Mobilizing Narratives

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Narrating Injustices of (Im)Mobility

Edited by

Hager Ben Driss

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INTRODUCTION

HAGER BEN DRISS

> We hear the sense of injustice in the voices of Job and Jonah and Hesiod at the dawn of our literary history, and it still rings loud and true. Where indeed would our literature be without it? What on earth would Dickens have had to write about without the sense of injustice? He, no less than Voltaire, reminds us that we are not only aroused on our behalf but emphatically also when the indignities of injustice are experienced by other people. (Judith N. Shklar 1990, 3)

Judith N. Shklar's conceptualization of injustice undergirds the debate on the diverse forms of (im)mobility in this volume. *Mobilizing Narratives: Narrating Injustices of (Im)Mobility* not only sustains Shklar's judicious claim that the sense of injustice fuels acts of narration, but also reacts against "passive injustice", that is "civic failure to stop private and public acts of injustice" (Shklar 1990, 6). This collection of articles, therefore, seeks to cultivate global civic justice. As global citizen readers and writers, we are passively unjust when we don't report mobility crimes; when we tolerate forced immobility; and when we silently accept deportations and all forms of coercive movements. This book explores the dynamic relationship between (im)mobility, injustice, and narration. These terms intersect, exchange places, negotiate meanings, and mobilize acts of resistance.

While it is not my intention to engage in a dispute over terminology, I would like to start with a reflection on the frequent assemblage of the terms "mobility" and "justice" in such a way that they are almost transformed into a collocation. The Mobility Turn instigated by Mimi Sheller and John Urry has encroached upon the Spatial Turn, hailed by geographer Edward Soja as "irreversible" (Soja 2009, 10), and incorporated it within sociology (Sheller 2017, 2). This new paradigm is cogently described, analyzed, and assessed in Sheller's seminal *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes*, duly considered a key text in current mobility studies. While the rationale behind this collection of articles bears heavily on Sheller's theorization of mobility justice, my choice to use "(im)mobility" and "injustice" as part of its title aims to

complicate the rather assumptive terms "mobility" and "justice" circulated by the title of Sheller's book.

The intriguing fact, however, is that *Mobility Justice* engages a critique of immobility injustice. Sheller's definition of this concept is as much attentive to immobility and injustice as it is to mobility and justice: "mobility justice is an overreaching concept for thinking about how power and inequality inform the governance and control of movement, shaping the patterns of unequal mobility and immobility in the circulation of people, resources, and information" (Sheller 2018a, 36). So where is the problem here? The writer makes it clear that "mobility justice" is a concept that refers inherently to immobility and injustice. The trouble resides precisely in taking things for granted as Shklar states: "They take it for granted that injustice is simply the absence of justice … One misses a great deal by looking only at justice" (Shklar 1990, 15). Within the same vein, the following addendum may be pertinent: they take it for granted that immobility is simply the absence of mobility; one misses a great deal by looking only at mobility. In his discussion of the label "new mobility paradigm", Tim Cresswell uses with caveat the term "mobility": "Any study of mobility runs the risk of suggesting that the (allegedly) immobile - notions such as boundaries and borders, place, territory, and landscape - is of the past and no longer relevant to the dynamic world of the 21st century" (Cresswell 2009, 174). It is clear, however, right from the inception of the new mobilities paradigm that there is no predilection for advancing a mobile subjectivity. In their "Editorial: Mobilities, Immobilities, and Moorings", Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller, and John Urry show awareness of multiple critiques of idealizing, romanticizing, and even fetishizing movement at the expense of impaired mobility. The title of their editorial announces overtly that their aim is to pursue "the power and politics of discourses and practices of mobility in creating both movement and stasis" (Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006, 3). In the case of Sheller's book, however, I believe that the *title*, which circulates the whole concept, promotes one side of the story and normalizes its use. Hence my choice to use '(im)mobility' and 'injustice' as keywords in the title of this volume.

The principal objective in putting this collection together is to foreground the continua and connections at the heart of mobility and immobility as well as justice and injustice. These terms do not merely function as antonyms; they form a chain of concepts that pass into one another and cannot be readily distinguished. Advancing the term (im)mobility in the title of this volume is in tune with Sheller's use of "(im)mobilities" as a way "to signal that mobility and immobility are always connected,

relational, and co-dependent, such that we should always think of them together, not as binary opposites but as dynamic constellations of multiple scales, simultaneous practices, and rational meanings" (Sheller 2018a, 20). Using parentheses to separate immobility from mobility is not only a typographical device to foreground immobility, but also a mode to underscore the inseparability of the two terms both visually and phonetically. Peter Adey points out the relational and experiential quality of mobility and immobility, which create "illusions" of movement and stasis (Adey 2006, 83). The first half of his article's title, "If Mobility is Everything then it is Nothing", draws attention to the necessity of reconsidering the systematic circulation of one term which may be misleading when used alone and without further elucidation, something beyond the scope of a title. Adey's second half of the title, "Towards a Relational Politics of (Im)mobilities", advocates a direct and straightforward use of the term (im)mobility. Instead of the standardized use of the word "mobility", which evokes "immediate associations of fluidity and permeability of borders" (Carling 2002, 5), the employment of (im)mobility is more prone to accentuate such an important continuum.

