



travellers' tales

NARRATIVES OF HOME AND DISPLACEMENT

Edited by

George Robertson, Melinda Mash, Lisa Tickner,
Jon Bird, Barry Curtis and Tim Putnam



future s

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Travellers' Tales

Travellers' Tales is the second of a series which brings together theorists from different disciplines to assess the implications of economic, political and social change for intellectual enquiry and cultural practice. The series arises from and continues the concerns of *BLOCK* (1979 to 1989), the journal of visual culture.

Most of us, at various moments in our lives, either adopt a tourist identity or are 'framed' within another's tourist experience. *Travellers' Tales* investigates the future for travelling in a world whose boundaries are shifting and dissolving. The contributors bring together popular and critical discourses of travel to explore questions of identity and politics; history and narration; collecting and representing other cultures.

Travellers' tales oscillate between the thrill of novel experiences and unexpected pleasures, and the alienation and loneliness of exile in a strange land. The contributions review recent work on the discourses of tourism, travel and cultural politics; the effects of global interactions and local resistances; and the ways in which records, memorials and signs have all been used to describe the experience of encountering the 'other'.

The editors—George Robertson, Melinda Mash, Lisa Tickner, Jon Bird, Barry Curtis and Tim Putnam—all lecture at Middlesex University.

The contributors: Sunpreet Arshi, Stephen Bann, Iain Chambers, Annie E. Coombes, Barry Curtis, Nelia Dias, Carmen Kirstein, Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, Anne McClintock, Chantal Mouffe, Riaz Naqvi, Rob Nixon, Claire Pajaczkowska, Falk Pankow, Griselda Pollock, Jacques Rancière, Adrian Rifkin, Madan Sarup, Trinh T.Minh-ha, Peter Wollen.

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Travellers' Tales

Narratives of home and
displacement

Edited by George Robertson,
Melinda Mash, Lisa Tickner, Jon Bird,
Barry Curtis and Tim Putnam



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In memory
Madan Sarup 1930–1993

Contents

List of figures	viii
Notes on contributors	x
Acknowledgements	xiii
As the world turns: introduction	1
Forwards	
1 Other than myself/my other self <i>Trinh T.Minh-ha</i>	8
Part I Neighbours	
2 Discovering new worlds: politics of travel and metaphors of space <i>Jacques Rancière</i>	27
3 The becoming threshold of matrixial borderlines <i>Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger</i>	36
4 Territories of desire: reconsiderations of an African childhood <i>Griselda Pollock</i>	61
Part II Home and away	
5 Home and identity <i>Madan Sarup</i>	89
6 For a politics of nomadic identity <i>Chantal Mouffe</i>	102
7 Refugees and homecomings: Bessie Head and the end of exile <i>Rob Nixon</i>	111
Part III Crossroads	

8	Soft-soaping empire: commodity racism and imperial advertising <i>Anne McClintock</i>	128
9	Travelling to collect: the booty of John Bargrave and Charles Waterton <i>Stephen Bann</i>	153
10	Looking at objects: memory, knowledge in nineteenth-century ethnographic displays <i>Nélia Dias</i>	162
11	The distance between two points: global culture and the liberal dilemma <i>Annie E. Coombes</i>	175
12	The cosmopolitan ideal in the arts <i>Peter Wollen</i>	186
Part IV Take the high road		
13	‘Getting there’: travel, time and narrative <i>Barry Curtis and Claire Pajaczkowska</i>	197
14	Travel for men: from Claude Lévi-Strauss to the Sailor Hans <i>Adrian Rifkin</i>	215
15	Why travel? Tropics, en-tropics and apo-tropaics <i>Sunpreet Arshi, Carmen Kirstein, Riaz Naqvi and Falk Pankow</i>	224
Backwords		
16	Leaky habitats and broken grammar <i>Iain Chambers</i>	243
	Index	248

