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Ambiguous arrival: Emotions and dislocations in the migrant encounter with Sweden

Helena Wulff

Sweden is relatively new as an immigration country, and there used to be a claim to an ethos of ethnic inclusivity, in policy as well as in informal interaction. With the growth of immigration in the post-Second World War period, however, migrants' experiences of exclusion became more noticeable in society at large. The 1960s saw a peak of migrants arriving on labour recruitment schemes mainly from Italy, Greece, former Yugoslavia and Turkey, as well as Finland. This was followed by war refugees in the 1980s from Iran and Iraq, and in the 1990s from the Balkans. In 2015, when the migration crisis erupted in Europe, more than 160,000 refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and North Africa arrived in Sweden during the course of a couple of months.¹ The migration infrastructure collapsed, as it was not prepared to process this huge number of asylum seekers in such a short period of time.² One response to this sudden impact of refugees in Sweden was a growing anti-immigration attitude. This was in line with the agenda of an expanding right-wing party, the Sweden Democrats.

Exclusion, even prejudice and racism, are recurrent topics in fiction and autobiography by a young generation of writers who migrated to Sweden as children.³ In their fiction they all share a concern with *migrant experiences* that expose cruel conditions, yet often in tandem with instances of integration as a matter of course in residential areas, at places of work, among friends and in

¹ See <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/population/>. In 2019, just over 2 million of the 10 million+ population in Sweden were born abroad, www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/sverige-i-siffror/manniskorna-i-sverige/utrikes-fodda/.

² Bruno Meeus, Karel Arnaut and Bas van Heur, eds., *Arrival Infrastructures: Migration and Urban Social Mobilities* (New York: Palgrave, 2019).

³ Elsewhere the study incorporates writers who were born in Sweden to parents who have migrated there. See for instance, Helena Wulff, 'Writing Truth to Power: Jonas Hassen Khemiri's Work in Stockholm and New York', *Anthropology & Humanism* 44, no.1 (2019): 7–19.

marriages. While their location is Sweden, this can be a contested space for them which is why the notion of *dislocation* is more appropriate in their case than location, as their orientation is also towards their country of origin.

My literary anthropological study of migrant writing in Sweden includes three autobiographical stories of arrival in Sweden that I will explore in this chapter in terms of emotions, dislocations and the migrant encounter along a time axis.⁴ This will reveal how the stories register the writers' changing emotional orientations to their locations, not only to Sweden, but also to their countries of origin over time. It follows Patrick Colm Hogan's observation that: 'The centrality of emotions to literature and literary experience has been recognized throughout literary history and across literary traditions.'⁵ In relation to the remit of this volume, and the idea of location as claimed by cosmopolitan and vernacular strategies, this chapter, again, reveals rather a sense of dislocation. Still, cosmopolitan and vernacular processes are at stake. As to the vernacular, written in Swedish originally (and not always available in translation), migrant writing and literature in Sweden is a form of vernacular literature. It should be pointed out that those writers who have native languages other than Swedish occasionally include a term from this language for non-Swedish food or an expression signalling a significant circumstance. It goes without saying that immigrant background is indicated with the use of, for instance, Persian or Arabic first names of characters in the stories. Jonas Hassen Khemiri (who was born in Sweden to a father from Tunisia and a Swedish mother) even invented a Swedish immigrant dialect identified as 'jubilantly rhythmic and consciously accented Swedish' in his iconic debut novel *One Eye Red* (*Ett öga rött*).^{6, 7} The exceptional success of this book – especially among young Swedes from migrant backgrounds, but also among native Swedes – provided its successful entry into the Swedish literary world as a vernacular product. In addition, its story about young people in immigrant suburbs of Stockholm is an example of how the work of these writers is *cosmopolitanizing Sweden from within*.⁸ The point is that

⁴ See also Wulff, 'Writing Truth to Power'. Helena Wulff, 'Diasporic Divides: Location and Orientations of "Home" in Pooneh Rohi's *Araben*', in *World Literatures: Exploring the Cosmopolitan-Vernacular Exchange*, eds. Stefan Helgesson, Annika Mörté Alling, Yvonne Lindqvist and Helena Wulff (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2018), 119–28. Helena Wulff, 'Diversifying from Within: Diaspora Writings in Sweden', in *The Composition of Anthropology: How Anthropological Texts are Written*, eds. Morten Nielsen and Nigel Rapport (London: Routledge, 2018), 122–36.

⁵ Patrick Colm Hogan, *Literature and Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 1.

⁶ All translations of titles and quotes from literary texts and interviews into English are mine.

⁷ Jonas Hassen Khemiri, *Ett öga rött* (*One Eye Red*) (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2003), www.khemiri.se/en/books/one-eye-red-ett-oga-rott/.

⁸ Wulff, 'Diasporic Divides'; 'Diversifying from Within'.

