



How I loved this picture—to see the usually triumphant Columbus, brought so low, seated at the bottom of a boat just watching things go by “The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go”

Jamaica Kincaid, *Annie John*

Soon he would touch / our land. his charted mind's desire . . .
What did this journey mean. this / new world mean. dis/covery?

Kamau Brathwaite, *Middle Passages*

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Becoming Home Diaspora and the Anglophone Transnational

Edited by

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and

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Series in Literary Studies



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Preface

Elaine Savory

The New School

The title of this rich and absorbing collection of essays describes a kinetic, endless dialogue in individual lives, mediated through stories and other cultural artifacts. Serious and accomplished literary texts, such as are discussed here, can deepen and complicate the familiar terms we have at hand (for example, exile, diaspora, transnational, and home, the last perhaps the most nebulous but vital of all).

We can try to understand the experiences of others through observations and framing theories, but we try to name ourselves through our experience, often making successive adaptations and changes. At the core of this remarkable collection of essays lies a productive tension between identities which shape-shift along the journey-lines of individual lives, especially when there is the experience of migration. Such lives question reductive categories such as race, gender, class, and nation. Home remains an iconic idea, but in truth and in fact, only an idea, once adulthood is reached. The word “home” signifies many things, such as point of origin, profound emotional attachment to place, or the almost mythic status accorded a building in which important formative experiences occurred. For some, home is the presence of a loved person. For those millions upon millions whose history has known traumas of kidnapping and enslavement, war and conquest, deterritorialization from ancestral land, or voluntary exile, the idea of home is painfully framed by loss, hopefully informed by new attachments, but never straightforward.

In the beginning, in Africa, when our species still understood itself to be one, somebody decided to begin the great treks which ultimately brought human presence to the whole world. Those ancient travels and travelers led to settlements but then some moved on, whether by urgent necessity caused by conflict, environmental change, or simply because of the desire to see somewhere else. Those poles of experience, staying in one place or moving to another, mark human existence to this day. What we mean by migration is a very broad and vexed term, which cannot do justice to the plethora of ways individuals navigate transitions, voluntary or involuntary, and the reinvention of self they so often demand. That is why these essays are so satisfying to read, because they hunt out stories and other evidence which undermine attempts to simplify or codify many-stranded experience.

Somewhat more than half of this collection is Caribbean-centered, which is appropriate, since the region's human societies have been built on migration, both coerced and voluntary. Even animals and plants have often been brought from some other part of the world. Four essays deal respectively with creative renditions of Korean experience in Hawai'i, the British in Australia, and Nigerians and South Asians in Britain. Perhaps the most obvious response to these wonderfully nuanced and interesting examples is to think of migration as a major and normative part of human existence. We know how commonplace it is for humans to move plants from one part of the world to another. Their taste is altered when they grow in different soil, air, and water. We know that a food dish from home can never be perfectly reproduced in another location, though it might prove utterly delicious when altered to suit its new locale. Searching for authenticity, in the sense of originary identity, is a futile goal whether for food or for people, for as writers and artists discussed in this collection demonstrate, namely Derek Walcott, Samuel Selvon, Monica Ali, Nadeem Aslam, Ty Pak, and Ben Okri, transitions from one cultural space to another can provide creative opportunities for profound, if often challenging, growth. Cultural indicators such as periodicals and cookbooks provide other important lenses in this collection for exploring the way migrations are understood and experienced.

This book sometimes asks us to measure the messiness and unpredictability of experience by terms we might use to describe it. Those found in this collection, beyond diaspora, transnational, and exile, include hybrid, displacement, contact zone, and transcultural. They are helpful, as long as they do not become reductive and confining. Story-telling, however, offers the particular as a way in for readers to find their own connections, embracing both similarities and differences. The way art works is to accept that one person's sense of diaspora is not another's, but to hope that the imagination is enlivened not only to think afresh about other people's experience but also about the personal in new ways. To name oneself transnational is not simply to claim crossing of borders, but to honor a profound transformative recreation of self, acknowledging all important cultural influences in their unique interactions in a life, bringing together general expectations and unique combinations of knowledge and experience. The way essays in this collection explore the relation of particular and general in the context of migration and diaspora is groundbreaking and innovative and helps us redefine how we think of both.

