

Introduction

Greeting Xamar

After Mohamed disembarked from the plane and set foot in the city he had left behind thirty years ago, he knelt down on the tarmac to kiss the ground. Fellow passengers gave him puzzled looks, awkward giggles, smiles. It was his way of greeting *Xamar*, ‘the red one’, as Somalis often like to call Mogadishu.



Figure 0.1 *Stray bullet on a stony path. Image courtesy of Mohamed Ibrahim*

Over the past two decades the colour red has come to take on a new symbolic meaning for Somalis. It represents the violence, fear and terror that have devastated the country, driven more than a million people out of Somalia and led to the breakdown of the government, as well as to ever-shifting alliances, and attacks and counter-attacks, among clans and sub-clans. In 1981, only nineteen years old, and after months of struggling to gain a passport, Mohamed migrated to Australia – partly because he had met an Australian woman, a young nurse who had come to Somalia as a member of a health team assisting internally displaced refugees, and partly because he sensed the upcoming civil war. Mohamed was amongst the first Somalis to settle in Melbourne. In the thirty years that followed he married the Australian woman he had fallen in love with, had four children with her, studied, became a telecommunications expert and made Melbourne his home. During this time, with the war uprooting his elderly parents and his brothers and sisters, many of whom he brought to Melbourne, Somalia as a place that lived and breathed had slipped away into a shadow area of his mind. While not entirely out of his life, Somalia had taken on the shape of a *somewhere*.

Around 2009, however, something changed. Somalia began crawling back into Mohamed's thoughts. Its aches and pains began to preoccupy him. It was time, he thought, to look for cures – and such a search needed the strength and energy of every Somali, old and young, man and woman, in the country and outside of it. He gave up his job in Melbourne in exchange for the (financial and personal) insecurity that came with the role of an IT advisor to the Somali transitional government. This government was in desperate need of educated people like Mohamed, driven by the motivation to rebuild Somalia and holding a passport from a Western country that allowed them to travel, connect and negotiate with other countries. From now on Mohamed was constantly on the move: from country to country, from UN conference to UN conference, from one international meeting to the next. But despite leading the life of a globetrotter, none of his travels took him back to the place all his thoughts and effort were directed towards. Because of the continuous instability in Mogadishu and the risk for politicians to move about freely, most Somali ministers operated from neighbouring countries. So although Somalia was at the centre of Mohamed's thoughts and actions, initially his position did not require him to return to his country. In 2011, however, he was overcome by an urge to see and confront Mogadishu as it had become. Despite the dangers of travelling in such a lawless place, and despite the continuing threat of attacks

by Islamist al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam rebels, Mohamed decided to embark on this return journey. Walking through the devastated streets and buildings, he took photos – images he would take back with him to Melbourne.

Back in Australia, sitting in a small coffee shop at Melbourne University, Mohamed showed me these photos. In 2009, when I was trying to find my way around Melbourne and looking for Somalis interested to work with me on their life stories, he was amongst the first people I had met. In fact, he was amongst the first people in Melbourne I became friends with. Looking for organizations to provide an entry point into the community, I had come across Mohamed as the chairman of the Somali Cultural Association. While none of the organizations I contacted paved my way into the field, my friendship with Mohamed marked the beginning of my research taking shape. The photos of his journeys he shared with me during his stays in Melbourne, or in emails laconically signed ‘the nomad’, began to form a bridge between us and shape some of the main themes that would come to preoccupy me in my research.

Sitting in the university coffee shop, flicking through the photos he had taken in Mogadishu on his laptop, he paused and pointed. ‘Look!’ he said to me. ‘I really like this one.’ I was surprised that he said he *liked* the photo. It depicts one of the many bullets that, as he told me, cover the city’s ground. Against the backdrop of a grey gravel road, the bullet looks tiny, almost lost and innocent. Laughing, he explained that because of their whistling noise people in Mogadishu have jokingly come to call them ‘Yusuf’. Ssuf, ssuf, ssuf they go ...

But for Mohamed the bullet was not what moved him about the picture. ‘Look at the ground it lies on,’ he told me and pointed at the road. ‘These rocks, they are so special, so specific for this part of Mogadishu, that even if I hadn’t been the one to take this photo, I would have recognized it.’ ‘And the bullet?’ I asked. ‘They are everywhere’, Mohamed said. ‘Even if you are not looking for them, you will find them everywhere.’

While I had read the photo as another testimony to the destruction of Mogadishu, Mohamed was preoccupied with the sense of place it depicted. The stones that moved him to take the picture are the stones that cover a road that leads from the city to the ocean. That road stands for the light and easy times Mohamed experienced in Mogadishu as a teenager, a time before the Barre regime’s violence against dissident clans, and a time he remembers in terms of the city’s beauty and sophistication. It was the road he promenaded

along with friends on warm summer evenings, when people flocked towards the beach for picnics and games. Because the beach was such a popular place for all inhabitants of Mogadishu to meet and spend time together, and the road the best way to walk there from the city, Mohamed stresses that anyone who has lived there will recognize the stones as part of the road that leads towards the Indian Ocean. Far from being another sad document of the breakdown of Somalia, the photo evokes a sense of past unity, of the days when people from all clans literally walked down the same path. It calls upon the memories of all Mogadishians, those who still live there and those whom the war has displaced, and it does so through *place*. Just as Mohamed, much to the bewilderment of the people around him, had kissed the tarmac to greet the city he had left behind, so did his photo embrace the sense of place that had carried his being-at-home in Mogadishu.

If a stony road in a city left behind so many years ago has the power to evoke such a strong sense of attachment to (or perhaps even love for) place, what is it that underlies this feeling? Is it what some theorists have described as ‘the power of place’ (Agnew and Duncan 1989; Hayden 1997; De Blij 2009)? Or is it, perhaps, the opposite? Does the strength of Mohamed’s image derive from the very sense of displacement it depicts? In a world in which people like Mohamed (the ‘nomad’) can be in Geneva today for a conference and in Mali tomorrow, at another, and at a meeting in Dubai the day after, and in which people like me can move to the other side of the globe to do research with people who have also left their home-places behind, are homelessness and uprootedness, as John Berger (1984: 55) has suggested, the ‘quintessential experience’ of our time? Then again, how can *displacement* in and for itself explain the abiding strength of stones on a road in a place like Mogadishu that has witnessed so much grief?