Figures

3.1	Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, <i>Matrixial Borderline nos 1–4</i> , 1990–1.	41
3.2	Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, detail from <i>Matrixial Borderline no. 3</i> .	44
3.3	Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, detail from <i>Matrixial Borderline no. 4</i> .	46
3.4	Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, <i>Case History and Analysis nos 1–2</i> , 1985–91.	54
3.5	Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, detail from <i>Case History and Analysis no. 1</i> .	54
3.6	Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, <i>Mamalangué—Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism no. 5, no. 7</i> , 1989–91.	57
3.7	Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, detail from <i>Mamalangué no. 5</i> .	58
4.1	Paul Gauguin, <i>Manao Tupapau</i> , 1892.	62
4.2	Edouard Manet, <i>Olympia</i> , 1863.	65
4.3	Family photograph, taken at St Michael’s on Sea, South Africa, 1950.	73
4.4	Detail of Figure 4.3.	73
4.5	Detail of Figure 4.3.	73
4.6	Detail of Figure 4.3.	73
4.7	‘Rough proof—childhood portrait.	77
4.8	‘Underdeveloped’/‘Overexposed’—childhood portrait.	79
4.9	Lubaina Himid, <i>Five</i> , 1992.	83
8.1	A white man sanitizing himself as he crosses the threshold of empire.	129
8.2	The sacrament of soap: racializing domesticity.	135
8.3	Anachronistic space—the ambivalent border of jungle and city.	137
8.4	The myth of first contact with the conquering commodity.	139
8.5	Panoptical time: imperial progress consumed at a glance.	140
8.6	The commodity signature as colonial fetish.	143
8.7	‘As if writ by nature.’	144
9.1	J.H. Foljambe, drawing after Charles Waterton, ‘A Nondescript’, c. 1825.	156

- 9.2 John Bargrave, engraving to show 'Queen Christina of Sweden being received into the Roman Catholic Church', Innsbruck, 1655. 157
- 11.1 Sonia Boyce, *She Ain't Holding Them Up, She's Holding On (Some English Rose)*, 1986. 181
- 11.2 H el ene Hourmat, *Le Go t sal  des l vres, ou le d troit de Gibraltar*, 1989. 181
- 11.3 Helene Hourmat, *Viridiane*, 1988. 181
- 15.1 Desirable destinations (All a-bored!) 240

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As the world turns: introduction

‘And just how far would you like to go in?’ he asked and the three kings all looked at each other. ‘Not too far but just far enough so’s we can say that we’ve been there.’¹

The process of editing is one of selection, ordering and construction—in effect, of narration—composing a tale for the reader to travel through. The introduction becomes a route-map (tracing the most efficient course), or a tour guide (pointing out significant sights and sites). But the tidy helpfulness of an introduction as metanarrative, or map, threatens to undermine our project. There is no single route through the conflicts and ambiguities attending a range of explosive futures for the relations between travel, community, identity and difference. Perhaps the ideal form would be a collection of postcards home, from which the reader would create his or her own preferred itinerary but, given the structure of books, there has to be a beginning, a middle and an end. So the ‘foreword’ is offered here in the spirit of holiday snaps or a guidebook read when the journey is over, as an *aide mémoire*, and for the pleasures of musing rather than mapping. Trinh Minh-ha’s chapter serves as a prologue—charting the territories through which the following essays move, outlining possible boundaries, and proposing routes through the modern flux of shifting and sometimes violently abrading identities—and Iain Chambers gives us our epilogue, revisiting themes from the essays in between, acknowledging both the continuing power of historical narratives and the ultimate impossibility of final destination and closure.

Any atlas index resonates now with images of violent displacement: Bosnia, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Kurdistan, Los Angeles, Mozambique, Palestine, Romania, Rostock, Somalia...the world witnesses what is probably the largest ever movement and migration of peoples dispossessed by war, drought, ‘ethnic cleansing’ and economic instability. A conference at the Tate Gallery in 1992 and a few thousand readers of this book contemplating ‘narratives of home and displacement’ from their

armchairs might seem irrelevant to this global drama of violence and misery. We hope nevertheless that on its own territory this book can be seen as a positive attempt to unravel the meanings and desires located in *ideas* of self, home, nation, travel and encounter.

