

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Migration/Immigration

by Susan Gushee O'Malley and Linda Dittmar



JACOB LAWRENCE, THE MIGRATION GAINED IN MOMENTUM IN THE MIGRATION SERIES, THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (1940–41)

Home

no one leaves home unless

home is the mouth of a shark

you only run for the border

when you see the whole city running as well

...

you have to understand,

that no one puts their children in a boat

unless the water is safer than the land

...

- Warsan Shire, British poet, born in Kenya to Somali parents

The Introduction to "Teaching and Immigration," issue #84 of *Radical Teacher* (2006), edited by James Davis, Joseph Entin, and Susan O'Malley, began with "This issue of *Radical Teacher* features work that conveys the urgency of teaching about immigration and offers educators ways of meeting that challenge." Since then, that urgency has grown to unprecedented proportions, both as a concern inside the United States and internationally. It has become, moreover, not only an issue of *immigration*, but one of *migration*, with the attendant traumas of wars, expulsions, climate change, economic crises, and globalized economies.

In 2006, hundreds of thousands of immigrants and their supporters marched in dozens of cities in the United States. In 2019, there were an estimated 272 million international migrants, an increase of 51 million since 2010. Yet even as we write, the numbers only grow. By 2020, the number of people leaving home or migrating globally has greatly increased to an estimated 281 million, an increase of 51 million. Migrants make up 3.5% of the global population, up from 2.8% in 2000, with 38 million (14%) under 20 years of age (Women's Human Rights Teaching, Learning and Advocacy Resource). People migrate because of war (by 2020, 6.6 million Syrians had sought refuge primarily in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Turkey) (UNHCR, "Syria"); because of domestic and institutionalized violence and crime; because of natural disasters – devastating hurricanes, volcanoes, tsunamis, fires, earthquakes exacerbated by climate change; because their water has dried up or become polluted with toxic waste runoff from mining companies upstream from them; because they have been targeted as a hated minority group and deprived of citizenship (Rohingyas in Myanmar); because of food insecurity caused by NAFTA's (North American Free Trade Agreement) intervention in Mexico's corn crops, for example, or Monsanto's genetically modified seed promotion in Mali.

Of these, 4.2 million people are stateless today, many of them tenuously residing in 94 countries, with millions housed in refugee camps (UNHCR, "Refugee"). "Stateless" means that their birth was never registered or that they left

their country without birth or school certificates often fleeing because of conflict, violence, and flooding.) The largest refugee camp is Kutupalong in Bangladesh, housing more than 800,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar; Dadaab in Kenya is made up of 5 camps, housing more than 200,000 refugees (USA for UNHCR). Refugee camps are located primarily in the global south in undeveloped or least developed countries. While providing refuge, there can be food and water shortages and ethnic, religious, and gendered violence, including attacks on LGBTQ people. With COVID-19 spreading, countries have also shut their borders, citing the pandemic as their reason for not allowing refugees who have already been approved to immigrate even though they could test them for COVID.

The numbers are overwhelming, even if already out of date. According to the UN Department of Economic Affairs, 2019, the US has the largest number of international migrants at 51 million. Thirteen million migrants have sought refuge in Germany and Saudi Arabia, 12 million in the Russian Federation, 10 million in the United Kingdom, 9 million in the United Arab Emirates, 8 million in France, Canada, Australia, and 6 million in Italy (WHRTLAR). 21.8% of the population of Lebanon are refugees (UNHCR, "Lebanon").

Xenophobia, populist governments, criminalization of migrants, and COVID-19 have been used to deny all immigration, and the US is not an exception. Its policies and populist assault on immigrants--long-term citizens or newly arrived, documented or not--were particularly hate-filled under Trump, but in fact predated him and continue. Even as this issue of *Radical Teacher* was being copyedited, Vice-President Kamala Harris was in Guatemala, following up on Biden's preposterous idea that the US will fix the situation in Mexico/Latin America so people will not need to migrate. The import of her emphatic "do not come" message was not lost on a people who recently saw their families torn apart and children caged--sometimes irreparably lost to their parents--under ICE.

The facts underlying these policies and numbers are grim. We may glimpse them in Ai Wei Wei's documentary, *The Human Wave*, which gives a powerfully sweeping sense of the mass displacement and misery taking place across the globe or look to the US in Netflix's documentary *Immigrant Nation*, which follows ICE's devastation of individual and communal destinies. The situations presented are not parallel. *The Human Wave* is a counter-epic of migration, an endless sequence of displacement traumas, of one spoken language and another, one ravaged face and another, one story and another. *Immigrant Nation* is clinical and specific, following closely individuals and situations subject to meticulously legalized bureaucratic control. Neither has closure and, in a sense, both register one reality--that of displaced people denied a desperately needed shelter.

