

Rupture and Exile: Permanent Liminality in Spaces for Movement and Abandonment

By Harmony Sigantoria and Frank G. Karioris

The historical materialist cannot do without the concept of a present which is not a transition, in which time originates and has come to a standstill. For this concept defines precisely the present in which he writes history for his person. Historicism depicts the 'eternal' picture of the past; the historical materialist, an experience with it, which stands alone. He leaves it to others to give themselves to the whole called 'Once upon a time' in the bordello of historicism. He remains master of his powers: man enough, to explode the continuum of history. (Walter Benjamin, quoted in Virno 2015: 3)

The 20th and 21st Centuries have borne witness to several waves of movement across the globe, both within and across borders, owing either to a sometimes violent re-drawing of them, or because of transnational flows which may or may not be read as a fall-out of what is known in short-hand as globalization. With these changes, we have seen notions of statehood and nationhood challenged, pushing down – in many cases – on the ability for one to be stateless in a world where the power of the state is increasing dramatically. In addition, this period has witnessed a major transformation of individual subjectivities and the ways that people work with, through, contest, and exist in relation to elements of tradition, culture, and each other. Forms of relationality – in the strict sense of connections between individuals and between one's self and facets of identity and belonging – have found new ground and holds, while simultaneously facing challenges to the sovereignty of individuals to define their subjectivity. This thematic section attempts to reflect on some of these changes through looking at the space and place of liminality within cultures and peoples, at the extension of liminality towards permanence, and the ways in which permanence is managed, obtained, and addressed. Through this series of articles, the section hopes to contribute to our understandings of liminality, rupture and exile, as well as providing new thinking on the topic through what we believe is unique and original research.

Various thinkers who have developed the concept of liminality – expanding on the initial anthropological writings by Arnold van Gennep (1960) linked almost exclusively to rites of passage, and later Victor Turner (1969) – have taken the notion, and expanded it to include a greater variety of ambiguous situations, epochs, and spaces that might be read as liminal. As Turner outlines, liminality can be applied to someone going through a transition, being neither this nor that, and therefore simultaneously being both and neither. In his conception, liminal entities are ones who are “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned

and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony” (Turner 1969: 95). These entities are therefore outside prior ‘classifications’, but not outside the need (or requirement) for classification anew. Liminality is therefore construed as a midpoint – similar to Michel de Certeau’s (1988) concept of the ‘bridge’, widely perceived as a temporary state which must end with the ‘initiate’s’ reincorporation into the social structure.

Arpad Szakolczai, building on this idea, suggests that one is also able to become trapped in a form of ‘permanent liminality’, which he says comes in three stages, mirroring the phases demarcated in and for rites of passage. He holds that “liminality becomes a permanent condition when any of the phases in this sequence (separation, liminality, and re-aggregation) becomes frozen, as if a film stopped at a particular frame” (Szakolczai 2000: 220). In such a liminal situation, as BjørnThomassen warns us, liminality is “pure danger” (2012: 30). What Szakolczai calls ‘separation’ – the first stage in a rite of passage – is what contributors to this section explore in the idea of rupture; a breach, or even a clean break from the orientations and grand narratives which undergird societies. A number of pieces in this section grapple with outlining reasons for (and analysing the nature of) contextually located ruptures with prior epistemes which force communities or groups into liminality. These pieces read various manifestations of rupture as markers which indicate whether liminality may, indeed, become permanent or ‘dangerous’, and whether the final stage of re-aggregation is therefore a possibility for the groups in question at all. In other words, rupture as treated in this section is both closely allied to liminality, as well as indicative of the kind of liminality that groups occupy/traverse.

Overview of the Thematic Section

It is the ‘danger’ of liminality that Paul D’Souza’s ‘Life-as-Lived Today: Perpetual (Undesired) Liminality of Half-widows of Kashmir’ sets out to delineate, in the particular context of the liminal characters known as the ‘half-widows’ of Kashmir. The disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir in northern India has been wracked with violence for decades, to the point that what started out as the dispute ‘of’ Kashmir (because both Pakistan as well as India lay claim to it) has led to crippling conflicts ‘in’ Kashmir. By the early 1990s, the deployment of ground troops on the streets of Kashmir, aimed to curb the armed insurgency which had arisen in the area, and militarized the entire region. ‘Half-widow’ is the term used to refer to women whose husbands have gone ‘missing’. The legal position of their status is yet to be clarified both by clergy and law, rendering this figure a personification of one form of what it means to be permanently liminal. D’Souza writes, “By conservative estimates, there are 1,500 women who are identified as half-widows ‘whose husbands are assumed dead but there is no proof to show they actually are’ ... They occupy a liminal space that denies them both the status of a wife and the dignity of a widow”. More broadly, the article explores what it means to live in an ‘undesired’ liminal state,

and questions whether there is a possibility that these women will be able to move towards a space where half-widows can participate as full citizens of a polity, and members of their respective communities.

Following this, Aija Lulle's 'Revitalising Borders: Memory, Mobility and Materiality in a Latvian-Russian Border Region' explores the ramifications of acts of rupture premised on the re/drawing and enforcing of physical (and political) borders in the region between Latvia and Russia. Lulle proposes that the concept of 'rupture' bespeaks political as well as embodied change, pertaining to individual and social upheaval. She holds that rupture is also an important concept with which to study the shifting conceptualisations in border studies, applicable to natural, geopolitical and socially constructed barriers alike. "By placing an emphasis on rupture, the main question becomes as follows: *how do ruptures emerge; how are they produced and experienced by people in a borderland?*" she explores in her article, which sets out to establish how the idea of the border is revitalised in routine political rhetoric and discourses dealing with threat and the 'securitisation' of nation-states. Drawing on fieldwork, the author shows how lived reality can appear in sharp contrast to the political revitalisation of the border. It is within symbolic and cultural realms that this article locates memories of mobility as residing. These memories afforded by (and in) 'Soviet times' are embedded in discourses of youth and vitality, corresponding to the respondents' own youth and working lives, in terms of time-lines. This is juxtaposed against the lexicon of empty dreariness which has come to be associated with perceived immobility in the present, made concrete in the words of respondents who describe it as "abandonment, decay" and the desire to move away from where they find themselves.

