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The Social, Political, and Psychological  
Extensions of Expatriation through  
Views of Place

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# The Social, Political, and Psychological Extensions of Expatriation through Views of Place

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*Abstract: The project Views from Expatria: Photographing Place and the Self in Transience investigates the intersection between photography, expatriation, and an expanded context of human migrations. Expatriates, transient skilled workers, within today's ease of mobility for work can easily lose sight of "home." Recurrent transits and travels away from home are associated with the everyday experience of expatriates. Although there are many benefits associated with working abroad, these do not come without challenges for the expatriated individual. My creative work Photographing Place and Self in transience and this article reveal the social, political, and psychological complexities associated with the global phenomenon of expatriation. Using place photography and autoethnography away from practices and concepts of forced migration and refugee displacement, the work argues that living and working outside one's home country has a profound impact on the identity of the expatriate individual. The article reassesses the ideologies of place representation, mobility, and identity, highlighting their contents and disconnects and contributes to current discourses about expatriation and the transient self.*

*Keywords: Place Photography; Views; Landscapes; Expatriation; Autoethnography; Global Mobility*

## Introduction

*Views from Expatria: Photographing Place and the Self in Transience* investigates the intersection between photography, expatriation, and an expanded context of human migrations. The role of place representation is examined, and through the uses of contemporary photography the project seeks to contribute creative parallels to current discourses in society about place, expatriation, belonging, home, and identity.

Drawing from Fechter (2007), Leonard (2010), Walsh (2010, 2012, 2014), and Kunz (2016), who claims that "expatriate in its myriad appearances and meanings needs to be further opened up for investigation; conceptualized and analysed as a category of practice that amongst other things expresses and performs a certain migrant subjectivity" (Kunz 2016, n. p.), *Photographing Place and the Self in Transience* discloses ways in which my personal expatriation and transience align with contemporary global conditions of expatriation, migration, immigration, and the specific social, political, and psychological drivers that have shaped it. In this way, it advocates the need for an expanded context of human migrations that includes voluntary, privileged mobility, and the legitimization of autoethnographic, autobiographical narratives of expatriation using contemporary photography.

The output of the creative-based research *Views from Expatria: Photographing Place and the Self in Transience* consists of five series of original place-related photographic projects, namely, Out of Place; Home No Home; Interiors; Photographing the Unphotographable; and Here There Are Lions (Figures 1–5).

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Figure 1: Xeriscaping from Out of Place



Figure 2: Rooted–Uprooted from Home No Home

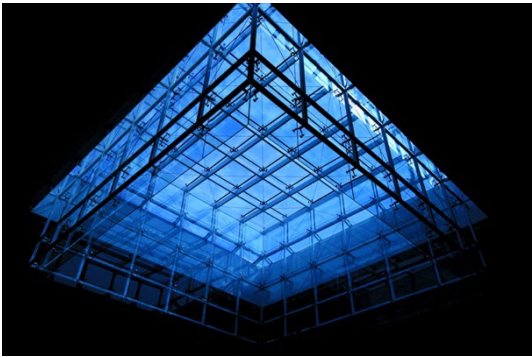


Figure 3: Parallel Sides from Interiors

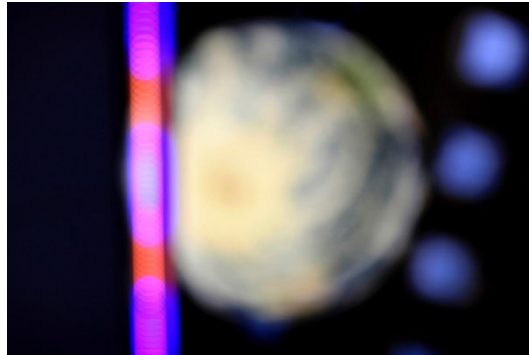
Figure 4: Constant Farewell from *Photographing the Unphotographable*

Figure 5: 35,000 Billion Kilometers Away from Here There Are Lions

The series *Out of Place* uses lens-based capturing of random displaced, out of geographic context objects to illustrate and restage key psychosocial extensions pertaining to transience and expatriation, that is, thinking, feeling, and being “in and out” of place; transience and impermanence; and place mystification and demystification.