The word "mobility", which enjoys now the status of a keyword in mobility studies, was not included in Raymond Williams' *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, both in its first edition (1976) and revised one (1983). "Mobility" as well as "justice" have recently received recognition as significant words in cultural and social studies. Both are included in *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, in which Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris add new indicative terms. The word "mobility", which first appeared in the 16th century, has undergone a spectacular semantic change. Indeed, from a term used to "describe gatherings of people appraised as dangerous", it ends up as "a widely sought individual right" (Bennett, Grossberg and Morris 2005, 217-218). The book, however, regulates "mobility" and "justice" as de facto concepts. Accordingly, "immobility" or "injustice" are not given separate entries, nor are they defined as constitutive of mobility and justice respectively.

The growing attention to differential mobilities has rerouted the focus from "conspicuous" to "hidden" movements of people and objects (Greenblatt 2010, 250). The editors of *Keywords of Mobility*, for instance, allocate a full chapter for the term "immobility." "The keyword 'immobility'", Nichola Khan states, "has developed as a cipher for assemblages of blocked, stuck, and transitional movement" (Khan 2016, 93). What is interesting in Khan's perceptive examination of this term is that immobility does not

necessarily mean a negative state, as it "may enfold ideas of freedom, free will, and resistance" (Khan 2016, 96). Indeed, immobility can equally refer to a desired state, while mobility becomes a forced situation, as experienced by refugees or exiles, for instance. In other cases, both mobility and immobility are forced. In times of war and political unrest, for example, those who find themselves obliged to move away leave behind others with impaired mobility. While placing (im)mobility center stage, Danièle Bélanger and Rachel Silvey go as far as calling for an "immobility turn", wherein attention is primarily devoted to "the constraints, regulations, and limits simultaneously placed on migration, everyday mobility, and border-crossings at multiple scales" (Bélanger and Silvey 2019, 3). *Mobilizing Narratives: Narrating Injustices of (Im)Mobility* engages this broad conversation with specific attention to all forms of prejudices and inequalities related to movement and circulation.

We live in a period of (im)mobility injustice, of forced immobility and of unequal opportunities for movement, that needs exposure and redress. Miranda Fricker's working definition of "epistemic injustice" (Fricker 2007) provides adequate parlance to delineate (im)mobility injustice. Following Fricker's phrasing, I call (im)mobility injustice the wrong done to someone in their capacity as an (im)mobile agent, and thus in a capacity essential to human life. Such an injustice occurs when someone's movement or stasis are damaged. Therefore, we might say that this injustice is caused by prejudice in the economy of (im)mobility. This (im)mobility deficit damages the subject's humanity to the extent that they are degraded *qua* (im)mobile subjects, and they are degraded *qua* humans. (Im)mobility injustice is intersectional or "systematic", in Fricker's phrasing, as it is connected to a large spectrum of prejudices that "track the subject through different dimensions of social activity - economic, educational, professional, sexual, legal, political, religious, and so on" (Fricker 2007, 27). (Im)mobility injustice is systematically connected to a larger gamut of entangled prejudices. The asymmetrical access to (im)mobility is regulated by several heterogeneity markers such as gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability.

While the major project of this volume is to home in on the different forms of (im)mobility injustice, it proposes to fill in a niche in mobility studies. *Mobilizing Narratives: Narrating Injustices of (Im)Mobility* sustains an emphasis on pressing the boundaries of mobility studies to the realm of literary studies. It attempts to open up venues of dialogue and exchange between literature, sociology, and other related fields. John Urry declares that the new project of sociology should zoom in on mobility (Urry 2004,

109). Along the same lines, Sheller celebrates the new mobilities paradigm as a revival of sociology: "It is time for sociology as a discipline to open its own paradigmatic horizons to the assemblage of transdisciplinary spatial and temporal questions that the mobilities paradigm has opened up" (Sheller 2017, 12). Her triumphal statement is met with disapproval by humanities scholars, who believe that it is quite presumptuous to appropriate an already established field of research. In their "Mobility and the Humanities", Peter Merriman and Lynne Pearce challenge "overly simplistic accounts which position mobilities research as a product of the social sciences" (Merriman and Pierce 2017, 394). They claim that the interest in mobility started with postcolonial studies and the focus on travel, immigration, and diaspora. Within the same vein, Marian Aguiar, Charlotte Mathieson, and Lynne Pearce, while tracing the genealogy of this field, claim that literary studies "can most certainly be written into the history of mobilities studies" (Aguiar, Mathieson, and Pearce 2019, 7). They argued that text-based scholarship, which flourished within postcolonial theory, engaged in mobility as a thematic focus without taking a further step to theorize it. Far from weakening the field, this debate over origins stresses its interdisciplinary impulse, as "it allowed sociologists, geographers, anthropologists, media studies scholars, artists and architects, and many others to move with each other in new assemblages that drew in ever-widening circles of interest, intervention, and creative instigation" (Sheller 2017, 6). Such interdisciplinarity is what makes of mobility studies a field in progress, ready to iron out differences, expand, and improve.

This volume joins the growing, albeit slow, interest in bringing together mobility studies and literary scholarship. It maintains the aim to reflect on the reciprocal exchange between (im)mobilities and narrative practices. Literary production has the capacity to gauge the power of discourses undergirding (im)mobility injustices. Engaging an interdisciplinary dialogue is at the heart of this collection, and confirms what the editors of *Mobilities, Literature, Culture* maintain: "our timely intervention will speak to these interdisciplinary debates and encourage a new generation of literary scholars to explore the usefulness of mobility theory for their research, as well as signal to social scientists the contribution text-based materials can make to their own methodologies" (Aguiar, Mathieson, and Pearce 2019, 2). Their volume has paved the way for another recent collection of articles titled *Transnational Crime Fiction: Mobilities, Borders and Detection* (2020), which also introduces humanities perspectives into mobilities research.