Khemiri brings the world to his Swedish readership through the experiences of his characters who have come from afar, or whose parents did. This is one part of the idea of a new world literature that Stefan Helgesson and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen make the case for 'because our current historical moment, shaped by migration, digital media and forms of uneven economic globalization, has accelerated the cross-border traffic of (some) literature, genres, writers.'⁹

Before considering the three autobiographical stories on arrival in analytical detail, some contextualization is required. Literature has been one source of cultural knowledge in anthropology to some degree since its inception in the late nineteenth century. With a gradual growth, especially in the last decades, this approach is now established and referred to as literary anthropology. It can be applied in three ways: by referring to literary texts as ethnography, by writing in a literary style and by studying literary culture and production.¹⁰ In *Rhythms of Writing: An Anthropology of Irish Literature*, I combine the use of literary text as ethnography with the study of literary culture and production as I investigate writing in Ireland as craft and career.¹¹ This combination has also been the methodological procedure in my study of migrant writing in Sweden. As traditional anthropological participant observation does not suffice for this, I have done some participant observation at public events such as literary festivals and book launches, as well as panel discussions and readings by the writers. This is 'interface ethnography', a concept that Sherry Ortner coined for her study of independent filmmakers in Hollywood, as 'most closed communities have events where they interact with the public'.¹² In my study, interviews with writers and close readings of their literary texts as well as media and internet appearances were also crucial. Another methodological feature of this study is that it is a part of the relatively recent tendency in anthropology to research people who in some sense are included in the ethnographer's community of intellectuals.¹³ While some of the works of migrant writers are translated into other languages, primarily English which entails a certain international reputation, other writers are mostly known in Sweden only. Researching them all thus entails

⁹ Stefan Helgesson and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, 'Introduction: Why World Literature?', in *Literature and the World* (London: Routledge, 2020), 1–23.

¹⁰ Ellen Wiles, 'Three Branches of Literary Anthropology: Sources, Styles, Subject Matter', *Ethnography* 21, no. 2 (2020): 280–95.

¹¹ Helena Wulff, *Rhythms of Writing: An Anthropology of Irish Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

¹² Sherry Ortner, *Not Hollywood: Independent Film at the Twilight of the American Dream* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

¹³ Douglas R. Holmes and George E. Marcus, 'Cultures of Expertise and the Management of Globalization: Toward the Re-Functioning of Ethnography', in *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, eds. Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 235–52.

‘studying sideways’, as identified by Ulf Hannerz in his investigations into the work of foreign correspondents.¹⁴ Literary scholarship on migrant literature in Sweden also forms a backdrop to my study.¹⁵

But why this interest in arrival? Apart from being poetic statements of political conflict, what is the analytical significance of this topic for an anthropologist looking at literature? When I started interviewing the writers, I never asked about their arrivals, but they told me at great length about those momentous moments anyway, and when I read their autobiographical accounts, I was struck by the strength of these stories. These real-life dramas that could have gone so very wrong (and, of course, keep going very wrong for masses of people) have stayed with me. Thinking about how to organize my research material – novels and short fiction, interviews, observations – into writing, V. S. Naipaul’s acclaimed title *The Enigma of Arrival* occurred to me.¹⁶ Naipaul’s title was inspired by the painting *The Enigma of the Arrival and the Afternoon* from 1912, by the surrealist painter Giorgio de Chirico, which is on the front cover of the first editions of his book.¹⁷ This is an autobiography of a writer’s journey from Trinidad, then a British colony, to the countryside of England (among other places), and his changing state of mind over the course of twenty years. At one point he finds a book with a picture of de Chirico’s painting. This triggers an idea for a story about arrival as a ‘scene of desolation and mystery: it speaks of the mystery of arrival’.¹⁸ The story – which is a story-in-the-story of the book – would have a narrator who arrives at this ‘port with the walls and gateways like cutouts’ and:

He would walk past that muffled figure on that quayside. He would move from that silence and desolation, that blankness, to a gateway or door. He would enter there and be swallowed by the life and noise of a crowded city ... The mission he had come on – family business, study, religious initiation – would give him encounters and adventures. He would enter interiors, of houses and temples. Gradually there would come to him a feeling that he was getting nowhere; he would lose his sense of mission; he would begin to know only that he was lost.

¹⁴ Ulf Hannerz, *Foreign News: Exploring the World of Foreign Correspondents* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ See for instance, Satu Gröndahl, ‘Identity Politics and the Construction of Minor Literatures: Multicultural Swedish Literature at the Turn of the Millenium’, *multiethnica* 30 (2007): 21–9; Magnus Nilsson, ‘Swedish “Immigrant Literature” and the Construction of Ethnicity’, *Tijdschrift voor Skandinavistiek* 31, no.1 (2010): 199–218; Evelina Stenbeck, *Poesi som politik: aktivistisk poetik hos Johannes Anyuru och Athena Farroukhzad* (Lund: Ellerström, 2017).

¹⁶ V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).

¹⁷ In *The Enigma of Arrival*, Naipaul, mentions that it was the poet Guillaume Apollinaire who suggested the title of the painting.

¹⁸ Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, 98–9.

