

Through Global Eyes

The baby is crying again – and how could he not be? The “ship” is swaying in all directions, and a “36-hour” long journey is hardly ideal for a baby barely out of the womb¹. The cabin is quiet, thankfully my cabinmates are still asleep. I suppose I am lucky, in some ways. Not everyone was able to escape from this looming “uncertain future”². I look down at my baby, trying to soothe him so that everyone can get some sleep. We will soon be reunited with my husband³.

But the baby will not stop crying. I look down at his chest, staring at the tiny cross that hangs from his neck – we had just Christened him⁴. This way, maybe our merciful God will spare him.

But...terrible, dark red droplets are appearing on his chest. Blood, by the looks of them. Bewildered, I dig into my baby’s clothes, trying to find the source, and I gasp in horror when I discover that the chain of his cross is strangling him, sawing the sensitive skin of his neck. I pull at it relentlessly, desperately trying to loosen it but to no avail, and the baby is crying, crying, crying...

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My eyes snap open. This wretched dream again. This wretched dream of that wretched ship- no, that’s ungrateful. I’m here with my husband, our baby is okay, we are okay⁵. Conditions “are somewhat better... there [is] no war, no uncertainty, you [can] even find a job”⁶. We are making do.

My son is fussing in his bed- time for me to get up and tend to him. Time to live this new life.

My husband is at work, of course, so I have to handle the daily chores and taking care of our child by myself⁷. Not that there’s anything more interesting to occupy myself with.

¹ Interview with Charlotte (pseudonym for participant), conducted in 2023. The interview was conducted in Greek, and the excerpts used in this short story have been translated into English by me.

² Interview with Charlotte, conducted in 2023.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

There's no social life here at all⁸. Hardly ideal life for a girl just "20 years old"⁹, *longing* to have a life. But to have a life, you also need money. Money is tight, and we have to "calculate everything to survive, there[']s no other solution"¹⁰. Before having a life, comes survival.

The flat is small, a "survival home"¹¹, as we've been jokingly calling it, so my daily chores aren't too time-consuming. It can't compare to the home I left behind because of the war¹². "Most things, our furniture, our living room, televisions"¹³, everything is still in that house I don't know if we'll ever go back to. It's not just the 'things' though, is it? It's the memories too. It's that past life, long gone.

I pick up my sleepy son from his crib and cross the short hallway to the kitchen to make his breakfast, mentally compiling a to-do list. I start the washing machine with a sigh, setting him into his highchair. The laundry won't do itself. Nor is there anyone to help me with anything¹⁴.

We didn't think it would happen to us, initially. We knew that trouble was brewing, we knew about the "bombings and the battles" in the other villages¹⁵, but momentarily, it had seemed like we would be fine. It couldn't happen to us – until it did. I blinked and it all turned into reality.

I blinked and there I was, heavily "pregnant", leaving my home, and spending hot summer evening with my swollen belly resting "on the ground on a single quilt", at some stranger's house, in safe place in the mountains¹⁶.

I blinked, and we were moving to a flat in the city – not given to us as our own, of course, and in the chaos of it all, I gave birth to my son¹⁷.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

I blinked, and I was on a “ship”¹⁸.

I always dreamed of seeing the world, but definitely not like this. Before the war, the sea meant summertime, ports and ships meant vacation, and suitcases meant moving to university – with promises to come back for Christmas. Until the war, the sea had never been the only viable option, the only chance to have a home, money, and support¹⁹.

I blinked, and the laundry is done.

I go outside to our tiny balcony, to hang the clothes to dry. The sun has barely risen over the horizon, and for a second I am comforted in the idea that my family, my people that I left behind²⁰, are also just waking up to the same sunrise – but this is quickly replaced by the familiar worry I felt for them day I left my country. “Worry about further bombings and battles” but also about what the “uncertain future” held for them, “without jobs, without anything”²¹.

Moments like this, I grieve about what I lost, about how much more “productive” life would have been, if I still lived in my village, in my home²². From the looks of it, we are going to be staying here a while²³, long enough to rebuild our lives before we go back to our country.

I step inside once again, and watch as my baby, almost a toddler now, is crawling across the kitchen floor. Soon he’ll be walking, taking his first steps on foreign soil. Soon he’ll call home a place that he wouldn’t otherwise have known. Soon he’ll speak the tongue of the other children here, different to that of his motherland²⁴. My heart pains for him, as it pains for me.

The laundry is drying; the baby is crawling; the sun is rising; the sea, the sea that brought me here, is dancing.