Mobilizing Narratives: Narrating Injustices of (Im)Mobility adds a new intervention in the field of mobility studies. Its focus on (im)mobility and injustice is seconded by foregrounding the capacity of literature to marshal emotions and values. This volume is attentive to the power of narratives to mobilize a sustained critique of differential (im)mobility. Writers, texts, and readers serve as "mobilizers", "agents, go-betweens, translators, or intermediaries" (Greenblatt 2010, 251), capable of galvanizing consciousness and calling public attention to (im)mobility inequalities and violations. Lynn Hunt claims that the act of reading served as the groundwork of human rights. Reading, which generates novel experiences, is conducive to social and political awareness. Tracing the roots of the contemporary human rights movement to the empathy engendered by the thriving epistolary novel in the 18th century, Lynn argues that "reading accounts of torture or epistolary novels had physical effects that translated into brain changes and came back out as new concepts about the organization of social and political life" (Hunt 2007, 33). What she terms "imagined empathy" can be seamlessly applied to accounts of coerced (im)mobility, for "empathy requires a leap of faith, of imagining that someone is like you" (Hunt 2007, 30). Literary representations of damaged movement and stasis are liable to change public opinions and reroute political debates. Advancing virtuous readers or citizens represents the chief concern of Martha Nussbaum's philosophical conceptualization of the global reader-citizen who should cultivate "the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and desires that someone so placed might have" (Nussbaum 2002, 299). Nussbaum advances the novel as the best receptacle of "moral attention and moral vision" (Nussbaum 1985, 516). Both Nussbaum and Hunt are indebted to Richard Rorty's views of the foundational role of reading stories in pressing forward human rights. Rorty advocates a type of sentimental education capable to activate a humanitarian response and cultivate empathy (Rorty 1993). This volume participates in the large debate over mobilizing narratives as well as rallying a public interest in unequal (im)mobility conditions. When structures of power, private or institutional, impose a regime of (im)mobility, then narrating these (im)mobility injustices in artistic forms becomes an act of mobilization.

The key aim of this volume is to examine kinopolitics from a literary perspective. Derived from the Greek word *kino*, meaning movement, "Kinopolitics is the politics of movement" (Nail 2016). Sheller refers to it as "kinetic politics", an attribute that "recognizes mobilities as a constitutive political relation and even as *constitutive* of political relations" (Sheller

2018a, 35). Accordingly, this collection takes up the task of politicizing motion and inertness by answering the chief questions raised in relation to mobility and immobility injustice: "Who is able to exercise rights to mobility and who is not capable of mobility within particular situations? Who is mobile or immobile and why?" (Sheller 2018b, 22). Who enjoys a full claim to (im)mobility and who is denied this right? The eight chapters that constitute this book address coerced movement and stasis in conjunction with travel, immigration, identity, colonization, gender, and environment.

Part I, titled "Mobilizing Genres: Redefining Travel Narratives", advances the argument that texts are apt to set in motion alternative practices of reading and interpretation. "Mobilizing" here also refers to the dynamic nature of literary genres. Scrutinized from the lenses of mobility studies, travel narratives provide keen insights into hidden movements which frequently go under the radar. The etymology of the word "travel", from old French *travail*, meaning labor, work, and suffering, is currently more relevant than ever. The three chapters in this part press the borders of travel writing to the recent concerns of the new mobility paradigm.

The chapter "The Refugees' Progress: Redefining Travel in Zeyn Joukhadar's *The Map of Salt and Stars*" by Hager Ben Driss starts from the heated debate around defining travel literature and proposes to move the boundaries of this genre to forced mobility in times of war or political unrest. The chapter focuses on Zeyn Joukhadar's *The Map of Salt and Stars*, a novel amalgamating history, fiction, and documentation. The novel addresses the plight of Syrian refugees and mobilizes attention to their damaged (im)mobility. While subverting the law of travel writing, Ben Driss argues that Joukhadar's narrative redefines the idea of travel by negotiating new politics of location. She examines the ethical, aesthetic, and material sides of travel.

Engaged in the same pursuit of readjusting generic lines from the prism of the new mobility paradigm, Michelle Stork's chapter "'Everyone Leaves': (Auto)Mobility and Migration in Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive*" proposes a deconstruction of the road novel. This genre, typically associated with uncontrolled fluid movement, displays signs of generic insurgence as it is currently utilized to upset the presumptions of the totalizing narratives of mobility. Luiselli's novel uses and confuses immigrants and refugees and blurs the lines between voluntary and forced (im)mobilities. Stork's chapter sustains a dual emphasis on the way the road novel genre can engage with questions of differential mobilities, and the way the novel

mobilizes empathy. It inspects various narrative strategies employed in Luiselli's road novel, namely visceral descriptions of (im)mobility and metafictional reflections on the role of the reader. Drawing on Sheller's and Weik von Mossner's research, Stork traces the interconnection of (im)mobility injustices and concludes that contemporary road novel, like Luiselli's, revamps conceptualizations of fluidity and circulation.