The narrator in Naipaul's imagined story turns back to the quayside, finds the door and thinks with relief that he is saved, but then 'one thing is missing now. Above the cutout walls and building there is no mast, no sail'. The ship is gone. 'The traveller has lived out his life.' This lack of connection and how it lingers on, is what Naipaul grapples with in the book. Writing about his own arrival in Sweden from Southern Africa as a boy, Stefan Helgesson is told that because of family links, this place which seemed foreign to him is in fact his country. This is why he finds a familiarity in Naipaul's depiction of how arrival in a new place 'creates a silence which is mysterious'.¹⁹

Having your heart in two places

With Naipaul's insights in mind, I now go back to the three autobiographical arrival stories in my study. It is important that they represent different types of migration streams to Sweden over time, from the 1960s labour recruitment scheme to the war refugees in the 1990s and the twenty-first century. The stories reveal the same idea about Sweden as a safe country with opportunities for work and political freedom. They also reveal an acute sense of dislocation. Firstly, there is the autobiographical novel *Foreigners (Utlänningar)* by Theodor Kallifatides who came from unemployment and political oppression in Greece in the early 1960s, as a part of a scheme to recruit labourers to Sweden.²⁰ An acclaimed writer for a long time, Kallifatides is also well known outside the literary world in Sweden: his humble and pleasant ways and storytelling skills work very well in public presentations, whether he performs live on literary panels or is interviewed on television. Secondly, I will discuss two memoirs, both debut books: *The Rain Has No Smell Here: A Family Portrait (Regnet luktar inte här: Ett familjeporträtt)* by Duraïd Al-Khamisi, and the short booklet titled *The Angel and the Sparrow: Texts by an Unaccompanied Youth on The Run (Ängeln och sparven: Texter av en ensam ungdom på flykt)* by Ali Zardadi.²¹ Al-Khamisi had to flee from war in Baghdad with his family in 1994. Zardadi came to Sweden from Afghanistan in 2016 as an unaccompanied teenager. By coincidence, all three writers are men,

¹⁹ Stefan Helgesson, *Efter västerlandet: Texter om kulturell förändring* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 2004), 11.

²⁰ Theodor Kallifatides, *Utlänningar* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1973).

²¹ Duraïd Al-Khamisi, *Regnet luktar inte här: Ett familjeporträtt* (Stockholm: Atlas, 2015); Ali Zardadi, *Ängeln och sparven: Texter av en ensam ungdom på flykt* (Gothenburg: Catoblepas förlag, 2017).

as are the writers who make up the comparative cases I use here, except a short section on Pooneh Rohi's work.²² I should make clear that women writers are the main protagonists elsewhere in my study. None of these three books have been translated into English.

Recalling his arrival in Sweden from Greece several decades ago, Theodor Kallifatides, the pioneering and prominent migrant writer now in his early 80s, told me in an interview:²³

You have not really arrived until you are rid of memories from home. As long as memories from home are still a part of everyday life you have not arrived. For me, it took twelve years. It happened when my first child was born.²⁴

So not only does a migrant arrival go on for a long time, perhaps forever, emotionally and culturally, it is also morphing into different meanings and phases over time. This can be considered in terms of *multiple arrivals* to a new country, both physically and mentally. Eventually, the political situation in Greece changed, which made it possible for Kallifatides to visit there as he pleases, and then return to Sweden.

In his novel *Foreigners*, Kallifatides has his protagonist describe the very moment of his first arrival²⁵:

Stockholm, June 1964, in the evening. I got off the train slightly confused, tired and worried. It was the first time I arrived somewhere without one single person waiting for me. The Central Station was probably just like many of the other stations I had passed by on my journey, but it still felt different. Here I was going to stay, the Central Station was not a station, it was the end of the journey, and this transformed the station into something secretive and frightening.

Echoing Naipaul's mood above, Kallifatides thus describes how the awareness that he was going to stay 'transformed the station into something secretive and frightening.'²⁶ There was no passport control at the Stockholm Central Station

²² Wulff, 'Diasporic Divides'.

²³ The interview was conducted in Stockholm on 29 May 2018.

²⁴ 'Du är inte framme i någon egentlig mening förrän du är av med minnen hemifrån. Så länge minnena är kvar i vardagen har du inte anlänt. För mig tog det tolv år. Det var när mitt första barn föddes.'

²⁵ Kallifatides, *Utlänningar*, 14: 'Stockholm, juni 1964, på kvällen. Jag steg av tåget lite omtöcknad, trött och orolig. Det var första gången jag kom någonstans utan en enda människa som väntade på mig. Centralen var förmodligen som många av de andra stationerna jag hade passerat på vägen men det kändes ändå annorlunda. Här skulle jag stanna, Centralen var inte en station, den var slutet på resan och detta förvandlade stationen till något hemlighetsfullt och skrämmande.'

²⁶ Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, 99. Kallifatides, *Utlänningar*, 14: 'förvandlade stationen till något hemlighetsfullt och skrämmande.'

when Kallifatides got off the train that June evening in 1964. He had already crossed the national border with Denmark, that was open at the time, many hours earlier, as it is located about 600 kilometres south of Stockholm.

