

Deexceptionalizing Displacement: An Introduction

What does it mean to be displaced in a world of seemingly perpetual crisis? Typically seen as synonymous with forced movement, displacement has conventionally been framed as an exceptional event, a pathological state of being. The 2015 “European migration crisis” was the year when refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants began arriving in unprecedented numbers on European shores. At the same time, the United States began to record high numbers of people crossing the border from Mexico, producing a so-called border crisis that would define American politics in the years to follow. With human dislocation and movement worldwide framed as emerging from crisis after crisis—environmental disasters to political instability, economic insecurity to outright war, global pandemic to the uneven effects of climate change—it is clear that, just as “crisis” is becoming the norm, so too is displacement. Indeed, as the world becomes less livable, so might people increasingly seek livability elsewhere.

Displacement can only appear exceptional if life-worlds are imagined as generally stable and sedentary, secured by taken-for-granted orders of nation-states, stable economies, and just legal systems assumed to be protective and benevolent. But these structures of rootedness have primarily only benefited select groups of people, often along racialized lines, leaving others who are unable to rely on those structures—or whose exploitation, dislocation, and alienation is in fact calculated into them—subject to constraints on where and how they are able to pursue livable lives.

As we write this editorial introduction from the heart of the Covid-19 winter of 2021, it is increasingly clear that conventional understandings of displacement as an exceptional condition, synonymous with forced mobility, are not sufficient to characterize the situations that so many are currently dealing with: whether forcibly mobile or immobile in place, people face regimes of displacement that are as violent as they are unexceptional. As lockdowns have radically curtailed physical mobility across the globe, people everywhere—migrants and citizens alike—are reeling from the myriad forms of political instability, economic insecurity, environmental degradation, and racial injustice that have surfaced in tandem with the spread of the pandemic. While many of us are literally stuck in place, we nonetheless *feel* displaced, as the pandemic has marked reconfigurations in networks of kin, friendship, and work; and in sensorial and embodied routines. And yet, while those of us in positions of relative privilege may trace these shifts to the global spread of the Covid-19 virus, the pandemic’s uneven costs on precarious workers and persons of color indicate not so much a break or rupture in the norm, but erosions in livable lifeworlds that had, in fact, taken place long before.

It is clearer than ever that being still, stuck, or in place may give rise to overwhelming forms of dispossession and alienation as well as to new modes of sustaining or connecting

relations. Conversely, movement does not simply erode or sever connections between people—and between people and places—but may also thicken these ties. To reckon with these complexities, we need a new conceptual lens for thinking about and understanding displacement that can speak to such conditions; not just the dislocations of forced mobility, but fragmentations in communities, economies, political systems, and ecologies. Displacement, we argue, goes beyond the binary of mobility and stasis; it entails the dilution, erosion, or rupture of the human and nonhuman ties that make possible the sustainability and flourishing of lives.

The genesis of this dossier was a collective desire to nuance emergent dialogs about displacement, particularly those arising from the various migration “crises” that have dominated media headlines and scholarly inquiries. Rather than interpreting the large numbers of cross-border migrations in recent years as indicating an exceptional scale of displacement, we see them as suggesting just the opposite: that the displacements these movements signal are somewhat ubiquitous. The rising numbers undertaking dangerous—often life-threatening—journeys with little chance of success (and even less possibility for legal and social integration in destination countries) reflect not just migration statistics but increasingly impossible conditions of life in many parts of the world. We had also found (following other critical migration scholarship) that a focus on the exceptionality of forced physical mobility elides predicaments, systemic and structural factors, and power relations that impact groups across diverse categories of belonging, in both overlapping and divergent ways. As we suggest here, these other factors may be even more crucial to experiences of displacement than physical movement.

