Women and Migration
Responses in Art and History

EDITED BY
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Introduction: Women and Migration[s]

This edited volume *Women and Migration* examines the role photography, art, film, history, and writing play in identifying and remembering the migratory activities of women. The reader will explore a wide range of topics from interdisciplinary perspectives, including concepts of place, memory, globalization and the arts, photography and mobility, travel writing and food, experiences of refugees, the Caribbean Diaspora, border crossings, slavery and involuntary migration, displacement, marriage, indigeneity, pleasure, love, politics, war and family stories. To bring some order to this rich heterogeneity, the book is divided into eight parts that reflect these themes. Our authors, who come from many different nations, explore, interpret and reimagine ways in which we can discuss ideas and develop theories about migration. The interdisciplinarity of this project is rooted in its approaches to history, art, visual culture, and politics.

Part One, *Imagining Family and Migration*, offers the reader intimate personal narratives of migration. We learn how travel across borders and oceans affects families, and we learn more about the authors’ connections to and re-articulations of homeland — as well as the corporeality of migration. Ellyn Toscano writes about silences and secrets within the family, exploring an unknown story about her grandmother’s migration from South Carolina to a Home for Destitute Colored Children in Rye, New York when she was six years old. ‘Between Self and Memory’ is a story about racial passing, racial identity and a family secret in which Toscano writes about the consequences of deracination, concealment and the self-fashioning of transitive identities. Utilizing memoir, history

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and visual culture, ‘The Impermanence of Place: Migration, Memory and Method’ by Anna Arabindan Kesson reflects on her journey from Sri Lanka (her birthplace) to Australia and how that experience of migration shaped her scholarship. In ‘A Congolese Woman’s Life in Europe: A Post-Colonial Diptych of Migration’, Sandrine Colard describes the photographs of her mother in her family photo album, as she chronicles her mother leaving the Congo, studying in Europe and getting married to Colard’s Belgian father. Colard compares photographs of herself as a student and a professional with those of the young couple on their wedding day. Kathy Engel’s ‘Migrations’ is a memoir-poem of the cultural work she has pursued over her lifetime working with women living in the United States, South America, the Caribbean, the Middle East and in South Africa. Engel includes her own discovery of what it means to migrate, something she learned not by direct experience but by listening to stories as a child and working with women who were fleeing violence.

Part Two, Mobility and Migration, gives the reader an insight into the creative methods used by artists to portray the transient and transcendental qualities of being in motion. This section explores the materials that women carry with them, while also probing the idea of ‘woman’ as the carrier of memories, stories, emotions, traditions, culture and religion. Marianne Hirsch’s ‘Carrying Memory’ explores the connections between three distinctly twenty-first-century projects by women artists responding to mobility and migration: Argentinian artist Mirta Kupferminc, Kenyan/US artist Wangechi Mutu, and Chinese artist Yin Xiuzhen. All three turn to the archive to explore how women carry the burden of a painful past in a way that attempts to look to the future. ‘Making Through Motion, Art Practice Manifesto’ explores how memory and metaphor shape Wangechi Mutu’s practice. Mutu connects her life and migration to three generations of women in her family, drawing out themes of empowerment and independence. Karen Finley’s ‘Strange Set of Circumstances: White Artistic Migration and Crazy Quilt’ reflects on her activism as an artist who was censored by the US during the 1990s. She discusses her own participation in the white migration that brought about the gentrification of low-income neighborhoods and considers how she benefited from censorship, having received recognition at the expense of the silencing of artists of color and the erasure of the cultural heritage of immigrant communities. Cheryl Wall’s ‘Nora
Holt: New Negro Composer and Jazz-Age Goddess’ reflects on Holt’s extraordinary life and the connections between movement and female self-invention.

In , the third section of the book, the authors offer insights into migrant experiences through images and documentation. The reader will encounter a diverse set of stories centered on the authors’ approaches to researching, making and interpreting images that in some cases reveal and in others obscure preconceptions about identity, ethnicity and transnationality. ‘ : Linking Bodies, Desert, Water’ is a series of photographs by the Palestinian-Iraqi artist Sama Alshaibi. Alshaibi, whose family was exiled from two homelands, spent her formative years migrating across Middle-Eastern countries as a political refugee. She argues that any understanding of the socio-economic and political upheavals that Middle-Eastern women experience is complicated by problematic historical and contemporary depictions of them in photographs, which often reduce their challenges to what they wear. Alshaibi’s photo essay offers an overview of various strategies she pursues in her own work to decode and subvert familiar images of Middle-Eastern women, while using a personal vernacular to describe her relationship with the many countries and cultures that have formed her identity. Jessica Ingram’s ‘My Baby Changed My Life: Migration and Motherhood in an American High School’, expands on her social practice as a photographer committed to social change. Ingram photographed and worked closely with students at Hilltop High, a public high school for pregnant teenagers in the Mission District of San Francisco. Ingram portrays Hilltop as a crucial safe space for young women and their children who have emigrated to the United States.