The series *Home No Home* utilizes autobiography and expanded and computational photographic practices to reenact a remote visit to a “familiar stranger” home. Its result discloses the complexity of thoughts and feelings of expatriation and challenges the evocation of place, past, and memory through photography. The works further frame discussions on the losses associated with displacement and the complex feelings allied with home, attachment to home, and belonging to a place through a transient lens.

*Interiors* explores sites and parameters specific to the production and interpretation of fixed indoor architectural structures as metaphors and symbols of expatriation. Simultaneously, it engages with shifting traditions that call for expatriation and transience to be attributed exclusively to the portrayal of people, places, and objects on the move.

The works prove how fixed indoor architectural structures can become emblematic through photography and reflect the social, political, and psychological intricacies of expatriation such as desolation, channeling, and wishful thinking.

*Photographing the Unphotographable* presents allegorical and visually abstract ways of photographing place and expatriation through pictorial manipulation. The latter both augment and question the validity of the photographic document in conveying inexpressible thoughts and feelings of expatriation. The works push place representation and interpretation process to the limits between autobiography, metaphor, and poetry.

*Here There Are Lions* uses expanded and computational photographic practices to lay out a “verifictional” tale of humanity’s possible imminent migration to an outer-space colony. The

series projects that the next version of *Expatria* will be in outer space and that for humans, there is no end to being in this “place” of no home. The works set forth the notion that the expatriated individual is the type of person who is a transient citizen living in and documenting a constantly transient place.

Themes of place, belonging, migration, and mobility are central to *Views from Expatria: Photographing Place and the Self in Transience*, revealing a need to explore the complex global conditions and personal reflections of expatriation and how it informs, and is informed by, contemporary themes of place. This article provides insights into the expanded context of human migration, including voluntary displacement, and explores the social, political, and psychological extensions and limitations that shape it. The article, additionally, offers a summary of artists and exhibitions with a focus on human displacement to locate the project within a broader context and to draw links with contemporary issues of expatriation.

## Methodology

The project adopts various methodologies to guide the visual translation of places into metaphors of expatriation and transience: a combination of phenomenological and expanded creative practice coupled with noetic synthesis, heuristic introspection, autoethnography, and creative practice review. The research narrative of the project lies across five discrete photographic series, each exploring a different relationship with expatriation, transience, and the contemporary place. For this reason, the methodology for each series shifted, scaffolding on the previous. I will therefore summarize the research methodologies here and provide additional and relevant details within the analysis of each individual series.

### *Phenomenological and Expanded Creative Practice*

My expanded creative practice is flanked by a “phenomenology of practice” (Van Manen 2007, 11–30). These methods and capture modes are bound to a process Stout (cited in Valentine 2001; Schaar 2013) calls “noetic synthesis.” This process draws from on- and off-site capturing of place with simultaneous cross-comparison of theoretical discourses relevant to the themes explored in the project.

The process of noetic synthesis supports the project in being able to align practice with the critical analysis of a multifaceted bibliography. Through noetic synthesis, the visual translation of places into personal autobiographical views addresses creative and theoretical contexts simultaneously.

My investigation is anchored in analog and digital photography and its immediate expanded practices; creating works that include direct digital capture and post production, as well as software generated images.

The creation of works occurred during local walks in the United Arab Emirates and travel that included Greece, Australia, China, France, and Italy—both actual and virtual—and through web browsing, specifically, sites such as Google Earth and Google Maps. Travel resonates with my situation as a migrant expatriate worker in the UAE and artist in transience (i.e., traveling on work to conferences and exhibitions worldwide and dividing my time between Europe, the UAE, and Australia). Through these life circumstances, I created representations of place pertaining to expatriation and myself in transience from a creative, analytical, and autoethnographic perspective.