The papers included in this special issue collectively approach displacement not as reducible to forced mobility, nor as an exceptional condition traceable to a particular event; but as an often normative experience. Across distinct theoretical genealogies and site-specific interventions, each piece seeks to collapse conventional analytical boundaries that border much scholarship on displacement. They also privilege thick, contextually grounded accounts over grand theory—itself a statement on the need to situate analyses of displacement within historical and social milieux. The papers examine the nature of displacement; the processes that produce it; the histories that shape those processes; the forces that control and contain those who are displaced; and the often insular scholarly and public imaginaries that render invisible more broadly shared dynamics of displacement. These lines of inquiry challenge us to rethink displacement beyond the tempos of urgency and crisis, the scales that render displacement into local-regional “problems,” and the scopes that map displacement onto a citizen-migrant binary. We suggest that de-exceptionalizing displacement, as we describe below and as variously explored and extended in each of the papers in this issue, is one way to overcome such scholarly partitions. Underpinning this inquiry, humble as it may be, is the wider question of how to imagine and carve out spaces of collective and individual flourishing that work against the dynamics of displacement.

Beyond Forced Mobility as a Requisite for Displacement

Displacement is often conflated in social science scholarship and popular imaginaries with forced migration and involuntary mobility. It is used as a descriptor in reference to refugees who have left their countries and been forced to seek refuge in another nation-state;

IDPs (internally displaced persons)—those who have fled violence but have not crossed into another national territory; or people who have been forced to leave a place owing to environmental disaster or climate change (for example, “climate” refugees). Displacement is also used to describe people who have been priced out of housing markets in urban areas due to gentrification. In each of these cases, the “place” in displacement is taken literally as a material location in space and, occasionally, the density of human relationships that endow it with meaning.¹

Displacement is thus frequently reduced to a logistical “problem” of involuntary movement. The presumed link between displacement and involuntary mobility informs policy thinking, associating displacement with distinct categories of people as well as specific processes of movement; legitimating forms of movement perceived as involving less agency (that is, refugees), while demonizing other forms of movement as involving choice and strategy (that is, people who migrate because of economic situations, particularly those who “seek a better life”). This approach politicizes and polarizes mobility, and occludes how many types of migration are similarly concerned with futures, livelihoods, aspirations, and survival more generally.² Thinking of people as “displaced” (or not) purely in terms of physical dislocation thus becomes a political tool through which claims to rights and protections are legitimized for some, and not others.

The “place” in displacement may not even be the most significant aspect of what it means to actually *feel* displaced. Notwithstanding how place shapes experience in fundamental ways,³ ultimately the feeling of being *dis*-placed resonates as an existential condition that might be triggered by transformations in environmental-social relations,⁴ situatedness in space, or ruptures in temporal continuity. Displacement pulls a person out of alignment with their sense of the world, their expectations of the future, and the solidity of the places in which they are situated.⁵ None of these elements is exclusive to experiences of forced movement.

Scholarship tends to attach displacement to migration in part through theorizations of temporality. Studies often emphasize—rightly—the liminality of asylum bureaucracies and immigration detention regimes.⁶ While the physical separation of migrants into camps, detention facilities, and specialized housing visibly distinguishes them from the spaces occupied by citizens, particular rhythms of time—drawn out slowness, panicked acceleration, all governed by immigration bureaucracies⁷—also prevent migrants from experiencing the seemingly “ordinary” time, and antecedent futures, presumed to be accessible to citizens and others legally and politically rooted in place.⁸ But the assumed stability of time outside of immigration control is itself illusory, since many migrants, after gaining legal permission to stay in a country, continue to experience forms of temporal disjuncture that are determined by external legal, political, and social processes.⁹ These temporal rhythms of seemingly perpetual liminality, and regimes of control over time, are not just the products of movement and migration, then, but of specific social and political formations that manifest across the migrant/citizen divide.

It is not forced mobility, or uprootedness in time and place, that constitutes displacement; but rather, the existential shifts that so often (but not always) accompany such changes.¹⁰ This is a subtle—but important—distinction: it opens up novel ways of conceptualizing and studying displacement and allows us to approach diverse and perhaps unexpected circumstances within this analytical frame.

