

## Introduction

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Terlingua, Texas, 2018 (photo: Claudia Hoffmann)

Don't leave without seeing all the colours.  
- Shukria Rezaei, "I Want a Poem"

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The final line of Shukria Rezaei's "I Want a Poem" expresses vividly the message we wish to convey as readers embark on the journey this issue has become: "Don't leave without seeing all the colours." What started out as an exclusively academic project has turned into an invitation to see the many more colors created by alternative migration trajectories and experiences than academic scholarship could convey. We use the phrase "alternative migrations" to describe those migratory experiences that are rooted in the need to leave, the precarity of staying, or the inability to return. Alternative migrations are characterized by being uncertain, such as border crossings without "legal documents," forced displacement from homelands and lived experiences without the security of residency rights. As art can express the unspeakable, the pain and trauma, it can also express a hope and a future. In public discourse, we often witness an obsession with the past: "What did you flee from?" or "How did you cross the border 'illegally'?" We aimed to move beyond that and explore a variety of migration experiences across disciplines, regions, art forms, and genres to unsettle the tendency to collectivize experiences and to challenge the ways in which we conventionally imagine migration. Throughout the process of putting this issue together, we have asked ourselves the question of how the humanities, and especially the arts, can add to the ongoing conversation about alternative migration across our disciplines. How can we move beyond precarious migrations as moments of crisis? We want to trouble reductive representations that justify exclusionary, divisive and violent politics and explore how the arts can transform public ideas and images around clandestine migration. But most importantly, we want to engage in direct and immediate dialogue between artists, activists, and scholars. We would hereby like to thank the editors of *Theory in Action* for trusting us with this project and for giving us a platform for this form of engagement.

Scholars who "study" populations whose lives are precarious in different forms must continuously grapple with the possibility of exploiting struggles for the purpose of career advancement and little practical value. We therefore decided to take a different approach and to reach out to migrant artists to ask if they would collaborate with us through their work. This issue features a variety of experiences across regions, disciplines, art forms, and genres; contributions are situated at the U.S.-Mexican border, the Mediterranean Sea, in refugee camps, classrooms, farms, offshore detention centers, and within the individual self. Novelists, poets, painters, animators, and filmmakers, along with the scholars who study their work, artfully and eloquently unsettle dominant migration discourse. They all resist what Judith Butler so aptly calls

"[normative] schemes of intelligibility [that] establish what will and will not be human, what will be a livable life, what will be a grievable death . . . . But sometimes these normative schemes work precisely through providing no image, no name, no narrative, so that there never was a life, and there never was a death" (146). To acknowledge deaths only by statistics and countries of origin, for example, eliminates faces, lives, and narratives for the purpose of maintaining control over the "integrity" of the nation state. As long as migrants remain firmly situated in the realm of numbered problems, their humanity is not bound to threaten the ethics or logic of violent immigration policies. Jana Evans Brazil and Anita Mannur remind us that diaspora "may not be reduced to such macroeconomic and technological flows. It remains, above all, a human phenomenon - lived and experienced" (8). Furthermore, "to fruitfully analyze such questions and problematic dynamics, diasporic studies will need to move beyond theorizing how diasporic identities are constructed and consolidated and must ask, how are these diasporic identities practiced, lived and experienced?" (9). In the introduction to her book *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, Gayatri Spivak astutely observes that "[globalization] can never happen to the sensory equipment of the experiencing being except insofar as it always was implicit in its vanishing outlines" (2). Spivak adds that "[only] an aesthetic education can continue to prepare us for this, thinking an uneven and only apparently accessible contemporaneity that can no longer be interpreted by such nice polarities as modernity/tradition, colonial/postcolonial" (2). Spivak distinguishes the individual and immediate experience of people from globalization as a process of movement and separates the immediacy of living a global reality from the sweeping conceptualization of globalization as collective experience. The human experience, then, is not part of globalization, which, according to Spivak, "takes place only in capital and data" (1). In order to *know* alternative migrations differently, as human experience rather than abstracted global movement, we must turn to the humanities. The expression of immediate and sensory experience in art provides us with new opportunities to explore different expressions of alternative migration beyond polarities, binaries, hierarchies, and legalities and through an immediate, individual, imaginative, and sensory experience.