### *Heuristic Introspection—Autoethnography*

Heuristic introspection and autoethnography stems from phenomenological reflections. According to Van Manen, “it inheres the sense and sensuality of our practical actions, in

encounters with others, and in the ways that our bodies are responsive to the things of our world and to the situations and relations in which we find ourselves" (Van Manen 2007, 11). The creation of artworks and the real-time reflection on geographic, actual, and virtual place assisted me in transfiguring my out-of-context views of place into series. Heuristic introspection, from the Greek *heuriskein*, means to "find, find out, or discover." According to Douglass and Moustakas (1985, 39–55), "heuristic methodology encourages the researcher to explore and pursue the creative journey that begins inside one's being and ultimately uncovers its direction and meaning through internal discovery." My series sublimate transience and migration to the "place within." This enables an introspective assessment of my creative practice, its methods, motives, and motifs, as well as an examination of the way expatriation informed them.

### *Autoethnography*

Given that expatriation and the ideologies adopted by being from a certain place, or by residing in different places, informs an individual's "sense of place" (Relph 1976, 1997, 2007; Seamon and Sower 2008; Tuan 2009; Jackson 1994) then, as an artist and photographer in transience, I felt the need to turn the camera inward and "document" my identity, my "sense of self" (Gallagher and Meltzoff 1996, 211–233). The motives of my creative practice signal this sentiment with images. I consider my inner landscape, using American philosopher Edward Casey's words in *Body, Self and Landscape* (2001) as "the immediate ambiance of my lived body and its history, including ... cultural and social influences and personal interests that compose my life history" (Casey 2001, 404). After all, "our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears, in tangible, visible form" (Salvessen 2009, 11–53).

In this regard, the project is an investigation on place photography and autoethnography. According to Adams, Ellis, and Jones (2017), autoethnography is a research method that uses personal experience ("auto") to describe and interpret ("graphy") cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices ("ethno"). Autoethnographers believe that personal experience is infused with political/cultural norms and expectations, and they engage in rigorous self-reflection to identify and interrogate the intersections between the self and social life (Adams, Ellis, and Jones 2017, 1).

Autoethnography "allows researchers to draw on their own experiences to understand a particular phenomenon or culture" (Mendez 2013, 1); employing autoethnography "necessitates working at the intersection of autobiography and ethnography" (Adams, Ellis, and Jones 2017, 2). When one uses autobiography, one often draws from memory and lived experiences in the past.

*Views from Expatria: Photographing Place and the Self in Transience* is primed not only by art practices and other epistemic disciplines but also by my autobiography, hence my life experiences with place, others, and the environment. As Jeff Malpas mentions in *Place, Space and Landscape* 2011, reflecting on Foucault (1984), "the deeper significance of landscape...is not restricted merely to...painting, but is directly tied to the interconnection of human life with the spaces and places in which that life is lived" (Malpas 2011, 8). Photography as used in the project, in a nonindexical manner (through expanded practices), offers fragmentary views as traces to "any place," as traces to "one's life." Having said that, with the autoethnographic tone of *Photographing Place and the Self in Transience*, I highlight allies who share with me a similar historical and political space of voluntary expatriation and transience globally, beyond borders and national frontiers. Through autoethnography, I position my views from, and of, expatriation, as markers within a constructed imaginary atlas of the world. In this atlas, one might find the figurative territory I call *Expatria*. An intangible place molded by my personal experience as an expatriate (and the inevitable social, political, and psychological circumstances that have shaped it), in which one could pinpoint my identity.

## Creative Practice Review

My project surveys work by artists dealing with displacement, belonging, home mobility, and identity, without strictly photographing place. Such works belong to artists, namely, “Andre Kertesz (*Hungarian Memory*), Constantine Manos (*Greek Portfolio*), Lukas Samaras (*Phototransformation*), Shirin Neshat (*Rapture*), An My Le (*Ho Chi Minh City*)” (Josenhans et al. 2017, 15–41, 78, 114, 222, 230, and Walid Raad (*Atlas Group Project*)).

Other international artists that I have reviewed (beyond photographers), whose creative practice pertains to issues of migration, historic memory, and exile, are the Palestinian multimedia and installation artist “Mona Hatoum (*Routes II*), [and the] South Korean artist Do Ho Suh (*My Country*), who has lived in New York, London, and Seoul and worked across the globe” (Josenhans et al. 2017, 21). Furthermore, I have surveyed and assessed artists featured in the latest Malmö Museum exhibition *Migration: Traces in an Art Collection* (2020) curated by the Swedish Maria Lind and Cecilia Widenheim.