Situating the Intervention

Despite a wealth of critical migration scholarship—and the now widely accepted critique of methodological nationalism (the tendency to reassert national imaginaries even as scholars seek to critique or unsettle them)¹¹—entrenched analytical inertia persists in much social science scholarship and policy/public discourse alike, which sees displacement as an encoded reference to refugees and involuntary migration. However, intellectual work that has come out of other moments of mass displacement and migration “crisis” contains threads of analysis urging scholars to broaden understandings about what it means to be displaced. For example, while the category of the “refugee” was codified in international law following World War II, Hannah Arendt argued—based on her own experiences fleeing Germany during the war—that this development was not because persecution and mobility were unprecedented conditions.¹² Rather, the solidification of national borders and identities in the early-twentieth century had served to construe those who did move (forcibly or not) across these figurative boundaries as aberrations,¹³ as politico-legal problems that needed to be solved. The “refugee” label was one way to name such an aberration. Subsequently, the emergence of the figure of the refugee following WWII spoke more to the naturalization of an emergent national order than to a new condition of exile. More pointedly, Arendt critiqued the post-World War II creation of the “refugee” category, arguing that it further abstracted the humanity of people whose humanity had already been rejected.¹⁴

Similarly, Edward Said saw in the creation of “refugee” status a troubling sanitizing of the political and historical forces that produce displacement.¹⁵ Too often, Said warned, scholars move only to humanize the nameless masses of refugees; an approach that, in attempting to restore dignity to the displaced, ultimately ignores how theirs is a condition premised on the denial of their fundamental humanity. Instead, Said directed attention to the institutions that create these conditions, rather than to the condition of exile itself. Both Arendt and Said were critical of how the externality of the “refugee” category implicitly reinforces the legitimacy of “the nation” as a basis of political and social identity; especially since the persecution of people as not belonging within a nation is, itself, what produces refugees—and exiles, displaced people, or the stateless.¹⁶ Crucial to these critiques is the idea that displacement is not extraordinary; rather, it is a logical outcome and continuation of embedded forms of oppression, whether these be through nationalism, racism, or religious persecution.

Another key intellectual genealogy highlights the sensory and psychic dimensions of displacement that emerge as endemic to modern and contemporary social life. Freud’s “uncanny” (*unheimlich*)—often rendered in English with the awkward translation of “un-homely”—has permeated film and literary analysis as well as social science scholarship as a way to describe the familiar made strange, the home that is no longer home.¹⁷ The uncanny speaks to accreted forms of strangeness and rupture that do not emerge from simple physical mobility, but are embedded in the organization of modern and contemporary worlds: specifically, the nexus of nation-state, colonialism, and industrial capitalism. Homi Bhabha, in particular, highlights how the unhomely conveys a form of “displacement” grounded not on movement itself but on repressive political structures that transect various social groups and locations.¹⁸ Experiences of disorientation and displacement (often in place) are normative, even mundane, aspects of contemporary sensory and aesthetic life.

Research on indigeneity, the appropriation of native lands, and ongoing threats to indigenous sovereignty underscore perhaps most profoundly how the forms of dispossession and disjuncture often coded as “displacement” cannot be reduced to mere forced mobility across borders.¹⁹ Likewise, the significance of chattel slavery as a founding form of displacement in colonial words goes far beyond forced movement or any singular moment of crisis and rupture. What Saidiya Hartman calls the “afterlife of slavery,”²⁰ and the ongoing violence that characterizes the Black Atlantic,²¹ reverberates in the sedimented logics of the plantation and the prison,²² regimes of discipline and carcerality,²³ and urban invisibilization and exclusion.²⁴ Meanwhile, people have found diverse ways of navigating and negotiating these displacements in contexts of *both* mobility and stasis.²⁵

With the “refugee” problem clearly unresolved by the end of twentieth century (even as it had been imagined, in the World War II context, to be temporary), scholars began critically reassessing the framing of certain groups as mobile or displaced. It was becoming increasingly clear that those labelled “refugees” could not be defined by or reduced to a universalized experience of displacement, even as humanitarian and politico-legal orders worked so often to do just that. Here the work of Liisa Malkki has been foundational. Echoing the earlier work of Arendt and Said, Malkki suggests that reducing displacement to physical dislocation pathologizes those who sit outside the “national order of things”; conflates citizenship with sedentism; and naturalizes national membership.²⁶ In this spirit, ceasing to frame movement as the catalyst of displacement opens up analytical space to consider more critically the broader kinds of experience that fit within that frame.