As this project came together, the pieces started speaking to each other. The items left behind by migrants and curated by Amanda Krugliak and Richard Barnes, for example, bear the logos of corporate entities that might be responsible for the environmental destruction in Mexico that Paula Straile-Costa addresses in her discussion of Alex

Rivera's *Sleep Dealer*. For Shukria Rezaei, poetry became a way of expressing herself after feeling silenced in a foreign country with a foreign language, similar to the characters discussed by Bronislava Greskovicova-Chang. For Abbas Alaboudi, painting became a way to cope with the horror of being detained in Australia's offshore detention center for refugees. Eduardo Juárez Jr. considers creating comics his "own self therapy," a way to work through, among other things, the pressures of being undocumented. This issue begins with Sara Mir's cover piece "Moving" in which a lone figure traverses a globe, suggesting the universality of migration and underlining our conviction that migration is a human right. Kane Smego's poem "The Border" speaks to the arbitrariness and violence implicit in geographical borders: "The border loves to talk politics / but never history." Smego reminds us that restrictive immigration, asylum, and refugee policies can only be justified with a blind eye to the complicity of governments past and present in making regions unsafe to live in because "the border severs memory." And the border transcends the geographical lines: it is "the rental office" in which managers demand Social Security numbers and reject those who do not have them. Smego's poetic rendering of the border conjures up, among many other images, the desert near Arivaca, Arizona, where Archaeologist Jason de León and his research teams collected items left behind by migrants. The social sciences have done tremendous work in investigating, dismantling, presenting, and rethinking undocumented migration, but *State of Exhibition* is an excellent example of how Anthropology and art can form a new way of making sense of migrant movements that is more immediate and more sensory than an ethnography alone. In their contribution, Amanda Krugliak and Richard Barnes describe how they conceived, developed, and installed the exhibition that turned the Archaeological artifacts into a haunting and evocative exhibit through symbolic staging. We wonder who this backpack, this rosary, this money, or this photograph belonged to and where the people might be now. Shukria Rezaei's poem "My Hazara People" embodies a similar search for people, but rather centered on the impossibility of expressing their suffering: "I can't write about my Hazara people / who have suffered for decades / in Afghanistan where they come from . . ." Her poem raises the question of how to express the unspeakable, the pain and the trauma that people leave behind (or take with them) in search of safety. Rezaei resists the pervasive erasure of individual suffering in favor of national concerns over "too many refugees."

In his analysis of Woodie Guthrie's song "Plane Wreck at Los Gatos (Deportees)," and the context in which it was created and recreated, Edward Shannon also commemorates those whose plight has largely remained intelligible (to use Butler's words). In his song, Guthrie wrote about a plane crash that killed 28 Mexican farm workers who for the longest time remained unnamed. Shannon argues that the song asks us to look beyond the crash itself and see the people and the conditions under which they lived, and he traces the efforts to recover the victims' names, now commemorated in a memorial at the crash site. Wunin Han's artwork tells the story of a private journey that is ongoing. The young Guatemalan artist powerfully imagines the stages of a migratory path in ways that are both deeply personal and highly recognizable by recreating known cultural iconography into something new. Paula Straile-Costa article "Hacking the Border: Undocumented Migration and Technologies of Resistance in Alex Rivera's *Sleep Dealer* and Digital Media" analyzes a film that similarly repaints, if you wish, known border images into new, and subversive, visual statements. Straile-Costa shows how cinema and different forms of digital media can become outlets of resistance. She argues that Peruvian-American filmmaker and artist Alex Rivera's science fiction film about futuristic undocumented labor, *Sleep Dealer*, shows the complex interplay between modern technology, such as the internet and drone technology, environmental destruction and labor exploitation in the name of capitalism, and ingenious, local ways of resistance against foreign corporate exploitation of resources. This article therefore points to the complicity of nations in creating the conditions that force people to migrate to the very same nations. Furthermore, Paula Straile-Costa reminds us of the power of local resistance, sometimes through "surviving and resisting through tradition," other times through the manipulation of technology.