Born in 1938 in a village in Greece, Theodor Kallifatides did well at school.²⁷ He graduated from high school with excellent grades. As expected, he performed outstandingly at the university entrance exam in Athens. Nevertheless, he was rejected on the grounds that his father had been in prison because he was a communist. Denied the university studies he desired, Kallifatides tried to find any kind of job, but failed. He found himself bereft of all opportunities. What to do? Unemployment was widespread in Athens. One afternoon, at the height of political unrest in the early 1960s, Kallifatides and his friends were chased by the police. He took refuge in a cinema where he found himself watching the film *The Virgin Spring* by the Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman. Kallifatides was enthralled by the sound of the Swedish language, identifying it as 'this sparse language', and started to learn Swedish from a Linguaphone record. Incidentally, a friend who was also listening to the Linguaphone records, said: 'This is a language for writing stories!' Kallifatides had made up his mind. Even though he knew next to nothing about Sweden, it was the only country in Europe that was still open to labour migration. He was going to emigrate there. As he said: 'I knew I had to leave my country in order to get a life.' But his sombre advice is: 'Don't do it – until you know that there is no other solution!' His father gave him all his savings, equivalent to 60 euro, and he got on a train to Sweden.

Just like the protagonist in the novel *Foreigners*, Kallifatides' first job was at a restaurant in Stockholm where he became a dishwasher. Later he worked as a newspaper boy, while reading novels by the Swedish author August Strindberg in order to improve his Swedish. One early autumn he brought his high school diploma to the students' entrance office at Stockholm University. The middle-aged lady behind the desk looked bewildered at the diploma and exclaimed: 'But this is pure Greek!' Kallifatides nodded nervously. Then the lady scrutinized him carefully, and demanded: 'Be honest, are these good grades?' Kallifatides was pleased to confirm that they were indeed very good grades. 'Okay', the lady said: 'You can start studying at the University!' Overwhelmed by happiness, Kallifatides studied philosophy, completed a BA and took a job as a schoolteacher.

²⁷ This paragraph is composed of extracts from 'Sommar', a programme broadcast on Swedish Radio, 11 July 2013, with the 2018 interview mentioned above, and Theodor Kallifatides, *Ett nytt land utanför mitt fönster (A new country outside my window)* (Stockholm: Bonnier Pocket, 2017), 69–70.

Meanwhile, he was writing poems about the predicament of 'having your heart in two places'. He sent them to Bonniers, the leading publishing house in Stockholm. After a couple of days he received a letter from the editor saying: 'Come and see us soon! To sign the contract!' The editor had found the poems to be of the highest literary quality. They were published as *The Memory in Exile* (*Minnet i exil*) and were very well received.²⁸ Kallifatides went on to write novels about migrants in Sweden, the history of Greece, and the essence of love, as well as some crime fiction and travel stories, mostly as he got older, including the one about his own journey to Stockholm in 1964, and his first years there.

The autobiographical perspective is even more pronounced in Duraid Al-Khamisi's *The Rain Has No Smell Here*.²⁹ The year is 1994, the opening scene inside a small fishing boat crammed with panicking refugees in a raging storm on the Baltic Sea, heading for the Swedish island Gotland – but it could have been set recently on the Mediterranean Sea. Al-Khamisi was eight years old and his family (who were Mande, a small Iraqi ethnic group), had left a comfortable upper-class life in Baghdad. Al-Khamisi's father was a highly respected and successful goldsmith, but they had to flee at short notice from Saddam Hussein's oppressive regime. Now they are trapped in the boat for days, before the storm subsides and they are able to go up on deck. Even though it is starting to get dark, this is when they spot the shore of Gotland, of Sweden and safety. In order to avoid being discovered by the coastguard, the smugglers will not drive the boat to the shore. The refugees are put into three orange rubber boats. They are all desperate to leave the fishing boat. Close to the shore they get out of the boat and walk in knee-high water to land. Al-Khamisi is soaked and cold. A moment later, he says: 'The following scenes on the pitch dark beach are euphoric. People kiss each other, give thanks to higher powers, lifting us children.' The refugees are taken care of by the Red Cross and stay the night in a hostel. The next day the children get blue bags with 'drawing pad colouring pencils, erasers and a pencil sharpener'. Al-Khamisi adds: 'We got toys. I grabbed a big, red Ferrari car!' So he and his family survived the dangerous journey across the Baltic Sea, but other challenges are now in front of them as they move to a so-called disadvantaged area, a suburb of Stockholm. Al-Khamisi's father remains unemployed, and his mother suffers from loneliness and the dark Stockholm winters, while Al-Khamisi is hanging out with a criminal gang. One night he is in a serious fight in

²⁸ Theodor Kallifatides, *Minnet i exil* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1969).

²⁹ Al-Khamisi, *Regnet luktar inte här*, 7–12.

the street and has to go to the hospital as his face is badly hurt. He is bandaged and his lip is sewn up with three stitches. Then he is sent home. The turning point comes when his younger brother (who went on to become a human rights lawyer) is taking him to task for dishonouring their parents, saying 'you are spending time with guys who sell drugs, rob and beat up people. What is wrong with you?' In response to this Al-Khamisi writes³⁰:

I was used to the hate from the Swedes. I felt their contempt. But it had never before occurred to me that other immigrants might see me the same way. Look down on me. It began with the teachers, spread to pupils and ended with everyone around me looking down on me. That was enough. I had had enough.