David Wills' chapter titled "Refugee Crises in Greece, 1920-2020: Ancient Histories in Modern Contexts" engages with history to pursue the debate on impaired (im)mobility as represented in travelogues. Shifting the focus towards Greece, a land traditionally associated with emigration, he addresses two key journeys across the Mediterranean, namely the Exchange of Population of 1922-23 and the migrant crisis of 2015. Almost a century apart, the two crises intersect in their large scale of coerced mobility. Wills argues that Anglophone texts recording these two tragedies are more attentive to the ancient Greek lore than the refugees' predicament. When 1920s authors did notice the forced arrivals, they often chose to inscribe this as a positive displacement – Greeks returning to the ancestral homeland – rather than a social crisis. In the more recent period, travelers to islands close to the Turkish coast have praised local residents' reception of migrants who have now been rendered immobile by the inaction and neglect of officials from EU level downwards. Wills notes examples where ancient history is still referenced in the description of current "odysseys", but concludes that this now feels appropriate only when adopted by the refugees themselves.

Part II, "Mobilizing Identities: Life Narratives", addresses the intersection of (im)mobility, identity, and memory in conjunction with places and borders. The three chapters constituting this part bring together an assemblage of associated terms, including exile, statelessness, and immigration. They examine identities in motion as narrated in memoirs and autobiographical accounts of displacement. The three contributors engage "the atmosphere or 'feeling' of particular kinds of movements" (Sheller & Urry 2006, 218) and discuss the trans/formations of identities as they negotiate mobility and sendentariness.

The chapter "'house I unhouse': Derek Walcott's Mobile Houses/Heterotopian Spaces" by Adel Sliti explores the interplay of place and uneven (im)mobility systems. It complicates the tense rapport between mobility and immobility in Walcott's poetry by conjugating embodied (im)mobility and (im)mobile locations. Walcott's poetical account of the Caribbean corroborates his anxieties over place and emplacement as well as his

critique of the (neo)colonial project of emptying and demystifying spaces. The colonial discourse of immobilization works within two crucial concepts: first *terra nullius*, or empty and misused lands, and second *terra sine tempore*, or lands outside time and history. While paying attention to the aesthetic, Sliti shows the conflation of mobility, dispossession, and damaged identities in Walcott's poems. He examines the way Walcott's poetics of motion demonstrates mobility and dispossession as correlative items. The narrative in *Omeros*, for instance, plays out narcissistic claims about itself as a narrative built around the movement of themes, and, at the same time, reflects on a deracinated slave diaspora. Mobility, Sliti shows, morphs into an identity-assigning reference testifying for the Caribbean cross-cultural genealogy. Walcott in this way is also attentive to the semantic mobilities words and worlds undergo as he digs into those trajectories and temporalities of loss and destitution.

(Im)mobility injustice related to homelessness and statelessness is at the core of Ahlam Abulaila's chapter "Once Displaced, Forever Displaced: Words Without Borders and Borders Within Words in Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah.*" Abulaila examines the "politics of obduracy, fixity and friction" (Cresswell 2011, 174) as narrated in Barghouti's poignant autobiography. The writer's rhetorical question "who listens to the stories of men, women and children who are taken by their displacement to that other shore from which no one ever returns?" (Barghouti 2000, 11) provides a conflated case of epistemic and (im)mobility injustice. The text narrates the case of an entire population wronged in their capacity as tellers and knowers as well as (im)mobile agents. Hagar Kotef considers the Israeli occupation of Palestine "a regime of movement" that "offers a condensed laboratory for examining technologies of regulating movement and the subject positions emerging through these technologies" (Kotef 2015, 5). Defying all systems of immobilization, Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah* emerges as an intriguing example of the way texts move. Translated from Arabic into several languages, gaining therefore a large circulation, the memoir displays a great capacity to move readers, in the sense that it can stir emotion, affect, and transform. Put differently, Barghouti's narrative, which is mobilized through translation, gathers the power to mobilize attention to damaged mobilities.

Mobilizing life narratives to focus on impaired mobilities is also the subject matter in "Barren Binaries: Immobility in Migration from Bihar" by Nidhi Jha and Smriti Singh. The two books the contributors address, namely Amitava Kumar's *Passport Photos* and Gaiutra Bahadur *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture*, present archival reenactments of

differential (im)mobilities. Both reconstruct the history of Indian indentured workers, known as *girmitya*, a corruption of the English word 'agreement.' The chapter interrogates the voluntariness of migration and argues against the normalizing assumption that emigration from Bihar is a spontaneous and chosen act. Jorgen Carling maintains that "there is no categorical analytical distinction between the 'forced' and the 'voluntary' migration, since all migration involves both choices and constraints" (Carling 2002, 8). Within the same vein, Jha and Smriti examine the economic and social factors that generated a mass emigration from Bihar. They also focus on the identity fluctuation of emigrants who are caught between longing for their origins and belonging to a new culture.

The third part, "Entangled (Im)Mobilities: Colonization, Immigration, and Environment", carries on the discussion further by focusing on the convoluted quality of (im)mobility. Elements like colonization, immigration, and climate change, which may be regarded as disparate issues, are in reality intertwined in a complex assemblage. In the chapter "(Im)mobilities in Fettouma Touati's *Desperate Spring* and Boualem Sansal's *An Unfinished Business*", Emma Musty discusses (im)mobility and agency in colonial and postcolonial contexts. She addresses the narratives of two Algerian writers whose works, she argues, elucidate the impact of colonization on uneven mobility. Through a close reading of these texts, she underlines the power dynamics inherent in mobility regimes and dissects them in relation to class, citizenship, and gender. European and male mobilities, Musty maintains, are privileged over other citizenries and genders. Literature hence provides a rich seam to interrogate these norms and steer a path towards (im)mobility justice.

