6-19-2013

Book Review: Countering Displacements: The Creativity and Resilience of Indigenous and Refugee-ed Peoples

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Recommended Citation

Cottrell, Michael (2013) "Book Review: Countering Displacements: The Creativity and Resilience of Indigenous and Refugee-ed Peoples," *Canadian and International Education / Education canadienne et internationale*: Vol. 42: Iss. 1, Article 8.

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Countering Displacements: The Creativity and Resilience of Indigenous and Refugee-ed Peoples (2012). Daniel Coleman, Erin Goheen Glanville, Wafaa Hasan and Agnes Kramer-Hamstra (Eds.) Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2012. 232 pages

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The eight essays included in *Countering Displacements* focus on two disparate groups, Indigenous and refugee-ed people, who share common experiences of having been “unwillingly displaced by environmental, economic, social, or political adversities” (xiv). While these two groups have seldom been studied together or in relation to each other, a central argument of this collection is that “the figures of the native and the refugee are inherently bound to one another in the larger narrative of multiple, and often intersecting, displacements”(xvi). Most of these essays were first presented at an interdisciplinary public forum at McMaster University in 2008, which was convened to address the legal, political and cultural causes, effects and possibilities of global displacement. Intended primarily to encourage dialogue between scholars in the fields of Indigenous and refugee studies, the conference and resulting collection offer a variety of provocative reflections on a wide range of questions around dispossession, migration, marginalization, resilience and creativity. In the process they also generate some intriguing insights into the roles of nation states and transnational organizations in protecting the human rights of those victimized by displacement. Consequently the collection will likely appeal more broadly to scholars in the fields of literary studies, international relations, law, citizenship studies, globalization studies, cultural studies, media studies and beyond.

Jon Gordon’s essay “Displacing Oil: Towards “Lyric” Re-presentations of the Alberta Oil Sands” examines how literary expressions have been employed by Indigenous peoples and their non- Indigenous allies to protest the ecological destruction and physical displacements visited on Alberta’s Indigenous peoples by the oil sands development. Here creative acts of narration are treated as forms of agency and resistance to counter the narrative of wealth creation and progress articulated by Big Oil and their media allies. Jean McDonald’s “Citizenship Studies and Migrant Illegality” provides the theoretical grounding for the volume with a review of recent research in citizenship studies, especially focusing on the tensions between nation-state sovereignty and those excluded from statehood or citizenship by various forms of displacement. Essays by Catherine Graham and Mazen Masri both address the Palestinian dilemma, the first highlighting theatre as a witness to displacement and the second focusing on organized resistance to the Israeli-built segregation wall. Pavithra Narayanan and Subhasri Ghosh’s essays on displaced groups in the Indian sub-continent demonstrate how uprooted people exert agency and resilience in the form of theatrical performances and other creative forms of protest to assert their continued right to citizenship. The final two essays focus on

the Canadian context. Agnes Kramer-Hamstra explores how Mohawk filmmaker Shelley Niro's work challenges stereotypical depictions of Native people in Canada by employing her medium to revitalize authentic Indigenous traditions in a modern context. Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed's essay draws attention to the resilience of refugee women in Canada who find healing from traumatic experiences of displacement through art.

Although the editors frame displacement as a "series of interconnected and often contradictory losses" (xvi) the displaced peoples featured in these essays rarely appear merely as passive victims of powerful forces beyond their control. The focus rather is on human agency, resiliency, innovation and creativity as diasporic communities resist dispossession, nurture their cultures, and animate creative energies in unfamiliar spaces. The editors make explicit their intellectual debt to Raymond Williams, especially his assertion that "Culture is Ordinary" (xii-xii), as they track and emphasize people's everyday agency. The result is a collection of case studies documenting "how particular peoples have, in their unique responses to displacement, been active in reshaping their lives in public ways...creatively countering unequal political and cultural power through political, communal and artistic acts..." (xiii).

The collection is not without its shortcomings, some of which stem from the "conference-presentations-as-collected-essays" genre to which it belongs. Especially troubling is that much of the language employed throughout, while no doubt familiar to conference participants and academic insiders, is so heavily theoretical and specialized as to make it virtually incomprehensible to the majority of refugee-ed and Indigenous peoples on whose behalf these scholars claim to speak. Nevertheless the collection brings together a diverse range of original perspectives on the complex relationships between indigeneity, migration, colonialism, and settlement, as well as the role of human agency and creativity in navigating these experiences. While the essays may not be entirely accessible to the Indigenous and refugee-ed peoples featured here, they will be an important resource for the social scientists and policymakers who work in concert with them.