, and together we "drew" it. She couldn't remember; she was so keen to carry on learning the remaining ten.

An affectionate handwritten note from my mother to her grandsons

My mother tried her hand at writing simple broken letters, in phrases that reflect the struggle to communicate through written language. It reads with difficulties:

> To my precious darling Mourad, God be with you and Happy New Year
>
> Your grandmother
> Friday 9 April 2004

Fig. 43.1. Photo by Natalya Din-Kariuki.

Natalya Din-Kariuki

This glass belonged to my late aunt Yasmin. It was part of a collection of crystalware that she acquired while living abroad in Northern Ireland in the 1970s, and which she carried with her when she migrated to the United States before bringing it home to Kenya, where my grandfather had migrated from India some decades earlier. As a child, I often had sleepovers at her house in Nairobi, where she and my uncle would drink red wine with their dinner. I, too, would get a sip, served in this glass, the perfect size for my tiny hands. Something about the experience was thrilling. It felt like a pact, like a secret, like being part, even if only for a moment, of the glamour of adult life. When I travelled with the glass to the UK, where I live now, I feared that it would break. I marveled at how my aunt had managed to cross several continents with such a delicate thing while keeping it intact. Looking at it, I am transported temporarily to another time and place, and reminded not only of the love that she and I shared, but of the way that this strange combination of fragility and resilience shaped her migrant experience, and my own.

Fig. 44.1. Still from an animation of a tale from "The Huntsman and the King's Son."

Dine Diallo

Those who make the crossing of the Mediterranean from Africa have nothing material left. But they bring us their knowledge, memories, and imagination. Dine Diallo was told many stories by his grandfather. This one comes from a cycle of tales, "The Huntsman and the King's Son," which explores ideas of justice:

> Once upon a time there was a woman who had a baby and a cat. Sometimes the cat was left to mind the baby. One day, a huge serpent entered the house—but the cat seized it and bit it in two, and dragged the pieces outside. When the mother came back and saw blood everywhere and all over the baby, she thought the cat had killed her baby. And she took a stick and killed the cat.
>
> Soon after, the baby woke up. Then, outside the house, the mother found the head and the body of the huge snake, and she understood that the cat had saved her baby.

Afterword

Rowan Williams

1.

As the process of putting together this collection has advanced, against a background of political developments that make its subject matter all the more urgent, we have become more sharply aware of how our own terminology might be interrogated. Subha's Introduction notes that the vocabulary we use to speak of variously "displaced" communities of experience is not innocent: as it is with the familiar and recurring tropes of "deserving" and "undeserving" poor, so in this connection also. The "refugee" is granted a measure of moral legitimacy as someone whose presence away from their home territory is not a matter of choice. So in the current UK climate, Ukrainians are imaginatively accorded full legitimacy in a way that, say, Afghans are not — even though the actual nuts and bolts of receiving even Ukrainians have not been exactly a model of compassion or efficiency. The "asylum seeker" has a more ambivalent status; they are agents to the degree that they are "seeking" something from us, and so the legitimacy of their claim is open to testing. To designate someone simply and without qualification as a "migrant" tends to load on them the full weight of having chosen to leave

where they belong and intrude into the territory of another, and this "choice" is seen as a potentially threatening self-assertion that necessarily poses a problem for and limits the choices of a host society. In the light of this, the language of migrancy can increasingly act as a catchall designation for the displaced, in a way that sanctions suspicion. Both the truthfulness and the judgment of displaced individuals is seen as requiring challenge and interrogation. "Migrancy" comes to have uncomfortable resonance with a traditional rhetoric about the dangers we face from rootless wanderers who will never be assimilable in our particular place and who will compromise our collective racial and cultural identity — a familiar trope of anti-Semitism, modern and premodern. If we in this book utilize "migrant" as covering the widest possible range of what I've called "displaced" experience, we need to acknowledge the shadows around the word and the ways in which it can be used to encode and reinforce the power of identitarian, "insider" definitions. We need to be clear about using the word strictly as an adjective for what and who it is that is in motion, in transit, for whatever reason — enforced exile, flight from imminent danger, the choice of more secure opportunities, or whatever it may be. And, as many of our contributors here spell out and illuminate so vividly, thinking about migrant knowing and imagining in the immediate, concrete context of displaced persons and communities can make us see more clearly the "migrant" character of a huge range of human habits of thought.

2.

We come to know what we know quite literally because of where we are; we know what we know as the *bodies* we are — which is why we have had to learn in recent decades so much more about how the male, white, heterosexual, cisgender body has developed and deployed the power to define a world in which other bodies have in some degree to deny what they know *as the bodies they are,* in order to "make sense" in a world where the definitions and protocols come from another (another's)