The closing chapter, "Routes and Rights of Passage: Mobilities in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*", by Pragyan Padmaja Behera turns our attention to questions of (im)mobility injustice with respect to border crossing, technological innovations, and climate change. It discusses the way different forms of mobilities, like walking, sea travel, etc., have acquired new significance in the current times. In addition, Behera highlights the recent phenomenon of virtual mobility generated by the Internet and its role in determining the present patterns and processes of mobilities. The chapter addresses Amitav Ghosh's most recent novel, a narrative that openly functions as a manifesto against policing borders while showing the intertwined rapport between climate change and immigration. Ghosh's novel provides a cogent example of entangled mobilities, wherein "environmental injustices and mobility injustices are two faces of the same problem, each contributing to the other" (Sheller 2018b, 25).

All the chapters in this volume engage in a text-based approach within a deliberate move to synchronize mobility studies and literary studies. They are linked explicitly by their concern with (im)mobility and injustice. Through diverse lenses of analysis, they show that (im)mobility is not mere motion or stasis; it is an apparatus of power. Like any other product, (im)mobility justice is differentially and unequally distributed. While the rationale behind this collection is to foreground the injustices related to various types of (im)mobility, it sustains the aim to enhance a collective consciousness, accountability, and redress. The ultimate goal of this book is to advance (a)kinetic ethics, which is the ethics of (im)mobility. Once again, Shklar's philosophy of injustice provides us with keen insight into the ethical dimension at the core of uneven (im)mobility: "To have no idea of what it means to be treated unjustly is to have no moral knowledge, no moral life" (Shklar 1990, 15). Research into (im)mobility is fundamentally a venture to ethicize as well as politicize movement and stasis.

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PART I:

MOBILIZING GENRES:
REDEFINING TRAVEL NARRATIVES

CHAPTER ONE

THE REFUGEES' PROGRESS:
REDEFINING TRAVEL IN ZEYN JOUKHADAR'S
THE MAP OF SALT AND STARS[1]

HAGER BEN DRISS

> Is it lack of imagination that makes us come to imagined places, not just stay at home?
>
> Or could Pascal have been not entirely right about just sitting quietly in one's room? (Elizabeth Bishop 1965, "Questions of Travel")
>
> We live in a period of migration, of forced travel and forced residence, that has literally engulfed the globe (Edward Said 2003, *Culture and Resistance*)

Almost half a century separates Elizabeth Bishop's poetic cogitations on travel from Edward Said's matter-of-fact account of global mobility. While attending to completely different perceptions and conceptions of the journey, the two excerpts testify to the riveting and pervasive nature of travel in contemporary times. Bishop complicates travel by juxtaposing spiritual or intellectual im/mobility with the spatial one. Her interrogation of Blaise Pascal's creed that "the cause of all man's misfortune consists in this one thing, his inability to remain quietly in one room" (1908: 38) has the effect of prioritizing movement in space. And yet, venturing forth or sitting quietly in one's room, in Bishop's narrative of the journey, refer to a traveling subject who willingly chooses mobility or immobility. On the other side of this question, Said's statement that we live in an age of

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[1] Two years after the publication of *The Map of Salt and Stars* under the name Jennifer Zeynab Joukhadar, the writer announced publicly in 2020 that he was transgender and that he started using the name Zeyn and he/him pronouns. Even though the edition I have used in this chapter is under the name Jennifer Zeynab, I align with the writer's wish to be addressed as Zeyn and therefore use male pronouns in all my references to the author.

coerced forms of im/mobility inscribes travel in a geopolitical reality that destabilizes the romantic figure of the traveler. His account reroutes the discourse of travel writing to complex patterns of migration, displacement, and exile.

Such an urgent need to redefine travel writing informs the sub-text of Syrian-American Zeyn Joukhadar's *The Map of Salt and Stars* (2018a). His two-timeline narrative of travel and mobility charts two girls' parallel journeys, eight hundred years apart, that will eventually take them to Ceuta in Spain. Nour's poignant account of her family's forced travel during the recent war in Syria is superimposed on Rawiya's story of adventures as an apprentice to Arab geographer al-Idrisi. The significance of the novel resides in its playful engagement with the idea of travel. Rawiya's traditional circular journey, based on departure, encounters, and return, is juxtaposed with Nour's open-ended journey seeking asylum, wherein return is suspended, if not obliterated altogether. And yet, the two itinerants' progress is energized by the same interplay of roots and routes. The two girls' travels are activated by questions of home, origins, place, and emplacement.

Starting from the heated debate around defining travel literature, this chapter proposes to press the boundaries of this genre to forced mobility and its attendant injustices in times of war or political unrest. I argue that Joukhadar's narrative redefines the idea of travel by negotiating new politics of location. Informed by mobility studies, I read it as a nomadic mode of narration trespassing across the boundaries of the travel narrative and the narrative about travel. In other words, while it does not abide by the norms of the traditional travel account, its relationship with this genre remains close and rather troubling. Joukhadar's text is conceived within the travel modus operandi, for it displays both a documentary-like registration of places and events, as well as an account of the fantastic.