The exhibition included works by a wide variety of artists such as “Meriç Algün, Carlos Capelán, Maxime Hourani, Jakob Kulle, Runo Lagomarsino, Franco Leidi and Per-Oskar Leu” (Malmö 2020). Most relevant to this discussion because of their allegiance to my work are artists whose origins differ from the locations on which they focus. For example, Meriç Algün (*Billboards*) is of Turkish descent based in Stockholm. Her work involves text and installations about issues of residency and naturalization in the European Union, whereas Carlos Capelán (*Now You See It*) is a Uruguayan based in Sweden. His “multi-layered, atmospheric installations explore issues of displacement, dislocation [and] themes of identity” (Beaverbrook Gallery 2014). These artists’ life and work are closely related to my experience of expatriation, but are not using exclusively expanded photography and an investigation of expatriation, transience, and identity through views of place, as is the case with my project.

## Views from Expatria and the Expanded Context of Human Migrations

My condition of expatriation is voluntary. It differs from immigration, which implies permanence and settlement, variable with the notion of migration, and adversely related to forced migration and refugee displacement, yet is still a displacement. Current workforce mobility causes voluntary and conscious transit from one place to another on work. Although such movement is not comparable to forced migration and refugee mobility, it remains a form of displacement. The process of self-expatriation or self-displacement and their associated thoughts and feelings of temporariness or impermanence led to a traumatic social experience for the individual because they are associated with the troubling experience of leaving one’s home for another, one’s country or culture for another. Simultaneously, the prospect of expatriation/skilled worker mobility binds individuals to a specific, sometimes lucrative, yet problematic, livelihood. *Views from Expatria: Photographing Place and the Self in Transience* locates, assesses, and reenacts this tension through creative work. For the purposes of this research project, expatriation is included in contemporary discussions around migration and mobility—not in competition with the complex issues of refugees (i.e., safety, conflict, or even genocide) but within the broad themes of human mobility and migration.

Joining other scholars and theorists, Fechter (2007), Leonard (2010), Walsh (2010, 2012, 2014), Kunz (2016), and Josenhans et al. (2017), cited in this article, who acknowledge a wider conversation on human displacement, I include self-expatriation and transient lifestyles in the discourse of human migration, where global mobility is a way of life. I present broader categories of migration to support my project, *Views from Expatria: Photographing Place and the Self in Transience*. These include the concepts “self-displacement” and “self-exile.” Frauke V. Josenhans, curator of the 2017 exhibition, *Artists in Exile: Expressions of Loss and Hope* at Yale University gallery, uses the concept self-exile in specific artworks and artist biographies.



In the current age of technology and globalization, with people easily commuting between different cities, countries, and continents, it is essential to look at exile in the visual arts from a new perspective and to reconsider artists who left their countries of birth, or their adopted homes, for a variety of reasons. (Josenhans et al. 2017, 15)

Maria Lind and Cecilia Widenheim, curators of the 2020 Malmö Museum of Sweden exhibition *Migration: Traces in an Art Collection*, assembled close to one hundred creations from the museum's collection depicting 150 years of migration history. The works involved "a range of artistic expressions of the migrant experience" (Malmö 2020) beyond the contexts of refuge mobility.

The concepts self-expatriation, self-displacement, and even self-exile ignore any country-specific or financial reasons for displacement that might be ascribed to the displaced individual and instead focus on their outcomes, their impact on the identity of the transient individual, and its global context. This is one of the core frameworks of the research. Expatriation heavily impacts the identity of the transient self, regardless of where, how, and why one expatriates. I propose to ground this context expansion in four main ways that reveal the social, political, and psychological drivers behind it and, consequentially, the ways in which my personal expatriation and transience align with contemporary global conditions of expatriation, as well as the extensions and limitations of my research project:

- Global mobility and skilled labor
- Dispersion and belonging lived and felt
- Acculturation, social integration, place attachment
- Making political but not activist art

## Global Mobility and Skilled Labor

Global mobility or transience (the term used in this article) "is often associated with global flows and freedom of the middle classes" (Hulbert 2017, 3). Migration in the instances of forced migration and refugee displacement "is seen in opposing lights, as the status of forced migration and refugee displacement are signifying disempowerment, while being mobile hints at a having a vehicle for freedom and empowerment" (Hulbert 2017, 3).