place. At the same time, growing into a better awareness of this more and more shows us the contingent and hybrid nature of so much of what passes for "standard" forms of knowing. Normative positions, too, have stories; they have adjusted to what were initially strange environments. The bare fact of physical growth and decline, the long history of the brain's evolution, the interplay of nerves, glands, hormones, and the like with what we are capable of thinking, all this implies that what we call knowing is irreducibly a "migrant" reality — the engagement with an environment that does not sit still and allow itself to be immobilized in a canonical and unchanging scheme. Current panics about how new perspectives on gender threaten to turn their back on "biology" underrate the mobile and cross-woven character of bodily knowing. To say that there is a "migrant" element in our sexuality and our gender identification is in no way to minimize the fact, even the "givenness," of our embodiment; quite the contrary, if anything — so long as we do not identify "bodily" with "static." We are always material systems looking for more sustainable equilibrium with, and enhanced possibilities of movement within, the material systems around us with which we are already enmeshed. And on top of this, as a couple of our contributors emphasize, the migrant dimension in the organic reality of non-human life, including plant life, and the critical damage done by our illiteracy about this, need to be remembered. The collapse of pollination systems, the effects of a forced (and thus highly political) introduction of non-indigenous flora and fauna in certain parts of the world to solve local problems around production — these developments are showing us how some of the violence and short-termism that characterize our attitudes to human migration play out in the wider organic world.

We could say that no one's knowledge is ever simply what it was, because no one is simply where they were. Because our language and imagining exist in time as well as place, and because time changes how place is understood or negotiated, some sort of displacement is built into our thinking. But this can't be said in a way which sidesteps the distinctive nature of a know-

ing that arises from the *forced* displacement of individuals and communities. We can talk about "migrancy" as a dimension of all knowledge, and learn something significant from this about the embodied and local character of learning processes. And we can examine the kind of voluntary migration that takes place with the goal of augmenting the knowledge and control I/we have — the voyage of "discovery" or conquest, what has been called the great European "migration" of the colonial project, from the sixteenth century onwards. But this is a displacement which we can manage to our own advantage without being dispossessed of what we already know. And this self-focused displacement is typical of the individual scholar or observer as much as of the collective culture of colonization. To put it graphically, the "migrant knowledge" of the conquistador and that of the violently enslaved and transported African are not comparable. Understanding more of what the latter knows means reckoning with dispossession as well as displacement, with the violent assault on the agency of the displaced that underlies the experiences of so many, including many whose voices are recorded here. And the focus of this book is not only on what is known in these experiences of dispossession but also on what *forms* of material, verbal, and visual culture emerge to embody and communicate the reality of dispossession.

3.

The old Latin tag from Horace about how, when we travel, we may "change the sky under which we live but not the mind within" is true in one sense — change of place can't be relied on to resolve or release the problems we take with us which are bound up in our history and identity — but in another sense does less than justice to what happens in displacement and dispossession. Some of the most searching pages of this book present the reader with instances of what is done with objects, songs, and recipes that travel with those who have been displaced, whether by circumstance or by open force. What makes a displaced person pick up this rather than that as they leave their home is a

vastly rich and diverse world of motivation. People report their own surprise at what they decide will travel with them; I have a vivid recollection of a woman at a refugee center in Romania describing her decision to take a rather cumbersome traditional ethnic musical instrument from her home in eastern Ukraine when Russian troops advanced on her home town. Objects are so often brought not simply to carry a passive meaning that will assist nostalgic recollections but because they are seen or sensed as resources for *active* coping with the strange environment ahead. They will become tools in a new world of reference and interpretation, modifying and being modified. These objects too, we could say, have been "dispossessed" of their semantic homes, and must re-establish a context for themselves. "Migrant form" could be defined in this connection as the product of that imaginative bridge between what is lost and what is conserved which grounds the displaced person or community sufficiently strongly to allow them to speak into a strange environment, both to communicate or share and to reinforce and rework what is to be said about their own identity. Historically speaking, we might look at the rituals that are part of Santeria in Brazil or the spirituals of the African American South; at the cultures of the Jewish shtetl of Eastern Europe and its metamorphosis in the reverse process of Eastern European migration into Israel in the last seventy or so years; at the cultural, political, and religious transformations of the Iranian diaspora of recent decades; at how Palestinian, Somali, or Sudanese identities have been paradoxically consolidated and deepened by traumatic levels of displacement; or indeed at the surprising history of Anglo-Indian cuisine. In these and other phenomena, it is not that a lost cultural world is being reinstated, which would not literally be possible, or even that it is being wistfully evoked as absent. What is happening is that communities "reinvest" in aspects of that lost world as vehicles for connecting more effectively with where they now are. One of the most serious traumas of displacement is the kind of suffering which surfaces in the inability to activate or reinvest, because the violence involved in displacement has so undermined confidence in any future agency. "How

can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" is the question of the Jewish exiles in Babylon in Psalm 137; the deep and angry passion of this lyric is all about not forgetting what is lost. Yet the very existence of the lyric is testimony that a "migrant form" has been created *in* the fact of lamenting — and eloquently lamenting — the apparent impossibility of managing loss on such a scale. The depth of the lament expresses the once-experienced confidence in what has been lost, and so the lament's force recovers something of that confidence within the context of a strange landscape.

4.

