13 “The Place was not a Place”

A Critical Phenomenology of Forced Displacement

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> What was life in Kakuma? Was it life? There was debate about this. On the one hand, we were alive, which meant that we were living a life, that we were eating and could enjoy friendships and learning and could love. But we were nowhere. Kakuma was nowhere. *Kakuma* was, we were first told, the Kenyan word for nowhere. No matter the meaning of the word, the place was not a place.
>
> —Dave Eggers, *What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (2007, 373)

In 2003, Sudanese refugee Valentino Achak Deng collaborated with American author Dave Eggers to tell the story of his forced displacement during the second Sudanese civil war (1983–2005).[1] The result was published as *What is the What* in 2007. Deng and the other “Lost Boys of Sudan” walked for months—losing several members along the way to malnutrition, dehydration, and lion attacks—to the border of Ethiopia, where the Pinyudo refugee camp was eventually established. But within a few years, the Lost Boys and other refugees were chased from this camp by Ethiopian government forces, and after further nomadic wanderings, they ended up in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. Deng spent his adolescence in Kakuma; he was educated, fell in love, and even became part of theatre troupe there. And yet, throughout this time, he was plagued by an existential dilemma—was life in Kakuma really *lived*? After all, it was “nowhere”: “the place was not a place.”

Deng reflects on his forced displacement from the US, where he was eventually granted asylum.[2] But the effects of his original displacement from Sudan are not resolved by his new citizenship status because he experiences a new form of displacement, as that of the immigrant. In the opening chapter of the book, Deng is robbed by an American couple who force their way into his apartment. As they keep him captive, he ponders: “if this is punishment for the hubris of wanting to leave Africa, of harboring dreams of college and solvency in America, I am now chastened and I apologize. I will return with a bowed head. …

I have been humbled so many times since arriving that I am beginning to think someone is trying desperately to send me a message, and that message is 'Leave this place'" (4).

What is the What is a powerful reminder that the effects of displacement remain long after a supposed political or legal resolution, especially in a globalized era where displacement is a primary and on-going experience for so many. On the one hand, the world has never been more accessible: frequent flyers, commuters, and tourists traverse the globe for the purposes of business and leisure. Likewise, the Internet and the evolution of telecommunication technologies have transformed traditional notions of place as tied to physical environments. On the other hand, the defense of place as a national boundary is on the rise worldwide, and tightly controlled borders mean that millions of people are "uprooted," to borrow Hannah Arendt's term, with "no place in the world, recognized and guaranteed by others" (1978, 475).

In her work on refugees and forced displacement, Serena Parekh notes that "living outside a nation-state is no longer an anomaly that can be brushed aside as exceptional to contemporary political life; it has in many ways become a standard way of living for millions of people, and will increasingly be so in the future" (2017, 5). Not only are people displaced by national and international conflict, but climate change has ushered in a new form of displaced person, who seeks refuge from rising sea levels, soaring temperatures, and natural disasters (Collectif Argos 2010; Wennersten and Robbins 2017). Giorgio Agamben's assessment that "in the context of the inexorable decline of the nation-state and the general corrosion of traditional legal-political categories, the refugee is perhaps the only imaginable figure of the people in our day" seems more prescient now than ever (1995, 114). In other words, never has place mattered to so many, including phenomenologists.

This chapter is a *critical* phenomenology in two senses. Firstly, it is an investigation that is at times critical of phenomenology—namely, its tendency to reduce displacement to an ontological side-effect of the loss of place. Secondly, I propose that phenomenology is critical to any understanding and potential transformation of displacement as a lived experience. At a time when places emerge at the interstices of increased mobility and immobility, both real and virtual, it is imperative that a phenomenology of place considers the fundamentality of displacement in the constitution of the contemporary world. I do this first by situating displacement within contemporary phenomenological notions of place, arguing that if we are to truly understand displacement as an embodied phenomenon, then we must *displace* the ontological foundations of place, so to speak. I then turn to the ambivalent ontological and human status of refugees and displaced persons, which is illustrated in the reduction of their bodies from lived to *merely existing.* This reduction prohibits a meaningful inhabitation of place, and it is

exacerbated by the attempted biopolitical control of refugee camps and detention centers by humanitarian organizations and national governments. In the final section, I consider the relationship between the body and temporality in the experience of displacement, in which refugees and displaced persons encounter, to quote the anthropologist Michel Agier "a present that never ends" (2011, 78). Drawing on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, I propose that this seemingly endless present contributes to the physical and emotional disintegration of refugees and displaced persons, which subsequently precipitates a slide into non-meaning and superfluousness.