This dossier is also in close conversation with (and takes inspiration from) current scholars of mobility who extend understandings of displacement beyond spatial and temporal (up)rootedness. Jesper Bjarnesen and Henrik Vigh explore how displacement and emplacement work dialectically to shape the experiences of mobile people.²⁷ Annika Lems explores how “attachment and boundedness,” and “movement and openness,” figure in the active work of placemaking through which people narrate and make meaning.²⁸ Gregory Feldman frames the condition of migranhood as crucial to contemporary social life for how “people face common conditions of existence for a life experience proverbially understood as that of a ‘migrant:’ rootless, uncertain, atomized, disempowered.”²⁹ Through ethnographically rich studies of three cities, Ayşe Çağlar and Nina Glick Schiller challenge dominant narratives of migrants as isolated and alienated others, showing that migrants are already deeply enmeshed in social projects of urban community building; and, further, that the “dispossession processes of urban restructuring and regeneration” produce forms of displacement and disempowerment that affect all residents, migrant and citizen alike.³⁰

Approaches that, in Janine Dahinden’s words, seek to “demigrantize” migration, challenge scholars not to segment “migrants” off from other groups but rather to consider the challenges engaged by various sectors of the population—of which migrants may be part.³¹ This effort entails seeking points of connection and shared struggle that transect *a priori* classifications of insider and outsider, such as through access to housing, healthcare, food, childcare, the labor market, and other crucial needs.³² On the other end of the spectrum of membership, Bridget Anderson crucially challenges us to “migrantize” citizens: to recognize how those with the formal benefits of citizenship nonetheless face forms of dispossession that may entail both material and existential forms of displacement

through gentrification, environmental changes, unemployment, development, and increasingly unstable futures.³³

This dossier intervenes in and contributes to these strands of scholarship by seeking to reconceptualize displacement analytically and methodologically. We propose that the concept of displacement characterizes various forces of dislocation that make rupture itself a state of ordinary life for diverse categories of people: those on the move as well as those who stay closer to “home.” Far from being an exceptional condition that must be puzzled over in scholarship and potentially resolved through policy, displacement is becoming a new normal.

The Problem with Exceptionalism

Those who are “displaced” are often framed as exceptional to (and outside of) the jurisdiction of legal protections provided through citizenship, and thereby inherently vulnerable to extreme forms of violence.³⁴ Largely inspired by Giorgio Agamben’s work, scholarship on this subject has often naturalized the idea that displacement necessarily embeds a person in an abnormal or suspended state of being, understood as a foil to the seeming normality of citizenship.³⁵ Importantly, Agamben himself shows how the assumed exception itself becomes “the norm,” and that the exceptional logics of crisis and emergency often constitute the interiorities of law and governance.³⁶ Yet the once-ubiquitous—even obligatory—invocations of Agamben in refugee and migration studies further reified the boundaries between insider/outsider, citizen/alien. This exceptionalism was also replicated in an ethnographic focus on sites of encampment and abjection.³⁷ The citizen-alien binary embedded in liberal notions of citizenship, and the implicit dichotomy of security-insecurity that it implies, shows how exceptionalism works to partition. Exceptionalizing border crossing (and border crossers, by proxy) in a suspended and abnormal state reinforces the seeming naturalness of nation-state logics, grounded on mythologies of “rootedness” and autochthony, in which national belonging emerges as the fundamental basis of protection, care, and collective identity.³⁸