Mohamed’s story of the image draws attention to the complex dynamics between emplacement and displacement as lived and felt in people’s everyday lives. It raises questions about the links between place and the sensual, place and memory, place and movement, and place and the larger world. Mohamed’s strong attachment to place also evokes questions about the common portrayal of people who have experienced displacement as homelessness as a being out of place, or, literally, as placelessness; it challenges us to ask how people actually shape and reshape places, particularly in the face of displacement, and how they negotiate their position in relation to the wider world.

Storying Place

Mohamed's photograph evokes a sense of the lived tension between emplacement and displacement. His image and reflections form a direct link to the two people whose lives and stories form the core of this book: Halima Mohamed and Omar Farah Dhollawa, two Somalis, who, over the course of two years, have told me their life stories. In weaving its way through their ups and downs, victories and losses, hopes and bereavements, this book looks at how emplacement and displacement are felt and understood in the everyday lives of these two individuals.

In many ways this book is anchored in the power of storytelling. It is through stories that humans travel their inner landscapes with others and thereby move them beyond their inner selves, and it is through stories that these landscapes morph and transcend and receive a presence in the here and now. I was not just a silent listener, the passive recipient of life stories. Rather, in travelling through these landscapes together, in letting them leak into the present, we allowed our lives to touch each other. Storying, the means through which we bring our inner world out and take the outer world in, has the ability to form, transform and change our experiences of things. It is through storying that we overcome our separateness, that we work towards common ground and that we rework reality. Through telling each other stories, through walking and talking Melbourne, Mogadishu, Puntland, Dubai and Vienna together, my understanding of emplacement and displacement took shape. In order to attend to this crucial moment of ethnographic work – to come to an understanding of meaning as a lived intersubjective reality, as the product of a dialogue that includes the material, imaginative and emotional landscapes of human relationships – some of my own stories will inevitably come to enter this book.

In sharp contrast to the grand themes, statistics and models that mark much research in the field of forced migration, the zooming in on two individuals' lifeworlds allows for a close look at the particularity and everydayness of being-in-place. This is not to suggest that Halima's and Omar's stories do not have the power to speak for more than themselves. As philosopher Jeff Malpas stresses, 'for the most part, it is the place of the ordinary and the everyday in and through which what is extraordinary shines forth' (Malpas 2012: 14). The following travels through stories will show how, through an engagement with the ordinary activities around which human life

takes shape, the world at large comes into view. Throughout this journey, Mohamed's photographs accompany and pave the way for my thinking, writing and storying. The sensitivity, beauty and poetry of his way of seeing and depicting Mogadishu form junctures, or crossroads, between chapters that allow for a moment of reflection and a chance to gather, let go of or re-emplace thoughts. Above all, Mohamed's images of all the lost, ruined, reawakening and stubbornly persisting places he came across work as a skilful reminder of some of the deep-seated layers of emplacement and displacement that cannot always easily be expressed in words. Yet, it is perhaps through stories of displacement that emplacement best comes to the fore. In the last stanza of his poem 'Little Gidding', T.S. Eliot suggests that it is in the human nature to venture out into the world and explore it. He notes that it is precisely because of these outward movements that we are able to look at the place we have left behind with new eyes and understand it 'for the first time'.

Two People, Two Places

Australia and Somalia, two countries which, each in their own ways, have movement and migration at the core of their foundation stories, are intriguing places around which to frame a project that examines the dynamics of emplacement and displacement in a world of movement.

Somalis are often pictured to represent a double sense of movement: with around 60 per cent of the population organized along nomadic, non-sedentary clan-structures, identifying a place of 'original' territorial and cultural belonging takes on an entirely new meaning. With nomadic pastoralism and trade as the main forms of livelihood, mobility has been a crucial element for the Somali-speaking region over many centuries. In traditional stories and oral history accounts, migration is narrated as central to Somaliness itself. In these stories, Somalis speak of their migration from Aden to the Horn of Africa about one thousand years ago, but also of migratory movements within the country (Lewis 1999: 21–23; Kleist 2004: 2). Thirty years of war have led to the movement of a large number of Somalis all over the world. Ever since the breakdown of the military government of Siyaad Barre in 1991, Somalia has been without a central government. Warlordism, famine and ethnic conflict have turned more than one million people into refugees, with a third generation of Somalis growing up in exile. Because of the (historical and

present) importance of migratory movement in the lives of Somalis, many scholars have highlighted the ways mobility determines questions of identity and belonging (e.g. Griffiths 2002; Horst 2006; Huisman et al. 2011).

In Australia, a nation of migrants that was built on the back of the violent displacement of its indigenous inhabitants, the search for an understanding of emplacement also needs to dig deep. For while Australia likes to celebrate itself as an immigrant nation, the question of who is allowed in and who has to stay out, who can lay claim to the place and who cannot, is highly contested (Hage 1998). Australia is amongst the few countries worldwide committed to resettling a substantial number of refugees living in protracted situations every year, but the question of who of the 22.5 million refugees worldwide is ‘deserving’ of resettlement in Australia has become a highly politicized issue. Forced migrants, who cannot or do not want to await the highly unlikely chance of being amongst the 1 per cent selected for resettlement by the UNHCR every year and take charge of their situations by coming to Australia (be it on leaky boats or by plane on tourist visas) and applying for asylum onshore, are portrayed as security threats and as queue jumpers who take away places from the deserving. Indeed, Australia has gone to great lengths to keep asylum seekers, marked as the ultimate outsiders, from laying claim to the place. Since 2001, the country has used draconian measures to prevent boat refugees from entering Australian territory. Reflecting a longstanding fear of invasion from the north, government responses treat asylum seekers arriving by boat as a serious threat (Mares 2001; Neumann 2015). Boat refugees are intercepted at sea and either turned back or sent to offshore detention centres on remote islands beyond the Australian migration zone, where they languish under extremely harsh conditions for indefinite periods of time. The treatment of refugees in Australia is thus marked by a sharp divide between people coming through the government’s official resettlement programme and asylum seekers arriving by boat. While the former are deemed deserving the protection and attention of the Australian public and receive generous support, the latter are treated as threats in need of control and containment.