* * *

> What do you think of this place, Achak?
> …
> —Kakuma? I said.
> —Yes, Kakuma. There's nothing here but us. Don't you find that weird? That it's only people and dust? We've already cut down all the trees and grass for our homes and firewood. And now what?
> —What do you mean?
> —We just stay here? Do we stay here always, till we die?
> Until that moment I hadn't thought of dying in Kakuma.
>
> (380)

* * *

Displacing Place

Displacement perpetually haunts the concept of place because the ontological, social, and political realities of place matter so dearly to those who have been denied access, for one reason or another, to the experience of belonging to a place (real or virtual). Bruce Janz suggests that "part of the impetus to research place comes from the recognition that many are displaced, either due to their forcible removal from a place (e.g., a refugee situation) or from the demise of the place itself. One cannot easily research the nature of place without becoming implicated by it" (2005, 92). Likewise, in his indispensable philosophical historiography of place, Edward S. Casey concedes that the forced migration of entire peoples alongside the evolution of information and telecommunication technologies suggests that the contemporary world "is nothing but a scene of endless displacement" (1997, xiii). But while there might be agreement that place matters precisely because of displacement (or unplacement), what constitutes "place" and "displacement" is a lot harder to pinpoint across disciplinary boundaries. Janz helpfully splits

the range of approaches to place into four categories: "Phenomenological and Hermeneutical," "Symbolic and Structural," "Social Constructivist and Marxian," and "Psychological and Determinist" (2005, 90–91). As he points out, these various approaches to place often exist in a "productive tension" with one another:

> A phenomenologist may well assume that the meaning of place lies in what our places bring out of us, while a symbolic thinker may assume that the meaning is coded in the intersubjectively available aspects of place. A social constructivist may (though not necessarily) be inclined to regard place as a potentially obfuscating concept and thus in need of deconstruction, while others may see it as giving light to something fundamentally true or meaningful about human experience.
>
> (91)

There is a sense, then, that the concept of place is itself displaced between disciplines and approaches. But what these studies share is a commitment to place as *meaningful*, whether this meaning is ontological, social, symbolic, or otherwise.

The popularity of place as a trans-disciplinary concept is partly motivated by the desire to transcend the association of place with location. In his Heideggerian analysis of place, Jeff Malpas suggests that we shift away from "the simplistic notion of place as mere 'location' (the notion of place that is at work in the use of a map or in the giving of an address)" and instead consider "place as that wherein things appear or come to presence." Consequently, "place has the character of both openness and opening—the latter being 'respectively' the most fundamental modes of the spatial and the temporal" (2016, 6).[3] Earlier studies of place tended to stem this spatial and temporal openness. Yi-Fu Tuan argued for instance, "if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place" (1977, 6). In a similar vein, Michel de Certeau asserted that "place (*lieu*) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (*place*). … A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability" (1984, 117). There are obvious issues with this spatially and temporally static notion of place—not least because it contradicts the durational reality of the lived body—as it reduces the socio-spatial experience of displacement to that of spatial dislocation (Davidson 2009). This has significant political and social implications. "The more clearly the world is ordered into discrete places," writes geographer Tim Cresswell, "the

more people and things that exist outside of these places are likely to be labeled as disorder—as out of place. The production of order is simultaneously the production of disorder and deviance" (2009, 8). Consequently, rigid notions of places as locations have the potential to align with exclusionary and discriminatory biopolitical modes of social control. Agier observes this phenomenon in his work at refugee camps as does Lisa Guenther in her work on prisons (2013)—both are places that "turn their occupants into permanent deviants, abnormals who are kept at a distance" (Agier 2011, 182).

While the idea of place as "openness and opening" allows for a more fluent and accessible notion of place, it is a *conditional* openness that depends on a stable notion of what constitutes subjectivity and a human body. That is, it requires an embodied subject that initially belongs to a recognizable place. In his book *The Memory of Place* (2012), Dylan Trigg suggests that "being-in-the-world means being *placed*. At all times, we find ourselves located in a particular place, specific to the bodily subject experiencing that place. We are forever in the *here*, and it is from that *here* that our experiences take place" (2012, 4; emphasis in original). But we might ask, who is this "we"?[4] Does this include refugees and the forcibly displaced?