Mobilizing Narratives/Narrating Mobility

The controversy over travel writing sounds tedious and rather "politically and theoretically short-sighted" (Egan 1999, 14), in Susanna Egan's phrasing, for how can we quarrel with a term as supple and all-embracing as travel? Egan's rebuking statement describes the squabbles assailing the term "autobiography", which can seamlessly qualify the state of travel writing. Paul Fussell's reductive definition of travel books, wherein he claims that "the narrative -unlike that in novel or romance- claims literal validity by constant reference to actuality" (1980: 203), will find resonance

later in the dividing walls Philip Lejeune (1989) erects around autobiography. Veracity and factuality represent the only defining traits of a travel book, which is readily accepted as a literary production, but jealously separated from fiction. In his 2013 book, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, Tim Youngs preserves the same generic straight jacket, based on an author-reader contract, and claims that "travel writing consists of predominantly factual, first-person prose accounts of travels that have been undertaken by the author-narrator" (2013: 3). While Youngs' definition sounds categorical and adamant, his earlier work on this genre belies such assertiveness. In their introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Hulme and Youngs claim that "travel writing is best considered as a broad and ever-shifting genre" (2002: 6). Such contradictory definitions attest to the protean quality of travel writing and its resistance to generic closure.

The sweeping nature of travel writing defies the attempts at delimiting its contours. According to Carl Thompson, "the term is a very loose generic label, and has always embraced a bewildering diverse range of material" (11). He concludes his lengthy discussion of Fussell's definition with the same assertion: "the boundaries of travel writing genre are fuzzy, and there is little point in policing them too rigidly" (2011: 26). Thompson joins several other scholars who believe in the encompassing quality of travel writing. Indeed, Jan Borm's use of the term as an umbrella genre that includes "memoirs, journals, and ships' logs as well as narratives of adventure, exploration, journey, and escape" (2004: 13) tunes with Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan's claim of "a hybrid genre that straddles categories and disciplines" (2000: 8). It also resonates with James Clifford's earlier "expansive use of 'travel'" (1997: 11) and Jonathan Raban's apt metaphors describing travel writing as "a notoriously raffish open house" (1987: 253) or "a too big umbrella, full of holes to let the rain in" (2008). Such porosity allowing generic leakages can best be apprehended in a broader field of studies, one that accepts new directions in travel writings.

Positioning travel writing in mobility studies may offer better avenues to explore and redefine the term 'travel'. This field, Stephen Greenblatt claims in his *Manifesto* on mobility studies, "should shed light on hidden as well as conspicuous movements of peoples, objects, images, texts, and ideas" (2009: 250). The three-patterned conventional model of departure-encounters-return is only able to account for the traditional journey or its modern counterpart, tourism. Fussell's assumption that "travel is now impossible … tourism is all we have left" (1980: 41) testifies to a conformist

sense of travel. And yet, his claim is not void of truth, not because tourism prevails nowadays, but because travel has lost its ancient aura. It has undergone a semantic metamorphosis not yet registered in dictionaries and glossaries. Ironically enough, the term travel, contrary to what Fussell believes, has maintained its etymology, "*travail*, a word deriving from Latin *tripalium*, a torture instrument" (Fussell 1980, 39). Indeed forced mobility or hidden movements, in Greenblatt's phrasing, which are displaced or silenced in conventional accounts of travel, are steeped in suffering. Bell hooks proposes a deconstruction of such a formal conceptualization of travel in order to theorize a broader variety of journeying, one that includes "rites of passage, immigration, enforced immigration, relocation, enslavement, homelessness" (1992: 343). Hooks' description of the fear and terror that accompanied the forced travels of African-Americans operates within a similar vision of the *travail* of Syrian refugees, forced to escape their homeland, as narrated by Joukhadar.

While inhabiting mobility studies, Joukhadar's *The Map of Salt and Stars* offers a redefinition of travel, wherein movement in space is anchored in a continuum of injustices. The writer seems aware of this urgent need to broaden the semantic field of this term: "everything in life is a journey, but it is harder to think of a traumatic journey (like a refugee flight, exile, forced displacement, or homelessness) as a journey" (2018b), he claims in a short piece where he speaks about the music play-list that relates to his novel. His reflection on the question of the journey comes as a comment on *Saffar*, a song by Indian Kiran Ahluwalia. Even though Joukhadar provides "journey" as the translation of "*safar*", the Arabic word dwells in a dense semantic terrain more generative than the word "*rihla*", from the root "*rahala*", to travel. Along with its meaning of spatial movement, the root "*sa-fa-ra*" refers to a scribe (*safirun*, plural: *safaratun*), a book (*sifrun*), as well as an ambassador (*safirun*), among several other connotations. While aware that Joukhadar may not have these meanings in mind, I find all of them relevant to his thematic exploration of the enmeshed relationship between writer/storyteller and traveler, as I will explain later. The third sense, *safirun* or ambassador, is particularly applicable to the major idea in his narrative, which he describes in the same piece. He claims that his novel aims "to explore the question: in what ways is it possible for those of us who have lost home(s) to both grieve what the journey has cost us as well as to celebrate what cannot be taken away?" From this perspective, Joukhadar serves as what Greenblatt calls a "mobilizer", an agent, go-between, translator, or intermediary (2009: 251), whose role is to shed light on the contemporary reality of mobility. Travel writing, according to Mary B. Campbell is "a literary instrument of

consciousness, a genre of cultural translation" (1988: 11). Indeed, the ultimate objective behind Joukhadar's book, as he states in an interview, is "to start a discussion about and increase empathy for Syrians, for refugees, and for displaced people in general" (2018c). It is also his way of appropriating the story of the Syrian refugees and claiming his right as a Syrian to provide his narrative of the mass displacement of Syrians. His role of a mobilizer is announced in the narrative via Khaldun, Rawiya's fellow traveler: "If you don't know the tale of where you come from … the words of others can overwhelm and drown out on your own. So, you see, you must keep careful track of the borders of your stories, where your voice ends and another's begins" (2018a: 112). The writer, nevertheless, is quite alert to the danger of transforming refugee narratives into a commodity function according to the market expectations (Joukhadar 2018d), as he crafts a poignant narrative while eliding pathos and sensationalism. Put differently, the "mobilizer" facilitates the circulation or the mobility of an idea or a cause without playing the role of a cultural informant or comprador.