Lorie Novak’s ‘Visualizing Displacement Above the Fold’ looks at the placement of articles in the to explore how gender, displacement and migration are visualized and, at the same time, to highlight what is not photographed. In ‘Unveiling Violence: Gender and Migration in Right-Wing European Populism’ Debora Spini emphasizes how migrant women are constructed as ‘others’ and further how their bodies become the locus of discourses of domination that either turn them into prey or commodities. Maaza Mengiste’s ‘A Different Lens’ is a meditation on how photography reshapes memory, using photographs taken by Italian colonial forces in Ethiopia from 1935–41 to understand more about how war was experienced by women and children — those
villagers who did not make it into the history books. Isolde Brielmaier’s ‘Reinventing the Spaces Within: The Early Images of Artist Lalla Essaydi’ highlights the critical role of the artist and her engagement with women in setting the stage for a broader discussion about migration. Kellie Jones’s ‘Swimming with E. C.’ places the artwork of Elizabeth Catlett in the context of the political history of artists and others who worked between Mexico and the United States. Catlett’s themes have remained consistent over time: celebrations of women — their power, their politics, their bodies, their bond with their children, and their culture. Her contribution can, in many ways, be considered part of the recent history of self-portraiture in art through the lenses of migration, photography and performance.

The essays in part four, *Reclaiming Our Time*, reveal narratives in which the intrinsic significance of women of color have been overlooked and ignored. Their authors critique debates about the legacy of colonialism and racism, and put forward new models to dismantle preexisting structures of power. In ‘Kinship, the Middle Passage, and the Origins of Racial Slavery’ Jennifer L. Morgan offers a revised perspective of the forced migration of women. She is concerned with how the seventeenth-century slave trade sets in motion a set of violent practices and assumptions that have particular implications for enslaved women. Bettina Love’s ‘Black Women’s Work: Undoing Character Education’ critiques concepts of civic engagement by Black women as they marshal new possibilities that focus on Black joy and Black radical imagination. Editha Mesina’s photographic essay ‘Gabriela NY and Justice for Mary Jane Veloso’ focuses on a Filipina organization called Gabriela NY, a grassroots human rights feminist organization that advocates for migrant workers. Allana Finley’s ‘Women and Migrations: African Fashion’s Global Takeover’ shares her journey through African’s diverse fashion industry, and chronicles her dedication to bringing African creatives into the global market. Treva B. Lindsey’s ‘What Would It Mean to Sing A Black Girl’s Song?: A Brief Statement on the Reality of Anti-Black Girl Terror’ focuses on Black femme insurgency as a contemporary liberation praxis that advocates for justice for Black women.

The essays in part five, *Situated at the Edge*, focus on women whose stories have been marginalized or forgotten in the histories of migration. Pamela Newkirk’s ‘Fredi Washington’s Forgotten War on Hollywood’ is a revelatory account on this overlooked actress who was
one of Hollywood’s and Broadway’s pioneering African-American leading ladies. Newkirk highlights aspects of her noteworthy civil rights activism in the United States and abroad. Vanessa Perez Rosario’s essay ‘Julia de Burgos, Cultural Crossing and Iconicity’ focuses on de Burgos’s life, death, poetry, activism, and legacy, while highlighting the escape routes she created to transcend the rigid confines of gender in Puerto Rico in the 1930s. Sirpa Salenius examines a Black American female abolitionist’s European travel in the nineteenth century in ‘Sarah Parker Remond’s Black American Grand Tour’. Remond participated in transatlantic struggles for social justice, moving beyond the borders of her nationality, race, and gender. Her travels and her detachment from her previous set of social conditions enabled her to propose a progressive model of Black womanhood — one of independence, intellectualism, and personal and professional success. Arlene Davila’s ‘Making Latinx Art: Juana Valdes at the Crossroads of Latinx and Latin American Art’ addresses how the political economy of contemporary art markets impact the making of Latinx and Latin American art. Patricia Cronin’s essay ‘Moving Mountains: Harriet Hosmer’s Nineteenth-Century Italian Migration to Become the First Professional Woman Sculptor’ is a pioneering work that combines hand-painted images with art historical research to reveal the complexities of Hosmer’s career, reputation, and legacy.

