

WE WERE STRANGERS ONCE

Monica R. Howell

Title: We Were Strangers Once

Artist: Monica R. Howell

Format: Letterpress- and hand-printed artist's book

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UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency, states that there are 65.6 million displaced people, including nearly 22.5 million refugees, in the world in 2017.¹ Two years ago, Ayalon Eliach called for Jews observing Rosh Hashanah to dedicate their Unetaneh Tokef prayer to refugees,² to reflect on the circumstances facing those who are running for their lives and to do everything we can to save them from the awful fates described in the prayer. HIAS, the Jewish nonprofit working to protect refugees worldwide, also references this prayer in their resources for learning about refugee issues.³ I decided to make an artist's book as part of my response to the refugee crisis, drawing upon the language of Unetaneh Tokef for the book's letter-

¹ UNHCR, "Figures at a Glance" (June 19 2017), as accessed at <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html> on December 31, 2017.

² Ayalon Eliach, "This Rosh Hashanah, Dedicate Your Prayer Against Suffering to Refugees" (September 8 2015), as accessed at <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/the-jewish-thinker/1.675161> on December 31, 2017.

³ HIAS, *HIAS High Holiday Resources 2016/5777*, as accessed at <https://www.hias.org/hias-high-holiday-resources-20165777> on December 31, 2017.

press-printed text. The book consists of three separate accordion-folded pages, plus a band closure that also serves as the cover.

Refugees have been framed as humans-as-waste by academic theorists for decades.⁴ Some expressions of this concept include discarded people,⁵ disposable people,⁶ wasted humans,⁷ garbaged bodies,⁸ waste populations,⁹ and humans as waste.¹⁰ I made use of these terms in designing the book's cover image, which was hand-carved and hand-printed. Each book page features a hand-carved and hand-printed image related to that page's text: a shipwreck, drought-cracked earth, or a child in a refugee camp. The paper used for the book pages was handmade in Minneapolis by Cave Paper.

⁴ Hudson McFann, "Humans-as-Waste" (September 4, 2015) in *Discard Studies: Social Studies of Waste, Pollution, & Externalities* as accessed at <https://discardstudies.com/2015/09/04/refugees-humans-as-waste/> on December 31, 2017.

⁵ Cosmas Desmon, *The Discarded People: An Account of African Resettlement in South Africa* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1971).

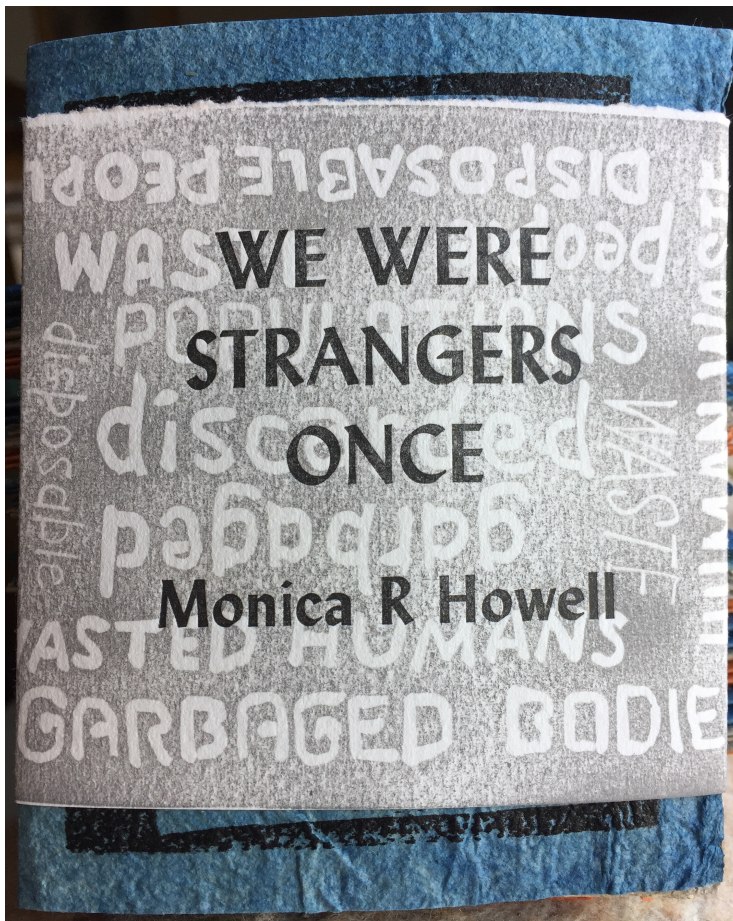
⁶ Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1999).

⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2004).

⁸ John Scanlan, *On Garbage* (London: Reaktion Books 2005).

⁹ John Beck, *Dirty Wars: Landscape, Power, and Waste in Western American Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2009).

¹⁰ Achille Mbembe, "Democracy as a Community of Life" in *The Johannesburg Salon 4* (2011), pp. 5-10 and Michelle Yates, "The Human-as-Waste, the Labor Theory of Value, and Disposability in Contemporary Capitalism" in *Antipode* 43:5 (2011), pp. 1679-1695.









Monica R. Howell is a librarian, archivist, and book artist living in Minneapolis, MN. Her work has been exhibited at the University of Minnesota, Rosalux Gallery (Minneapolis), SooVAC (Minneapolis), and the Minnesota Center for Book Arts, among others. More of her work can be found at <http://www.mnartists.org/monicarhowell>.