"Migrant form" in words and artifacts thus becomes a statement of capacity within a setting where everything seems to conspire to create lack of capacity, lack of initiative. Degrees of trauma will vary, depending on what exactly creates the situation where migration comes to seem the best or only option. Without diminishing the acute grief of forced displacement, even here — as this volume shows — the displaced person can use what they have brought with them as raw material for shaping new meanings in negotiation with the new environment. Traditions of song and storytelling are at least as important as the ways in which material objects are used and reimagined, and several of our contributors provide vivid illustration of this. Much could be said about how music in particular produces complex experiences of recognition in alien circumstances and alienation in familiar circumstances. Once again, a personal recollection: The transformation of some English hymn tunes into the basis for a liturgical Mass setting of texts in a Southern African language group, a musical setting very widely accepted within these groups as common currency for Anglican worship after a century or more of usage. Migrant form, as displayed in these ways, is a dramatic embodying of how to live out of a tradition while learning one's way around a nontraditional landscape. It may carry with it all sorts of ironies in the ways it uses what is received both from background culture and from host society;

it may sometimes be parodic and transgressive in this respect, and thus difficult for both background and host environments. Most obviously, it challenges the crude binary of ghettoization or assimilation: It expresses the perspective of a genuine subject, an "author," who has been formed by tradition and experience to such a level of awareness that they can actively respond both to what they have inherited and to what they have been forced to reckon with in their displaced setting.

From one point of view, this collection is a celebration of that awareness, and of the remarkable individuals who produce these forms in so many diverse media. From another, it is a question to the assumptions we make about the nature of culture. "Multiculturalism" is one of those words used by polemicists to make both positive and negative points — and the confusion has a lot to do with an unwillingness to pause and ask what is being taken for granted about "culture." Very often, a set of behaviors, beliefs, or attitudes is identified and labeled from outside, by a dominant group who will define the space that may be occupied by subaltern communities; those communities are encouraged to "know their place" by a socially powerful authority, which will decisively tell them what that place is. A "culture" is (nominally) validated by being accepted as a picturesque or simply opaque corner of the social map, as a domesticated and acceptably labeled form of otherness. A "multiculturalism" which works with any such model (and the working may often be well-meaning and even unconscious) will fail to reckon with what "migrant knowledge" knows and "migrant form" embodies — the fact of the imaginative freedom the migrant may discover to reinvent both inherited and unfamiliar cultural processes in creating a new and more "polyphonic" identity. Identities like this can be unsettling for those who have not yet grasped that cultures are innately mobile, hybrid, and adaptive — "cross-woven," as with all kinds of embodied knowledge. There will always be those for whom "hybridity" is an eccentric and undesirable weakening of what should be a clear identity. Think of the anxieties around linguistic "contamination" and the systematic marginalizing or demeaning of "creole" or "pidgin" languages. As so often, one of

the focal problems here is the ingrained reluctance to remember how any group or individual actually *comes to know,* in time and in unpredictable encounter.

5.

Humans do not simply speak; they translate. They carry over (the literal meaning of "translation") the things they know and can articulate in one setting into another where those things are changed, and where they also change the new environment. Cultures are built and rebuilt around moments of "carrying over": the recognition of the self in what is strange, the negotiating with what is strange in order to go on being oneself. The migrant experience casts light on this basic process of discovering and constructing meaning. It may sound over-ambitious to put it like this, but there is something "metaphysical" in what this experience uncovers for us. Identities, patterns of continuous and intelligible action, are not fixed and timeless, but neither are they just made up arbitrarily: They emerge in the processes by which those underlying patterns grapple with fresh stimuli and produce fresh forms; they emerge as such patterns of energy are reconstructed in the discovery that they can cope with, incorporate, or converge with what seemed alien. Once again, we are reminded that, in thinking about cultural plurality, we are not stuck with the alternatives of assimilation — in which an original identity is negated or deeply buried — and the essentializing conservation of some kind of officially permitted foreignness.

But it is crucial not to make this simply a bland reduction of migrant experience to a source of edification and education. Back to where we began: the map of migrancy in the world of today is a map of the gross inequalities of power. It is true enough to say that, in the broadest sense, migrant reality casts light on something deeply bound up with the historical and linguistic transactions that make us human. But we have to bear in mind that the capacity of forcibly displaced humans to retain and display their humanity in the ways this book records and explores is something won in circumstances of systemic inhu-

manity — circumstances which will humiliate, silence, and often kill those whose strength is fatally undermined by being at the receiving end of this inhumanity. There are children traumatized by loss and terror in civil wars, bombardment, epidemic, violent separation from families (a separation regularly reinforced by the panic and moral laziness of politicians). There are women whose exposure to trafficking and sustained abuse of all sorts intensifies the vulnerability they may already have known in their own societies and will face afresh in host societies. There are all those made old, drained, and hopeless by the frustrations of bureaucracy as well as the threats of armed terror or state repression. There are those whose sexual orientation or gender identification puts their lives exhaustingly and daily at risk in a way hard to imagine for many in the contemporary West. Not everyone finds a voice. Not everyone survives the passage. "Good chance" does not come to all.

So a collection like this cannot be a consoling celebration of the "strong" which allows us to forget about those who have been or are being silenced in one way or another. To be thankful, to express gratitude and admiration for those who continue to make meaningful, articulate, challenging patterns out of the violence they have endured, is important. Just as important is to keep alive the questions of why we tolerate systems or policies that demand such exceptional levels of resourcefulness; why we continually fail to sustain useable systems of support, redress, and encouragement; and why we still recycle the corrupt language of blame and stigma which is so ready to treat the "migrant" as someone who has made a choice whose unyielding legal and political consequences they have to live with. "You knew the risks" is a chilly response to the already desperate.