The trends of migration in terms of forced migration, refugee displacement, and border politics, have never been so challenging. According to the International Organization for Migration's 2018 Global Migration Indicators,

258 million international migrants were counted globally – people residing in a country other than their country of birth, 68.5 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide due to persecution, conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations, or other reasons by the end of 2017, while 150.3 million migrant workers were counted globally in 2015. (IOM 2018)

Concurrent with this global condition is "political discourse that favors prejudice and discrimination toward immigrants, refugees, and other minority groups [that] has intensified" (Moyano 2019, n.p.).

Such discourse stems from various emergent radical social movements and political parties, "generally populist anti-immigration and/or from the extreme right, [where] open rejection of these minorities is promoted" (Moyano 2019, n.p.). Although the bulk of the almost "70 million forcibly displaced worldwide are hosted in developing countries, some 2 million have sought asylum in Europe since 2014, meeting with responses ranging from welcome to tightened borders" (Bigg 2019, n.p.). These large numbers of immigrants and asylum seekers uncovered

hindrance in the European migration system and showed the demand for reforms. “To respond to this migration crisis, European institutions have been taking measures to improve the asylum system and formulate fairer and more effective policies” (Moyano 2019, n.p.).

The latter topics are highly sensitive, opening a larger conversation about international borders linked to the context of “place-as-war-zone,” which I cannot fully cover in this creative study. But what about voluntary expatriation? As I have previously mentioned, expatriates are privileged skilled workers, and the social, political, and psychological footprint of voluntary expatriation is less striking and more limiting in terms of viewership and political discourse than is the displacement of refugees. However, my project *Views from Expatria: Photographing Place and the Self in Transience* uses expatriation as an added form of mobility that is shifting away from being the norm of the privileged and into a more ambiguous space of belonging in the world. For many skilled worker expatriates, discourses through art that portray an extended anthropological impact of transience on the expatriated individual are of grave importance. Therefore, the project is central to this interrogation of fundamental traditions of thinking about expatriation and transience and reassesses these eminent interpretations of human migration in society through “subjective” practiced-based research.

## Dispersion and Belonging, Lived and Felt

Voluntary expatriation includes both positive and negative human manifestations and lived experiences. The positive trigger fewer problematic outcomes and include, for example, ambitions of better living conditions, positive reinforcement of one’s identity via exposure to new cultures, and creative aspirations. The negative present a (potentially) greater problem set and can include a fragile sense of belonging or feeling dispersed. Not belonging or having a fragile sense of belonging or belongingness or feeling dispersed creates problematic social interactions and emotional responses for the expatriated or transient individual.

Belonging is defined as a “secure relationship or affinity.”<sup>2</sup> Professors Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary (1995) regard “the need to belong as a fundamental human motivation in one’s life” (Baumeister and Leary 1995, 1), whereas the sense of belonging has been “defined as one specific interpersonal process that influences health” (Hagerty et al. 1996, 234). Together, these concepts, that is, human need and motivation to better one’s well-being, stem from the fact that from their earliest days, humans seek “interaction and affiliation, forming and maintaining long-term bonds and belonging to the group” (Over 2016, 2).

Failure to achieve these living conditions results in the threat of social exclusion, thus distressing the individual. If left unresolved for a long time, they have “negative consequences for health and well-being” (Over 2016, 2). Therefore, to belong or feel that one belongs requires a secure place to be that augments the health and well-being of the individual.

