HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG

perspectives

Issue 10
September 2016

POLITICAL ANALYSES AND COMMENTARY

Middle East & North Africa

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Editorial

When ISIS announced the establishment of the so-called 'Islamic State' it fuelled discussions as to whether this would herald the 'end of Sykes-Picot' – borders artificially drawn by the colonial powers at the beginning of the twentieth century. But borders are more than 'lines in the sand': they divide. While the privileged few may cross legitimately by simply presenting their passport, for most, these borders present difficult if not insurmountable hurdles. People fleeing from war, climate change or economic hardship, attempt to cross the Mediterranean but many drown trying.

Crossing borders legally has become increasingly difficult which leaves many who are desperate at the mercy of smugglers or human traffickers; and, in this equation, it is more often the victims who are prosecuted, punished and deported than those who sell passage on barely seaworthy vessels.

So what is on the map for the region? Syrian author Haid Haid discusses whether the division of Syria is an option. This necessarily raises the question of the future of the Kurds, a question that has become even more relevant following the Turkish intervention in Syria. Bakr Sidki explores whether the issue is autonomy, federalism, or something entirely different.

While borders between nations might be the best documented, there are plenty of other lines of division: social, ethnic, religious and ideological. How firm or permeable the divisions are is subject to change, but any border is a painful memory of the fact that it is not an individual's choice to define which side he or she is on.

Hanaa Edwar, a member of the Iraqi communist party, joined the Iraqi resistance, the Peshmerga, in the 1980s. She takes us back to a time when she and her comrades developed a vision of how to overcome the borders imposed by ethnicity, religion, class and gender.

The Lebanese artists of KnoozRoom consider the situation of people in communities particularly affected by the drawing of borders – a project featured by one of its creators, Tamara Qiblawi.

Mohammed Dibo discusses the relationship between a virtually shrinking world and the new challenges globalization poses to identity. In a world where some have the chance to move and others are forced to migrate, people become modern nomads; this, at least, is the approach of Moroccan artist Mohammed Laouli and German Artist Karin Ströbel in their project 'Frontières Fluides – fluid boundaries'. Morocco is a transit country for migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, and because of the proximity of some of its borders to Europe, it is particularly affected by border regimes.

The Jordanian satirical magazine Al Hudood mocks European efforts to seal its borders, while Moroccan author Mehdi Alioua describes the 'Walls of Fortress Europe' as full of cracks that allow for selective and ambivalent transgressions. In similar fashion, Khalid Mouna looks at the city of Tangier and how migration and drug trafficking blur the concept of border control as a means to enhance security.

Abraham Zeitoun interviews actress Sawsan Bou Khaled on her understanding of the more subtle borders of the body and the arts.

Finally, this issue is illustrated by the Lebanese artist Nadine Bekdache with her take on space, borders and transgression.

Permit us a little celebration: with 'Borders', the Arab Middle East and North Africa offices publish their tenth edition of Perspectives!

Bente Scheller, Dorothea Rischewski, Bettina Marx and Joachim Paul.

Is Partitioning Syria a Solution?

Haid Haid

Over the past few years, talks about partitioning Syria as a potential solution to ending the conflict have been taking place among diplomats and experts; these ideas tend to gain momentum following significant military shifts or before high profile political talks. The most significant development in this context was the US secretary of state, John Kerry's, statement about a Plan B that could involve partitioning Syria if a planned ceasefire in February 2016 did not work, or if a political transition did not begin in the coming months.[1]

Although Kerry did not advocate partition as a solution and refused to reveal the details of Plan B, many people interpreted his words as a threat to partition Syria. Some of the supporters of this proposal justify their position with the de facto division of Syria, as different groups control different areas. Others see it as the only way to end Syria's conflict, as all political attempts have failed, arguing that Syria's ethnic and religious groups do not want to live together anymore. Partitioning Syria is yet another decontextualized proposal made by people who are not well informed about the Syrian context and who do not even try to become so. Partitioning Syria is not an option because people, locally and regionally, are against it; because it lacks the necessary requirements and because it has many downsides which will be discussed here.



Haid Haid is a Syrian researcher who focuses on security policies, conflict resolution, and Kurdish and Islamist movements. Prior to that, he was programme manager for Syria and Iraq at the Heinrich Böll Stiftung-Middle East Office in Beirut. He has also worked as a senior community services protection assistant at UNHCR's Damascus office. He has an MA in social development and a BA in Sociology.

What is the Proposal About?