Expressing how identities shift through mediated sources such as film, music, and the internet, part six, Transit, Transiting, Transition explores mobility through alternate realities. Roshini Kempadoo’s ‘Urban Candy: Screens, Selfies and Imaginings’ explores the itinerant imagery of her art project Face Up for the appropriateness of its response to current neoliberal politics and popular media. Kempadoo questions how difference is viewed when focusing on the Black women’s body across the world. In ‘Controlled Images and Cultural Reassembly: Material Black Girls Living in an Avatar World’ Joan Morgan analyses the line between what is considered ‘the real’ self and what exists in digital space, suggesting that this division is at best blurred and more likely illusory. Sarah Khan’s ‘Supershero: Amrita, Partitioned Once, Migrated Twice’ is an exploration of migrant stories through food. She illustrates Indian women farmers in their working environments and tells the story of farmers through the eyes of a seriously playful and playfully serious super shero, Amrita Simla. The Shero is neither
oversexualized nor over-covered. She demonstrates agency based on her own experience, intellect, and humanity. In the essay ‘Diaspora, Indigeneity, Queer Critique: Tracey Moffatt’s Aesthetics of Dwelling in Displacement’ by Gayatri Gopinath we experience identity and aesthetics through the same frame of different histories of dispossession and displacement, colonialism and racialization — without rendering them equivalent. Kalia Brooks Nelson’s ‘The Performance of Doubles: The Transposition of Gender and Race in Ming Wong’s Life of Imitation’ highlights Wong’s work and the reception of gendered-racial narratives that are distributed through the international reach of Hollywood image culture, and received by audiences in other parts of the world. Wong’s video intervenes in the cinematic depiction of racial passing, and the limitations that are enacted through this form of psychological doubling.

Part seven, _The World is Ours, Too_, is informed by mobility and desire, which frame studies of women traveling and finding their voices in countries and spaces from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century. Francille Rusan Wilson’s ‘The Roots of Black Women’s Internationalism’ examines Black women activists’ travel and writing from the late nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century, and considers how their exposure to international debates on decolonization, women’s rights, and missionary work helped to reshape the worldviews of Black American women’s organizations, and expanded their conception of the possibility of sisterhood and common struggles across continents. Tiffany Gill’s ‘“The World is Ours, Too”: Millennial Women and the New Black Travel Movement’ recounts how Black women in the early years of the civil rights movement built a ‘travel movement’ and explores how, in the early twenty-first century, the Black Lives Matter crusade has seen its resurgence. In this iteration Black millennial women, those 18–35 year olds who, in true millennial fashion, think they are the first to engage in this phenomenon, are at the forefront. Gill’s essay explores the history of a movement that began in the 1940s and has a great deal to teach us about the tensions between political activism, leisure culture, and global freedom struggles. Paulette Young’s essay ‘“I Want to do Something and be Something; I Want to Make a Name!” Performing a Life: Mattie Allen McAdoo’s Odyssey from Ohio to South Africa, Australia and Beyond, 1890–1900’ on musician Mattie Allen McAdoo, explores the ways in which Mattie
navigated her role as wife, performer and African-American woman during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Young examines her migration from a student and musical prodigy in Ohio and a teacher in Washington, D.C., to her travels as an international performer and her return to the US as a race woman. Her presentation of self through professional photographic portraits taken in South Africa, Tasmania and the United States is a central visual component of this effort. Sharon Harley’s chapter “I Don’t Pay Those Borders No Mind At All”: Audley E. Moore (‘Queen Mother’ Moore) — Grassroots Global Traveler and Activist’ expands the conversation about female activism by showing that gender roles and class identity played a major part in shaping Black women’s activism, vision, and travel at home and abroad. Cheryl Finley’s ‘Loïs Mailou Jones in the World’ examines the work, life and influence of Loïs Mailou Jones as they relate to the themes of travel and migration — both literally and figuratively. As an artist and designer, Jones practiced, taught and utilized theories of travel and migration, most notably in her Art-Deco-era textile designs inspired by Art Nouveau and Chinoiserie, and the paintings from her Africa Series (1950s–1980s) inspired by her travels to Haiti in the 1950s and Africa in the 1960s and 1970s.