And I am standing still, longing for the stillness of my old life.

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

Reflection:

The word ‘migrant’ can function as an “umbrella term” to describe a wide variety of globalised individuals and their experiences (IOM, 2024), with migration being a similarly ‘catch-all’ term, if defined as “movement from one geographical location to another” (Mavroudi and Nagel, 2016, pg. 4). My family’s history of displacement, and my own migration experience as an international student seemed to both be ‘covered’ by that definition, which intrigued me, and inspired the two aims of my project: Firstly, I wanted to raise awareness about involuntary migration movements, specifically refugee movements, by creating an informative yet emotive piece using an anthropocentric perspective. Secondly, as an international student, I wanted this project to encourage reflection for those with voluntary migration experiences similar to mine. My chosen title, ‘Through Global Eyes’, reflects the transdisciplinarity of my project: Migration is best understood *through* the *global eyes* of the people that have experienced it – not just specialists of particular disciplines.

In achieving these aims, I decided to interview a refugee, my grandmother, who undertook internal and international relocations after becoming displaced during the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus (Charlotte, 2023). The interview was conversational, and guided by open-ended questions and prompts for discussion. Then, I took elements and quotations from it and incorporated them into a fictional short story – the medium of my Student Devised Assessment (SDA). The interview was conducted in Greek, and was translated by me for this assignment.

A conscious decision in making my short story transdisciplinary was avoiding contested political terms and definitions, so that the reader can focus on the human experience conveyed in the project without being distracted by political debates. Therefore, even though I interviewed someone that sees themselves as having been made a refugee (Charlotte, 2023), I did not include such terminology in the short story. I was surprised to realise that the internally displaced Cypriots of the 1974 invasion would not be considered refugees according to the UNHCR (2024) perception of refugees as “people who have fled their countries to escape conflict, violence, or persecution, and have sought safety in another country”. In contrast, the Republic of Cyprus calls internally displaced people “refugees in their own country” (MFA, 2024), evidently using

terminology differently. Simultaneously, following the UNHCR (2024) approach, where the threat of direct violence as the reason for one's flight seems to be a requirement in defining refugees, neither would my grandmother leaving Cyprus be enough to 'qualify' her as a refugee, as the war ended in August 1974 (Drousiotis, 2009) before she had left, even though she effectively had no other option – being away from her husband and having no permanent home – and she made clear that she would not have left had it not been for the war (Charlotte, 2023). Ultimately, I think that terminology is subjective, and attaching it to human experiences is harmful in that it seems to de-legitimise the experiences that can only be seen *through the global eyes* of those that have lived them. Hence, I did not tie the protagonist of the short story to any particular migrant category – I simply show that her migration was involuntary. Nevertheless, I think that it is important to present this issue here, to explore a limitation of *disciplinarily* defining the lived experience of individuals, which highlights the value of transdisciplinarity in simply *listening and empathising*, rather than trying to categorise human beings.

The short story is fictional since it is not a narration of an actual day in my grandmother's life, but it follows the experiences she recounted during the interview. I made this choice because I wanted my medium to be relatable to a **universal audience**, as well as **myself**: I think that presenting a dramatized short story instead of describing a non-fiction account is more effective in raising awareness by helping these audiences to step into the world of the protagonist, which is also ideal for **international students** like me, to reflect on their experience by comparing them with hers. To achieve this, apart from demographic characteristics that I considered central to the story, I have omitted ethnicity, countries of origin and destination, and names, in an attempt to make it as universal as possible, and I also set the majority of the story in a domestic environment that a universal audience can envision themselves in. Ultimately, I tried to make the story as transdisciplinary as possible: Since it doesn't require any disciplinary knowledge to read and relate to, it can reach a more general audience than it could if I had used another medium, like an academic essay on migration, which may have been less accessible to people without an academic background. Simultaneously, I didn't want to raise awareness on the grounds of *over-dramatization*, which is why it was important to

conduct the interview and explore the *actual* experience of a refugee instead of relying purely on my imagination to craft the story.