Many years of study on belonging, sense of belonging, and belongingness have led to an urgency in migration studies to acknowledge the “feeling of belonging” (Hedetoft 2002) as a focus area of its own, within the contexts of migration and belonging. Danish academic Ulf Hedetoft, in *Discourses and Images of Belonging: Migrants between “New Racism,” Liberal Nationalism and Globalization* (2002), mentions that

Belonging must be situated in relation to four key parameters, which in varying configurations are responsible for its relations to and importance for the identity politics of different groups. They are, in systematic order, (1) sources of belonging, (2) feelings of belonging, (3) ascriptions and constructions of belonging, (4) fluidities of belonging. (Hedetoft 2002, 2)

<sup>2</sup> Collins Dictionary. 2020. “Keyword ‘Belonging’.” <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/belonging>.

My expatriation, thought and felt, is linked to my sense of belonging and my identity, and hence to my autobiography. I am a Greek national, born in Patras in 1976, shortly after the 1974 downfall of the dictatorial government and the return of democracy to Greece. I became an expatriate in the 1990s. The decade brought “new and old concerns to the forefront of Greek national politics. The Fall of the Berlin Wall, the dissolution of the Balkan nation-states” (Danopoulos and Karpathakis 2005, 4) became the backdrop of my tertiary education and the School of Photographic and Audio-visual Arts at the University of West Attica, which I attended part time until completion while also engaging in freelance jobs and exhibiting art wherever I could, locally and abroad. I lived in many regions of Greece until 2007. As a European citizen, I had the freedom to work in any other member state after the establishment of Articles 21 and 45—“Freedom to movement reside and work” (Europa 2020) and the increase of human “workforce mobility within the Eurozone” (Bonde 2009, 202–205), respectively. Instead, I moved to the United States in 2008 to study for my master’s and Master of Fine Arts degrees. This decision was influenced by the Anglo-American education I received in Greece in the 1980s. Learning English and other European languages was dictated by social and political etiquette.

I lived in Virginia Beach, Virginia, between 2008 and 2012 while working and studying for a Master of Fine Arts degree. The worldwide economic crash of 2008–2010 “strained public finances, and subsequent revelations about falsified statistical data drove up Greece’s borrowing costs” (Nelson, Belkin, and Mix 2001, n.p). At the beginning of 2010, Greece virtually defaulted on its public debt within the auspices of a political drama that was broadcast worldwide. The default would trigger a major crisis within the Eurozone and destabilize the world economy.

In 2010–2011, I was still in the United States. However, expatriation is bound to specific status of citizenship, and that status has an expiration date. I could not be a US resident. I lived almost 5 years in the USA but was technically out of the country, my status there being as a student, a resident alien. After graduate school, I married a French Italian, and our family then relocated to France. In 2013, we moved to the United Arab Emirates, where I am currently based, working as a visual arts professor at an Emirati university.

This autobiography defines my creative work, transience, and my current expatriation—I have lived more outside my hometown than inside. Living in several cities in Greece, in the United States, in France, and the United Arab Emirates, I constantly feel as if I do not belong or as if I am dispersed through the continents; “the world has become flat” (Friedman 2005) for me.

This curriculum vita manifests not only being a skilled worker expatriate but also belonging to the identity of the “diasporic intellectual” (Chen and Morley 2008, 486). The word “diasporic” or “diaspora” is of great importance in our vocabulary of human migration but hardly ever connotes self-expatriation, self-displacement, and even self-exile. Nevertheless, according to a workshop/report on the contextualization of the Greek crisis (2008 up to now) conducted in 2017, entitled *Diaspora and Development: The case of Greece* (led by Othon Anastasakis), “since 2010, more than 400,000 Greek citizens have left the country. Approximately two-thirds of the outflow comprises of university graduates” (Seesox 2017). The report vividly illustrates my lived experience of expatriation and establishes the underlying motives of my creative practice.

The term “diasporic” mentioned here in my analysis is used as an adjective to mean an individual of a specific ethnicity, living or working outside their country of origin. The difference is that most people belonging to a diaspora often find themselves having double or triple citizenship after several years of residence, which is not the case with my expatriation, which is temporary and precludes no naturalization to the countries I have lived in. I therefore differentiate my lived experience of expatriation with most people from the “Greek omogenia (of the same race) – a term widely used...to refer to Greek populations outside Greece” (Anagnostou 2009, 174).