That Somalis were permitted to immigrate and that Halima, Mohamed and Omar made their way to Melbourne were the result of a complex set of political processes. It was only from the 1990s onwards that a shift in policy focus allowed for the resettlement of refugees from the Horn of Africa, most of whom settled in the state of Victoria, specifically in and around Melbourne. The 2011 census

showed the number of Somalia-born living in Victoria to be 3,061, an increase of almost 17 per cent to the census figures from 2006 (ABS 2012). With the backlash against Muslim migrants after 9/11 (Poynting et al. 2004) and the complication of family reunion processes, however, the possibilities for Somalis to migrate to or become resettled in Australia have increasingly narrowed. Those who try to circumvent these exclusionary policies by embarking on perilous journeys to reach Australia by boat are confronted with the flipside of Australia's Janus-faced approach to refugees, as they are shipped to offshore detention camps or returned to Indonesia, Sri Lanka or Vietnam.

The two main places this book moves in and around, it seems, are united through images of displacement; Halima's and Omar's stories, however, suggest otherwise. While born in Somalia, neither of them lived the life of a nomad, not in Somalia, and not during the many years they spent on the move, looking for a place to settle down. Although both were admitted to Australia on humanitarian grounds, neither of them regarded themselves to be refugees. Refugeeeness, Omar often told me, was nothing more than an obstacle, an extra weight that kept dragging people down. From the very first time I met Omar, he told me that Australia was his home. He arrived in Melbourne in 1989, shortly before the outbreak of the civil war in Somalia. Like Mohamed, he left the country with the combination of an adventurous spirit and fear that the already precarious political situation would deteriorate. In Australia, Omar studied international development and married a Somali woman from Mogadishu. Together with their five children they live in Hopper's Crossing, an outer suburb about 30 km south-west of Melbourne's centre.

Melbourne is where Omar locates his home now – and he invests all his time and effort to shape the place in ways that will allow him and fellow Somalis to become an accepted part of it. After years of struggle to find employment and watching many of his highly qualified Somali friends getting turned down time and again, Omar founded an NGO, Horn-Afrik, an employment, training and advocacy organization. He also works as a freelance interpreter, translating Somali documents into English, or government announcements into Somali. Because of his ability to articulate his community's concerns, and also because of his considerate nature, he has become a well-respected elder and spokesperson within the wider community of Somalis in Melbourne.

Like Omar, Halima is also actively involved in making the Somali community feel at home in Melbourne. She arrived in Australia ten

years ago with three of her children and her adopted son. Because of her involvement in the government, she had been forced to leave Mogadishu in 1991 when the Barre regime collapsed and guerrillas from rival clans began to systematically target members of her clan. In the chaos of fleeing Somalia, Halima lost her husband, and for over a decade she did not know that he was still alive. Her own exodus led her, her four children and her sister's son through many different countries and finally to the United Arab Emirates, where she stayed for twelve years. After years of being in a constant state of limbo in a country where she did not have a legal status and on the verge of being deported back to Somalia, she was granted a family reunion visa to live in Australia. Over the past ten years, she has developed a strong sense of connection to her neighbourhood in the suburb of Maidstone, an area that is often portrayed as conflict-ridden and unsafe. All these problems, however, do not keep Halima from being attached to this place. Soon after her arrival in Melbourne she began looking for ways to help and strengthen the Somali community in her corner of the city. Once a week Halima works for a multicultural children's playgroup. She has also set up a small group of Somali women to run the canteen in a school in Kensington, a suburb close to where she lives, and organizes sewing classes for African women.

Without anticipating the details of the stories that form the heart of this book, these brief profiles of Halima and Omar and the places in which they are located already foreshadow some of the core dynamics. The efforts Halima and Omar invest in making Melbourne their home suggests that it is not their experience of displacement but rather their relentless struggle for *emplacement* that links them. These movements towards emplacement underscore Tim Ingold's suggestion that life is a movement of opening, not closing. Rather than getting stuck in a state of inescapable displacement, Halima's and Omar's narratives speak for the power of the story to move beyond these limitations. Life, Ingold (2011: 4) writes, 'just keeps on going, finding a way through the myriad of things that form, persist and break up in its currents'. It is exactly this, human life in its openness, in all its ambiguities and potentials, which forms my interest in anthropology. In a similar vein the tensions between people's need for attachment and boundedness, on the one side, and movement and openness, on the other, mark the main threads that run through this book.

The Topos of the Field

If I were to map out the site where my fieldwork took place, my field would not have much in common with the ethnographic field in the traditional sense of the term: rather than going on a journey to study ‘a people’ in their home-environment, my research only moved within the realms of three people and their lives. Not only are their original home-places far away, but the fact that they have been transformed, if not destroyed, by decades of violence complicates the concept of home as rooted in place.

While my research took place in Melbourne, Halima, Mohamed and Omar, in telling me their stories, moved the field beyond our immediate location and towards places they had left behind, but which, despite all, had not left them yet. Through their stories, these memory places were reawakened; they came back to life and in the moment of their telling often felt present and formed a lively part of the here and now. This here and now could be in Halima’s living room, with her daughters Sagal and Sahra pottering around the house and joining us every now and then. This here and now could also be in Omar’s small office at the ground level of a twenty-odd-story housing commission flat in Melbourne’s inner suburb of Carlton, the photo of his children on top of the filing cabinet, like silent observers of the stories their father told me. Sometimes this here and now was at a Somali wedding or a fundraiser Halima or Omar had invited me to join, or in a mall in Footscray, where Halima and I were looking for herbs that smelled of Mogadishu. Sometimes, this here and now was in an email from Mohamed, ‘the nomad’, sending me photos from Tokyo or Abu Dhabi. Or, on Mohamed’s occasional visits to Melbourne, this here and now could take the shape of a walk through the very mall I had strolled through with Halima, the ‘Somali mall’, a place that, as he told me, made him feel like at home – home in Somalia, and not home here, where we were walking and talking.