The paradoxical nature of place rests on a simple premise: in order to move seamlessly within and between places, one must possess a secure—primarily legal and economic—connection to a place. Without this secure connection, being-in-the-world means being *displaced*. There lies a potential problem, therefore, at the heart of the phenomenology of place. Most notably, it depends on a Westernized and, to a certain degree, privileged understanding of the relationship between place and subjectivity.[5] While Heidegger asserted that "'place' places man in such a way that it reveals the external bonds of his existence and at the same time the depths of his freedom and reality," place (or lack of) can also be the very mechanism that denies freedom and reality (1958, 19). Thus, there is a wider issue at stake with place as a philosophical concept—that is, the bifurcation of the world into two different places: "on the one hand, a clean, healthy and visible world; on the other, the world's residual 'remnants,' dark, diseased and invisible" (Agier 2011, 4). And as Merleau-Ponty showed us, the invisible is deeply enmeshed in the visible and vice versa (1968).

Refugees and displaced persons exist in the invisible world. Parekh suggests that "once a person becomes stateless and is rejected from the common world, phenomenologically if not legally, the forcibly displaced person remains in a state of abandonment" (2017, 92). This ontological status of abandonment, Agier observes, is "characterized by wandering and lasting destitution," which constitutes the experience of "*no longer being* in the world" (2008, 14–15; emphasis in original). Thus, when Trigg suggests that "over time … places define and structure our sense

of self, such that being dis-placed can have a dramatic consequence on our experience of who we are, and even leave us with a feeling of being homeless in the world," he presupposes that one is anchored in the world in the first place (2012, 1). Yet it would seem from testimonies that the displaced do not feel "homeless *in* the world"; rather, they exist *outside* the world, "condemn[ed] … to a position outside, as it were, of mankind as a whole" (Arendt 2003, 150). Parekh concludes, therefore, that "having been excluded from this realm of shared meaning, experience, and fabrication, stateless people have a kind of worldlessness, and are uprooted and rendered superfluous" (2017, 91).

Phenomenologists might reply to this issue by arguing that displacement is still a lived experience of place (Casey 1998, 24), and thus the identities of displaced persons are determined by their experiences of locations and environments as displacing. And of course they would be right. To be entirely displaced is an existential and spatial impossibility, and thus, displacement is not in a strict sense a phenomenological reality. Rather, it is a term used to denote an embodied experience of place that diverges from social and political norms. But this conclusion would not be of much comfort to those who experience displacement as a daily reality, a reality that is both created by the primordiality of place and somehow transcendent of this primordiality. It is important to remember in this context that place itself is a construct—what Judith Butler might call a "frame" (2009, 6–12)—that works to define the socially-accepted phenomenal sphere, both to augment and limit what can be experienced and by whom. What we need, therefore, is a phenomenology of place that is cognizant of its own limitations—that is, a phenomenology that is aware that place by no means provides a settled ontology. This is what I mean by a *critical* phenomenology of displacement.

The phenomenology of place might have overlooked displacement to date, but phenomenology, more than any other philosophical tradition, also provides the theoretical tools to examine what it means to be displaced. I agree with both Parekh and Agier that displacement pushes the refugee or displaced person into a liminal phenomenal sphere. But as Deng's experience in *What is the What* exemplifies, this liminal sphere is still punctuated by embodied and perceptual phenomena that can tell us something about the limitations of place as an ontological ground zero. The point of a critical phenomenology of displacement is not to think about how we incorporate the displaced into contemporary understandings of place (which is the dominant logic of current refugee policies). Rather, it is to consider how we might adjust the notion of place to account for displacement—we must, that is, *displace* place. This seems to me like the most productive philosophical avenue in a world where less than one percent of displaced persons are granted refuge annually (UN Figures).

One way to perform a critical phenomenology of displacement is to compare the role of the body in experiences of place and displacement.

Like citizens who are constituted by their embodied experience of places, refugees and displaced persons are constituted by their exclusion. Where citizens *live* in places, refugees *merely exist* outside places—"they no longer have a social or political existence apart from their biological one" (Agier 2008, 49). Being reduced to pure biological existence transforms what it means to be a lived body, which has significant implications for phenomenological considerations of place. For Casey, "*lived bodies belong to places* and help to constitute them" (1998, 24; emphasis in original). Likewise, Trigg posits that "to have a body means being in place; likewise, to be in place means having a body" (2017a, 125). But what about those bodies that are living but do not necessarily *belong* to places? Can we even say that they are "lived" bodies in the phenomenological sense?