So he took his bag and went to Södertälje, a town south of Stockholm, to live with his uncle. Al-Khamisi was eighteen years old, enrolled in high school with a total focus on getting top grades, which he did. Following his father's advice over the years, he applied to the School of Journalism. He graduated the same year as the Arab Spring flared up. Now he had the tools to tell his stories about the suburb, Swedes and immigrants, and about Iraq both as a place of terror and as a lost home that he keeps missing, not least because, as he told me when we met in December 2018 at a café in Stockholm: 'Writing *The Rain Has No Smell Here* was a way to handle losing a country and all our relatives and friends. So many of my age have died Education is important.' He continued emphatically, 'especially for those from the suburbs. They need education and a job.'³¹

Education is a way to build bridges. My hope with *The Rain Has No Smell Here* was to build bridges, that young people would understand their own situation. I wanted to create understanding. But I was shocked by the reactions to it. What happened was that non-white critics did not understand. They just saw me as angry. The book divided the critics.³²

³⁰ Al-Khamisi, *Regnet luktar inte här*, 106: 'Du hänger med killar som säljer knark, rånar och misshandlar människor. Vad är det med dig?' 'Jag var van vid hatet från svenskarna. Jag kände deras förakt. Men jag hade aldrig förr tänkt på att andra invandrare kunde se mig på samma sätt. Se ner på mig. Det började med lärarna, spred sig till eleverna och slutade med att alla runt omkring såg ner på mig. Jag fick nog. Det räckte.'

³¹ The interview was conducted in Stockholm on 8 January 2019. 'Att skriva *Regnet luktar inte här* var ett sätt att hantera förlusten av ett land och alla våra släktingar och vänner. Så många i min ålder har dött'. 'Utbildning är viktigt', han fortsatte, 'speciellt för dem från förorten. De behöver utbildning och job'.

³² Interview with Al-Khamisi, 2019: 'Utbildning är ett sätt att bygga broar. Min förhoppning med *Regnet luktar inte här* var att unga människor skulle förstå sin egen situation. Jag ville skapa förståelse. Men jag var chockad av reaktionerna på den. Det som hände var att icke-vita kritiker inte förstod. De såg mig bara som arg. Boken delade kritikerna.'

The reviews were many, but rather mixed. They did mention Al-Khamisi's anger, as in Ulrika Stahre's description of the book as a story about the journey of a young man who is angry, but moves towards something that resembles peace of mind, while providing an updated picture of Husby (the name of the suburb), of its riots and social bias. It is about life in the suburb as a contrast with life in the city. There is class hate and desire for revenge. Another review, by Bodil Hansson, points out that this is a skilled description of how immensely demanding it is to be young without support, and that there is an expectation of failure. But Al-Khamisi is empowered and gets the energy to get out of that which pulls him down. With education, he is able to create a platform for expressing his experience through words. According to this review:

This is an important book to read. One should read it if one wants to understand something about what it is like when the rain does not smell. One should read it if one wants to encounter the difficulties many children of refugees have to handle. One should read it if one wants to reflect over what Sweden means to, and does with, our refugees.³³

Writing stories had been a part of Al-Khamisi's upbringing, as he told me in our interview:

I have always listened to stories and written stories. I was surrounded by stories when I grew up. My grandmother told morality tales about animals and the devil, aphorisms. My father told stories about heroes, real events, things that had happened, torture and prison. Self-revealing stories, things he remembered about life that he told me straight out, but for no one else.³⁴

It is likely that Al-Khamisi acquired storytelling techniques such as suspension and surprise, the use of repetition and rhythm while listening to these stories. His style is quite rhythmical, which might also have something to do with the fact that he often listens to music while writing. He even has a metronome to keep track of different rhythms.

³³ Bodil Hansson, 'Om flykt, identitet och saknad', *Litteraturmagasinet*, 12 January 2016: 'Boken är viktig att läsa. Man skall läsa den om man vill förstå något av hur det är när regnet inte luktar. Man skall läsa den om man vill möta de svårigheter som många barn till flyktingar har att bemästra. Man skall läsa den om man vill reflektera över vad Sverige betyder för och gör med våra flyktingar.'

³⁴ 'Jag var omgiven av berättelser när jag växte upp. Min farmor berättade historier om rätt och fel om djur och jävulen, aforismer. Min pappa berättade historier om hjältar, verkliga händelser, saker som hade hänt, tortyr och fängelse. Självutlämnande historier, saker han kom ihåg om livet som han berättade rakt ut för mig, men inte för någon annan.'