The multilayered character of the places where my research took place raises the question of how far we can actually speak of an ethnographic field. Alongside which boundaries or limitations does it constitute itself? Where can it be placed? The question of the whereness of the ethnographic field is complex and needs to be spelled out in more detail, as it is intimately linked to notions of place. In anthropology, the question of the topos of the ethnographic field has been discussed intensively over the last two decades by many different writers and from many different angles (e.g. Fog Olwig

and Hastrup 1997; Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, 1997b; Coleman and Collins 2006). They tried to critique the way the field had been thought of previously – a self-imagination, which, although deeply rooted in place, did not take itself very seriously.

A famous line in the introduction to Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, a book that lay the grounds for anthropology as a 'fieldwork science', has much to say about the discipline's strong, yet ambiguous and often unarticulated, connection to place:

Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy that has brought you sails away out of sight. (Malinowski 1932: 4)

'Imagine yourself', Malinowski tells his readers, and thereby invites them to join him in a timeless landscape that seems to mirror the people that inhabit it. At the same time, Malinowski's 'Imagine yourself' invites the readers to join him on a journey that has taken him away from the familiar and known hereness of home and towards the distant, exotic thereness of a tropical island-world. The island-world, an unnamed village somewhere in the Western Pacific's Trobriand Islands, is where the 'natives' seem to have their 'proper' place. At the same time, the remoteness of the island, the strenuous effort it took to get there, and the lonely researcher, who was thrown into the unknown and watches his last connection to home sail out of sight, map the anthropologist into his proper position, too. As Arjun Appadurai (1988a: 16) points out in his critique of the ethnographic fieldwork tradition, the field of the classical anthropologist is defined by his own voluntary displacement, while those he sets out to study are pushed into the position of the involuntarily localized 'other'. Malinowski's introductory notes suggest that the people he had come to study had their proper place in the 'native village', but that it may in fact have been the anthropologist who was in desperate need of the mappable and calculable boundaries of the 'terrains', 'regions', 'areas', 'landscapes', 'environments', 'centres', or 'peripheries' he had set out to study. For without the 'natives' mappable position and the anthropologist's displacement, what is it that defines (and confines) the field?

Before anthropologists came to ask this question, however, generations of ethnographers followed in Malinowski's footsteps, celebrating their journeys in and out of the field as a rite of passage, an initiation ritual into the academic ranks (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a: 16). With his famous introductory lines, Malinowski created an image of the lone, white, male fieldworker, living among native villagers, an

image that had the power to form the discipline's self-imagination to such a degree that George Stocking (1992: 218) has described it as an 'archetype'. Within this vein, culture came to be seen as something fixed into a specific territory, and place became merely a tool for poetic reminiscences, or a backdrop of ethnographic accounts. While place has played a fundamental role from the beginning of anthropology as a discipline, it did so more as a framing device. As a concept, however, place was not critically scrutinized for a long time.

With the growing importance of global mobility and with the critique of the colonial nature of the ethnographic field tradition, the simple dualism of 'them' being there and 'us' being here came under scrutiny. The end of colonialism, the increasing number of 'them' being among 'us' and the problematization of this 'us' threw anthropology's self-conception into question. Key publications from the early 1980s, such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979) and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), as well as the turn towards interpretation and reflexivity, led the discipline to rethink its traditional placement within the field – and also within the wider world.

From the early 1990s, and inspired by the spatial turn in human geography, a number of anthropologists began to explicitly tackle concepts of space and place. Following on from first discussions that focused on the intersection of place and representation, there emerged a distinct group of thinkers who came to be the face of the spatial turn in anthropology, a turn that unfolded across the social sciences and humanities (Warf and Arias 2009). These thinkers include Arjun Appadurai, who kicked off the debate on the boundedness of the ethnographic field and who subsequently studied mobile and global phenomena (Appadurai 1988a, 1988b, 1996); Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, whose critique of the location of the anthropological fieldwork tradition lay the groundwork for an investigation of the links between power and place in anthropology (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997a, 1997b); Margaret Rodman, who in taking a 'hard look' at places, showed them as politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, multiple social constructions (Rodman 1992); Liisa Malkki, who in studying refugees threw anthropological ways of creating intimate and 'natural' links between people and places into question (Malkki 1995a, 1995b); and Renato Rosaldo, who voiced an early critique about the way anthropologists, in constructing a field, had come to map certain problems or themes onto specific places and peoples (Rosaldo 1988). While the body of work they produced was diverse and cannot be subsumed under the label of 'anthropology of space', it signalled the beginning of a new focus (Ward 2003: 86).

In stating that this book cannot be anchored in a field in the classical ethnographic sense of the term, I am not positioning it outside the boundaries of the anthropological discipline. Rather, these boundaries have shifted and transformed to such a degree that by now the topos of the field almost needs to be looked for in its very displacement. Yet, to think of this book as grounded in a free-floating or placeless ethnographic encounter would not do justice to the importance of immediate physical and material settings on social life and thus to the way research takes shape. To speak of a fieldless ethnography would therefore go too far and deny the power and strength of being-in-place.

The ethnographic field that Omar, Mohamed, Halima and I were moving this research through must not be thought of as confined by boundary-lines in the way one would imagine the lines that mark the edge of a sports ground. Building on the existential tradition that considers place in its lived immediacy, I suggest imagining it as the conglomeration of specific places, confined not by a border, but by a horizon. A horizon, Martin Heidegger stresses, much like the boundary in the classical Greek sense of the term (*peras*), is not the point at which something stops. Instead, the boundary 'is that from which something *begins its presencing*' (Heidegger 1975: 154). To think of the field as confined by the openness of the horizon, which allows for things to be moved, formed and understood rather than incarcerated, is to allow for movement to be an intrinsic part of it. At the same time, however, such an understanding must not lose sight of the very physical settings from where things take place or, as Heidegger puts it, '*wo etwas sein Wesen beginnt*' (from where something begins its presencing).