Joukhadar's narrative of forced movement answers Anne-Marie Fortier's questions: "who moves freely and who doesn't? How does one's place of residence on the planet frame one's capacity to leave or travel, if one desires so? … Who can travel and who can stay at home?" (2014: 66). Such spatial politics of im/mobility informs Joukhadar's commentary on *Borders* by M.I.A., another song on his play-list:

> Refugees fleeing violence and displacement face cruel borders at every turn. This novel gave me an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which borders, particularly in the ways they are drawn and enforced, can be violent institutions used to further marginalize refugees, migrants, people of color (particularly Black folks), the disabled, those who are economically disadvantaged, and religious and ethnic minorities, for whom borders are differentially enforced (2018b).

As he claims "mobility justice" (Sheller 2014: 3), the writer engages in mobilizing his narrative while narrating mobility. The travel narrative emerges as terrain of negotiation and retrieval. It offers a contact space, wherein the aesthetics of mobility are politicized.

Traveling Stories and Mobile Borders

Storytelling and traveling are intricately connected in Joukhadar's narrative, both in representational and figurative ways. The novel's porous generic boundaries allow fluid mobility of literary forms and styles. He finds in

Lebanese Rabih Alameddine's *The Hakawati* (2008) a highly inspiring narratological model. It "was eye-opening for me," he says, "because I've never seen Arab storytelling traditions employed in literary fiction before, as well as the fantastic mixed in with the real and the contemporary, stories weaving in and out of each other" (Joukhadar 2018d). *The Map of Salt and Stars* replicates a similar intricate network of stories while it echoes the opening sentences of Alameddine's novel: "Let me take you on a journey beyond imagining. Let me tell you a story" (2008: 5). This invitation to the voyage, in Baudelaire's phrasing, inscribes the act of writing/storytelling in its mobile dimension.

Tzvetan Todorov's rhetorical question: "what is *not* a journey?" (1995: 60) is an ironic nod to the squabbles around definitions and categorizations assailing travel writing. His summation: "journey and narrative imply one another" (60), which tunes with Michel de Certeau's "every story is a travel story" (1988: 115), describes narration as inherently mobile. The progress of the narrative plot intertwines and mirrors the characters' spatial and emotional trajectories as Mieke Bal contends: "a traveller in narrative is in a sense always an allegory of the travel that narrative is" (1997: 137). These metaphorical overlapping edges equate writer with traveler, and informs Hélène Cixous's contention that the "true poet is a traveler" and the act of writing is nothing but "starting off" (2001: 100-101). It is also the same impetus that drives Michel Butor's claim that "to travel … is to write …, and to write is to travel" (2001: 102). These narratological insights energize Joukhadar's text, and rehabilitate it into a broader scope of travel writing. His narrative trespasses the law of genres, and, taking a cue from Jacques Derrida's "genreless text" (1981: 61), participates in maintaining that there is no travelless text.

Joukhadar's narrative strategies of creating loose borderlines offer a cogent artistic retaliation for the global policed borders. The structure of the novel, based on a dual story-line, erases the boundaries between the factual and the fantastic. Embarking on two journeys with different goals, Nour and Rawiya follow a similar trajectory eight hundred years apart. Nour's circuitous travels start from Homs and end up in Ceuta, a Spanish city on the northern coast of Africa. Her one-way journey to asylum follows Rawiya's adventurous return journey, which starts from Ceuta and intersects Nour's travels along Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco. The two girls' movements in space and time fuse and confuse reality and fiction. Rawiya's story interpolates a real historical figure, the Arab geographer and traveler Abu Abd Allah Muhammad al-Idrisi (1099-1154). Born in Ceuta, al-Idrisi immigrated to Sicily in 1138 and settled in

the court of King Roger II (1130-1154) who commissioned him "to map the lands between Anatolia and King Roger's outposts in Infriqiya, which lay beyond the gulf of Sidra and the city of Berneek" (Joukhadar 2018a: 44). Disguised as a boy, Rawiya becomes al-Idrisi's apprentice and takes part in his expedition. Nour's story, on the other hand, is set in contemporary times and takes the Arab uprisings as a background. While seemingly different, the two characters conflate in several ways and moments in the narrative: "You're more Rawiya than anyone" (Joukhadar 2018a: 172), the mother tells Nour. Indeed, Nour is the storyteller, the *rawiya*, in the two stories. Such amalgamation of names and roles creates fluid zones between the two leaking narratives.