* * *

> I don't live anywhere, and you should learn from this. Why do you think I'm alive boy? I'm alive because no one knows I'm here. I live because I do not exist.
>
> (204)

* * *

From the Lived to the *Merely Existing* Body

In his book *Humanitarian Reason* (2012), Didier Fassin notes that for asylum seekers attempting to enter France, their bodies, rather than their voices, have become the primary source of evidence for their experience of displacement. However, it is not the lived body as Casey imagines it, but the *objectified* body, which is examined by a medical practitioner for traces of hardship, persecution, and even torture (110–111). For Fassin, "the body, no longer the principal site at which the strength of power is manifested, has become the site where the truth of individuals is tested. For both the poor who must exhibit the stigmata of poverty in order to receive public aid or private charity, and the immigrants who must demonstrate their sickness or suffering in order to obtain a residence permit … the body has become that which bears witness to the truth" (113). In this sense, the asylum seeker is separated from his or her body as a lived entity and held accountable to judgments of others upon his or her physical being (Parekh 2017, 89). While for Casey the "body continually *takes me into place* … at once agent and vehicle, articulator and witness of being in place" (1993, 48), for the asylum seekers in Fassin's example, the body can be what denies them entry into place. Furthermore, while their bodies bear "witness of being in place," the original temporal and embodied act of witnessing

is irrelevant to their present plight. Their bodies are not *lived* in any meaningful sense of the word. Their bodies are rather prescribed to them, handed over to others, and reconstituted according to the judgments of others.

Butler's distinction between "apprehension" and "recognition" is a particularly useful framework for understanding the ontological status of this prescribed body. A human body can be *apprehended* as living, she suggests, but this does not necessarily mean it will be recognized as a life (2009, 4–5). Rather to be recognized as a life, this lived body "has to conform to certain conceptions of what life is, in order to become recognizable" (7). These "conceptions" are determined by a variety of political, social, and cultural norms, "which, in their reiteration, produce a shift in the terms through which subjects are recognized. These normative conditions for the production of the subject produce an historically contingent ontology, such that our very capacity to discern and name the 'being' of the subject is dependent on norms that facilitate that recognition" (3–4). We could suggest, for instance, that if being always emerges from or returns to place, then place is a norm through which we recognize certain subjects. Thus, those who exist outside places in a political and social sense are bound to suffer an existential crisis (like the one Deng recounts)—they are deemed *unrecognizable* through the normative frameworks that constitute subjectivity and humanity.

In the case of refugees and displaced persons, it is primarily the loss of citizenship that determines their ontological (and legal) status. As Parekh suggests, "once a person is stripped of her political persona and citizenship, she appears as an abstract human being who, precisely because of this abstraction, does not appear to be fully human" (2017, 86). The things that once denoted citizenship, which once underpinned and sustained one's right to be in a particular place, become superfluous. Reporting on the Rohingya refugees entering into Bangladesh from Myanmar, Hannah Beech notes that "their licences, diplomas and other paperwork mean nothing to officialdom. Besides, you cannot eat documents. Live chickens and bags of rice are more sustaining" (*New York Times*, 17 Sept. 2017). Documents only make sense in places (primarily nation-states) and thus lose all meaning outside of these contexts. This is a point that both Arendt and Agamben make with reference to human rights, which are intimately tied to nation-states. "Without a politically guaranteed public realm," Arendt proposes, "freedom lacks the worldly space to make its appearance" (1993, 149). Likewise, Agamben points out that in "the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man prove to be completely unprotected at the very moment it is no longer possible to characterize them as rights of the citizens of a state" (1995, 116). In other words, the "rights of man" are intimately dependent on a *place* of citizenship.[6]

The loss of citizenship also annihilates the capacity of refugees and displaced persons to act or speak in politically or socially meaningful ways—"the vulnerable, the wretched, and all other kinds of absolute victim, are not subjects of speech," Agier writes (2008, 103). Frantz Fanon makes a similar point when referring to the colonized: "living does not mean embodying a set of values, does not mean integrating oneself into the coherent, constructive development of a world. To live simply means not to die. To exist means staying alive" (2004, 232).[7] Those in refugee camps equally lose the capacity to contribute to the "constructive development of a world," and instead, staying alive is the only imaginable aspiration. As a spokeswoman for the International Red Cross recently remarked with reference to the refugee camps in northern Syria, "people don't care anymore about politics. What they wish for and what they hope for is—actually, the ones that we met recently, they want just to stay alive. Their only hope is to stay alive" (Sedky, 17 Aug. 2017). The witnessing of death in these camps continually shadows this hope, and therefore staying alive can manifest also as a radical fear of death. If "death" as Heidegger suggested, "is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of *Dasein*" (2010, 251), then perhaps living in a refugee camp is as close as one can get to realizing this impossibility.