Thinking about 'moving away from' opens up the discursive field which yields what Foucault identifies as the trace residue left over after a paradigm-altering rupture occurs. This thematic section reads rupture as discontinuity, or what Foucault explains as being a moment of transition that forces a "redistribution of the [prior] episteme" (Foucault 1970: 345). Speaking to this notion of memory (residue) and rupture as a redistribution of prior epistemes coded in embodied practices which manifest in lexicon and acts of naming, Harmony Siganporia's 'Seeking Dhasa; Finding Lhasa: Liminality and Narrative in the Tibetan Refugee Capital of Dharamsala' explores the role of narrative and narrativity as processes which seek to stabilise identities in exile, read here as a means of fending off what Thomassen identifies as the 'danger' inherent to liminality. The article is contextually located in the capital of Tibetan exile, the north Indian town of Dharamsala. It attempts to decode the narratives which allow the town to cohere and correspond with Lhasa, the erstwhile capital of free Tibet. The article explores how the act of narrativising is a demonstration of the fact that it is in indeterminacy – in liminality – that structuration becomes possible anew. Following Thomassen (2009) and Szakolczai (2009), liminality is here treated as a concept applicable to time as well as place; individuals as well as communities, and social 'events' or changes of magnitude. It

is this form of liminality that Siganporia proposes “has to be a central concept in any exploration of exile groups which...live in the spaces between the shorn identity markers of the past – rooted as these must be in a lost homeland – and the present, where they must be iterated or manufactured anew”. In response to Thomassen’s question about who, in times of ‘social drama’, the carriers of the new world-view which will eventually come to be institutionalised must be, particularly if there appears to be no end-point to the liminal condition in sight (2009: 19), Siganporia proposes that this question should be modified by adding ‘where’ (to index site or location) and ‘what’ (a scanning of cultural artefacts and practices emergent in exile) to the ‘who’ it seeks to locate as the carriers in question.

Following this, Line Richter’s ‘On the Edge of Existence: Malian Migrants in the Maghreb’ considers liminality in the context of the lived reality of Sub-Saharan migrants from the Maghreb en route to Europe. In her piece, Richter discusses how several studies on the region have outlined the marginalised and multiply precarious positions these migrants on the edge of Europe hold, in the light of the turn that liminality studies have taken after Victor Turner. Her own fieldwork looks at the way Malian migrants in Algeria and Morocco live out and experience this trope, in their day-to-day lives in the transit camps and localities which dot their passage to Europe. Treating the Maghreb as a place of ‘in-between-ness’, she argues that its location provides the setting for a kind of permanent liminality. She explores this theme in three ways: by analyzing the underlying motivations for migrant crossings; by exploring the ‘mimicking’ of social and political structures which mark and orient migrant localities and transit camps in meaningful ways; and by examining the ruptures with humanity which several of her respondents identify as constitutive of their experiences in this space/time. The article argues that “the concept of limbo, from the Latin *limbus*, which means *edge* or *border*, can...guide our attention to the fixity and dead-ended-ness of migrant life on the move,” suggesting that in this instance, it might prove a more interesting lens through which to explore journeying migrants than liminality itself.

‘Temporally Adrift and Permanently Liminal: Relations, Dystalgia and a U.S. University as Site of Transition and Frontier’ by Frank G. Karioris provides the bookend to the thematic section and explores time in the context of liminality through a study of homosocial relations in Regan Hall (an all-male hall of residence) at the University of St Jerome in the American Midwest. In this piece, Karioris reads the experiences of his respondents in the hall “as a transition phase which one is liable to get stuck in,” whilst seeking to uncover “what this specific iteration of perception might suggest about these men, their place in society, their age, gender, race, class, and desires”. He analyzes how these students situate themselves within a temporal frame which locates their experiences within framework that he calls “a nostalgia for the present,” through which process the ‘good-old days’ are, in fact, the ones being lived through in the present moment. Building on de Certeau’s ideas of the bridge and frontier, Karioris holds that both concepts act as

spaces of connection because they do not foreclose points of contact. The liminal space that is the bridge, in his study, is one which is “always connected and yet always outside of,” thus charging it with the possibility of danger and/or failure.

Conclusion

Each piece in this thematic section is a musing and contribution to the applicability of the concept of liminality – both as traditionally defined as well as extending into what we now think of as ‘permanent’ – to places, times, movements and communities around the world. The present moment is one which is seeing larger and larger worker and student uprisings in India, South Africa, Brazil and countless other post-colonies, not to mention the onset of the largest refugee crisis since World War II in Europe. It is clearly a moment in which the worth of a concept like liminality, which allows us an entry point into discourses of precarity, vulnerability, and the simultaneous erasure (rupture) and re-creation of modalities of classification, is vital. The articles that make up the section attempt to extend the questions one is able to ask of the concept of permanent liminality, even as they try to explore the ramifications of what it means to actually live it. We believe that these articles strongly contribute to our understandings of these critical concepts, and build on extant literature. We hope that they provide a further opening point for scholarship and allow for these prescient conceptual tools to be applied beyond these particular contexts, locales, and spatio-temporal boundaries.

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