Despite recent military gains by pro-Assad forces, experts working on Syria agree that there is no military solution to the war. Assad is unlikely to regain control over all territories in Syria, but even if he succeeded, it could easily lead to a long and violent guerilla war, which means that the armed conflict might continue for years to come. Given Syria's geopolitical importance and the negative ramifications of its conflict, regionally and internationally, a political solution is essential to restoring peace. Furthermore, the failure of previous attempts to find a political solution that all Syrians approve, has motivated efforts to think 'outside the box', to find ways to resolve the conflict and restore stability. One group of experts came up with an obvious solution, divide the country and create borders between those who are fighting each other. Their justification: that the odds of restoring Syria to a fully functioning state are slim, therefore partitioning the country along sectarian and ethnic lines would reassure groups within Syria and end the fight to control the state.

There are differing views on how the country should be divided, but there is a common understanding that it would be divided into three regions: an Alawite region in the coastal cities, a Kurdish region in the east, and a Sunni region in the central areas. However, others argue that this kind of negotiated partition is unlikely because of the balance of power in Syria. Therefore, they advocate an ethnic/religious/political partition along unofficial de facto division lines in Syria. In this scenario, the Assad regime will control what they call the 'useful Syria'; the coastal areas and the Lebanese border, Damascus, Aleppo, and the major cities of western, southern, and central Syria, including key energy infrastructures. The remaining two regions, the Kurdish and Sunni, will be organised according to the groups within Syria that can be realistically controlled. The argument is that the country is already divided on the ground but that the fight could be halted by formalizing the de facto partition, thereby appeasing all parties.

Lack of National and Regional Support

Despite the deep divisions between Syrians all of them, at least in public, agree that partitioning Syria is not an option. The Syrian conflict began in March 2011 as a peaceful revolution calling for basic rights and political reform, and, despite the ongoing atrocities against civilians for which Assad is largely responsible, Syrians did not call for partition as a solution. Even Syrian Kurds, who are usually accused of being separatists, clearly stated on many occasions that they did not support a division of Syria.[2] Moreover, the negative reactions to the attempts of the dominant Kurdish party, Democratic Union Party (PYD), to declare a federal system in the Kurdish-controlled areas of northern Syria, shows how little support there is for partition as an option. PYP officials declared in a number of statements that they are preparing for a federal system in northern Syria something they believe should be adopted by the whole of Syria.[3] They are keen to emphasise that they are not lobbying for a Kurdish-only region but an all-inclusive area that would provide representation for Turkmen, Arabs and Kurds in northern Syria. Abd Salam Ali, representative of the PYD party in Moscow, stated that, 'Separation of Rojava [Western Kurdistan] from Syria is not an option. We remain [a part of Syria], but declare a federation.'

Nonetheless, this announcement led to widespread criticism among opposition groups who refused to enter into talks about a federal system in Syria that might lead to partition. 'Syria's unity is a red line. This issue is non-negotiable and the idea of federalism is the prelude to the partitioning of Syria,' the head of the High Negotiations Committee, Riad Hijab, said in a conference call with reporters on 8 March 2016.[4] Seventy opposition armed groups signed a statement rejecting the federal system and vowing to resist any ideas that could lead to the partition of Syria.[5] The Kurdish National Council, one of the Syrian opposition blocs, also denounced the PYD's declaration and claimed that the declaration would 'undermine the Syrian Kurds' struggle and their national and patriotic aspirations.'[6] Furthermore, the Syrian Foreign Ministry rejected talks about a federal system in Syria and warned in an official statement that 'raising the issue of a union or federation would prejudice the unity of the Syrian land.'[7]

In addition, several regional and international powers released statements rejecting the declaration of the federal system. In a joint press conference with his Iranian counterpart, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu lashed out at the PYD for establishing a federal region.[8] 'They want to divide Syria …. with Iran, we support the territorial integrity of Syria.' Iran and Turkey fear the creation of an autonomous Kurdish region in Syria, similar to the Kurdish region in northern Iraq, believing it would fuel the separatist ambitions of their own Kurds. The Arab League also rejected Kurdish-led moves for a federal system of government in Syria, warning that they would lead to the break-up of the country.[9] The US State Department, responding to a Kurdish bid for autonomy in northern Syria, said it did not recognise self-governed zones inside the war-torn country and was working for a unified, non-sectarian state under different leadership.[10] The strong negative reactions to the announcement of a federal system by the major actors make the possibility of partitioning Syria even more difficult.