Exceptionalizing displacement also risks inscribing the experiences and circumstances associated with displacement within racialized global hierarchies that divide north from south. When confronted with spectacular images of migration and unprecedented numbers of displaced people, the Euro-Western world works itself into a frenzy, most states responding to the so-called crisis of migration with the reinforcement of physical borders and policies of detainment. The division between the Global North and Global South, originating from colonial times but maintained through the control of mobility with often militarized force—what Catherine Besteman calls “militarized global apartheid”—has nonetheless been breached by these large numbers of border crossers.³⁹ Meanwhile, the spectacle of migration into Europe (in 2015–16, in particular) produced its own flows of scholars flocking to document the seemingly exceptional experience of migration into and within European borders—on the heels of humanitarian organizations, volunteers, and journalists.⁴⁰ The panicked response in the Global North to more recent population movements thus derives from older classed and racialized boundaries, themselves often reinforced through scholarly approaches.

Finally, exceptionalizing displacement assigns, *a priori*, specific forms of experience to categories such as “refugee,” “asylum seeker,” or “migrant.” Sometimes this exceptionalism is expressed as a fascination for, or investment in, the refugee or migrant “Other.” A few

scholars caution against the exoticizing, colonial tendencies embedded in a fascination with mobile subjects as exceptional beings.⁴¹ Specifically, the forms of writing and representation that shape accounts of displaced people often insidiously contribute to their objectification through tropes of flight, victimhood, and vulnerability.⁴² Whether in seeking to extract refugee or migrant “voices,” experiences, and “stories,” or reinforcing logics of migrant otherness and insecurity, when scholarship naturalizes movement as an exceptional condition, “displaced” people become objects of intervention, assumed to embody an intrinsic state of otherness—whether as security risks or as suffering, needy subjects.⁴³

It is crucial to foreground the epistemic, political, and ethical stakes in how scholars approach questions of displacement, and their imbrication with wider sociocultural trends and projects.⁴⁴ Our project here does not claim to provide, in itself, a solution for how to conduct more capaciously engaged scholarship, yet we do seek to work against scholarly tendencies that exceptionalize and partition. Framing displacement as exceptional replicates borderwork in our scholarship and occludes crucial continuities (historical, temporal, spatial, experiential), and strands and planes of analysis, that cut across presumed forms of difference. The exceptionalism entailed in dominant approaches to displacement involves a partitioning of time (“normal” time and moments of “crisis”); of space (borders and their transgression, the Global South and the Global North); of categories (the refugee or migrant as opposed to the citizen); and experience. As such, *de*exceptionalizing entails disrupting epistemological and political boundaries, and examining erosions in the capacity for flourishing lives and livelihoods unfolding across diverse categories of membership.⁴⁵

Rethinking Citizenship

*De*exceptionalizing displacement means that we must simultaneously rethink citizenship. Race and (settler) colonialisms are established upon, and inscribe, clear (even binary) “in-group”/ “outgroup” formations, implicitly framing whiteness as constituting the “insides” of citizenship.⁴⁶ However, neoliberal processes have diffused extractive logics in diverse domains of society in ways that extend beyond the logics of colonialism, race, and racialization. Forms of displacement are thus also affecting categories of people who are often—owing to their historical positions of power—unproblematically assumed to be “in place” or “at home.” Neoliberal projects have increasingly challenged the capacities of welfare states and the attendant protections afforded by citizenship, which have further displaced (often while “in place”) even traditionally privileged citizens from zones of livable livelihood.

And so, a further, if corollary, concern in this special issue is the reconfiguration of citizenship in widening contexts of displacement. While the formal benefits of citizenship have always been contested in practice, recent scholarship on the effects of late global capitalism—echoing social and political movements—suggests that the meaning of citizenship itself is changing.⁴⁷ In some cases, this shift might entail the intensification of racialized logics applied to both border crossers and citizens.⁴⁸ In other cases, solidarities might emerge that trouble the binary frameworks of inclusion/exclusion on which liberal citizenship has historically been based.⁴⁹