The rights of refugees might have been firmly established under the United Nations convention in 1951, but this has not necessarily led to more generosity on the part of nation-states. Matthew J. Gibney charts the shifting status of the refugee over the course of the twentieth century and concludes that "to be a refugee, it seems, may be to have access to important rights, but woe betide those who arrive in Western states claiming to be a refugee" (2006, 141). In fact, the UN convention has led to "a situation where refugees are the responsibility of all states in general, but no state in particular" (ibid., 155). Refugees and displaced persons are not only forced from their homes, but also seemingly ostracized due to this fact: "Each displaced person, each refugee," Agier observes, "carries with them the experience of being undesirable and placeless. A lived experience of the original act of violent persecution, then the trials and complications of exodus, [and] resented by governments that refuse to register or assist populations displaced within their own country. Other governments … refuse to give them a national status as refugees, and try to negotiate their departure with international organizations" (2008, 28). Superfluity is thus the ontological consequence of refugee policies. This is most evident with the case of Said Imasi—a stateless asylum seeker who has been held without charge or trial in Australia since 2010 (Doherty, *Guardian*, 14 Jan. 2018). Imasi cannot prove where he was born—thus he cannot gain a passport—and when he appealed to Australian immigration officials to let him go back to Europe, they told him he had "no choices" because he "was not a citizen of any country" (ibid.) With no legal connection to place, Imasi

has no rights—he is locked up and continually surveilled. "Every day I am crushed, every day is another life sentence," he tells us, "and there is nothing I can do" (ibid.).

While humanitarian organizations play an important role in keeping refugees and displaced persons alive in camps or detention centers, they also operate as complex systems of biopolitical control that can reinforce the superfluousness and non-being of their inhabitants (Verdirame and Harell-Bond 2005). Agier argues that living in a camp "is an experience of living in the world while being maintained on the margins of the states, in a spatial, legal, and political in-between zone" (2016, 464). For him, a refugee camp is "no more than a euphemistic justification for controlling the undesirables," and humanitarian organizations have the "power over life (and to let live or survive) and death (to let die) over the individual that [they] view as absolute victim" (2011, 211; 196). The camp, or detention center, not only operates to control but also to *exclude* the "undesirables" from the meaningful places of the Western world (Agier 2016, 463–464). And in this exclusion lies the shoring up national and territorial boundaries that enable citizens to live with an existential attachment to place (Jones 2016).

Not only are refugees and displaced persons forcibly removed from the places that once enabled them to lead politically- and socially-engaged lives, they are often required to inhabit a subjectivity that disqualifies them from engaging productively in the political and social sphere. Namely, the role of the victim. Philip Marfleet points out that in camps, "refugees are allocated a subordinate role in which it is anticipated that they will accept the authority of the external forces and the 'charity script' in which they have been given non-speaking parts" (2006, 207).[8] This is not to say that refugees are literally voiceless and without the power to act—in fact, there are numerous examples to suggest otherwise, as Deng's experience in Kakuma illustrates.[9] Rather, it is to suggest that their speech or actions have no consequence on their living or ontological status. "The loss of the ability to act is such a fundamental loss not because it means that a person *can* no longer speak or act," Parekh notes, "but rather, they are no longer *judged* according to this but instead according to what is 'merely given' about their existence—the fact they are human beings in general" (2017, 94; emphasis in original). Like the asylum seekers in Fassin's example, refugees and the displaced are *prescribed subjects*, and as a result, "rather than being political *subjects*, they become *objects* of humanitarian aid, bodies to be cared for and protected" (ibid., 88; emphasis in original).

The reduction of the body from lived to merely existing presents problems for the phenomenology of place. If "lived bodies belong to places," then what do merely existing bodies belong to? And if a phenomenology of place depends on the lived body as the vehicle through which place can be experienced, is it even possible to construct a phenomenology of

displacement? Merleau-Ponty offers one way to answer these questions. The lived body is of course the cornerstone of his phenomenology—it is, after all, our "general medium for having a world" (2010, 169). But he is also aware that the body can be the very vehicle that denies a meaningful existence in the world:

> Our body does not always have meaning, and our thoughts, on the other hand—in timidity for example—do not always find a plenitude of their vital expression. In these cases of disintegration, the soul and the body are apparently distinct: and this is the truth of dualism. But the soul, if it possesses no means of expression—one should say rather, no means of actualizing itself—soon ceases to be *anything whatsoever* and in particular cases ceases to be the soul, as the thought of the aphasic weakens and becomes dissolved; the body which loses its meanings soon ceases to be a living body and falls back into a state of a physico-chemical mass; it arrives at non-meaning only by dying.
>
> (2008, 209; emphasis in original)

We can see that for Merleau-Ponty, the collapse of meaningful existence occurs through the "disintegration" of the body, where the body appears to turn against itself and precipitate a radical dualism at the heart of being-in-the-world. This disintegration has been applied to the experiences of solitary confinement (Guenther 2013), illness (Carel 2016), and anxiety (Trigg 2017a), but could as easily be attributed to the situation of refugees and displaced persons. In being denied a "means of expression" through the reduction of their bodies to mere biological existence, refugees and displaced persons are in danger of "ceas[ing] to be *anything whatsoever.*"