6.

In so much of the public debates around "migration," there is a noticeable absence of voices from those most directly concerned, and a tendency to slip into generalized narratives about geopolitics. The resurgence of exclusivist and often highly

mythologized nationalism treats migration as an abnormal phenomenon which threatens the integrity of nation states; uncontrolled inward migration must be resisted for everyone's sake, "unwelcoming environments" must be created which will be deliberately slow in offering benefits, integration, and citizenship, even for those with established asylum claims. The least unthinking and hardline versions of this may appeal to the risks of stripping countries of origin of their own citizens, especially those with socially significant qualifications. In reaction, there are some who believe that the response to forced displacement should be a universal abandoning of boundaries, a dissolution of the entire apparatus of the nation state as it has emerged in modernity.

Both attitudes suffer from the failure to ask what migrants have to say about their experience. The violence that leads to displacement may not always be overt and legally sanctioned, and the tools by which claims are assessed are notoriously inadequate, so that many who are genuinely at risk in an environment where the more obvious forms of public disorder or discrimination are not instantly evident are readily assimilated to those who are thought of as choosing to seek new opportunities. The odd language of "economic migrancy" conceals the reality of people who may not be persecuted but are faced with unsustainable futures for themselves and their families in a collapsing economy. They are seldom simply choosing a more advantageous economic future from a set of viable options. The only way to get a clearer picture of what choices are really available is to attend, again and again, to the particularity of the stories told and the statistics available.

But equally the messianic picture of a world without boundaries does not map on to the experience of many migrants with any exactitude. As our contributors make plain, it is not that "migrant knowledge" leaves behind the reality of belonging, nor that the migrant does not want some sort of integration in a host society. And the opportunistic opening of boundaries which maintains an insecure global market of mobile labor is not exactly an ideal situation for the vulnerable worker: Migrant

labor in its commonest forms cannot be ignored as a high-risk, high-cost mode of survival, and it features significantly in some of the contributions to this volume. Once again, if migrants are actually invited to speak about what they know, what they want, what they fear, some kinds of generalization become a lot less plausible.

7.

This closing reflection is deliberately more theoretical than most of what the book contains, but I hope it illustrates how attention to what migrant experience discovers and creates can generate an interpretative perspective that helps us think critically about both the whole process of our knowing and making, and about the more immediate moral challenge of how the distribution of power in our world intensifies the threat of violent displacement. And I include in this — remembering again the impact of mishandled and misunderstood "migrancy" in the non-human world — the accelerating "violence" of climate catastrophe as it makes various areas of the globe increasingly uninhabitable or uncultivable. The migrant knowledge we listen to and celebrate in this collection shows how power can be and is reclaimed in all sorts of reworkings of story and legacy, as well as all sorts of "formal" strategy. If this celebration highlights both the creative dignity of the human-as-migrant and the abiding structural injustice that menaces or destroys the exercise of that dignity for unprecedented numbers in our world, it will have brought into focus the nature of "migrant form" in the way the editors would hope.

Contributors

Faraj Alnasser was born in Aleppo where he grew up in a large family. He survived a gruelling journey through Europe before finding a home in the UK. Arriving at the age of nineteen with no education, no English skills, and no relatives, Faraj persevered and overcame three years of homelessness. In 2016 he was matched with a Jewish family who not only hosted him, but supported him and sent him to school to learn English. He found his second home, and peace, with them. His longing for his hometown, family, and grandmother led him to discover the healing power of food and its connection to memories and aroma. Faraj's passion for cooking led him to win a scholarship at a prestigious cookery school in London and train at Ottolenghi. Today, he owns a small business called Faraj's Kitchen, delivering vegan and vegetarian home-cooked Syrian food.

Aditi Anand is Artistic Director of the Migration Museum, and is a creative producer and curator working within the arts and nonprofit sectors. Previously, she produced and managed a multimedia education project in India that is currently being implemented in over a thousand schools, and was communications lead for India's largest media for social change initiative. She has

also worked in New York with the Museum of the Moving Image and with the interactive design firm, Local Projects.

Clelia Bartoli is Professor of Sociology of Law, Politics of Migration and Human Rights at the University of Palermo. Her studies focus on human rights, migration, critical theory of the State, institutional racism, epistemic violence, subalternity, social inclusion, and experimental pedagogy. She established "Polipolis," a wide experimental educational program for unaccompanied minors, and on that occasion she began collaborating with "Stories in Transit," a program led by Marina Warner. She co-founded Giocherenda, a collective of young migrants who invent and animate cooperative games. Her English publications include *Legal Clinics in Europe: For a Commitment of Higher Education in Social Justice* (Diritto & Questioni Pubbliche, 2016) and *Chile Revolts: From the Uprisings toward the Constitutional Process* (Accademia University Press, 2022).