Part eight, Emotional Cartography: Tracing the Personal, features Grace Aneiza Ali’s ‘The Ones Who Leave… the Ones Who Are Left: A Guyanese Migration Story’, which offers a personal reflection on artists’ experiences in Guyana. These particular experiences reveal universal tensions; they unveil the act of migration as a constant site of engagement and angst and explore what it means to be an immigrant in our twenty-first-century world. Through three distinct approaches — conceptual, portraiture, and documentary — three Guyanese artists unpack what drives one from their homeland as well as what keeps one emotionally and psychically tethered to it. Photographer Alessandra Capodacqua’s ‘The Acton Photograph Archive — Between Representation and Re-interpretation’ mines a unique photography collection by selecting portraits of women that align with the standards of mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century portraiture whereby women were represented as symbols of beauty and purity. She focuses on the gaze of these women, arguing that it conveys different messages because their expressions could not be controlled by the photographer as they could by a painter, for instance. M. Neelika Jayawardane’s ‘Reconciliations at
Sea: Reclaiming the Lusophone Archipelago in Mónica de Miranda’s Video Works’ explores traditions of travel writing via memoir and film. Alessandra Di Maio’s essay ‘Minor Transnational Literature: Cristina Ali Farah’s Somali Italian Narratives’ investigates Farah’s narratives and her use of language. Misan Sagay reflects on her scripting of a love story for an international television series in ‘GUERILLA — Black Resistance Narrative Reinvented’, which tells the story of a politically active couple whose relationship and values are tested when they liberate a political prisoner and form a radical underground cell in 1970s London. Gunja SenGupta’s ‘Migration as a Woman’s Right: Stories from Comparative and Transnational Slavery Histories’ explains that transnational history has yielded the important insight that migration makes meaning and that civic identities transform in transit from one place to another. This essay is woven from the archival traces of women on the margins, enslaved and free, who, through flight or emigration, appeared to seek reinvention. By nudging, navigating, narrating, and sometimes reshaping the contours of international borderlands, these women wrote themselves into the records that made and make history. Imani Uzuri’s ‘The Sacred Migration of Sister Gertrude Morgan’ is based on the New Orleans street preacher, visual artist, musician and mystic who migrated from Georgia to New Orleans in 1939.

This book, featuring the contributions of forty-two women, began life during a conference and exhibition convened by Deborah Willis and Ellyn Toscano on the campus of New York University in Florence, Italy in June 2017. The initial workshop took place at New York University’s Villa La Pietra in Florence, an ideal place to initiate this project because this site has been a nucleus for discussions about migration. In addition to the authors included in this volume, other participants in the workshop included Paula Giddings, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Sandra Jackson-Dumont, Karen Shimakawa, and Allyson Green. NYU Florence, through the programming of La Pietra Dialogues, has had a strong record of exploring migration since its inception in 2008, through conferences, talks and exhibitions, reflecting and responding to the unfolding crisis of hundreds of thousands of people arriving on the shores of Italy across the Mediterranean Sea from Africa, and many tragically perishing — drowning — in the desperate attempt to reach Europe. Even before the most recent wave of migration, African migrants were a common sight on the streets of Italy’s cities, provoking
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surprise in students who had come to study in Italy influenced by a tourism-driven preconception of Italians. Since the sinking on 3 October 2013 of a ship less than a mile from the Italian island of Lampedusa, resulting in the death of more than 300 people believed to have been from Eritrea and Somalia, the attention of the world was focused on migration to the Mediterranean. Increasingly, that attention has become hostile.

In June of 2018, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), created in 1950 in the aftermath of the Second World War to help millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes, reported that an unprecedented 68.5 million people around the world have been ‘forcibly displaced’ from their home. Among them are nearly 25.4 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18, and slightly less than half of whom are female.¹

As Toni Morrison observed in The Origin of Others, ‘Excluding the height of the slave trade in the nineteenth century, the mass movement of peoples in the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first is greater than it has ever been. It is a movement of workers, intellectuals, refugees, and immigrants, crossing oceans and continents, through customs offices or in flimsy boats, speaking multiple languages of trade, of political intervention, of persecution, war, violence and poverty’.²

Our perspective on migration is necessarily broad: the account of the migration of women comprises the totality of many stories. Women have been part of global and historical movements of peoples to escape war, to avoid persecution, for work, for security; we have been uprooted, stolen, trafficked, enslaved. We have moved rationally, for an education, a job, health care. We have been pushed off our land by climate change. We have moved and migrated for deeply private and personal reasons — to reach our potential freely, to lead a meaningful life, to secure a future for ourselves and our families. We have sailed, flown, driven and walked. Some of us have not survived the journey.

In this introduction we use the term migrations, using the expansive nature of the term to connote the geographic, legal, political, historical,

temporal or other definitions. We include diasporas, internal movements and displacements, and international and transnational migrations. Ultimately, we leave it to our authors to respond to the term as they are inspired, hoping that diverse perspectives will enhance our collective understanding.

In the following essays and art projects, each author addresses questions and concerns that stem from varied experiences of migration from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first. Each chapter builds on current scholarship that focuses on women, migration, and citizenship, and explores perceptions of identity, race, gender, family, and work by examining the global movements of women.

We thank NYU’s Global Institute for Advanced Study, Tisch School of the Arts, La Pietra Dialogues, the Ford Foundation and the Institute of International Education and Open Book Publishers of Cambridge, UK for their support and assistance in making this book possible.