Still, while the word "displaced" speaks to the overarching need and pain experienced by so many people, not all displacements are alike and not all legal and extrajudicial claims to shelter are alike. According to the UN's International Organization for Migration,

- **Immigrant:** a person who moves into a country other than of his or her
- nationality or usual residence, seen from the perspective of the country of arrival.
- **Migrant:** an umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons.

Either of the above categories may include,

- **Refugee** (as defined by the UN): a person who qualifies for the protection of the UN as provided by the High Commissioner for Refugees. A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable to avail himself of the protection of that country.
- **Asylum Seeker:** a person requesting admission as special protection from imminent danger or threat.
- **Exile:** a forced or self-imposed uprooting from one's home country, not necessarily violent.
- **Deportee:** a person forcibly removed from their country of residence.

Our title for the article cluster, "Migration/Immigration," points to all such displacement and suggests their interconnection. It concerns both the precarity of homelessness and the ongoing effects of immigration on those who attempt to find a new home in often unwelcoming lands.

Our "Call for Papers" for the present cluster was intentionally inclusive. When we, Linda and Susan, sent it out, we had no idea what kind of articles it would elicit. Our initial motives were different too. Susan was dismayed about feminists' ignorance regarding migration during her work preparing for the UN's Commission on the Status of Women's Beijing + 25 conference and, so, had agreed to chair the Social Protection Curriculum that included migration. She wanted a *Radical Teacher* issue that would provide teachers with syllabi on migration, such as the Sanctuary Curriculum, useful information that included a global human rights perspective on migration and refugee camps, not so US or Eurocentric. Linda, coming from a war-torn region (the Middle East) herself, wanted a clearer political analysis of the global aftershocks of colonialism, including the military and extractive-economic role of the US behind the refugee crisis, and including attention to historic displacements inside the US, notably Indigenous First People, enslaved Africans, and indentured Asian-Americans, as a history that anticipates the xenophobia, racism, and islamophobia rife today.

Of course, the articles we received had their own focus, and in one way they were unexpected. For many years

Radical Teacher tried unsuccessfully to solicit articles from teachers in schools, K-12. Our Immigration/Migration call elicited articles by three high school teachers: Alisha Mernick, an art teacher from California; Miguel Abrantes Antunes, an English Language (ELL) teacher from Pennsylvania; and Lynn Glixon Ditchfield, a Spanish teacher embedded in the Brazilian community on the island of Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts. Andy Beutel, a junior high school teacher in a suburban New Jersey town, whose students had never met an immigrant, discusses with his students the contradictions and difficulties of being an immigrant. Additionally, two grade school students, 6th grader Soraya Hajizadeh-Lieber and 5th grader Anna Sedlock-Reiner, asked to review their favorite books, Alan Gratz's *Refugee*, and Victoria Jamieson's graphic novel *When Stars are Scattered* about Omar and his brother Hassan who fled from Somalia to the Dadaab Refugee Camp in Kenya. Andy Beutel discusses teaching the chapter on Syria in *Refugee* that Soraya reviewed, while the Dadaab Refugee Camp is also discussed by Husseina Dinani (more below).

This concentration of high school and junior high teacher submissions is both welcome and suggestive. All four teachers are passionate about the well-being of their students and have developed innovative curricula and creative pedagogies that depart from the "banking model" common in higher education. All four demonstrate the power of personal engagement in learning that is not shackled by rigid syllabuses and testing. Younger students learn about immigration in collective settings of some duration, often "discovering" their families' immigration stories and working to challenge the reductive counter-narratives frequently used to describe immigrants. The power of empathy as a means to understanding is palpable in these articles, as is the awareness of the networks of relations that make or break the racism, xenophobia, and lack of privilege that constrain the immigrant experience. The empowering community-forming capability of this teaching emerges in this setting.

The three articles about college and university teaching reach outward, beyond our intra-national experience of immigration to the *global migration* crisis. Reading Ben Rawlence's *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp*, Husseina Dinani also focuses on Dadaab. About half of the families of her students at the University of Toronto (Scarborough) come from Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, and Cameroon. The account of displaced people in Dadaab by Rawlence challenges stereotypes of victimhood of the refugees in Dadaab by disrupting the victim-perpetrator binary in mainstream media with a counter-narrative of Africans as humans that have agency and dignity. For extra credit students turned out provocative artwork, one of which used UN Secretary General's statement, "Refugees are not terrorists. They are often the first victims of terrorism," written over a scene from that refugee camp.

Teaching at Ohio State and herself an immigrant, Amrita Dhar uses literature to reflect on global migration. Literature, she notes, lets her use the slow and reflective immersion it elicits to access "stories of those who have

been displaced, misplaced, replaced, and strangely placed.” Questions of race, class, and caste come up, as do climate, sexuality, and nationality--all intersecting within the US’s normative self-definition. Because the wingspan of this literature is wide, what emerges is a network of the empathic connections that can become movements for change. This empathy, moreover, is anchored in close reading. Using *TIDE* keywords as a central tool, Dhar has students analyze known and lesser known words (“denizen,” “foreigner,” “settler,” or “alien,” etc.) to contextualize and reflect on the historic and political ramifications of usage.