Anupam Basu is Assistant Professor of English at Washington University in St. Louis. An early modernist working on print culture and drama, his work has increasingly succumbed to the seductions of scale as he develops techniques to make the entire Early English Books Online Text Creation Partners (EEBO-TCP) corpus tractable for search and analysis as part of the ACLS- and Mellon-funded EarlyPrint project. He is currently working on a monograph on form and scale that asks how we might rethink literary forms through computational analysis. He has also published on the representation of poverty, vagrancy, and criminality in popular literature.

Yota Batsaki is the Executive Director of Dumbarton Oaks, a Harvard research institute, museum, and historic garden in Washington, DC, where she also directs the Plant Humanities Initiative, a collaborative endeavor to research and communicate how plants have shaped human cultures. Her recent work has appeared in *Environmental Humanities, Environmental History,* and *Critical Inquiry*.

Gillian Beer was formerly King Edward VII Professor of English Literature at the University of Cambridge. She commissioned domestic pots from Edmund de Waal when he was an undergraduate and has followed his work ever since.

Annabel Brett is Professor of Political Thought and History at the University of Cambridge, specializing in the political thought of the late medieval and early modern periods. She is the translator of *Marsilius of Padua: The Defender of the Peace* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), and the author of *Changes of State: Nature and the Limits of the City in Early Modern Natural Law* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

Anthony Vahni Capildeo, Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, is Professor at the University of York and an Honorary Student of Christ Church, Oxford. A Trinidadian Scottish writer of poetry and non-fiction, Capildeo's interests include traditional masquerade, silence, plurilingualism, and place. Their nine books and eight pamphlets have been recognized with awards including the Windham-Campbell Prize for Poetry, the OCM Bocas Prize for Poetry, the Cholmondeley Award, and the Forward Prize. Capildeo has served as a guest editor of a special ecopoetics issue of *Stand* magazine, and as a contributing editor at *PN Review* and the *Caribbean Review of Books*.

Valentina Castagna is Associate Professor of English Literature at the University of Palermo. She is a member of the Unipa Research Centre "Migrare" (Migration), CIR. Since 2015 she has worked with Marina Warner on the international project Stories in Transit in the UK and Italy. She has published books and articles in the field of Women's Studies and contemporary fiction and on medieval works such as *The Book of Margery Kempe,* focusing on contemporary rewriting of myths and popular culture, and on life writing.

Amit Chaudhuri is the author of eight novels, the latest of which is *Sojourn* (New York Review Books, 2022). His first major work

of non-fiction, *Calcutta: Two Years in the City,* was published by Knopf in 2013. His second work of non-fiction, *Finding the Raga* (New York Review Books, 2021), a critical meditation on North Indian classical music and his discovery of, and relationship with, this tradition won the James Tait Black Prize for Biography in 2022.

Supriya Chaudhuri is Professor Emerita in the Department of English, Jadavpur University. She has written and published in the fields of Renaissance studies, Indian cultural and literary history, modernism, urban studies, travel writing, sport, and cinema. Recent publications include the edited books *Religion and the City in India* (Routledge, 2022) and *Commodities and Culture in the Colonial World* (Routledge, 2018, with Josephine McDonagh, Brian Murray, and Rajeswari Rajan), as well as articles in *Spenser Studies, Bioscope, Études Épistémè, Thesis 11, Postcolonial Studies, Literature Compass,* and *Revue des Femmes Philosophes*.

Nadina Christopoulou is cofounder and Director of Melissa Network in Greece. Her research work focuses on diaspora narratives, migration, and childhood, as well as migrant women's solidarity networks. On the basis of that research, together with migrant women leaders in Greece, she co-founded Melissa Network in 2014, an award-winning organization with women members from over forty-five countries. She has also been working on the creation of a visual and narrative archive of the migration spiral that Greece has experienced in the past century, hoping one day to turn it into a museum of movements.

Brian Cummings teaches English at the University of York and is the author of *Mortal Thoughts: Religion, Secularity, & Identity in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2013) and *Bibliophobia: The End and the Beginning of the Book* (Oxford University Press, 2023). He is Fellow of the British Academy and of the Society of Antiquaries, and recipient

of a grant from the Leverhulme Trust (2020–2023) to write on Erasmus.

Rosita D'Amora is Associate Professor of Turkish Language and Literature at the University of Salento (Lecce, Italy). Her research interests range from Ottoman social history to contemporary Turkish literature, addressing issues related to different forms of representation and auto-representation of Ottoman and Turkish society.

Edmund de Waal is an internationally acclaimed artist and writer, best known for his large-scale installations of porcelain vessels, often created in response to collections and archives or the history of a particular place. His interventions have been made for diverse spaces and museums worldwide, including The British Museum, London; The Frick Collection, New York; Ateneo Veneto, Venice; Schindler House, Los Angeles; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; and V&A Museum, London. De Waal has published *The Hare with Amber Eyes* (Picador, 2010), *The White Road: Journey into an Obsession* (Picador, 2015), and *Letters to Camondo* (Picador, 2021). He was awarded the Windham-Campbell Prize for non-fiction by Yale University in 2015. In 2021 he was awarded a CBE for his services to art.

Olga Demetriou is a social anthropologist and Associate Professor at the Durham Global Security Institute, Durham University. She has written on displacement and borders, and the exclusions created in places mired by legacies of conflict. She is currently working on European refugee regimes and how they produce marginal orders of protection through law (complementary protection), politics (access to citizenship), and space (locations of first reception).