* * *

> The walk to Ethiopia, Julian, was only the beginning. Yes we had walked for months across deserts and wetlands, our ranks thinned daily. There was war all over southern Sudan but in Ethiopia, we were told, we would be safe and there would be food, dry beds, school. I admit that on the way, I allowed my imagination to flower. As we drew closer to the border, my expectations had come to include homes for each of us, new families, tall buildings, glass, waterfalls, bowls of bright oranges set upon clear tables.
>
> But when we reached Ethiopia, it was not that place.
> —We are here, Dut said.
> —This is not that place, I said.
> —This is Ethiopia, Dut said.

> It looked the same. There were no buildings, no glass. There were no bowls of oranges set upon clear glass tables. There was nothing. There was a river and little else.
> —This is not that place, I said again, and I said it many times over the coming days. The other boys tired of me. Some thought I had lost my mind.
>
> (256)

* * *

“A Present That Never Ends”

What is it like to arrive in a place that is not a place? What is it like to be forced from one’s home, from one’s placement in the world, and to travel alone or in a group for weeks, months, or even years, and arrive at an unknown location, one that can only have existed in the imagination until it is actually inhabited, and somewhere that, to all intents and purposes, is nowhere? Drawing on his experiences of various refugee camps, Agier depicts the characteristic experience of a new arrival:

> The typical displaced person arrives in the camp (a generic term that also includes refugee camps, makeshift settlements, and possibly reception centers or accommodation facilities for migrants) after having experienced many losses: a complete or partial loss of place, belongings, and links. Even if at a given time that person “chose” to leave due to whatever constraint (be it political, ecological, economic, or social), these losses are the main mark of his/her dis-identification (a term that refers to the complaint relating to the “loss of identity”). Furthermore, all displaced people end up in one way or another separated from, abandoned, or even rejected by the state that was supposed to protect and represent them. The camp is the place of the stateless, an “out-place” (*hors-lieu*) established in a zone between the jurisdictions, territories, and societies of the country or countries whose territory on which it stands, or to which it is adjacent. In camps that act as a border, the displaced only exceptionally come in groups; they are *individuals* who find themselves in a camp and try to recognize each other, get closer to one another and form at most a community of survival or a community of shared existence.
>
> (2016, 463)

Deng’s description of his arrival in Ethiopia rings true with Agier’s observations. Ethiopia is not the utopia he imagined but rather an aporetic repetition of the same. What emerges eventually is a makeshift community, one that is precarious, ever-changing, and dependent on external resources.

For other displaced persons, their arrival in a camp or detention center does not transform or even mildly placate their displacement, even if they are fleeing from violent persecution. A Rohingya refugee who arrived in a Bangladeshi refugee camp told Beech: “Now we are supposed to be safe in Bangladesh, but I do not feel safe” (*New York Times*, 2 Sept. 2017).

In attempting to understand the complexity of refugee camps, detention centers, or other locations in which displaced persons end up, it is important to distinguish between “out-places” and “non-places” (Relph 1976; Trigg 2012, 2017b). The latter are “those areas which have no personal or cultural meaning, but that we frequent, pass through, or spend long periods of time in as part of modern existence” (Aucoin 2017, 397). These include airports, supermarkets, hotel lobbies, and as is increasingly the case now, virtual places. Some scholars have referred to refugee camps and detention centers as “non-places” (Augé 1995; Sharma 2009; Dörfler and Rothfuß 2017), but there is a fundamental problem with this association. While airports, supermarkets, or hotels might be transient places, they are still *in* the world. In fact, they are extremely important to the functionality of the globalized world. This also means that a non-place is aimed towards some kind of future place, one in which the transiency of the non-place eventually abates. But an “out-place,” as Agier calls it, is an extra-territorial space that is outside of place, and therefore outside of the productive functionality of the world. In *What is the What*, for instance, Deng describes Kakuma as “a kind of vacuum created in the absence of any nation” (446). As vacuums, refugee camps and detention centers are, in many ways, external to linear or lived time. The phenomenological experience of these out-places manifests in a continuous state of waiting, but it is a waiting not aimed at anything or anywhere in particular—it is, to quote Agier, “a brutal entry into a state of liminal floating” (2008, 30).[10] As one Nepalese refugee reflects on his time in a camp, “I had no hopes for the future, no dreams for the destiny and I was aimless” (Tamang 2014, n. pag). It is this aimlessness that differentiates out-places from non-places in a phenomenological sense.[11]

The body plays a central role in orientating the subject towards a future. For Merleau-Ponty, the body “unites present, past, and future, it secretes time, or rather it becomes that location in nature where, for the first time, events, instead of pushing each other into the realm of being, project round the present a double horizon of past and future and acquire a historical orientation” (2010, 278–279). In doing so, the body “takes possession of time; it brings into existence a past and a future for a present; it is not a thing, but creates time instead of submitting to it” (ibid., 279). In order to create time, the body generates what he calls an “intentional arc,” which “projects round about us our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation, or rather which results in our being situated in all these respects.

