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“This place is now your home”. A Comparative View on Partition Migrants in a New City. Kamila Shamsie’s Kartography and Inga Iwasiów’s Bambino

Abstract

The goal of the article is the comparison between the condition of Polish and Pakistani migrants, forcibly resettled on new territories in 1940s, depicted in fictional narratives of two women writers. Both Central Europe and the Indian Subcontinent witnessed violent conflicts leading to changes of borders and large-scale migrations. Following the ravages of the Second World War, in 1945 Poland lost a considerable part of its pre-war territory, and acquired the formerly German regions to its West, labelled by the communist authorities as the “Regained Lands”. Poles who lost their homes in the Eastern territories were allocated the former German houses in the West. Just two years later, in 1947, the former British India was divided into India and Pakistan, and religious tensions became even more acute. As a result, millions of people previously living intermixed would now be forced to migrate – Hindus to India, and Muslims to Pakistan. In order to illustrate the fate of individuals taking part in these historical transformations, the article discusses two narratives of displacement and forced settlement on a new territory. These two stories originate from Inga Iwasiów’s novel “Bambino”, and Kamila Shamsie’s novel “Kartography”. Both authors present their protagonists with exceptional empathy, whether they are young people rebuilding their lives in the postwar Szczecin, or teenage lovers from Karachi, dealing with their parents’ traumas and their own quest for identity. In both these contexts, the key question
is how to reconstruct one’s own identity in a new place, with the burden of tragic experiences still fresh in one’s memory?

Keywords: forced migrations, displacement, identity, memory, Poland, Pakistan, “Regained Territories”, 1947 Indian Partition

Space and place are concepts that are usually taken for granted, Yi-Fu Tuan\(^1\) contends. The notion of place can be understood in many ways – a home, a neighbourhood, a town, or a country. However, what differentiates it from the more abstract notion of space is the meaning, or meanings, ascribed to it. Place is a space that one gets *attached* to, that gives one a feeling of a connectedness, a belongingness. What happens, though, when one loses that most intimate of places, one which serves as a point of reference for much of the “meaning” to all other aspects in one’s life, one that is called “home”? Can one reconstruct that same feeling of intimacy in a new environment? Can one ascribe the same “meaning” to an unfamiliar space that was previously reserved for the place called “home”? This article analyses the condition of *migrants*, people that were uprooted from their homes and forced to start a new life in an unfamiliar space. It takes into consideration two texts, although stemming from different cultural contexts, nonetheless depicting similar experiences and emotions.

**Drawing new borders, changing lives**

History of the world is one of mass migrations. Such migrations are often undertaken in search for new places to build a home and provide better means of life. Motivations for such movements are not always purely economic, but, many a times much more dramatic, one accompanied with violent conflict, trauma, and loss of the close ones. Sometimes, there is even no decision-making by the subject involved in such migrations. Through the ages, forced displacements of a people have been initiated by various authorities, more recently, in name of nationalist ideologies. And in times of war or conflict, such migrations may not be initiated by an authority but by groups or individuals, who may forcibly remove people from their homes. Both of these phenomena could be observed in the aftermath of the Indian Partition of 1947. Many were forced to leave their homes because of nationalist ideas of purity and ethnic or religious separation, and many emigrated out of fear of violence.

Similarly, in Central and Eastern Europe, where borders were radically changed after both the First and the Second World War, resulted in millions