Saifoudiny (Dine) Diallo was born in Guinea and lives in Palermo, Italy, where he founded the association for social promotion Giocherenda with other young people from different countries. He is a HIP ambassador for Philip Zimbardo's Heroic

Imagination Project and, as president of Giocherenda, he collaborates with Marina Warner for the Stories in Transit project. He is co-protagonist of Gabriele Gravagna's documentary film *Io sono qui* (2017).

Natalya Din-Kariuki is Associate Professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick, where she works on the literary and intellectual history of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with a particular focus on travel writing, transnational and transcultural encounters, and rhetoric and poetics. Her work has appeared in journals including the *Review of English Studies, Huntington Library Quarterly,* and *Textual Practice.*

Valerie Forman is Associate Professor at the Gallatin School at New York University. She works on theories and practices of labor, trade, migration, slavery, and capitalism in, through, and around early modern literature and history in the transatlantic world. Her first book is *Tragicomic Redemptions: Global Economics and the Early Modern English Stage* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). Since 2019, she has advocated for and participated in mutual aid projects with migrant people in NYC, at the border in Tijuana, and in immigration detention centers throughout the United States. She is also a co-facilitator of the Abolition Lab at NYU.

John Gallagher is Associate Professor of Early Modern History at the University of Leeds, and the author of *Learning Languages in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2019). He is a historian of language, migration, and education, focused on the history of Britain and Ireland in early modern Europe. His articles and essays have appeared in *Renaissance Quarterly, Huntington Library Quarterly, Renaissance Studies, The Italianist,* and elsewhere. He is the co-editor of the *Historical Journal*. His current research explores migration and multilingualism in early modern London, and the history of multilingual cities more broadly. John is a BBC/Arts & Humanities Research Council

New Generation Thinker and writes regularly for the *London Review of Books*. In 2023, he won a Philip Leverhulme Prize for History.

Simon Goldhill is Professor of Greek at the University of Cambridge and Foreign Secretary and Vice-President of the British Academy. His most recent books are *The Christian Invention of Time: Temporality and the Literature of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2022) and *What Is a Jewish Classicist? Essays on the Personal Voice and Disciplinary Politics* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2022). He has worked closely with the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA), and with the charity Refugees at Home.

Mina Gorji is Associate Professor of English at the University of Cambridge and fellow of Pembroke College. She has written about the poetics of place in John Clare's poetry, and her first poetry collection, *Art of Escape* (Carcanet Press, 2020), explores migration at different scales. In her collection *Scale* (Carcanet Press, 2022), adapting to the cold of a new continent opens a chromatic investigation of feeling across time and space.

Jonathan Gil Harris is Professor of English and Founding Dean at Ashoka University and the author of *The First Firangis* (Aleph Books, 2015) and *Masala Shakespeare* (Aleph Books, 2018), as well as many books on early modern culture, ideas of the foreign, and globalization, including *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); *Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism and Disease in Shakespeare's England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); and *Marvellous Repossessions: Globalisation, The Tempest, and the Waking Dream of Paradise* (Ronsdale, 2012).

Akid Hassan is a construction worker, painter and decorator, and artist. He has been a Cypriot citizen since 2020. He was

born in al-Hasakah, Syria, and, as a Kurd, has been stateless under Syrian legislation. He moved to Cyprus in the mid-2000s and has lived there since, under different precarious statuses, despite being married to a Cypriot national for part of that time and the parent of a second Cypriot national. Having been refused Cypriot nationality along with his siblings and parents, he staged a hunger strike in 2017 which lasted for sixty-seven days and received attention and support by local human rights organizations and the UNHCR. He was granted citizenship in February 2020.

Gabriel Josipovici is the author of over twenty novels and books of short stories and ten critical books, including *The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction* (Stanford University Press, 1971), *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (Yale University Press, 1986), and *What Ever Happened to Modernism?* (Yale University Press, 2011). His plays for stage and radio have been widely performed.

Dragana Jurišić is a Yugoslav artist and Assistant Professor of Communications at the Dublin City University. Working primarily with image, text, and video, and looking at the effects of exile and displacement on memory and identity, Jurišić has shown her work extensively and won many awards, including the Golden Fleece Special Recognition Award, IMMA 1000 Residency Award, and numerous Bursaries and Project Awards. Her work is in a collection of the National Gallery of Ireland, Arts Council Collection, and the Irish State Art Collection.

Bhanu Kapil, Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, is a Fellow of Churchill College. She is the author of six full-length collections, including *How To Wash A Heart* (Pavilion Poetry, 2020), winner of the TS Eliot Prize, and *Incubation: a space for monsters* (Kelsey Street Press, 2023). Kapil is the recipient of a Cholmondeley Award from the Society of Authors and a Windham Campbell Prize from Yale University, both for her body of work.