A minimal definition of travel would involve a movement from one place to another—between geographical locations or cultural experiences - but we can expand this common-sense definition to look at how movement functions psychically and metaphorically. Several of our contributors argue that identity is founded on imaginary trajectories of here and there, I and not-I, and hence on metaphors of movement and place. Metaphor as a linguistic operation is itself a displacement producing new figurations (the Greek *metaphora* means both ‘metaphor’ and ‘transport’ or ‘movement’). The transformations that mark the movement from one space to another have their micro- as well as their macro-level: as Jacques Rancière puts it, ‘the slight move which shapes the mapping of a *there* to a *here*’ is at the same time ‘the narrow and vertiginous gap which separates the inside... from the outside’. The travelling narrative is always a narrative of space and difference. It may not always broaden the mind but it prods at it. It provokes new concepts, new ways of seeing and being, or at the very least, when the old ways of seeing and being have been stubbornly imported into foreign territory, subjects them to strain and fatigue.

One of the founding travellers’ tales of Western culture is that of the movement of the people of Israel through the desert and out of it. For Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger such tales are to be understood as analogous to psychological transformations, aesthetic experiences and patterns of cognition. Therein lies their power and their analytic fruitfulness, and both Lichtenberg-Ettinger and Rancière invoke ‘the desert’ as a space of indeterminacy where there is no ‘here’ or ‘there’. In our last collection, Dick Hebdige pointed to the way in which the desert metaphor in postmodernist rhetoric functions ‘as a place of origins, endings and hard truths: the place at the end of the world where all meanings and values blow away; the place without landmarks that can never be mapped; the place where nothing grows and nobody stays put’. He contrasted this with ‘precise indigenous knowledges about particular wilderness ecologies’:² for those familiar with any particular desert, ‘desert’ just isn’t the metaphorically freighted term it is for the rest of us.

The point is taken, but Lichtenberg-Ettinger’s focus is precisely upon this recurrent representation of the desert as ‘a no-place fit for an emptying of identity’, and on the process by which the Hebrew narrative of what happens in the desert (and who God is) reduces in translation such that ‘difference’ and ‘becoming’ are transposed to ‘presence’ and ‘the present’. She goes on to argue that this parallels the foreclosure of a feminine dimension of subjectivity she calls the *Matrix* (‘multiple and/or partial strata of subjectivity...in which the *non-I* is not an intruder’).

Griselda Pollock's 'Territories of desire' moves from a feminist account of the triangulation between Gauguin and his Danish and Tahitian wives, via the story of the Book of Ruth, to an autobiographical narrative of a South African child with divided attachments to a white mother and an African nanny. In each instance she seeks to 'disorder the standard narratives' of displacement and exile by focusing on 'woman-to-woman' relations in which—as with Lichtenberg-Ettinger—we glimpse alternative, repressed configurations of otherness, identity and desire. Repressed configurations are brought into consciousness, into contact with the other-than-phantasmatic world, through communication in language, and particularly in metaphor. Metaphor can be a process in which material realities are veiled in literariness; but it is also—as Hebdige has reminded us—a powerful impulse to new ways of thinking with the potential to create

a focus for collective as well as personal identification in an always unfinished narrative of historical loss and redemption...a virtual space—blank, colourless, shapeless, a space to be made over, a space where everything is still to be won.³

Loss, redemption and 'a space to be made over' lie at the heart of several essays in this volume. In [Part II](#) of the book, 'Home and Away', three kinds of travellers' tales are explored: the migrant's tale, the exile's tale and the nomad's tale. Griselda Pollock illustrates the 'becoming' of self-hood in autobiographical encounters with the Other, in which an 'underdeveloped' identity acquires definition but is always a provisional 'rough proof'. A similar story, differently framed, emerges in Madan Sarup's extended meditation on the nature of 'home'—as that from which we are constantly displaced, but which we try constantly to re-place. The migrant, journeying from 'there' to 'here', becomes a stranger in a strange land. In Rob Nixon's study—an even more poignant tale of displacement, where exile is forcibly imposed—the dream of home and eventual return is shattered at the longed-for moment of re-entry. The homeland that was left, forever lost, survives only in traces and memories, but the returned exile becomes a Janus-faced 'translated person', a migrant with a crossborder hybrid identity and, in this instance, a particular cultural 'voice'. In his fascinating book, *The Road to Botany Bay*, Paul Carter records the '*spatial fantasies*' of the early transported convicts in Australia. The stories, tales, myths and dreams they recounted, he argues, 'represented strategies for constructing a believable place—a place in which to speak and, no less important, a place from which to escape'.⁴ Many of the narratives in this volume conform to this pattern: they are imaginative constructions that offer up the hope and possibility of a better—or at least a *different*—place in which new homes and identities can be forged.