It is this intentional arc which brings about the unity of the senses, of intelligence, of sensibility and motility" (ibid., 157). By anchoring us in space and time, the body, in its physicality, carries our immediate affective and historical behavioral past, which enables us to move towards the temporal horizon of the future. The present, therefore, must be conceived as a perpetual liminality, which "is supported by a future larger than any future. To consider the organism in a given minute, we observe that there is the future in every present, because its present is in a state of imbalance" (Merleau-Ponty 2003, 15). Yet as refugee testimonies illustrate, the present is not in a state of imbalance, nor is there an intentional arc directed towards the future. The daily struggle to survive grounds the body of the refugee or displaced person in an interminable present and the future ceases to exist as an imagined or even embodied possibility, but rather only as the repetition of the present. Merleau-Ponty observes a similar phenomenon with psychic illnesses, where "the move towards the future, towards the living present or towards the past, the power of learning, of maturing, of entering into communication with others, have become, as it were, arrested in a bodily symptom, existence is tied up and the body has become 'the place where life hides away'" (2010, 190). We might also say that refugee camps or detention centers are places "where life hides away," because the intentional arcs of their inhabitants have been "arrested in a bodily symptom"—that is, a body that is aimless.

Merleau-Ponty lays the ground for a phenomenology of displacement in *Phenomenology of Perception*. He writes that "if the world is atomized or dislocated, this is because one's own body has ceased to be a knowing body, and has ceased to draw together all objects in its one grip; and this debasement of the body into an organism must itself be attributed to the collapse of time, which no longer rises towards a future but falls back on itself" (2010, 329). For him, displacement is as much a temporal phenomenon as it is spatial. As time "falls back on itself" and manifests in an endless present, space is flattened out and place becomes indistinguishable from smooth space. In this sense, time is what gives space its depth, but only if this temporality is inhabited by a lived body. It is the lack of spatial depth, brought about by the collapse of time, which denies refugees and displaced persons from truly "inhabiting" place in any meaningful way. This is precisely why Deng can say of Kakuma "the place was not a place."

* * *

> One hour south would be Kakuma, sparsely populated by Kenyan herders known as the Turkana, but within a year there would be forty thousand Sudanese refugees there, too, and that would become

> our home for one year, for two, then five and ten. Ten years in a place in which no one, simply no one but the most desperate, would ever consider spending a day.
>
> (363)

* * *

Conclusion: Recovering the Lived Body

In her study of solitary confinement, Guenther suggests that "the body is the hinge of our being, the place where we are open to the world, and for that very reason it can be exploited and turned against us; but for the same reason, it is also a place where we can return to ourselves and rearticulate our bodily intimacy, recovering to whatever extent possible the phenomenological and ontological conditions of intercorporeal depth" (2013, 191). How do we recover the lived bodies of refugees and displaced persons? How do we return them to themselves? And how might phenomenology be useful in this endeavor? To answer the last question requires us to think critically about the phenomenology of place. We must admit that the notion of place conceals within itself an exclusionary dimension—that is, it depends as much upon what it excludes as it does upon what it includes. Also, we must acknowledge that the ontological and human status of refugees and displaced persons is ambivalent, and operates somewhere below the level of those who belong to place. We could say, presently, that the philosophical notion of place is not doing its job. Or rather, more precisely, it ought to do its job better. Rather than trying to adapt the identity of the refugee to established notions of political, social, and even national subjectivity (which are dependent on belonging to place), the ambiguous ontological status of the refugee represents an opportunity to bring into question the very normative reproductions of subjectivity that alienate the refugee or displaced person in the first place.