Issam Kourbaj comes from a background of fine art, architecture, and theater design. He was born in Syria and trained at the Institute of Fine Arts in Damascus, at the Repin Institute of Fine Arts & Architecture in St Petersburg, and at the Wimbledon School of Art. He has lived in Cambridge, UK, since 1990, where he has been artist-in-residence, bye-fellow, and lector in art, at Christ's College. His works have been featured at museums around the world, including Fitzwilliam Museum, Museum of Classical Archaeology, and Kettle's Yard House and Gallery; Penn Museum; British Museum and Victoria & Albert Museum; Brooklyn Museum; Tropenmuseum; and the Venice Biennale.

T.M. Krishna is one of the preeminent vocalists in the rigorous Karnatic tradition of India's classical music. As a public intellectual, Krishna speaks and writes about issues affecting the human condition and about cultural matters. His book *Sebastian and Sons* (Context, 2020) received the Tata Lit Live Award for the Best Non-Fiction book. His musical productions and collaborations include the Chennai Poromboke Paadal with environmentalist Nityanand Jayaraman; performances with the Jogappas, transgender musicians; and co-conceptualizing and performing Karnatik Kattaikuttu. In 2016 Krishna received the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award in recognition of "his forceful commitment as artist and advocate to art's power to heal India's deep social divisions." In 2017 he received the Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration, and in 2019 he received the Swathi Sangeetha Puraskaram, the highest honor for musicians, instituted by the Kerala State Government.

Angela Leighton is senior research fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge. She has written widely on nineteenth to twenty-first century literature, most recently *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018) and the edited collection *Walter de la Mare: Critical Appraisals* (Liverpool University Press, 2022, with Yui Kajita and A.J. Nickerson). Her poetry has appeared in many maga-

zines, including *The New Yorker, Times Literary Supplement, The Guardian, The Dark Horse, PN Review,* and *London Magazine*. She has published six volumes of poetry, among them *Spills* (2016) and, most recently, *Something, I Forget* (2023), both with Carcanet.

Sue McAlpine has found herself in museums for most of her working life, starting at the Museum of London in education when it first moved to the city in 1976. She set up an education service at Gunnersbury Park Museum, worked as an oral historian and community curator in Notting Hill, and then worked as exhibitions curator at Hackney Museum, connecting closely with the community. Her most favorite place has been the Migration Museum, collaborating with people from all over the world, making exhibitions from personal testimonies, highlighting the stories of migration to and from the UK. Sue's latest project has been supporting art students from the Ukraine, proving that art and performance are more resilient than war and violence.

Subha Mukherji is Professor of Early Modern Literature and Culture at the University of Cambridge. Her research interests and publications range across Renaissance English literature, early modern law and drama, form and faith, literary epistemologies, migration, and contemporary Indian art.

Joe Murphy and **Joe Robertson**, both British playwrights, are the founders of Good Chance, which builds temporary theaters of hope promoting freedom of expression, creativity, and dignity for everyone. Their debut play, *The Jungle*, came from their seven months running a theater in the Calais refugee and migrant camp. It premiered at the Young Vic in 2017, then transferred to London's West End (2018), St. Ann's Warehouse (New York, 2018–2019) and The Curran (San Francisco, 2019). The play received universal acclaim, the South Bank Sky Arts Award for Theatre, and an Obie Award. In 2021, Good Chance embarked upon *The Walk,* an 8,000-kilometer moving festival

of welcome across Europe with Little Amal, inspired by the character from *The Jungle.*

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh is a scholar, poet, and translator. He is the Joint-Lead of the Baddawi Camp Lab, as part of the Imagining Futures GCRF-Network+ project, and was Writer-in-Residence for the AHRC-funded Refugee Hosts project. His essays, poetry, and translations have appeared in *Modern Poetry in Translation, Critical Quarterly, GeoHumanities, Cambridge Literary Review, PN Review, Stand, New England Review,* and *Poetry London.* His collection, *Writing the Camp* (Broken Sleep Books, 2021), was a 2021 Poetry Book Society Recommendation and was selected as one of the Best Poetry Books of 2021 by the *Telegraph* and *The Irish Times*, highly commended by the 2021 Forward Prizes for Poetry, and shortlisted for the 2022 Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize. His latest books are *Eating the Archive* (Broken Sleep Books, 2023) and *The Southern Eye: Co-Seeing Displacements* (Broken Sleep Books, 2024).

Claudia Roden was born in Cairo. She came to London to study art and stayed on when her family had to leave Egypt after the Suez crisis in 1956. Drawn to the subject of food through a desire to evoke a lost heritage, she continued to write cookbooks with a special interest in the social, cultural, and historical background of food. She has written about the cooking of the Middle East, North Africa, the Mediterranean, Italy, and Spain, and about Jewish food. In 2022 she was awarded a CBE for her services to culinary culture. In 2023 she was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of London.

Mohamed Sarrar is a Sudanese musician and actor based in the UK. As part of the Good Chance Ensemble, Mohamed co-wrote and recorded a world music album *Sounds of Refuge* with John Falsetto and Ammar Haj Ahmad. Mohamed's theater experience includes *The Jungle* (Young Vic, West End, St Ann's Warehouse, Curran), *Rain Rain* (Bamboozle UK Tour), *The Welcome*

Party (Theatre Rites, Manchester International Festival), *Borderline* (UK Tour: London; Brighton Fringe Festival, Manchester; International Tour: Berlin, Kerala, and Copenhagen), *Encampment* (Good Chance at Southbank Centre), and *The Hope Show* (Good Chance, Calais).