In locating this book within the settings of a topos, enclosed along the line of a horizon, I am moving within and beyond the field as it is currently being thought of in anthropological debates. For the spatial turn in anthropology had two core effects: on the one hand, it allowed for a profound problematization of the field as the pre-given locus for anthropological research, the settings of which I have attempted to outline. Following on from Appadurai's (1988b: 37) suggestion that much ethnographic writing tends to 'incarcerate natives' in places, anthropologists began to concentrate on the constructedness of the field and look for alternative methods – methods that would not, by default, root people in places (Malkki 1992; Fog Olwig and Hastrup 1997; Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, 1997b). As a result, anthropologists began to loosen the fixation and boundedness of the field and let movement become an intrinsic part of their self-understanding.

The spatial turn also opened the doors for a new theoretical and empirical focus on the connections between space, power and identity. Directly related to the project of dislocating the anthropological field, some anthropologists opted for a close look at the production of space through questions of power, domination and territoriality (e.g. Bammer 1994; Malkki 1995a; Appadurai 1996; Castells 1996). Inspired by philosophers such as Michel de Certeau (1984), Michel Foucault (1986) and Henri Lefebvre (1991), who wrote about the use of space as a technique of power and social control, anthropologists began to question the meaning of place. They called for a change in focus from stable, rooted and mappable identities to fluid, transitory and migratory movements. The result of this development was the acceptance of *displacement* as the new trope through which anthropologists came to look at the world. Because this focus played a major role in the way space and place have come to be dealt with in anthropology, and because it can be seen as the premise from which much of my thinking in this book departs, I continue sketching the field by outlining some of the main ideas and debates that delineate it.

Space Travellers

Our age has often been characterized in terms of relentless movement and displacement. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt (1971: vii) describes the physiognomy of the twentieth century as typified by 'homelessness on an unprecedented scale' and 'rootlessness to an unprecedented depth'. Exploring this feeling of rootlessness as a theoretical opportunity to move beyond rigid and exclusionary political realities, many modern thinkers have described themselves and their work in terms of borderless movement. In this vein, Ian Chambers (1994: 14) suggests that in 'the extensive and multiple worlds of the modern city we, too, become nomads', and in the same spirit Zygmunt Bauman (1992: 693) stresses that we live today 'in a nomadic world, in the universe of migration'. Being in the late modern age, Angelika Bammer (1994: xii) claims, is by definition 'to be an Other: displaced'.

The uprootedness often connected with forced migration has led some intellectuals to celebrate the refugee as paradigmatic for a time of deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari 1986). Refugees have come to be the symbolic figures of an age of movement and fluctuation. They challenge established notions of a 'national order

of things' (Malkki 1995b), of a world that can be neatly mapped and of cultures that are deeply rooted in places that 'belong' to them. Within these lines, the refugee has come to be celebrated as a figure that embodies a sense of nomadic movement and who resists any form of categorization. In anthropology, the symbolic power of displacement has come to be of paradigmatic importance for the way place is conceptualized. From the 1980s onwards, and with the growing acceptance that the idea of studying people in their stable, 'local' environments did not meet the reality of the encounters ethnographers had in the field, the number of publications on refugees and migrants increased. In focusing on hypermobile people, anthropologists have attempted to move beyond the discursive conventions that see people as rooted in place and describe the loss of home as an incurable ailment. Refusing to be pinned down, refugees dismantle the national metaphysics and challenge cultural and national essentialisms (Malkki 1992: 36). Moving away from static and essentialist understandings of space and place, the figure of the refugee symbolizes the idea that people are more mobile and interconnected than ever. Rather than yearning for an immutable original place of belonging, in the last decades refugees and migrants have therefore come to be depicted as active agents whose rhizomic identities allow them to move beyond the incarceration of 'natives' or 'citizens' in places. With the spatial turn the metaphor of the root has become replaced by the image of the rhizome, a stem that is capable of producing the shoot and root systems of a new plant. In *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari develop the idea of the rhizome as a means of working against the metaphor of a tree setting roots, which represents the search for the original source of things. Rhizomes, then, stand for a way of positioning ourselves in the world that overcomes the immovability of the firmly rooted tree:

We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much. All of arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics. Nothing is beautiful or loving or political aside from underground stems and aerial roots, adventitious growths and rhizomes. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:15)

Inspired by this 'treeless', rhizomic imagination of our age, many anthropologists focused on movement, deterritorialization and globalization. Thinking beyond rigid national and territorial boundaries and the search for other, more flexible or nomadic ways of being has not just become a theoretical task, but also a political project.

In a world that continues to be interspersed with exclusionary practices, anthropological debates have moved their attention away from roots and towards global space or global flows. Manuel Castells (1996), for example, speaks of the 'network society', in which the 'space of flows' begins to overtake the 'space of places'. In such a society everything is ordered through flows – of goods, of people, of services and of geographic regions. And in such a society, Castells argues, places cease to exist, because their inner meanings become absorbed by the network. In a similar vein, Arjun Appadurai (1996) famously speaks of 'global ethnoscares' to describe the slippery and non-localized social, territorial, and cultural reproduction of group identity in an age of globalization. According to Zygmunt Bauman, this age of globalization can be characterized as a 'liquid modernity'. He imagines the stage of modernity we are currently living through in terms of fluids that constantly change their shape and can neither bind time nor space. In such a world of fluids, Bauman (2000: 2) argues, places lose their inner meaning because after all, they only exist 'for a moment' until they change shape again.

The shift to seeing contemporary people as 'migrants of identity' (Rapport and Dawson 1998), marked by the fluidity of time and space, has led to the loss of place as a metaphor for identity and culture (Escobar 2001: 146–47). Rather than being bounded to a timeless and unmovable place, people are now thought of as continuously moving through a flexible, open-ended and contested *space*. Humans and their lives have been set in motion; they have become space travellers – to such a degree that Slavoj Žižek (2007) poses the question of whether we are actually still living in a world. In an age in which subjectivity is celebrated as rootless, migratory, nomadic and hybrid, Žižek argues, the links that attach the mind to its fixed material embodiment seem to have become replaced by the logic of the computer, which allows us to migrate between endless possibilities.

