

Inner Migrations - the private and collective in transit and relation

By Anna Westhofen

For a long time, I imagined a place. A place in space and time that I could not map but felt strangely connected to; that called me with a far-away cry.

Do you have that one place that retrieves you time and again? I do, by now. Recently, I dwelled on the likely or unlikely setting of this imagined place. A location I do not name but provide a sense of; a place to be crafted by the mind's eye. Place-consciousness starts with the feeling we have about a place. In some places, we immediately feel at home. See, *home* is not necessarily a place of birth or where the family lives. The idea of *home* translates to the question *where do we belong*. Take it: the sweet coalescence of being in tune with your surroundings, others, and – most importantly – self. Now, can home equal displacement, too?

If you ask me, I believe the moments before you embark on a journey are the most interesting. Compose numerous versions of the place you'll travel to in your head, and then, slowly, realize for how long this place has been inhabiting your mind. In transit, you complete one of the pictures of the place that you've started painting in your head.

I recently transited through the place that I carved out of my stretch of imagination – it's a beautiful idea. With fresh ground beneath my feet, I was hoping to find new headspace. Transiting the country by foot, car, and train, I did not just hope to remind myself of the place's heady mountains but relied on putting a whole body of thought on its solid bedrock. I've done it before. I have.

But this time, I was not a wandering visitor. *Sojourn*. I was an observer – pausing, I saw the country's unrest. Only then I realised just as I moved through the country, the state was in transition too.

I talked. I talked to the people; the foreign yet familiar sound of their language gave me comfort but in the bleakness of the winter landscape, their words were unquiet. "This is –, after all," they said. *This is* –, and through language, I identified the reality of a nation. Divided. What followed these revelations was a great silence eating up at the presence. We waited for a winter bird's far cry outside to cut through the disappointment.

I could not discern answers to the preconceived questions that I had in mind. But I looked at the windswept landscape, and then I looked at their faces – I found fierceness in both. This is still the bright of their home.

A sense of place is yet to be imagined anew. I couldn't outstay but the pull is still strong. *Abide with me*. Perhaps, it is a sentimental story – and it is not just mine – but transition is also renewal.