Efi Savvides is an artist based in Nicosia and the founder of Artstudio Laboratories, an educational center for contemporary art and design. Her research explores conditions of exclusion established by government institutions, especially in relation to migrants and refugees in Cyprus. Savvides produces records of excluded life stories that stand as chapters within "minor histories." This peculiar archiving of actions, events, and facts remains her main artistic goal, while its political awareness works critically in indirect ways.

Regina M. Schwartz is Professor of Early Modern Literature, Religious Thought, and Law at Northwestern University. She is the author of *Remembering and Repeating: On Milton's Theology and Poetics* (University of Chicago Press 1993), *The Curse of Cain: the Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (University of Chicago Press, 1997), *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (Stanford University Press, 2008), and *Loving Justice, Living Shakespeare* (Oxford University Press, 2017). She has also edited *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond* (Routledge, 2004) and *Toward a Sacramental Poetics* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2021, with Patrick J. McGrath).

Rachel Spence is a poet and arts writer based in the United Kingdom and Italy. Her most recent poetry collection is *Daughter of the Sun* (The Emma Press, 2025). In 2023, she published *Venice Unclocked* (Ivorypress, 2022), a literary meditation on time in Venice in collaboration with the Venetian photographer Giacomo Cosua. Her nonfiction book *Battle for the Museum* (Hurst, 2024), which explores the relationship between art, power, and money, was a *Financial Times* Book of the Year.

A.E. Stallings is a US-born poet, translator, and critic who lives in Athens. Her most recent poetry volume is a selection of poems, *This Afterlife: Selected Poems* (Carcanet Press, 2022). Her most recent book of verse translation is an illustrated version of the pseudo-Homeric *The Battle Between the Frogs and the Mice* (Paul Dry Books, 2019). She is the recipient of numerous grants, fellowships, and prizes, including a Guggenheim and a MacArthur fellowship. Since 2015, she has been running a poetry workshop with refugee women at the Melissa Network for Migrant Women in Athens. She was elected the forty-seventh Oxford Professor of Poetry in 2023.

Susan Stockwell is an established international artist working across sculpture, installation, and film. Her practice is concerned with examining social and colonial histories and engaging with questions of social justice, trade, cultural mapping, and feminism. Susan is best known for her site-specific installations and dress sculptures that have been exhibited widely, including: Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam (2022); Museum of London (2021); Royal Shakespeare Company (2015); TATE Modern (2013); the Katonah Museum of Art, New York (2012); and the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) London (2010, 2005, 2001). Her work is held in international collections including The House of European History, Brussels; Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam; Black Rock Investments, Yale Centre for British Art, USA; and the University of Bedfordshire and V&A Museum London.

Carla Suthren is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Verona, working with Silvia Bigliazzi on her PRIN-funded project on classical reception in early modern English drama. She has published articles on various aspects of the reception of Greek tragedy in Renaissance literature, including Jane Lumley's *Iphigeneia* and Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh's *Jocasta*.

Marina Warner writes fiction, criticism, and cultural history. Her award-winning books explore myths, symbols, and fairy tales, including *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and*

Their Tellers (Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1994) and *Stranger Magic: Charmed States & the Arabian Nights* (Chatto & Windus, 2011). She has published five novels and three collections of short stories, and her essays on literature and art have been collected in *Signs & Wonders: Essays on Literature and Culture* (Chatto & Windus, 2003) and *Forms of Enchantment: Writings on Art and Artists* (Thames & Hudson, 2018). Recent publications include *Temporale* (Sylph Editions, 2023) and *Sanctuary: Ways of Telling, Ways of Dwelling* (HarperCollins, 2025). She contributes regularly to the *New York Review of Books* and the *London Review of Books*. She is Professor of English and Creative Writing at Birkbeck College, a Distinguished Fellow of All Souls College, University of Oxford, and a Fellow of the British Academy. In 2015, she was awarded the Holberg Prize in the Arts and Humanities.

Clair Wills is King Edward VII Professor of English Literature at the University of Cambridge. She has written on Irish migration to post-war Britain in *The Best Are Leaving: Emigration and Post-War Irish Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), and on post-colonial and European migration in the wake of the Second World War in *Lovers and Strangers: An Immigrant History of Post-War Britain* (Allen Lane, 2017).

Pip Williams is a writer, theater maker, and performer from London. He is the co-artistic director of critically acclaimed theater company We Talk Of Horses, and has made work in collaboration with the Southwark Playhouse, Vaults, Camden People's Theatre, and The North Wall. He has performed with Boundless, Somna Theatre, and MoCo Theatre, and is an associate artist with Swings And Roundabouts Theatre.

Rowan Williams taught Theology in Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol, and Yale. From 2002 to 2012 he was Archbishop of Canterbury, and from 2012 to 2020 Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge. He has published widely on religion, literature, and politics, and was Chair of the development charity Christian Aid for eight years. He now lives in Wales, and is Chair of the

Peace Academy/Academi Heddwch. Recent books include *Justice and Love: A Philosophical Dialogue* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, with Mary Zournazi) and *Collected Poems* (Carcanet Press, 2021).