Other stories, meanwhile—fuelled by more sinister concepts of national identity, culture and home—precipitate whole peoples (if they avoid a local and more bloody fate) into the trauma of involuntary exile. The dissolution of the old binaries of Western and Eastern Europe, ‘capitalism’ and ‘communism’ conventionally understood, has, as Chantal Mouffe points out, produced a formidable challenge to democracy in the West and the East: in the East, because the old unity has evaporated in the wake of a multiplication of warring identities (ethnic, regional and religious), and in the West, because Western democracy has been destabilized by the loss of the enemy it defined itself against. Mouffe argues that liberal thought is powerless in the face of antagonism, but must come to terms with it; the crucial question is not how to arrive at a consensus without exclusion, or at an ‘us’ without a corresponding ‘them’, but how to locate and productively manage antagonism, by seeing the ‘other’ not as an enemy to be destroyed but as a counterpart who might be in our place. At this point, and despite its different focus and tone, Mouffe’s essay begins to broach some of the same concerns as Lichtenberg-Ettinger’s: she is alert to the political dangers of presuming a fully rational, liberal subject just as Lichtenberg-Ettinger is alert to the social potential of her psychoanalytic model of ‘matrixial’ relations.

These stories are rooted in the past: they are embedded in historical tales of exploration, empire or nation. The nomadic narratives of the present flow from the expansionist mythologies of yesterday. One instance of this is figured in Anne McClintock’s study of the relations of power and desire in the imperial narratives of nineteenth-century Britain. She looks specifically at how soap advertisements sought to legitimize racist conceptions of the Other, by fetishizing cleanliness and ‘whiteness’ and exporting ‘civilized’ forms of commodity fetishism to the ‘dark continent’. Back in the imperial ‘homeland’ this process leads to a transformation of the Victorian middleclass home into ‘a space for the display of imperial spectacle and the reinvention of race’, where Africans ‘are figured, not as historic agents, but as frames for the commodity, for their *exhibition* value alone.’ This mirrors the spectacularization of the Other addressed by Stephen Bann and Nélia Dias: *how* the West appropriates, categorizes and displays its ‘Others’—a story of everyday activities in the anthropological and museological fields—is a matter of knowledge and power as well as narration. Local values and linear time determine our attitude to those who ‘stay put’. They are over there. We are over here *and* over there. They are simply being. We are being *and becoming*. Frozen in our objectifying gaze, ‘they’ are at once the record of our journey and the benchmark of Western progress. Bringing it all back home is nevertheless a dialectical movement. The home we return to is never the home we left, and the baggage we bring back with us will—eventually—alter it forever. The assemblage of memories, images, tastes and objects that clings to our return will mark the

place of that return. Travel is corrosive. Bann's 'Frenchman's finger' is never a relic or talisman only, but always a pointer in new directions.

New directions, adequate to the interplay and representation of different cultures, feature prominently in contemporary debates in the fields of museology and curatorship. Annie Coombes argues—in the context of a discussion of 'hybridity' and what Peter Wollen calls 'creolization'—that we must take care to avoid reading the products of (specifically located) material cultures 'over there' through our own particular Western templates. Behind both Coombes's and Wollen's essays lies the memory of the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition at the Pompidou Centre in 1989, one of the few—if controversial—examples in recent years of an attempt to recognize the plurality of the local within an expanded definition of global artistic activity. The universalizing categories that guided the curators in their selections were inevitably construed as the imposition of a Western aesthetic sensibility on the difference of other cultural histories. However, many of the works displayed by artists—or perhaps we should say agents—marginal to the circuits of the international art market seemed more powerfully expressive and significant than anything from the historical centres. Wollen—in his call for an almost Utopian cosmopolitanism—suggests a way out of the impasse, urging us towards the pluralities of denationalized cultures as an alternative to the core-periphery model of global cultural relations. His chapter invokes the figure of Anacharsis Cloots as the embodiment of a revolutionary cosmopolitanism and the emblem of a culture at once unified and heterogeneous: a decentred international culture of 'dis-patriation'.