The spatial turn in anthropology quite literally did what the term announces: it led to a radical shift towards space – and thereby lost sight of place. The de-essentialization of place was crucially important for the reformulation of a discipline wary of being complicit in the creation of exclusionary boundaries and practices. Yet, the question arises of what happened to place within the fluid space of a late modern world, a world in which trees have become boring and anthropologists look at the earth from outer space. In the wake of a deterritorialized dream of (non)belonging, we all seem to have become displaced. But are we really all refugees, as philosopher

Giorgio Agamben (1995) famously suggested? Where would this leave people like Halima and Omar, who came to Australia as so-called humanitarian entrants, yet refuse to see themselves as refugees? If displacement hits the nerve of our time, this should encourage questions about how it is constituted – not just as a theoretical and analytical category, but as lived and thought of in people’s everyday lives.

The persistence of places in Halima’s and Omar’s stories and everyday lives moved my thinking away from an anthropology that locates humans in the blurry vastness of space. Their stories led me to move back towards a – albeit re-conceptualized – place-based focus. While places cannot be seen as bounded, immobile territories, place must not be disregarded altogether. This perspective is informed by the recognition that as place continues to be of such importance in people’s lives, anthropologists cannot bypass it by creating ever-tightening theoretical categories. My perspective on place can be read within the lines of existential and phenomenological thinkers such as Martin Heidegger, Edward Casey, Jeff Malpas and Gaston Bachelard, who, by focusing on lived experience, have all embraced the idea that there is no being outside of place. This book can also be read within the context of a wider anthropological revalidation of place (e.g. Weiner 1991; Basso 1996; Feld and Basso 1996; Kirby 2009; Gregorič and Repič 2016). In recent years, a noticeable number of anthropologists writing on global and migratory phenomena, including prominent authors associated with the spatial turn, have called for more balanced views on place, movement and deterritorialization (e.g. Appadurai 2006; Rapport and Williksen 2010; Coleman and Von Hellermann 2011). Yet, while there has been talk about an impending ‘topographic turn’ (Hastrup 2005: 145) in anthropology and while the voices calling for a stronger focus on phenomenology and materiality in migration studies are becoming louder, anthropologists still seem to be reluctant to initiate a full-fledged shift from space to place. Part of this might have to do with the sense of backwardness and exclusion place has become associated with. While in anthropology the turn towards space was of crucial importance for the de-essentialization of place, it came with the side effect of creating a deep chasm between theory and lived experience. For although researchers have gone to great pains to develop theoretical concepts that emphasize the importance of globalized, transnational, rhizomic or nomadic spaces and identities, this treatment of space is essentially metaphorical and is often bypassed in migrants’ everyday lives, where the particularity of place continues to be of importance.

Towards a Topology of Being

Sitting in the famous Melbourne coffee shop Brunetti on a busy Saturday afternoon whilst discussing the photographs Mohamed had brought with him, our conversation touched upon his migration to Melbourne. Sipping on his coffee, he tried to convey to me what it had been like to leave his home country and move to an unknown part of the world. One particular memory of this time, he said, had never left him. In 1981, waiting for a connecting flight to Melbourne after disembarking in Singapore from his first ever flight, Mohamed was struck by the strangeness of the place. Stepping outside the airport building, he could feel the heat clinging to his skin. 'I felt the wind and the humidity,' he told me. 'And I never knew what humidity was – all these little things you get used to. Where I grew up there was no humidity because it was dry in the morning and in the afternoon it got cooler. So to me, I couldn't understand: what was this? Why am I feeling sticky?' Laughing, he added that upon leaving Somalia, even little things like the sunset reminded him of the fact that he was somewhere else. Looking at the sun going down in Singapore, he was so overwhelmed by its size that he thought he must have come to the end of the world. 'I guess that was because I was close to the equator,' he explained. 'Anyway, this thing was huge and red, and all this comes to me when I think about it now.'

This brief, seemingly banal moment, which Mohamed told me that afternoon in the coffee shop, has much to say about the perspectives on place, displacement and storytelling that frame this book. When Mohamed stepped out of the world of the airport, the place immediately made itself felt. Through the humidity on his skin and the wind in the air he encountered some of its features and habits – habits he did not yet grasp. At the same time as the place made itself felt, it also created an utter sense of displacement within him. *All these little things you get used to* but were so strange and unknown made him realize how much he had been part and parcel of another place, a place he had left behind. And all these ways of being – the being-in-place, as well as the being-out-of-place – were so strong that thirty years later, sitting in a Melbourne café, they came back to him. Mohamed's story suggests that place does not cease to exist, even if it is experienced as a sense of deep and utter disruption (or displacement). It is always there, where we are. Because we cannot escape its presence, it plays into the way we see and engage with the world. We come to the world and keep returning to it, Edward Casey

(2000: 17–18) suggests, as already placed there. Humans, he stresses, are always already in place, never not emplaced. So what, then, is place – or the *in* of being-in-place?

Although the spatial turn in anthropology, as well as in the social sciences and humanities in general, set out to re-conceptualize space and place, it did not make the two terms any clearer. Trying to grasp the concept of place after the spatial turn, Edward Relph (2008: 5) notes, is ‘like walking into the aftermath of an academic explosion’. While there has been much talk about place, the focus has tended to be not so much on place itself, but on the boundlessness of space and time and on the spatial politics place is believed to be a result of. With its main interest in power dynamics, space is often seen as the unarticulated assumption of a neutral and pre-given tabula rasa onto which the particularities of culture and history become inscribed, and of which place is the result (Casey 2000: 14). Following Casey’s suggestion of a paradigmatic shift towards space in modern thinking, the current fascination with homelessness, exile and displacement is perhaps not surprising. He points out that the disregard of place in modern philosophy had massive impacts on Western theoretical thinking and specifically on the way the human became imagined as an inconsequential dot within the immensity of the universe (Casey 1997b: 292). In a world that is made up of fluid, boundless and indifferent open space, humans have become space travellers. Roots have become replaced by routes (Friedman 2002) and the human subject is left moving back and forth within the vastness of the universe without any abiding place to rest or dwell. Yet if, as in Mohamed’s case, even the stickiness of humidity on the skin, a sunset, or stones on a path can have such a strong effect, how then can we think of this world as an indifferent space, as a placeless universe? Does not such a view also preclude the intimacy of *all the little things you get used to* – and with it the possibilities for people like Mohamed, Halima and Omar to feel a meaningful part of anywhere again?