There are only nine essays, so the scope and breadth of each is rewardingly generous. This is an important collection because it embraces inclusion, diversity, and innovative perspectives, without in any way minimizing the damage and trauma caused by manifestations of divisive powers (as race, gender, class, colonialism, nationalism, war). As we face environmental crises,

we need to understand that our unified origins as a species need to come back into consciousness, so we may pool our energies and experiences for the common good, going forward. This seminal collection provides insights into what we have in common as well as perceptive insights on attempts (all too often successful) to separate us.

Our world is changing fast, and to look forward is to embrace that change, on a social and an individual level. Jude V. Nixon calls Derek Walcott's gesture in his great poem, "The Schooner Flight," "transnational and heterogenous": this also describes the core of this fine and timely book. It is a real pleasure to offer these few words, after so enjoying the collection.

They are just a doorway, not to encourage you to linger, but rather to pass quickly into the absorbing landscape of important ideas awaiting you.

Introduction

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Abstract

The introduction explores the classical diaspora—the dispersion of Jews—then shows how its modern incarnations elucidate the lives of disparate people and nations. A crucial event was the Middle Passage, which necessitated enslaved Africans and their descendants to renegotiate, reimagine, and reconstitute from the shards of history new identities in the Americas. The introduction teases out issues of what is home, where is home, who belongs where, and how do migration and transnationalism define and redefine the amorphous but crucial signifier home. For people of the diasporas, the quest for home involves leaving their place of birth to find a transnational home abroad. The introduction illustrates how one discrete case, the story of the English settler Hannah Duston, problematizes concepts of home, colonialism, and deterritorialization, and was appropriated by Puritan New Englanders as a Jewish exilic, captivity narrative, and a story of deliverance. Finally, the introduction assesses how each chapter in the volume addresses ideas of home, diaspora, and the transnational.

Keywords: colonialism, deterritorialization, diaspora, home, transnationalism

Home is where one starts from. And as we grow older
The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated . . .
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning.

T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

there's millions like you up here,
 picking their way through refuse,
 look for words they lost.
 You're your company's lost property
 with no office to claim you back.

A. Jussawalla, "Scenes from the Life," *Missing Person*

Often I had gone this way before:
 But now it seemed I never could be
 And never had been anywhere else;
 Twas home

Edward Thomas, "Home"

Introduction

What is home, where is home, and how do migration and transnationalism come to define and redefine the concept of home? What roles do imperialism, colonialism, and deterritorialization, armed with the weapon of history and historical erasure, play in the construction of home? Who belongs where? And is migration, as Derek Walcott sees it, a natural event and home a contingent and subjectivist experience? In his essay, "The Muse of History," Walcott poses a series of interrelated questions. Who "in the New World," he postulates, "does not have a horror of the past, whether his ancestor was torturer or victim? Who, in the depth of conscience, is not silently screaming for pardon or for revenge?" (39). Walcott's London encounter in *Omeros* generates unsettling, diasporic/transnational questions: "Who decrees a great epoch?" "Who doles out our zeal?" "Who defines our delight?" "Who screams out our price?" "Who invests in our happiness?" "Who will teach us a history of which we too are capable?" "in whose hands / are the black crusts of our children?" "Where is our sublunary peace?" (195-07). These are some of the questions that the collection of essays in this volume attempts in disparate ways to engage if not answer.

Hannah Duston

In the Merrimack Valley north of Boston, not far from the New Hampshire border, is the sleepy, industrial New England town of Haverhill, Massachusetts. A statue steeped in controversy stands in the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R) Park honoring Hannah Duston (sometimes Dustin). The statue has become a flashpoint in the US over the legitimacy and rationale for public monuments, especially Confederate and colonial ones, erected at key moments in the nation's history when its identity and authority were being