In the wake of this exchange of cultures and objects, people follow, and we arrive eventually at that most profoundly privileged and subjective form of modern travel—tourism. 'Travel' is cognate with 'travail' (both descend from the medieval Latin *trepalium*, a three-pronged instrument of torture), and tourism may be in its own indulgent way one of the more tortuous forms of travel we undertake. Barry Curtis and Claire Pajaczkowska consider tourism as one of the principal symbolic experiences available to the modern self. The imperative to travel signifies the quest for the acquisition of knowledge and a desire to return to a Utopian space of freedom, abundance and transparency. Psychic desires are displaced in partial and vicarious participation in another set of relations (another place and time), and the self becomes realized as the hero of its own narrative of departure and return. Both Adrian Rifkin, and Sunpreet Arshi, Carmen Kirstein, Riaz Naqvi and Falk Pankow, consider in this context that pivotal study of travel, Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*. Rifkin's tour is through the transmutations of ethnographic study and travellers' tales into fictional explorations of the Western city as the crucible of the modern self. Arshi, Kirstein, Naqvi and Pankow offer a critical reading of the entropic crises in the work of Lévi-Strauss and compare his self-

referential narrative with another key text in travel theory, Mary Louise Pratt's recent *Imperial Eyes*. It may be that in the move from travel to mass-tourism, travel writing—which writes around and to one side of it, as though it doesn't exist—may lose itself and its subjects. The rhetorical trap awaiting the unwitting writer of ethnographic, anthropological and documentary narratives is the unuttered assumption that 'we' are travellers while 'they' are merely tourists. Tourism may be the limit case for not only travel writing but also pleasurable travel itself. In the end both Rifkin and Arshi *et al.* pose the troubling question: 'why bother?'

Perhaps, then, the thing to do is not to tour but to detour or *detourn*; as Roland Barthes put it in another context, 'to change the object itself, to produce a new object [and] point of departure'.⁵ If one 'detourned' motif, one transformed and hybrid object, one new point of departure, pervades this collection it is Elaine Chang's 'blue frog', as recounted by Trinh Minh-ha. The blue frog slips through the textual undergrowth, a no less impassioned and resonant object when we recognize its origins in misrecognition and mis-translation. Its affective charge is not diminished under the knowing gaze of rational inquiry. Like the 'marvels and wonders' sought for by early explorers and travellers, it speaks to an impossible search for discovery and completion conducted with all the baggage of the place from which we have come. Life is a journey, even for the stay-at-homes, and we are all exiles whose return is always deferred.

NOTES

- 1 Bob Dylan, 'Three Kings' (sleeve notes), *John Wesley Harding* LP, CBS Records, 1968.
- 2 Dick Hebdige, 'Training some thoughts on the future' in Jon Bird *et al.* (eds) *Mapping the Futures*, London, Routledge, 1993, p. 275.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 278.
- 4 Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History*, London, Faber, 1987, p. 296.
- 5 Roland Barthes, 'Change the object itself in *linage*. *Music. Text*, London, Fontana, 1977, p. 169.

Forwards

Chapter 1

Other than myself/my other self

Trinh T.Minh-ha

Every voyage can be said to involve a re-siting of boundaries. The travelling self is here both the self that moves physically from one place to another, following ‘public routes and beaten tracks’ within a mapped movement, and the self that embarks on an undetermined journeying practice, having constantly to negotiate between home and abroad, native culture and adopted culture, or more creatively speaking, between a here, a there, *and* an elsewhere.

TRAVELLING TALES

A public place around a train station. In Marrakesh. In Fez. In a city of words, told by a husky voice. In a body full of sentences, proverbs, and noises. There, a story is born. This body is a fountain. Water is an image. The source travels. A crowd of children and women wait in line in front of the well. Water is scarce. Stories heap up at the bottom of the well...