Combining history, politics, and culture to question Western colonization of the continent, including the genocide of Indigenous people, Angela Cecilia Espinosa’s article, entitled “Teaching Dreamers in the Time of COVID,” discusses her course on US-Mexican Relations in the Chicana Studies Department at San Jose State. At issue is not only decimation but also survival, including the power of indigenous, non-Western knowledges. That Covid-19 hit this course in mid-semester (as it hit Dhar, above, too), followed by California’s wildfires and a bruising election, made studying especially challenging in this Hispanic-serving institution, with many of its students Dreamers. Espinosa describes “battle fatigue” but also the empowering force of a teaching that does away with the US founding mythology.

Literally taking place in refugee camps, the article co-written by Hadas Yanay and Juan Battle concerns an unusual project: an on-line internship-based course on teaching quantitative and qualitative analysis to refugees at the MA-level to do important research on COVID-19 in their refugee camps. Taking place in five different countries--Malawi, Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda, and Lebanon--this online pilot course has the students working together learn a marketable research skill that may lead to employment and their leaving their refugee camps. The course, sponsored by the Graduate Center, City University of New York, and the University of Southern New Hampshire, will continue to be taught as part of the MA program. Unlike the other articles included here, this course is not *about* the conditions of being immigrants or refugees, where both outsiders and those impacted by it, teachers and students, articulate deeper understanding of the wounds of displacement. It is not *about* immigrants, colonized people, or refugees, meant for people who need to know and care more about their condition. Rather, it sketches a way to empower the people who are at the hub of refugee life--living in a refugee camp--giving them access to new competencies and possible employment.

We also include two syllabi: *The Sanctuary Syllabus*, written and taught by New York University (NYU) faculty and graduate students who had organized to protect DACA and Muslim students and who attempted unsuccessfully to make NYU a Sanctuary Campus. The Syllabus includes topics such as Militarism and Refugees, Migration and Ecological Crisis, and Dispossession and Indigeneity. Included each week are policies and tools for change and resistance. The second is a Migration Curriculum based on an understanding of human rights that includes The UN Global Compact on Refugees, 2018 (an update of 1951 and 1967) and The Global Compact on Migration, 2018, to promote safe, orderly, and regular migration.

As always, the perennial question raised by the rich collection of articles gathered here is, “What is to be done?” Options include acquainting our students and ourselves to progressive organizations such as “Make the Road” (NY, NJ, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Connecticut) that work with immigrants who are undocumented and for the pathway to citizenship for Dreamers (young people brought to the US by their parents many years ago and who are still undocumented although they are allowed to work temporarily). Other possible progressive organizations are the Sanctuary Movement and the NGO Committee on Migration.

What emerges most clearly from this cluster is the focus on the teaching of outsiders--of learners, their families, and their communities--to know and care about the suffering of dispossessed people. We, mostly American *Radical Teacher* readers, know it most directly through our own national racism, xenophobia, and hate-filled border “protection,” intensified under Trump’s presidency. But, in fact, the discussion begun in *Radical Teacher* #84 is still relevant. The same issues persist, rooted in a white, red, black, brown, and yellow history whose wounds are still open. The main difference is that as waves of migration crash against all available shores, the traumas of global displacement have become more visible.

For radicals, this situation opens new challenges. The now more-or-less established teaching of post-colonialism needs to be understood more directly in relation to the displacements and migrations taking place across continents. Climate and economies are all factors, on top of wars and civil wars driven by need and greed but currently occurring under the flags of religion, ethnicity, and nationality. Undergirding it all is anxiety about the communities of choice and the nation-states they came to form: the “rights” of Magyar people, for example, to a pure and purified Magyar nation, or a Jewish only Israel. The teaching discussed in our articles is deeply humane and caring. It can help us live better with one another and know and teach better about the humanitarian crisis at hand. But for radical educators this is something of new territory, going beyond “diversity,” “multiculturalism,” and “postcolonialism” to consider the globalized flows of money, weapons, labor, and despair as a major political and economic reconfiguration under way.

This history includes the forced relocation of this land’s indigenous people (notably the 1830s’ Federally enforced “Trail of Tears”), the massive transportation of shackled African people into this country, the indentured Chinese workers brought to build our railroads and more, and the “traditional” immigrants imagined by the Statue of Liberty: the mostly European, light-skinned “huddled masses,” but also the Vietnamese and Cambodians for whose fate the US bears special responsibility, and others whose skill and/or money we crave. Notable among the current recipients of our xenophobia are Latinx people blamed for the usual panoply of “crimes” and “job theft,” Muslims feared as “terrorists,” and Asians blamed for the “China virus” of Covid-19. In all these respects, this cluster of articles shows us not only what we as radical teachers do, but also what new directions still await us as we face local and global surges of human movement.

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