Neoliberalization—as both a historically specific and global form—thus adds a key dimension to understanding experiences of displacement for how it has, in many cases,

fundamentally changed contours of belonging and membership. Structural adjustments and projects of austerity have directly targeted welfare and social support while buoying the protections afforded to finance capital and industry.⁵⁰ How structural adjustment plays out in various sociocultural, national, and regional contexts highly varies (and, indeed, a proliferation of experiences and subjectivities has itself been linked to the atomizing nature of neoliberalism).⁵¹ Across these contexts, however, neoliberalization has been shown to challenge state-based forms of support (medical care, pensions, educational opportunities, labor rights, and housing) and erode or reshape social ties. The effects of these shifts are perhaps most evident in phenomena that, like migration, are also characterized as exceptions to the norm—and in the figures of those framed as marginal. Extreme poverty, abandonment by kin, and in some cases physical evictions from housing and communities indicate the more dramatic costs of these restructurings.⁵² Yet displacements are occurring across vectors of race, class, gender, and citizen/noncitizen—in different ways, but with certain shared dimensions that are crucial to recognize and examine.

Anne Allison uses the provocative phrase “ordinary refugees” to describe young people in Japan whose experiences of dislocation and uncertainty have caused them to consider suicide.⁵³ The term is audacious, as is the implicit comparison it invokes: those fleeing war across national borders taken almost as a metaphor for the experiences of young people unable to achieve hopes, dreams, and societal expectations. Something about this metaphor sticks in one’s craw as laughable, almost vulgar. And yet, it is precisely the audacity of this claim that needs to be taken seriously. For Allison, “ordinary” refugeeeness refers to “insecurity in life, material, existential, social.”⁵⁴ Allison thus invites us to locate displacement in material and structural circumstances and attendant experiential dimensions that exceed physical mobility.

Displacement, however, goes beyond a concern with “precarity”—a condition often uniquely associated with post-Fordism, neoliberalization, and the rise of flexible labor.⁵⁵ Displacements, while conditioned by shifts in labor regimes, are multilayered and historically and culturally deep. Indeed, critics emphasize that the recent attention to precarity as a seemingly unprecedented modern condition overlooks that long-marginalized groups have been dealing with precarity for decades, if not centuries.⁵⁶ As Sean Hill II shows, the assumed novelty of precarity (and the precariat—framed as a class of precarious workers) occludes recognition of how people of African descent have, in modern and contemporary periods, never *not* been precarious.⁵⁷ This is also the case (though differently) in many sites of the Global South. As such, precarity—when treated as a novel formation—has the danger of reinscribing the white, middle class, Global North as the norm; and tacitly legitimating surprise and anger at the collapsing of that norm (and fascist tears). Precarization—as linked to neoliberalism, structural adjustment, and austerity—is just one aspect of contemporary displacement.⁵⁸ Hill’s focus on the positions of people of African descent is itself instructive: “precarity” on its own cannot capture how layered experiences of dislocation and dispossession intersect with emergent social and political economic events to produce displacement. Bridging racial oppression and settler logics with extractivism, contemporary displacements emerge from both longer and more recent projects of protracted capitalist expansion and the appropriation of land, resources, and bodies.

Displacements are thus embedded in entwined processes—global, regional, national, and local in scale—that have rendered lives increasingly unlivable not just for border

crossers and those on the margins but even, if we follow Allison, for the relatively privileged (though in different ways, and to different degrees). Displacements are marked by the unsustainability of social connections, erosions of ties to place, and—increasingly ordinary, and most often unspectacular—experiences of existential and material dislocation. Yet even within and through these forms of displacement, people struggle—together and alone, in place and on the move—to carve out manageable, meaningful pasts, presents, and futures as well as spaces of flourishing.

Ultimately, then, we know where forces of displacement arise from, already, without the need for much further scholarly puzzling: not migration in itself, not even conflict and war. The forces that create displacement are inextricably tied to the dislocating effects of global capitalism, which have made accumulation through dispossession an ordinary process for increasing numbers of people around the globe—even some for whom this experience may indeed seem novel.⁵⁹ This process tends to uproot those in the Global South, make scarcity thinking the norm in the Global North, and ultimately legitimate the violent bordering regimes that separate north from south, citizen from migrant, both materially and in popular and scholarly imaginaries. Scholars must stop reinforcing these boundaries in our work—while not ceasing to work to overcome them politically. The question, then, is how to track the multifaceted, systemic ways in which displacement unfolds while also attending to its textures and historical specificities?