These images land in disorder. They reach me from afar and speak to me in my mother tongue, an Arabic dialect riddled with symbols. This language which one speaks but does not write is the warm fabric of my memory. It shelters and nourishes me.

Can it withstand the travel, the shifts, the extreme mobility in the new clothes of an old foreign language? Out of modesty, it retains its secrets and only rarely does it give itself in. It is not it that travels. It is I who carry a few fragments of it.¹

The source moves about; it travels. Tahar Ben Jelloun’s fountain-body unfolds through movements of words, images of water, sensations of mother-memory, and sounds of travelling fictions. These come in disorder, he wrote, doubting that Mother’s language at home—or Language—will ever be able to withstand the mobility of the journey. Never quite giving

itself in, however, Language remains this inexhaustible reservoir from which noises, proverbs and stories continue to flow when water is scarce. Thus, it is not 'It' that travels. It is T who carries here and there a few fragments of It. In this cascade of words, where and which is the source finally? I or It? For memory and language are places both of sameness and otherness, dwelling and travelling. Here, Language is the site of return, the warm fabric of a memory, and the insisting call from afar, back home. But here also, there, and everywhere, language is a site of change, an evershifting ground. It is constituted, to borrow a wise man's words, as an 'infinitely interfertile family of species spreading or mysteriously declining over time, shamelessly and endlessly hybridizing, changing its own rules as it goes.'²

It is often said that writers of color, including anglophone and francophone Third World writers of the diaspora, are condemned to write only autobiographical works. Living in a double exile—far from the native land and far from their mother tongue—they are thought to write by memory and to depend to a large extent on hearsay. Directing their look toward a long bygone reality, they supposedly excel in reanimating the ashes of childhood and of the country of origin. The autobiography can thus be said to be an abode in which the writers mentioned necessarily take refuge. But to preserve this abode, they would have to open it up and pass it on. For, not every detail of their individual lives bears recounting in such an 'autobiography', and what they chose to recount no longer belongs to them as individuals. Writing from a representative space that is always politically marked (as 'coloured' or as 'Third World'), they do not so much remember for themselves as they remember in order to tell. When they open the doors of the abode and step out of it, they have, in a sense, freed themselves again from 'home'. They become a passage, start the travel anew, and pull themselves at once closer and further away from it by telling stories.

A shameless hybrid: I or It? Speaker or Language? Is it language which produces me, or I who produce language? In other words, when is the source 'here' and when is it 'there'? Rather than merely enclosing the above writers in a place recollected from the past, the autobiographical abode propels them forward to places of the present—foreign territories, or the lands of their adopted words and images. 'The writer writes so that he no longer has a face,' T.B.Jelloun remarked:

One relapses into memory as one relapses into childhood, with defeat and damage. Even if it were only to prevent such a fall, the writer sees to it that he is in a layer of 'future memory', where he lifts and displaces the stones of time.³

Journeying across generations and cultures, tale-telling excels in its powers of adaptation and germination; while with exile and migration, travelling

expanded in time and space becomes dizzyingly complex in its repercussive effects. Both are subject to the hazards of displacement, interaction and translation. Both, however, have the potential to widen the horizon of one's imagination and to shift the frontiers of reality and fantasy, or of Here and There. Both contribute to questioning the limits set on what is known as 'common' and 'ordinary' in daily existence, offering thereby the possibility of an elsewhere-within-here, or -there.

An African proverb says, 'A thing is always itself and more than itself.' Tale-telling brings the impossible within reach. With it, I am who It is, whom I am seen to be, yet I can only feel myself there where I am not, *vis-à-vis* an elsewhere I do not dwell in. The tale, which belongs to all countries, is a site where the extraordinary takes shape from the reality of daily life. Of all literary genres, it is the one to circulate the most, and its extreme mobility has been valued both for its local specificity and for its capacity to speak across cultural and ethnic boundaries. To depart from one's own language of origin, to be able to acknowledge that 'the source moves about', to fare like a foreigner in this language, and to return to it via its travelling fragments, is also to learn how to be silent and to speak again, differently. T.B.Jelloun opens, for example, his well-known tale of *Moha the Fool, Moha the Sage (Moha le fou, Moha le sage)* with an epigraph which reminds the reader of the political death of a man and goes on to affirm: 'It doesn't matter what the official declarations say. A man has been tortured. To resist the pain, to overcome the suffering, he resorted to a strategy: to recollect the most beautiful remembrances of his short life.'⁴ And on this statement unfolds the telling of the man, as captured and transmitted by Moha, or as written by Jelloun himself.