Again, *The Rain Has No Smell Here* was Al-Khamisi's debut book. It did get a lot of attention. He was invited to readings and book signings, and not least to the Swedish literary programme on television called *Babel* where writers of new books are interviewed. This is an influential programme as it sets the status system of the literary world in Sweden. Al-Khamisi told me how pleased he was: 'When they called from *Babel*, I bought a new suit and tie, and went there and talked to Jessica Gedin [who was hosting the programme]. It was mostly about the flight like it always was in interviews, not about the situation in the suburb.'³⁵

In his early thirties, Duraid Al-Khamisi is now settled and married, and has a child. He has moved back to the same suburb where he and his family live close to his parents. Writing a new book on 'contemporary Stockholm', he also does freelance jobs as a journalist and helps out in a tobacco shop he bought with his parents. So all is well, yet he told me – much in line with Theodor Kallifatides' experience of 'having your heart in two places': 'You know, it is easy to be lonely in Sweden. You have to practice to feel at home. A refugee is always missing his country.'³⁶ A part of this is the particular smell of the rain in Iraq – contrary to the rain in Sweden which has no smell. Iraq consists to a great extent of red desert sand. When there is a storm it whips up a red fog, and Al-Khamisi writes: 'When it later rains the sand goes back down and the loveliest scent I know is released: the smell of kerosene, gas and rain in a tender pairing with the warm scent of jasmin flowers.'³⁷ This lack of smells in Sweden, especially during winter, comes back in the work of other migrant writers in my study, such as that by Pooneh Rohi.³⁸ She contrasts Stockholm, 'the city smells of ice', with the memory of Iran and 'the smell of rain that does not cool down, of wet soil and wet stone, a breath of the scent from the rose bushes'. Just like Al-Khamisi, Rohi misses the rain, 'that salty wet air from the sea'. The strong smell of spices and flowers is often missed not least because they indicate what is remembered as a happy childhood.

³⁵ Interview with Al-Khamisi in 2019: 'När de ringde från Babel, köpte jag en ny kostym och slips, och gick dit och pratade med Jessica Gedin (programledaren). Det var mest om flykten som det alltid var i intervjuer, inte om situationen i förorten.'

³⁶ 'Du vet, det är lätt att vara ensam i Sverige. Man måste öva på att känna sig hemma. En flykting saknar alltid sitt land.'

³⁷ Al-Khamisi, *Regnet luktar inte här*, 132–3: 'När det sedan regnar lägger sig sanden, och ur den frigör sig den ljuvligaste lukt jag vet: lukten av fotogen, gasol och regnsom ömsint parar sig med den varma doften av jasminblommor.'

³⁸ Pooneh Rohi, *Araben* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2013), 9, 77: 'staden doftar av is', 'lukten av regn som inte svalkar, av blöt jord och blöt sten, en fläkt av rosenbuskarnas doft', 'den där salta fuktiga luften från havet.'

Finishing the interview with me, Duraid Al-Khamisi ends on a happy and hopeful note saying that:

I see a new attitude among the young generation, those who have grown up with immigrants. There are lots of immigrants in Södermalm [a fashionable part of Stockholm] now. Many have done class journeys upwards, many marry each other, are friends with each other, eat each other's food.³⁹

Moving on now to the third writer from my study: Ali Zardadi came to Sweden on his own when he was sixteen years old, one among tens of thousands of unaccompanied children and teenagers. Only fifteen months later, his Swedish was good enough for him to write his memoir *The Angel and the Sparrow* (2017). It consists of less than fifty pages, with ten very short stories about his first months in Sweden. As to his actual arrival from Afghanistan, he describes it rather matter-of-factly:

It was a dark day in winter when I came to Sweden. We went to Malmö first. Stayed one night and then we went to Linköping and had a long journey that day. On the bus we got food and water from the bus staff and I was wondering how to say in Swedish when you want to say thank you.⁴⁰

Ali takes out his mobile phone, and soon finds the word on Google translate: 'Tack'. In Stockholm, the young refugees were taken to the police who wore black uniforms. Ali's experience of the police in Afghanistan makes him frightened of the Swedish police. They start asking questions: 'Are you hungry? Are you tired? Are you cold? Soon you will meet many people who speak your language.'⁴¹ Then Ali and five or six other unaccompanied teenagers were driven to accommodation outside Stockholm. Step by step, he learns Swedish and starts school. He acquires friends, and is planning to become a social worker. But he keeps missing his mother. In his book, in an author biography, he says that he is not a real author. He might well become one, though. Since then he has joined a writer's centre for young people (*Berättarministeriet*) and recently co-published a volume titled *We See, we Feel, we Struggle* together with eight other young people.⁴² Ali's chapter is

³⁹ 'Jag ser en ny attityd hos den unga generationen, de som har växt upp med invandrare. Det är fullt av invandrare på Södermalm nu. Det är många som har gjort klassresor, som gifter sig med varandra, äter varandras mat.'

⁴⁰ Zardadi, *Ängeln och sparven*, 33–4: 'Det var en mörk dag på vintern när jag kom till Sverige. Vi åkte till Malmö först. Stannade en natt där och sedan åkte vi till Linköping och hade en lång resa under dagen. På bussen fick vi mat och vatten från busspersonal och jag undrade hur man säger på svenska när man vill säga tack.'