The two stories attest to hooks' claim that to travel, one "must always move through fear, confront terror" (1992: 344). Indeed, both girls' progress is set in a gothic atmosphere replete with danger and horror. Along with numerous battles to cross borders or save al-Idrisi's maps, Rawiya has to confront a legendary creature, the roc, "some awful flying beast" (46), she calls "the pale terror" (Joukhadar 2018a: 57). Immediately after the first appearance of the roc in Hama, the narrative turns to the bombing in Homs which triggers the journey of Nour and her family. In an allegorical move, the mythical bird finds a counterpart in "the whimpering of helicopter", an "angry high-pitched whirring … A shrieking thrum" (Joukhadar 2018a: 47-48). The description of the fantastic roc's destructive power is evocative of the contemporary mechanical birds dropping bombs on civilians: "he terrorized the townspeople, dropping boulders on them from out of the sky, diving down on their flocks and scattering them, carrying off whole sheep in his talons" (2018a: 75). The destruction caused by the fighter planes transforms Homs into an unmapped city, which destabilizes Nour's mother's cartographical skills. In a city whose topography is utterly disfigured, Nour needs a cognitive map to reach the house of Abou Sayeed, her father's friend. The family's walk along the destroyed city "could have been an adventure, an expedition" (Joukhadar 2018a: 63), Nour reflects in a moment of narrative slippage between the two stories. Their wandering through a devastated landscape is reminiscent of what Julia Hell (2008) calls "ruins travel", referring to a new kind of travel that developed across Europe during WWII. Similar to those ruins travelers, whose progress is marked by disorientation, Nour advances in a geography that needs to be mapped again, and therefore she takes the role of Rawiya as an apprentice cartographer.

Creating troubled borders extends to issues of gender and mobility. The impetus behind Rawiya's adventure is forced immobility. While her brother Salim is free to embark on sea voyages, her mobility is socially and culturally regulated. Rawiya, the reader is informed, "tried to be content with her embroidery and her quiet life with her mother, but she was restless" (Joukhadar 2018a: 10). Her willful mobility, however, is obstructed by gender barriers. Hence, to carry out her dreams of adventure, Rawiya disguises herself as a merchant's son, renames herself Rami, and cuts her hair. Trespassing gender borderlines finds its way into the forced mobility of Nour, whose name announces a gender ambiguity as it applies both to males and females. In a significant episode in the narrative, in which the mother shaves Nour's hair to rid it of lice, the young girl experiences a moment of narrative uncertainty: "I'm not Rawiya. This isn't an adventure" (Joukhadar 2018a: 119). While trying to maintain a dividing line between reality and fantasy, Nour seems unaware of the dangers threatening women travelers. Her mother's warning: "being seen as a boy will protect you from bad people" (Joukhadar 2018a: 124) will soon concretize in Cairo, wherein two boys try to violate her sister, Huda. The journey in space imposes a mobile gender on the two female protagonists and transforms their progress into a type of a picaresque narrative wherein they need inventiveness and cunning to survive. Rawiya/Rami, "the one who throws the arrow" (Joukhadar 2018a: 11), shows considerable intelligence and bravura. Her deftness at using the sling saves al Idrisi's expedition from the monstrous roc. Nour, on the other side, enjoys the gift of a good memory, which enables her to decipher her mother's coded map and safely reach Ceuta with her sister.

The notion of travel in the novel, then, encompasses itinerant stories, mobile genres, as well as porous gender borders. The fantastic stories recuperated from *The Thousand and One Nights* circulate in Rawiya's story and infiltrate Nour's. This textual mobility creates fluid genres accommodating reality and fiction, voluntary and forced mobility, and adventure and refugee narratives. It also reroutes the traditional discussion of travel, which takes up the male voyager as a pressing focus of debate, towards gender concerns. Joukhadar's narrative refurbishes the conversation around travel by highlighting not only issues of borders, but also by bringing to the fore the movements of objects, means of transportation, and the imbricated nature of routes and roots.

Objects on the Move

The material side of travel has acquired a significant place in mobility studies. People and objects interact in specific ways when they are on the move. Paul Basu and Simon Coleman describe such interactions as "both moving, in the sense that they stir the emotions, and, indeed, moving, insofar as they entail the movement of both people and things, subjects and objects" (2008: 318). The etymological connection of motion and emotion accounts for the strong link between affect and mobility. The Latin origin of emotion is *emovere*, composed of "e", a variant of "ex", which means "out", and "*movere*", which means to move. The two cognate words feed into each other, as motion generates emotion and emotion is motivated by motion. The traveler's progress operates in this grammar of e/motion, wherein objects transcend their utilitarian function and maneuver in the realm of the affect.

Luggage is one of the important elements attesting to the intersection of mobility and materiality. Orvar Lofgren's ethnographic study of "emotional baggage" offers an interesting insight into the semiotics of the suitcase, which "turns into a cultural container by this throwntogetherness, enclosing and joining together stuff that may be seen as a personal micro-universe" (2016: 148). He borrows Doreen Massey's concept, *throwntogetherness*, which initially refers to a fleeting encounter of people and things, and applies it to the contents of a traveler's suitcase that amalgamates objects with feelings. The suitcase functions "not only as a container for stuff, but also for affects, dreams, anxieties and ideals. … it is an object in which affects and materialities are crammed and intertwined in interesting ways" (Lofgren 2016: 126). The act of packing is both cultural and emotional and depends on the nature and circumstances of mobility. A deliberate packing for exciting holidays is definitely different from a hasty cramming of anything at reach in forced movement. This accounts for the attempt at redefining the objects related to mobility in a refugee's context. Under the heading, "luggage/baggage", The Critical Refugee Studies Collective provides the following meanings:

> Baggage for the refugee carries material and symbolic meaning. Combined with the physical luggage that refugees put together in their haste to escape violence, baggage represents the different forms of content that people try to fill and carry. For example, war is a baggage that refugees always have to carry. The refugee also becomes baggage for the nation-state. Baggage also simultaneously functions as trauma and resilience/survival. To be sure, baggage is ephemeral, it can be lost through movement without the possibility of retrieval. Yet, traces of the baggage and its contents remain.