The Articles

Through qualitative research in different sites across the globe—Asia, Africa, Europe, and the South and North Americas—the articles in this special issue wed empirical nuance with a systems-level view of displacement that does not take for granted or reinscribe the presumed distinction between citizens and noncitizens. Attending to the “resonating logics and systemic resonances” of displacement makes it not just possible but necessary to think across categories of belonging so often taken as discrete.⁶⁰

Ramsay’s article shows how homeless veterans and refugees—so often framed in an antagonistic relationship in the United States—both face displacements that emerge from connected projects of militarization and capitalist expansion. Nicole Constable’s article shows how women domestic workers in Hong Kong occupy positions as simultaneous citizens-non-citizens (noncitizens of Hong Kong, but citizens of home countries) which is crucial for understanding their experiences of displacement. Heike Drotbohm’s ethnography of a squat in São Paulo, Brazil, explores how projects of living together become important sites for the articulation of aspirational futures (as well as disaffection) for racialized Brazilians facing urban poverty; recently arrived refugees; and international political organizers alike. Through the narrative practices of illegalized residents in the United States from Latin America, Susan Coutin et al. examine the diverse attitudes toward belonging to which they give voice; and how these interlocutors themselves “shapeshift” the contours of enforcement regimes to make claims to place, livelihood, and community.⁶¹ Through the prism of a former colonial military fort in Pennsylvania, United States, more recently the site of housing for resettled refugees, Michelle Munyikwa shows how refuge for some is produced through the dispossession and displacement of others, through entwined military and settler interventions. Bridget Anderson’s analysis of race and belonging in the United Kingdom shows that deexceptionalizing displacement must also entail re-exceptionalizing citizenship: recognizing how histories of racial and

class inequality render even those with the formal privileges of membership disposable and even, in some cases, deportable.

In seeking to move beyond ascribed categories of belonging, then, this dossier as a whole takes “the human” as a key foundation from which to witness displacement. Each piece shows that displacement emerges from various processes by which hierarchies of humanity are produced, emerging from older imperialisms of race, exploitation, and uneven opportunities for safety and stability that thwart collective capacities not just to achieve livable lives, but to thrive. These systemic factors also condition how people experience displacement, make meaning, and seek human potentialities that go beyond displacement.

The essays in *Deexceptionalizing Displacement* call attention to persistent and pervasive forms of displacement, stemming not from the shock or “crisis” of forced mobility or worlds transformed overnight by catastrophe, but through an accretion of processes and experiences; alongside the machinations of contemporary capitalism that reinforce partitions around who can access meaningful livelihoods, relations, and full humanity (however defined). Some of the most devastating forms of displacement may not ever be traceable to a singular “event,” and may not even be legible as such.⁶² Further, even displacements that appear, on one scale, as the ahistorical products of breach or crisis must be contextualized more capaciously within deeper, and wider, frames of analysis. This approach has important implications for how one locates the time and space of displacement, shifting the scope of what “counts” as displacement to consider how certain forms of suffering or dispossession do (or do not) become legible as exceptional; as well as how displacements are normalized or even invisible.