A STRANGER IN A STRANGE COUNTRY

'He's a stranger,' Louise said joyfully. 'I always thought so—he'll never really fit in here.'

'How long are you going to keep me prisoner?' he asked.

'Prisoner?' answered the director, frowning. 'Why do you say prisoner? The Home isn't a jail. You weren't allowed to go out for several days for reasons of hygiene, but now you're free to go wherever you like in the city.'

'Excuse me,' said Akim, 'I meant to say: when can I leave the Home?'

'Later,' said the director, annoyed, 'later. And besides, Alexander Akim, that depends on you. When you no longer feel like a stranger, then there will be no problem in becoming a stranger again.'⁵

Much has been written on the achievements of exile as an artistic vocation, but as a travelling voice from Palestine puts it, exile on the twentieth-century scale and in the present age of mass immigration, refugeeism, and displacement 'is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible'. This 'irremediably secular and unbearably historical' phenomenon of untimely massive wandering remains 'strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience' (Edward Said).⁶ For people who have been dispossessed and forced to leave for an uncertain destiny, rejected time and again, returned to the sea or to the no man's land of border zones; for these unwanted expatriated, it seems that all attempts at exalting the achievements of exile are but desperate efforts to quell the crippling sorrow of homelessness and estrangement. The process of rehabilitation, which involves the search for a new home, appears to be above all a process by which people stunned, traumatized and mutilated by the shifts of event that have expelled them from their homelands learn to adjust to their sudden state of isolation and uprootedness.

Refugeeism, for example, may be said to be produced by political and economic conditions that make continued residence intolerable. The irreversible sense of 'losing ground' and losing contact is, however, often suppressed by the immediate urge to 'settle in' or to assimilate in order to overcome the humiliation of bearing the too-many-too-needy status of the homeless-stateless alien. The problem that prevails then is to be accepted rather than to accept. 'We are grateful. We do not want to be a nuisance', said a Vietnamese male refugee in Australia who, while feeling indebted to his host country, believes that only in Vietnam can a Vietnamese live happily.⁷ Or else, 'We are a disturbance. That's the word. Because we show you in a terrible way how fragile the world we live in is... You didn't know this in your skin, in your life, in every second of your life', said a less grateful Cambodian woman refugee in France who considers Paris to be, in the racial distances it maintains, 'a city of loneliness and ghosts'.⁸

Intensely connected with the history and the politics that have erupted to displace them, refugees are unwanted persons whose story has been an embarrassment for everyone, as it 'exposes power politics in its most primitive form...the ruthlessness of major powers, the brutality of nation states, the avarice and prejudice of people'.⁹ Dispossessed not only of their material belongings but also of their social heritage, refugees lead a provisional life, drifting from camp to camp, disturbing local people's habits, and destabilizing the latter's lifestyle when they move into a neighborhood. However they are relocated, they are a burden on the community. On the one hand, migrant settlements can turn out to be 'centres of hopelessness' which soon become 'centres of discontent'. On the other hand, both those who succeed in resettling are blamed for usurping the work from someone else, and those who fail to secure happiness in their adopted lands are accused of being ungrateful, worsening thereby a

situation in which exclusionary policies have been advocated on the ground that the rich host nations will soon be put in ‘the poorhouse’ by the flood of refugees—because ‘they multiply’.¹⁰