⁴¹ Zardadi, *Ängeln och sparven*, 34: 'Är du hungrig?', 'Är du trött?', 'Fryser du?', 'Snart kommer du få träffa många som pratar ditt språk.'

⁴² Moa Liem et al., *Vi ser, vi känner, vi kämpar* (Stockholm: BonnierCarlsen, 2018).

on getting your application for asylum rejected, as has happened to a number of his friends. In an online video interview, Ali talks about his writing:

Through writing you can send your words to others and you can be touched by that. That is why I chose writing as a way to calm down. And to help my friends by being a voice for them.⁴³

I learned about Ali Zardadi and his bestselling book *The Angel and the Sparrow* on the news on Swedish television in the summer of 2017 when it had just been published. I have not yet met Zardadi for an interview, but found an interview with him in a local newspaper. It turns out that he had not read novels before, had never seen a library, but in Sweden he had been writing short pieces at school, that his teachers had corrected, about his experience as a refugee. His Swedish 'mother' is his 'angel' for taking care of him, while he himself is the 'sparrow' in the title of the book. It was his Swedish mother who had suggested that he put together the stories into a book. Zardadi had not been thinking about this possibility. But when he posted stories on Facebook, he had a massive positive reaction with so many people asking for them in a book format that they would be able to borrow at the library. They wanted a continuation. This was very inspiring for Zardadi.⁴⁴

He has not seen his real mother since they were torn apart in 2016. Ali, two brothers and their mother had fled from Afghanistan. They were in a big group of about 200 people. Before crossing the border to Turkey, they tried to get some sleep. It was dark. Ali did not know where they were. At dawn he saw mountains. Then he saw Iranian soldiers approaching them. People started to run. A guy took his arm asking him to come with him. Ali hesitated. He did not want to leave his family. But the guy said that his father would take care of them.

At the border he discovered that his mother and brothers were not with them. This made him very sad and worried. 'It was the hardest time in my life.'⁴⁵ He was thinking that if he went back, he would not be able to find them. So he came to Sweden on his own. It took him three months to get in touch with his mother again. He does not think his family can come to Sweden. He has a temporary residency at the moment and is waiting for a permanent one. In the meantime,

⁴³ 'Genom att skriva kan man skicka sina ord till andra och man kan bli berörd av det. Så därför valde jag att skriva som ett sätt att lugna ner mina känslor. Och att hjälpa mina vänner genom att vara en röst för dem.' www.selmastories.se/forfattarna/intervju/ali-zardadi/

⁴⁴ Frida Wänelöf, 'Ali flyttar saknaden till pappret', *Huddinge Direkt*. 2017, www.stockholmdirekt.se/kultur/ali-flyttar-saknaden-till-pappret/repqcu!c6kYBk3lYDIFi@oud4Mb1A/

⁴⁵ Wänelöf, 'Ali flyttar saknaden till pappret': 'Det var den svåraste tiden i mitt liv'.

he has become an award-winning activist for unaccompanied children and teenagers. He writes short articles in newspapers, gives talks and interviews and is involved in the association for unaccompanied young people, organizing get-togethers such as parties and lectures.

Claiming a (contested) space

It is time to move on to an analytical level and compare these three textual arrival stories further. We have already noted that they represent different major migration streams to Sweden over time, from the 1960s labour recruitment scheme to the war refugees in the 1990s and the twenty-first century. The three writers are also at different stages in their life cycles and careers. Both Theodor Kallifatides and Duraïd Al-Khamisi were in their mid-twenties when they wrote their respective arrival stories that I have been referring to here. All three stories reveal the same imaginary about Sweden as a country of safety and hope for those fleeing political violence and war. Key to the stories is the ambiguous nature of arrival: a combination of strong contradictory emotions of relief and fright. Even though Helgesson and his family did not have to flee for their lives or for subsistence, he still identifies arrival in a foreign country (which, again, incidentally is also Sweden) in terms of ambiguity, 'the arrival is both delightful and bitter'⁴⁶:

that which recently filled one's world is still accessible. At the same time one sees another world spreading out, a world where one notices everything that differs from that one has just left. This is a delightful experience ... a feeling of a lightness appears. The world can change!

But the arrival is also bitter. The lightness transforms into rootlessness. Instead of having access to two possible ways of being, you are excluded from both. That which you left is lost and the new place appears incomprehensible, inhospitable, closed.