## Acculturation, Social Integration, Place Attachment

Other negative human manifestations facing the expatriated, transient individual include a dysfunctional social and cultural adaptation that leads to social exclusion, alienation, culture and reverse culture shock, place attachment, and nostalgia for home. The aforementioned conditions are part of the everyday living experiences of expatriates and transient individuals and are reflected in series of creative work.

Acculturation “refers to the cultural changes that occur when two or more groups with different cultures come into contact” (Moyano 2019, n.p.). Acculturation depends on specific lived experiences and the degree of “culture shock” (Oberg 1960; Pedersen 1995) and “reverse culture shock” (Oberg 1960; Garone 2014; Clarke 2016) to which an expatriated individual is exposed. Professor Paul B. Pedersen, specializing in intercultural and multicultural interactions, defines culture shock as “any situation where the individual is forced to adjust to an unfamiliar social environment where previous learning no longer applies” (Pedersen 1995, 1; Presbytero 2016, 28). Reverse culture shock has been defined as analogous to culture shock, “although the focus is on the stresses and challenges associated with moving back to one’s own home culture after one has sojourned or lived in another cultural environment” (Presbytero 2016, 29; Gaw 2000).

The awareness of the handling of acculturation leads to four bearings: “Assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization” (Presbytero 2016, 30). Various individuals and social and cultural groups “may exhibit different acculturation trends...and a greater or lesser tendency toward social integration” (Moyano 2019, n.p.). Social integration truly depends on the identity of each expatriated or in transience individual, one’s age, and one’s perceived selfhood. Drawing from my lived experiences as an expatriate, social integration also depends on the number of expatriations, relocations, and acculturations one has undergone, which can manifest the level of attachment one has to the place once seen as home.

The negative feelings of belonging, social and cultural integration/alienation, and chronic culture and reverse culture shock are crucial concepts for *Views from Expatria: Photographing Place and the Self in Transience* and are evidenced in my series. Along with the relationship between place, place attachment, and home are fundamental social and psychological issues inextricably related to expatriation and transience. Any positive or negative response to (self) expatriation outcome depends on the equation acculturation and integration versus place attachment and nostalgia for home.

Place attachment focuses on the environmental settings to which people are emotionally and culturally attached, whereas home, as place, represents one of the stabilizing factors of the self. Proshansky et al. (1983) regard as a “stabilizing tendency of the self: the need of consistency” (cited in Korpela 1992, 244). Consistency is often associated with a fixed place; hence, a home. I explore these concepts and sentiments in *Views from Expatria: Photographing Place and the Self in Transience* in league with (or as a binary to) belonging, through my creative work, and through the hypothetical equation of place attachment versus acculturation/integration. My creative work is further informed by important scholarly works from human geography and psychology, which blend belonging into the notions of “home and place attachment” (Du 2017; Giuliani 2003; Gustafson 2006; Lewicka 2011; Low and Altman 1992; Tuan 1974; Relph 1976).

## Making Political, Not Activist, Art

Artists working within political art in an activist space have vividly portrayed the violent and inhumane side of involuntary migration. There are many illustrated concepts of the refugee or forced refugee state (e.g., Isaac Julien’s, *Cast No Shadow* 2007; Ai Weiwei’s *Laundromat* 2016, *The Law of the Journey* 2017; and Jessica Segall’s *Coda* 2020), as numerous exhibitions worldwide have taken a stance on the latest refugee crisis. For example, the 2017 MoMA

exhibition *Insecurities: Tracing Displacement and Shelter* explored “ways in which contemporary architecture and design have addressed notions of shelter in light of global refugee emergencies” (MoMA 2017). The 2018 exhibition in London’s King’s Cross, “Journeys Drawn: Illustration from the Refugee Crisis, documented the plights of Syrian refugees” (House of Illustration 2018). The 2019 Venice exhibition, *Rothko in Lampedusa: May You Live in Interesting Times*, presented works by internationally acclaimed artists “such as Ai Weiwei and Richard Mosse and those of five emerging artists from Syria, Iran, Iraq, Ivory Coast and Somalia who are also refugees” (Bigg 2019).