Great generosity and extreme gratitude within sharp hostility; profound disturbance for both newcomers and oldtimers: the experience of exile is never simply binary. If it’s hard to be a stranger, it is even more so to stop being one. ‘Exile is neither psychological nor ontological’, wrote Maurice Blanchot: ‘The exile cannot accommodate himself to his condition, nor to renouncing it, nor to turning exile into a mode of residence. The immigrant is tempted to naturalize himself, through marriage for example, but he continues to be a migrant.’¹¹ The one named ‘stranger’ will never really fit in, so it is said, joyfully. To be named and classified is to gain better acceptance, even when it is question of fitting in a no-fit-in category. The feeling of imprisonment denotes here a mere subjection to strangeness as confinement. But the Home, as it is repeatedly reminded, is not a jail. It is a place where one is compelled to find stability and happiness. One is made to understand that if one has been temporarily kept within specific boundaries, it is mainly for one’s own good. Foreignness is acceptable once I no longer draw the line between myself and the others. First assimilate, then be different within permitted boundaries: ‘When you no longer feel like a stranger, then there will be no problem in becoming a stranger again.’ As you come to love your new home, it is thus implied, you will immediately be sent back to your old home (the authorized and pre-marked ethnic, gender or sexual identity) where you are bound to undergo again another form of estrangement. Or else, if such a statement is to be read in its enabling potential, then, unlearning strangeness as confinement becomes a way of assuming anew the predicament of deterritorialization: it is both I and It that travel; the home is here, there, wherever one is led to in one’s movement.

WANDERERS ACROSS LANGUAGE

Our present age is one of exile. How can one avoid sinking into the mire of common sense, if not by becoming a stranger to one’s own country, language, sex and identity? Writing is impossible without some kind of exile. Exile is already in itself a form of *dissidence*...a way of surviving in the face of the *dead father*.... A woman is trapped within the frontiers of her body and even of her species, and consequently always feels exiled both by the general clichés that make up a common consensus and by the very powers of generalization intrinsic to language. This female in exile in relation to the General and to Meaning is such that a woman is always singular, to the point where she

comes to represent the singularity of the singular—the fragmentation, the drive, the unnameable.¹²

Perhaps, ‘a person of the twentieth century can exist honestly only as a foreigner’,¹³ suggests Julia Kristeva. Supposedly a haven for the persecuted and the homeless, Paris—which has offered itself to many stateless wanderers as a second home ever since the late nineteenth century—is itself a city whose houses, as Walter Benjamin described them, ‘do not seem made to be lived in, but are like stones set for people to walk between’.¹⁴ The city owes its liveliness to the movements of life that unfold in the streets. Here—by choice or by necessity—pedestrians, passers-by, visitors, people in transit can all be said to ‘dwell’ in passageways, strolling through them, spending their time and carrying most of their activities outside the houses, in the intervals of the stoneworks. Such a view of Paris would contribute to offsetting the notion of home and dwelling as a place and a practice of fixation and sameness. For after all, where does dwelling stop? In a built environment where outside walls line the streets like inside walls, and where the homey enclosures are so walled off, so protected against the outside that they appear paradoxically set only ‘for people to walk between’, outsiders have merely brought with them one form of outsidership: that very form which others, who call themselves insiders, do not—out of habit—recognize as their own insidership.

‘Modern Western culture’, remarks Said, ‘is in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees.’¹⁵ If it seems obvious that the history of migration is one of instability, fluctuation and discontinuity, it seems also clear for many Third World members of the diaspora that their sense of group solidarity, of ethnic and national identity, has been nourished in the milieu of the immigrant, the refugee and the exiled. Here, identity is a product of articulation. It lies at the intersection of dwelling and travelling and is a claim of continuity within discontinuity (and vice-versa). A politics rather than an inherited marking, its articulation and rearticulation grows out of the very tension raised between these two constructs: one based on socio-cultural determinants; the other, on biological ones. The need to revive a language and a culture (or to reconstitute a nation out of exile as in the case of the Palestinian struggle) thus develops *with* the radical refusal to indulge in exile as a redemptive motif, and to feel uncritically ‘at home in one’s own home’, whether this home is over there or over here. Such a stance goes far beyond any simplistic positive assertions of ethnic or sexual identity, and it is in this difficult context of investigation of self that, rather than constituting a privilege, exile and other forms of migration can become ‘an *alternative* to the mass institutions that dominate modern life’.¹⁶

Home and language tend to be taken for granted; like Mother or Woman, they are often naturalized and homogenized. The source becomes