As a politics student, including my grandmother's lived experience into the short story was useful in departing from my own disciplinary knowledge on migration by giving me other perspectives I was less knowledgeable about. For example, attempting to capturing the psychological experience of refugees, I asked questions about my grandmother's emotions at every leg of her migration journey. The dream I crafted as the opening of my short story was not something she narrated to me, but is drawing from her experiences travelling to her destination country. By incorporating that dream, I wanted to explore the mental health risks among refugees that can arise from traumatic experiences on their journeys (Emmelkamp, 2023). Research shows that the mental health of relocated refugees can be affected by financial issues and worry for loved ones left behind (Emmelkamp, 2023), which were reported in the interview (Charlotte, 2023) and incorporated into the short story, as well as missing home, and concern about children's education (Emmelkamp, 2023), which my grandmother mentioned as reasons she wanted to return to Cyprus (Charlotte, 2023). Moreover, the short story hints at medical dangers refugees might face, specifically pregnant refugee women. The protagonist in my short story has lived through my grandmother's internal displacement while pregnant (Charlotte, 2023), a detail that I felt was important to include to display that pregnant female refugees may face additional health dangers on their migration journeys, with research showing that the risk of stillbirths and miscarriages is higher among refugee women, which has been linked physical and mental stress during migration (Harakow et al., 2021).

The link to the theme of Global Connections is easily identified in the story, and is connected to the second aim of my project – realisation of privilege, alongside legitimisation of different experiences. For this aim, it was important to me that I interviewed my own grandmother because of the demographic similarities we shared at the time of our migration – gender and approximate age – which would be useful to me as an audience for this SDA in reflecting on my own experiences. Key to wider international student audiences, however, would be the involuntary and forcible conditions under which the character of the story became displaced, and consequently globally

connected. Drawing from my own experience, I perceive studying abroad as a choice and a privilege that signifies a big step into adulthood. However, for Charlotte (2023) and my story's protagonist displacement was involuntary, and migration was necessary. I tried to address this in the short story through the emotional conundrum the protagonist is facing, going back and forth between being grateful for her ability to migrate, and resenting her new life while missing her home, to explore whether there was actually any real choice in the situation. Moreover, the arduous internal migration flashbacks that draw from Charlotte's (2023) story offer a contrast to what I perceive to be the typical international student migration experience of packing up and going to the airport, often with the help of parents.

Furthermore, the mundanity of the protagonist's life alongside her newfound adult responsibilities are described in the short story, which were perhaps too great for a young woman doing it all by herself. This was especially important for me to reflect on as a young adult also assuming some adult responsibilities in a new country, but not to that extent – I do not have any dependents or financial constraints, and I have migrated to a town where there is plenty to do. International students with experiences similar to mine could maybe benefit from reflecting on their privilege by trying to put themselves into the shoes of other migrant groups, like refugees, and explore what emotions this surfaces for them.

However, without moderation, this way of thinking may be self-destructive: I sometimes resent myself for having any 'negative' feelings about living abroad, especially for missing my family, and for feeling like a foreigner. However, these were variations of emotions that Charlotte (2023) also described having as a young adult living away from her family: missing home, being called "The Cypriot", and longing for the life she left behind. This shows that these are all valid feelings and emotions of any migrant, be they a refugee, or an international student. So, while the experience of completing this project helped me understand my privilege, it also reinforced that becoming globally connected isn't always a positive experience, and migrants can feel a range of emotions on their journey, concluding then, that no migration journey is 'less valid' than others.

A limitation of my research is that I only interviewed one refugee for the short story, and I am only using my own experiences to explore the international student perspective in my reflection, making generalisations and assumptions based on that, which cannot reflect

the experience of all refugees or all international students. Perhaps this creates an opportunity for future research in comparing and contrasting migration experiences.

Overall, I think the combination of the disciplines of literature (short story), social science (the interview), politics, psychology, and medicine in completing this project show its interdisciplinarity, with the short story's focus on raising awareness and cultivating empathy, by exploring human experiences *through the global eyes* of those who have lived them hopefully making it transdisciplinary. Simultaneously, I hope to have conveyed valuable insights about privilege and legitimisation of experience which could help international student audiences to grow in empathy and maturity, as well as with being at peace with both positive and negative experiences on their migration journeys.

Word count: 2746

Appendix:

Regarding the use of footnotes/endnotes in the short story, the reader should be aware that whenever quotation marks AND footnotes/endnotes have been used, it means that the author is using direct quotations from the interview. When footnotes/endnotes are used by themselves, without quotation marks, it means that the text they correspond to has been paraphrased, or is drawing from the wider events described in the interview, but is not a direct quote. Parts where footnotes/endnotes have not been used at all are product of this author's imagination, and were inspired by the interview, but are not drawing from what was said in it. The use of [] indicates that the original tense (i.e. past tense) used in the interview has been changed to fit with the tenses used in the story (i.e. present tense)

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