Refugee displacement, forced migration, its constituent impact in society, and its representations are acknowledged in my research project. However, with my project, I do not use any political, social, or cultural activism, or raging protest. Social movements in Europe and its borders date from Mesopotamian kingdoms, Ancient Greece, and Rome to “peasant rebellions and journeyman’s protests in medieval Europe” (Berger and Nehring 2020) and from eighteenth and nineteenth-century labor protests to “the advances of mass democracy in the twentieth century” (Berger and Nehring 2020). These types of activism, in both society and art require political representation and action for or against them, which my work does not do. Direct political engagement with art complicates matters, because in the end it becomes a partisan instrument. As American artist Robert Smithson mentioned in *The Collected Writings* (1996) “direct political action becomes a matter of trying to pick poison out of boiling stew” (Smithson 1996, 134).

Choices of self-expatriation are political because “the taking, exhibiting and viewing of the photograph is a political process involved with the ways in which political subjects articulate themselves and their surroundings” (Loopmans, Cowell, and Oosterlynck 2012; Hawkins 2008) but is also personal. My creative works are political but not activist. My gaze and discourse on place, expatriation, and the self are not based on power-nation and ethnographic differences. Nor is my objective to offend other cultures or commit national treason in any host nation that has welcomed me by criticizing their society, culture, or governance. The unavoidable social and political discourse and critique depicted in my work is focused on human ideology in an expanded context of human migrations and its impact on identity. Within these parameters, voluntary expatriation, as a decision, is a highly personal, social, political, psychological, and existential experience, which I call into creative inquiry without any evocation to political activism. My own personal lived experience informs my view of decoupling art and activism. Having diverse Greek, French, Italian, European, American, Middle Eastern, and Australian engagement and having created art in all these places forces me to look beyond borders and national agendas that declare politics as the instrument of their resolution. According to Jacques Rancière, professor of aesthetics at the University of Paris, along with current political art comes a common misconception that art is highly effective as a political manifestation that justifies the term “political” (2010, 134).

There is also the twenty-first century demand (rooted in postmodernism) for art to return to the political. In photography, voices since the 1970s have called for the medium to take activist roles in societal discourse. The demand for art to “return to the political” is based on the questionable postulation that art “compels us to revolt when it shows us revolting things, that it mobilizes when it itself is taken outside of the workshop or museum and that it incites us to oppose the system of domination by demounting its own participation in that system” (Rancière 2010, 135). With *Views from Expatria: Photographing Place and the Self in Transience*, I consider the historical origins of migration and their notions and representations and suggest that they require a broader conversation conducted through contemporary, nonexclusive lenses and inquiry, to which my creative-based project contributes. Creating artworks and using concepts that depict voluntary expatriation, self-displacement, and self-exile as poles of societal discourse reflecting migrant experiences hints at a new, wider social context of investigating and representing thoughts and sentiments of migration.

Voluntary expatriation includes both positive and negative human manifestations and lived experiences. The positive trigger fewer problematic outcomes, whereas the negative present a greater problem for the transient individual such as a fragile sense of belonging or feeling dispersed. Not belonging or having a fragile sense of belonging or belongingness or feeling dispersed creates problematic social interactions and emotional responses for the expatriated or transient individual. This is because self-expatriation, self-displacement, and even self-exile disregard any country-specific reasons for displacement and rather center on the identity and lived experience of the transient individual. Global mobility and skilled labor, dispersion and belonging lived and felt, acculturation, social integration, place attachment, making political but not activist art advocate for a context expansion in the traditional narratives of human migrations. Placing these issues in a broader humanistic sphere, rather than being particular or disciplinarian, my project centralizes on human ideology in an expanded context of human migrations and its impact on identity. Within these parameters, voluntary expatriation, as a decision, is a highly personal, social, political, psychological, and existential experience, which I reenact with my images without any elicitation of activism. My quest, through the series *Out of Place*; *Home No Home*; *Interiors*; *Photographing the Unphotographable*; and *Here There Are Lions* is, as such, more anthropological and existential than political.

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