Just how quickly people are capable of turning the strangeness of an unknown place into something meaningful became apparent as Mohamed told me about his first months in Melbourne. Sitting in the Brunetti café, he told me how he had arrived in winter, and not being used to the cold and the language, he had felt isolated and lonely. He said that he feared he would never be able to understand this place, that he had felt intimidated by the smallest things, such as the public transport system. The sheer incomprehensibility of the way the trams, trains and busses created a web of links from one part of Melbourne to the other had made him feel lost. Rather than letting

these negative feelings overtake him, however, he felt the urge to leap into action and work against this sense of alienation. He managed to do so by taking on a job that required expert knowledge of the city. ‘Looking back at it now, I don’t think I could do that, but I managed to do it,’ Mohamed said, laughing. ‘I worked on the tram. After just four or five months I started to work on them.’ I asked Mohamed what kind of work he did on the tram. ‘Before the trams became automated like they are now, there used to be conductors who sold tickets in the tram. So I did that,’ Mohamed said. ‘It was an amazing job. But I was reflecting on it the other day. I thought: Could I do it now? I don’t think I could. I had such a big confidence, because I didn’t know the place and to do that job you have to know the streets by heart. Because people would ask me: “Can you please tell me when we are at Smith Street?”, or something. But I didn’t know! I myself didn’t know where Smith Street was.’ Looking back at his first moves through Melbourne, Mohamed was amazed by how confidently he had tackled this new place. By addressing the incomprehensibility of the place directly, by unravelling its different parts through his daily journeys on the tram, he actively combated the sense of displacement that had engulfed him upon arriving in Melbourne. Within a few months of taking on the job, he knew Melbourne’s inner city and suburbs inside out.

Mohamed’s story of fervently tackling his feelings of displacement indicates a key theme that spins its way throughout this book. Rather than using displacement as a metaphor for a sense of alienation from society, the stories that form the heart of this book show the different ways people actively make sense of new, left behind or lost places. In focusing on the felt, experienced and storied dimensions of place, rather than reducing it to its analytical and structural properties, this book can thus be read as a perspective on displacement that attempts to ‘get back into place’. In doing so, I can build on Edward Casey’s (1993) attempt to write the importance of place back into philosophy. His efforts to write the body back into place and place back into theoretical consciousness offered an important entry point for my own understanding. Building much of his work on Gaston Bachelard’s phenomenology of intimate spaces, Casey adopts the idea of topo-analysis, which, for Bachelard, is ‘the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives’ (Bachelard 1994: 8). In examining the intimate and often unconscious dream-like experience of the houses we inhabited (or still inhabit), from their cellars to their attics, from their furniture to their doors, Bachelard lays open a topology of the self. This topology is close to what Martin Heidegger

called a '*Topologie des Seins*' (topology of being) (see Heidegger 1977 [1956]: 32; 2003 [1977]: 41). It hints at being-in-the-world as something that is always emplaced. The links between self, place and experience are so crucial that throughout this book these three thinkers – Casey, Bachelard and Heidegger – play an essential role. They have informed my conceptualization of place as something that is not rigidly shielded off or enclosed, but as something that is essentially open – something *of* and *in* the world. While place is closely connected to being, this does not suggest that it is static – for being itself is always moving, always a form of becoming.

In developing the idea that place and being are intimately connected, yet not in ways that exclude the possibility for movement and change, I can draw on the work of Martin Heidegger. While *Being and Time* features sections on the spatiality of being (*die Räumlichkeit des Daseins*), the idea of place is not spelled out in detail and priority is given to existentiality and temporality. In his later work, however, Heidegger abandons this position and begins to focus on the topological character of *Dasein* (being) instead (Malpas 2012: 16). Indeed, the German term for being, 'Dasein', underscores the intimate relationship between being and place. While *Dasein* is rendered into English as 'being', it actually merges two words – *da* (here) and *Sein* (being). *Dasein*, then, literally means being-here. In the English reading of Heidegger's work, this inherently spatial character of being is commonly lost in translation. Rethinking being as being-here is a shift I found important for my own understanding of place, as it emphasizes the connection of being with the particularity and materiality of here. Being, this suggests, is intimately interwoven with the textures and dynamics of place. In turning the links between being (*Sein*) and here (*da*) into explicit objects of ethnographic inquiry, this book sketches an existential anthropological approach to place and placemaking.

This turn towards the lived experience of place should not be regarded as a reactionary turn backwards. As I will show in more detail in chapter one, a critical existential approach to place takes into account both the everyday practices that shape our engagements with places and the structural forces that inhibit and control our actions and movements within them. And as the stories of departures, arrivals and homecomings in this book will show, there is no such thing as a stagnant, immovable place. The idea of place not as an imprisonment, but as something that reaches out into the world whilst not losing its possibility as a dwelling for humans, has shaped my understanding of emplacement. Throughout Omar's and Halima's stories,

place features as something that contains and sets free at the same time, as something that is always moving, or ‘on the way’ (*unterwegs*), as Heidegger (1962: 110) puts it. In their stories, the process of taking roots does not take on the suffocating character of immobility. Reflecting on his own experience as a migrant in Australia, Ghassan Hage writes that rootedness should not too easily be mistaken for a sense of being stuck or immovable. He suggests that many people experience the opposite, ‘roots often are paradoxically experienced like an extra pair of wings’ (Hage 2013: 149).