Along these lines, temporality appears as a major theme throughout the dossier. While displacement is often theorized and imagined in terms of detachment from place, displacement emerges across each of the papers as a sense of temporal, as much as spatial, dislocation. Munyikwa emphasizes the significance of the (re)imagined, revised pasts that cloak the forces that produce displacement, specifically referring to violences of settler colonialism and militarization that layer onto spaces otherwise thought of as “refuge” in the present. Revised pasts also haunt Anderson’s piece, with the 2019 Windrush scandal re-writing the terms of citizenship and belonging that had been drawn up decades earlier, displacing thousands of Black long-term residents in the United Kingdom who were transformed overnight from legal residents to deportable subjects. In Constable’s paper, it is the immediacy of the present that structures displacement; Constable describes how the labor force of Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong is designed to be easily replaceable, tyrannized by the constant and immediate threat of deportation, making them more vulnerable to exploitation and violence. Coutin et al. show how the accounts of illegalized residents envisage pasts, presents, and futures in ways that serve variously to displace and emplace others and selves within regimes of rights and deservingness. Drotbohm and Ramsay view displacement in terms of futurity, both emphasizing how disjunctures between present life and aspirational futures produce an urgent sense of displacement. For Drotbohm, contested visions of the future structure how—and whether—people get along together in the present: in her article, displacement emerges from tensions produced when collectives attempt to work toward envisioned futures that are not shared by all. Ramsay, similarly, describes how value systems structure how displacement is produced and experienced; in her analysis, hegemonic capitalist

horizons produce displacement by actively excluding certain groups from value and participation. Across all of the pieces, displacement is read as informed by and through temporality.

Another major theme across the articles is that displacement derives from, implies, and co-produces forms of hierarchized humanity. The papers reveal that contestations over *how* humanity is valued—and *whose* humanity is recognized—are at the core of questions related to who experiences displacement, and why. Distinct from precarity, which at an affective level suggests a more expansive sense of ontological instability (nonetheless experienced in uneven ways), the explorations of displacement developed in this dossier illustrate how processes of displacement work across and are informed by existing social hierarchies encompassing race, class, gender, and citizenship; while not determined by these factors, displacement clearly reproduces and intensifies these divisions.

Munyikwa most clearly highlights how humanitarian regimes have historically relied on demarcations of humanity that allot and stratify who receives protection, erasing various forms of violence—settler colonialism, imperialist wars—that both produce the need for a space of refuge and set that space up as seemingly “empty” and ready to be (re) settled. Ramsay locates displacement in processes that prevent people from participating in society with their full sense of humanity intact; showing how the grinding impoverishment and alienation of capitalist economies produce not simply precarity, but also a fundamental, existential sense of worthlessness; a devaluing that is crucial to Ramsay’s theorization of displacement. Drotbohm shows that contested aspirational futures reflect contingent forms of humanity, with some ways of living valued more than others, and the emergent lack of consensus producing displacement. Documents and bureaucracy work as tools to reinforce ranked humanity in Constable’s paper: the vulnerability and exploitability of migrant women workers enabled through bureaucratic regimes that formalize their lesser power through a sociopolitical hierarchy that values certain forms of class and citizenship over others. Coutin et al. show how illegalized residents experiencing displacement themselves reassert hierarchical notions of humanity in articulations of who “deserves” access to belonging and stability; others invoke a vision of “common humanity” to contest or dismantle borders; while others still take an abolitionist approach sensitive to the multiplicity of what constitutes “the human.” Anderson’s paper also reminds us of the fragility, and danger, of juridical formations that are supposed to flatten hierarchy, showing how legal recognitions of citizenship and “permanent” residency do not resolve older forms of hierarchy around class, race, and gender: indeed, claims to legalistic distinction may obscure and enable these hierarchies to be reproduced.

Taken together, these papers emphasize that displacement fundamentally reproduces older modes of distinction that would see humanity as a spectrum of recognition and exclusion, rather than a shared condition of being. As we (collective humanity across the globe) move into a(nother) period of economic insecurity, political instability, and the emergent unknowns of climate disaster, the unjust hierarchies that have produced these instabilities and their unevenly felt effects are increasingly wrought as experiences of displacement, in which one’s sense of time, place, the self, and social worlds have reached a critical disjuncture. Collective flourishing has become a hierarchized project, one that requires the displacement of some to maintain the ever-diminishing advantages for others. As fewer and fewer people see in their own lives (and for future generations) possibility of

flourishing, so too does displacement, as explored and developed across the papers included in this special issue, emerge as less and less exceptional. Indeed, displacement is a condition of our time.

NOTES

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