As the stories of Kallifatides, Al-Khamisi and Zardadi unfold, they are testimonies to emotions of homesickness and loneliness that come with having arrived

⁴⁶ Helgesson, *Efter västerlandet* 12: 'ankomsten är både ljuv och bitter', 'det som nyss fyllde ens värld känns ännu tillgängligt. Samtidigt breder en annan värld ut sig framför ens ögon, en värld där man lägger märke till allt som skiljer sig från det man just har lämnat. Detta är en ljuv erfarenhet ... En lätthet infinner sig hos jaget. Världen kan förändras! / Men ankomsten är också bitter. Lättheten förbyts i rotlöshet. I stället för att ha tillgång till två möjliga sätt att vara utesluts du från bägge. Det du lämnade bakom dig är förlorat och den nya platsen framstår som obegriplig, ogästvänlig, sluten.'

in a new country as a migrant or refugee. There is also the humiliation that experiences of exclusion and racism produce. During the arrival journeys, the orientation of the migrants and refugees is obviously focused on Sweden. Also, beyond the actual arrival moment of the stories, the dislocation–orientation framework is useful for an analytical understanding of the migrant encounter with Sweden. Even though the three stories vary considerably when it comes to period of time, they obviously share Sweden as a location, but as I have pointed out, it is more appropriate to conceptualize this situation as dislocation even as the stories take place in different settings in Sweden: Kallifatides recalls working-class Stockholm in the 1960s, Al-Khamisi a ‘disadvantaged’ suburb of Stockholm in the 1990s, and Zardadi another Stockholm suburb in 2017. Despite these different sub-dislocations, the experiences of living in Sweden are strikingly similar, at least in the stories by Kallifatides and Al-Khamisi. This is the case despite the fact that their orientations to a great extent are towards their different countries of origin where the political systems may or may not allow them to return: Greece, Iraq and Afghanistan. These orientations are bound to change over time. This is especially obvious for Theodor Kallifatides, who has spent more than fifty years in Sweden. They all miss their countries of origin, family and friends they have left behind, especially mothers, and the life they led before they had to leave.

The three texts raise the issue of genre and the relationship between fiction and autobiography as they all build on the authors’ own experiences of encountering Sweden. Kallifatides’ book was marketed as fiction, but based on his own experiences and those of his compatriots. Al-Khamisi’s memoir is advertised as ‘an honest, furious and vulnerable story about Sweden’ on the back cover of the book.⁴⁷ The tone is one of reporting, which makes sense as Al-Khamisi also works as a journalist. Zardadi’s account is a straightforward story about his experiences of entering into Sweden.

Conclusion

This literary anthropological study of stories of arrival has discussed the ambiguities of these arrivals, which switch between forceful emotions of both relief and fright, but also importantly, as the stories move on, reveal ambiguous

⁴⁷ Al-Khamisi, *Regnet luktar inte här*: ‘en ärlig, rasande och såbar berättelse om Sverige.’

orientations of settling down, coupled with the continued pain of longing for the country of origin and a sense of alienation in Sweden. As migrant writings in general 'educate a mainstream audience in Sweden about the increasing presence of ethnic diversity as a matter of course', these stories specify some of its ambiguities.⁴⁸

The focus here has been on the journeys to Sweden, but what happens after the actual arrival moment? How is the migrant encounter with Sweden in the long run? As the stories of Kallifatides and Al-Khamisi unfold, they convey claims to Sweden that turn out to be a contested space for them: they do not always feel welcome. There are some serious instances of exclusion, on top of homesickness and loneliness that define their dislocation. Zardadi's story is also built around homesickness and loneliness as well as around his longing for his mother in Afghanistan, but it departs from the other two in two ways: firstly, there is no mention of exclusion or racism; secondly, instead, the story is driven by gratefulness for having been received with warmth in Sweden.

In all three stories there is, with time, a sense of some kind of belonging. It should be noted that in migration and refugee studies, the process towards belonging is increasingly connected with the concept of emplacement which is a useful way forward in this analysis too.⁴⁹ As Deborah Reed-Danahay points out: '[it] addresses the desire to be emplaced – either not to move at all or to seek emplacement after a geographical move'. Developing Bourdieu's idea of social space, she continues: 'Modes of emplacement or belonging are also modes of positioning in a social space. Migrants bring their dispositions and worldviews with them ... that may or may not be highly valued in the host setting.'⁵⁰ And as Kirin Narayan points out, storytelling is an intrinsic part of emplacement 'as an imaginative process, the orienting of self within multiple frameworks of meaning'.⁵¹ The three stories in this chapter are all set in Sweden, yet they differ considerably when it comes not only to period of time, but also type of emplacement process. Despite the different temporalities and sub-

⁴⁸ Wulff, 'Writing Truth to Power', 17.

⁴⁹ Caroline B. Brettell and Deborah Reed-Danahay, *Civic Engagements: The Citizenship Practices of Asian Indian and Vietnamese Immigrants* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012); Liisa H. Malkki 'Refugees and Exile: From "Refugee Studies" to the National Order of Things', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 495–523.

⁵⁰ Deborah Reed-Danahay, *Bourdieu and Social Space: Mobilities, Trajectories, Emplacements* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2019), 132.

⁵¹ Kirin Narayan, 'Placing Lives through Stories: Second-Generation South Asian Americans', in *Everyday Life in South Asia*, eds. Diane P. Mines and Sarah Lamb (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 472.

dislocations, the experiences of living in Sweden in the two stories by Theodor Kallifatides and Duraïd Al-Khamisi are on the whole surprisingly similar. While writing the stories is a way to handle their dislocation and at the same time move towards the process of emplacement, they also, importantly, inform a mainstream audience in Sweden about the new ethnic diversity in the country which, like elsewhere across the world, is here to stay and will keep growing.

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