Human beings are essentially terrestrial beings; they cannot but travel through place. If we accept this thought, then we also need to view displacement differently. In such a reading, place becomes something particular, yet outward bound, something that has a material, physical presence and is yet open to change. Ingold uses the term ‘wayfaring’ to describe the embodied experience of place. It is as wayfarers, he writes, that human beings inhabit the earth. Ingold’s wayfarer does not view the world as a surface to be traversed. Her movements form a thread *through*, rather than *across* the world, for the wayfarer is a terrestrial being and must travel over land (Ingold 2009: 37).

In framing a topology of being that begins and ends in place, yet in places that are always on the way, the strength of storytelling comes to the fore. It is through stories that people order, characterize, create and overrule places. And it is in places that stories come to life – that they, quite literally, take place. In 2009, when I moved to the other end of the world in order to write about other people’s displacements, I could not have foreseen that my research would reveal people’s continuous movements towards *emplacement*. It was by being-here in Melbourne and with Halima, Mohamed and Omar, and by telling each other stories, that I came to understand the continuous importance of place in their lives. They made me see that even people on the move, whether on the run from war, hunger or destruction, or simply looking for greener pastures elsewhere, do not move through an indifferent space. Rather, they travel through places – and in moving through, shape them and are in turn shaped by them.

Chapter Outline

It is along these horizons that the architecture of this book takes shape. The core themes of storytelling, emplacement and displacement form building blocks to the three parts. At the heart of the

book are the lives and stories of Halima Mohamed and Omar Farah Dhollawa, as well as the visual stories of Mohamed Ibrahim. Besides a chapter that fleshes out the existential dynamics of life storytelling, the book is structured into two core parts, each of which is centred on a set of stories and events that marked crucial moments in Halima's and Omar's lives. Each sub-chapter begins with a short first-person account by Halima or Omar that defines the tone and theme of the chapter. My interpretations of the stories are interwoven with interactions, conversations and moments that occurred as I was accompanying them in their daily pathways. By bringing Omar's and Halima's everyday engagements with places in a conversation with their narratives, I emphasize the ways place is experienced both immediately and bodily as well as in terms of reflected imaginary, memorial and storied layers.

Before I turn to the life stories, however, I deepen the problem of life storytelling and its links to experience. The idea that stories can reveal deep-seated existential questions requires careful unpacking, as there is nothing simple about the suggestion that stories have the ability to shed light on lifeworlds, or about the idea of the lifeworld itself. Part I therefore centres on the question of how the stories in this book came about and on how far they can reveal lived experiences. By drawing the contours of an existential anthropological approach to ethnography, it aims to bring more depth and complexity into heavily overused yet epistemologically underdeveloped notions such as 'experience', 'existence', or 'existential'. Following Hannah Arendt's call to approach theory as 'thinking what we are doing', I sketch my move from ethnographic fieldwork to anthropological meaning-making. By shedding light on the dynamics of the life storytelling sessions, I will complicate the dichotomy between narrative and experience. I will suggest that while fictionalization is an important ingredient of life stories, this should not lead us to believe that life stories do not have the ability to shed light on the teller's experiences. Rather, the intersubjective moment of the telling allows for experiences to be shared, felt and understood in new ways. In doing so, life stories allow us to constantly create new versions of ourselves, thereby giving deep insights into the ways individuals actively make sense of their being-here.

Part II focuses on Omar's life story. Meandering through a set of narratives, each of which discusses a different phase in his life, it aims to come to an understanding of the ambiguity and complexity underlying the experience of being-in-place. Whilst touching upon different times and places, Omar's stories are linked through the

overarching question of whether ‘home’ is located in a specific place and how people make sense of the places they find themselves at. Focusing on five stories that represent critical moments in Omar’s life, I will engage with the historical, political and emotional dynamics shaping places and placemaking practices. Part III is built around Halima’s stories and experiences and centres on the meaning of displacement. Thinking through the importance of emplacement and place-attachment in her narratives, the links between being-in- and out-of-place, past and present, and movement and stagnation come to the fore. The common thread going through all of Halima’s stories is her tireless attempt to understand and befriend the places she finds herself at. Her stories suggest that even in the face of the disorienting feeling of displacement, and despite years spent on the move or caught in limbo, the intimacy and immediacy of place never ceases to be of critical existential importance. By engaging with four stories that stand for important events in her life, I will shed light on the interplay of time and place and suggest a new, place-based reading of displacement. While the theme of emplacement runs more strongly through Omar’s stories, and displacement through Halima’s, there is no strict thematic divide between the chapters. The openness of the storytelling approach allows me to stay *unterwegs* (on the way), even in my writing, and to expose the complex movements, tensions and interrelations between the two phenomena. Mohamed’s photographs and stories will be woven throughout the book. They will form ‘Junctures’, brief interruptions between chapters that stand by themselves, but that nevertheless provoke reflections on some of the core themes that have been or will be touched upon in the chapters before or after.

More than anything else, this book can be read as a dialogue. In finding ways of not just retelling the stories Omar, Mohamed and Halima had told me, but also bringing the intersubjective dynamics of the storytelling moment into my writing, it became crucial to make myself part of the book. This was not a means of demonstrating reflexivity; rather, it grew out of the dialogical and conversational nature of the fieldwork condition. Ghassan Hage (2009: 62) has commented that ‘drowning oneself in a sea of self-reflexivity’ is hardly more anti-colonial than the ‘desire to *seriously* reach out for otherness’. I agree with him and would add that this otherness can become a meeting point and common ground in that, albeit in different ways, we are all *other* and, in many ways, we are *same*, too. In embarking on a poetics of storytelling I needed to make this dialogical situation, this back and forth, this moving towards a shared understanding part

of the writing of this book. The task was to find ways of weaving in and out of what Michael Jackson (2010: 49) describes as the three horizons of the hermeneutic circle: that of one's own world, that of the society one seeks to understand, and that of humanity. This book can be read as a dialogue between these three horizons, as it interweaves the stories of Halima, Mohamed and Omar with my own experiences, resulting in a constant movement towards the existential dynamics of emplacement.