The reality of undocumented life is also expressed artistically in the work of Eduardo Juárez Jr. whose comic "Lalo's World" reflects on his own experience of living undocumented. In his interview, he says that drawing and animation were his way of escaping the reality of being undocumented and coping with the anger that accompanied the realization that living without papers poses significant limitations. In her contribution "Dreamers: Living Undocumented in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction," Amy Cummins analyses three novels concerned with the lives of undocumented teenagers in the United States with experiences much like that of Juárez Jr. She highlights the role of literature to reveal realities of living undocumented in the United States to show the personal, intimate, and deeply human side of negotiating life without

papers rather than addressing the issue on a larger, societal scale. Cummins' analysis highlights the complexity of barriers and challenges faced by undocumented students as they negotiate a precarious social and political landscape. In "A Glass of Tea (after Rumi)," Shukria Rezaei writes about her own negotiation of landscapes with a heart that "is displaced": "Last year, I watched the dazzling sun dance gracefully. This year, / The faint sun moves futurelessly."

In her piece on the representation of Moroccan immigrants in contemporary Spanish literature, Bronislava Greskovicova-Chang shows the power of literature to tell stories often previously untold (or unheard). She returns to the issue of discovering buried and silenced experiences and voices, exploring how Spanish writers conceive of undocumented characters in the context of orientalist literary traditions and tracing the shift from silent migrant character to more empowered women with a voice. However, Greskovicova-Chang at no point loses sight of the limitations of authors from dominant cultures representing those on the margins from a centered position. Murtaza Ali Jafari's evocative and haunting artwork visualizes the perilous sea journeys undertaken by those traveling across global waters hoping to land in safer places. Among them was painter Abbas Alaboudi for whom art became a way of surviving the horrific conditions in Australia's notorious offshore detention center in the Pacific island nation of Nauru after he boarded a boat in an attempt to reach Australia. His paintings illustrate both the hopelessness of living in limbo, stripped off mobility, under inhumane conditions, and the power of artistic expression to both condemn the injustice and self-empower the victim. Daniella Trimboli addresses, among other issues, the human rights violations endured by refugees like Abbas Alaboudi and articulates the dilemma of trying to be conscientious observers of injustice while becoming increasingly immobilized by callous immigration and refugee politics and internal rage. Trimboli uses the example of her own art-based project to address the dilemma of well-meaning white ally-ship and the inherent dangers in "feel-good" approaches to structural change in which the refugee must wait to be included by the white ally.

The art of Emmanuel Asante embodies the diversity of a diasporic identity by mixing cultural influences. His paintings are a reflection of his Ghanaian-Australian identity, as well as a way to express the challenges of alienation and depression. As visual arts give voice to Asante, poetry does the same for Amineh Abou Kerech. In her prize-winning poem "Lament for Syria," Kerech masterfully evokes the homeland she had to leave and paints a poetic picture of beauty alongside

the imagery conjuring the wreckage of war. At the end she poses the question "Can anyone teach me / how to make a homeland?" Kerech fuses the pains of war and forced departures with the hope of rediscovery and arrival. It therefore seemed appropriate to end our issue with an image of hope. "Narcissus" by Safdar Ahmed features the iconic flower of Spring, growing out of a hand surrounded by broken chains. While the current global climate towards migrants and refugees is concerning, we are grateful to those who celebrate the humanity of alternative migrations in all its facets, through all its stages, and through all the joy and sorrows.

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