If we think of displacement simply as a lack of being placed, then we might think that the only solution to this predicament is the incorporation of the displaced into established places. The focus of contemporary refugee policies, for instance, is primarily on quotas, which are controlled largely by nation-states.[12] But as I noted earlier, the pitiful number of refugees who are granted asylum in nation-states illustrates that placing the entirety of the displaced is not a realistic possibility. Furthermore, housing displaced persons in new places does not so much solve the trauma of displacement, but merely relocates this trauma to a new environment. "Refugee policy," Parekh proposes, "ought to be concerned with addressing the ontological deprivation of statelessness, and not merely the political harm of a loss of citizenship" (2017, 83). What we need, therefore, is a deeper understanding of this "ontological

deprivation." That is, we need to acknowledge that displacement does not only situate refugees or displaced persons outside of place, but outside of themselves, humanity, and the world itself—they lose "the *ground* from which one can engage meaningfully with others and with the world that is shared in common" (ibid., 91; emphasis in original). Phenomenology offers us one means to explore this "ontological deprivation." Like being-in-place, being displaced is an embodied experience that occurs in the here and now, despite the uncertainty of this here and now. And while the living status of the displaced body might also be ambivalent, it is by adequately attending to the embodied experience of displacement that we can start to return the living body to its *lived* status. This to me seems like the least that phenomenology can do.

Notes

1 For details of the collaboration process, see *Guardian* article by Eggers (May 26, 2007) and VAD Foundation interview with Deng and Eggers (accessed Sept. 9, 2017).

2 Deng has since returned to the newly established Republic of South Sudan to take up the role as Education Minister in the northern state of Bahr el-Ghazal.

3 It is not possible to do justice to the entirety of Malpas's work on place here, which stems from his reading of Heideggerian phenomenology, particularly Heidegger's later works that develop a "topography" or "topology" as an ontological method. For a comprehensive overview of Malpas's work on place, see Paloma Puente-Lozano, "Jeff Malpas: From Hermeneutics and to Topology" in Janz (2017), 301–316.

4 The use of "we" as a personal pronoun is not limited to Trigg's work, but is rife throughout the phenomenology of place.

5 In defense of the claim that place is potentially exclusionary, Malpas argues that "an exclusionary politics presupposes the idea of that from which 'others' are excluded, but this does not establish that place is an intrinsically reactionary or exclusionary idea, only that it may be employed to reactionary or exclusionary ends—and this would seem to be true of just about any important concept one may care to name" (20). He writes later in the same book, "simply to reject place because of its use by reactionary politics is actually to run the risk of failing to understand why and how place is important, and so of failing to understand how the notion can, and does, serve a range of political ends" (27). See *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

6 In *The Ethics of Immigration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), Joseph Carens considers some practical solutions to this dilemma, which revolve around "breaking the link between claim and place." Doing so, he proposes, would mean that the incentive to claim asylum would not simply be motivated by economic reasons, as there would be no guarantee that one's economic situation would be better off in the place where one is eventually granted asylum (216–217).

7 Lisa Guenther observes a similar phenomenon with prisoners in supermax prisons in the US: "On the one hand, their bodies still live, eat and defecate, wake and sleep (often with difficulty). On the other hand, a meaningful sense of living embodiment has for the most part drained from their lives" (2013, 165).

8 In a similar vein, Agier observes that in Somalian refugee camps in the east of Kenya the humanitarian status of the refugees as victims "implies the social and political non-existence of the beneficiaries of aid" (2011, 133).
9 Marfleet points out that refugees often resist the role of the victim, "especially at times when regulations are being enforced most insistently, as during food distribution or when a camp census is under way," which can lead to skirmishes and riots (2006, 207–208). See also, Clara Lecadet, "Refugee Politics: Self-Organised 'Government' and Protests in the Agamé Refugee Camp (2005–13)." *Journal of Refugee Studies* (2016) 29 (2): 187–207.
10 Guenther suggests that "waiting to do nothing … is an overwhelming feature of prison temporality, even beyond the most obvious occasion for waiting: for eventual release from prison" (2013, 196).
11 There are occasions, however, when the transience of refugee camps is embraced and defended by its inhabitants, as Michael Kimmelman has noted with Palestinian refugees on the west bank. As these camps become more urbanized and architecturally developed, the Palestinian inhabitants fear losing their status as refugees or stateless people, which is marker of their political subjectivities. "Refugees Reshape Their Camp, at the Risk of Feeling at Home." *New York Times*, 6 Sept. 2014. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/07/world/middleeast/refugees-reshape-their-camp-at-the-risk-of-feeling-at-home.html?mcubz=0
12 For a detailed introduction to the different "measures of exclusion" used by Western states, see Gibney (2006), or for more on the rights of refugees see James Hathaway's *The Rights of Refugees Under International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) and Katarzyna Grabska and Lyla Mehta (eds.), *Forced Displacement: Why Rights Matter* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). In their understanding of humanitarian aid as "Janus-faced," Verdirame and Harrell-Bond also suggest that "UNHCR continued to support the encampment policy because of its perceived attraction to donors" (2005, 17).

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