INTERVENING ON BARRIERS
The site of Dalieh, a natural coastal land near Beirut's famous Pigeon Rock, has always been an open communal space despite its private ownership. Recent attempts to fence the site, spurred a range of interventions to assert the right of the public to freely access the land and the sea.

The Demographic Challenges

The proposed partition has been drawn up along ethnic and religious lines, however, people living on the ground are not easily divided into these groups. Therefore, transforming these heterogeneous areas into homogeneous ones, based on sectarian or ethnic divisions, will likely create new waves of mass internal displacements accompanied by violence. According to Wael Sawah, a Syrian researcher, the number of Alawites who live outside the coastal areas is larger than the number of those who actually live there, which means,[11]

… that more than 1.5 million Alawites would be forcibly displaced from their houses in Homs or Hama or Damascus and move to an area [coastal cities] where they have neither homes nor jobs. The same applies to hundreds of thousands of Syrian Sunnis who will be forcibly displaced from the homes and cities they have lived in for hundreds of years.[12]

The same applies to the potential Kurdish state. Kurds might be the majority in some areas but the percentage of non-Kurds who will be forced to leave is not insignificant. Tens of thousands of Kurds would also be displaced from other cities, especially Damascus and Aleppo.

Moreover, partitioning Syria along religious or ethnic lines is usually based upon two hypotheses: 1) that all members of the same group have a homogenous, collective identity and views; and 2) that they are supporters of partition. These hypotheses are based on the assumption that Syrian communities, because of the sectarian/ethnic dimensions of the Syrian conflict, are making choices instinctively for reasons of self-preservation. They are acting as a collective, according to their sectarian or ethnic identities, in order to protect themselves and their identities from the perceived threats. In this context, all Alawites are seen to be supporters of Assad and it is assumed that there are no differences of opinion between them. In the same way Sunnis and Kurds are each seen as one group with homogenous views based on their sectarian/ethnic identity. However, this assumption does not take account of the differences within these groups, that not everyone in Syria identifies himself/herself according to his/her sectarian/ethnic identity. In 2011 Syrians took to the streets to peacefully demand greater rights and political reform for a more inclusive regime. Even now a large percentage of Syrians still identify themselves first and foremost as Syrians and not according to their sectarian/ethnic identities, a contradiction of the previous assumption.

There are also clear political differences between these groups explaining why Syrians generally organize themselves along political rather than sectarian or ethnic lines. A good percentage of pro-Assad supporters are Sunnis, and a good percentage of non-Sunnis, Alawites and other minorities, oppose Assad. Moreover, Kurdish groups and activists, such as the Kurdish National Council, ally themselves with Syrian opposition groups against the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD). As the previous paragraph established, the majority of Syrians do not support partition so any attempt to partition Syria will create more conflict and violence across as well as within groups.

The Economic Challenges

None of the proposed mini-states have sufficient resources to be self-sustaining and, as a result of partition and its political implications, hostile neighbours will make imports extremely difficult resulting in a resources war. Economics will play an essential role in any plan to partition Syria, however, dividing it along ethnic and religious grounds doesn't take into consideration the resources needed for these mini-states to survive. Moreover, Syria is a small country and natural resources are not equally distributed between the regions, which will likely create another struggle for resources.

The proposed Alawite state would produce mainly non-strategic agricultural crops, fruit, some vegetables, olives and tobacco.[13] It has good water resources, two ports, an oil refinery and a medium level of industry - although it lacks oil and gas and essential crops such as wheat. In theory, this state could benefit from the ports and the refinery to generate money for imports, however, the anticipated hostile relations with its neighbours make this unlikely.

By comparison the proposed Kurdish state benefits from oil fields and a good stock of wheat and cotton although it would need to import electricity, vegetables, fruit, medicine, and other industrial goods. Imports via either the Sunni state or Turkey would be difficult and even importing goods from the Kurdish region of Iraq would be problematic due to high costs and the tensions between Masoud Barzani, the President of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, and the PYD over leadership.

Finally, the proposed Sunni state would have large industries and a variety of agricultural crops, but it would not have access to oil or ports.

It is likely that the pre-existing tensions between these three proposed states will make trade negotiations a challenge and undermine the potential for investment opportunities. As each state struggles to meet the demands of its population and begins to look elsewhere a battle for resources will ensue.

It is worrying that some politicians believe that the partitioning of Syria would provide a solution because on closer inspection the project is flawed. Those who advocate it clearly see the potential short-term benefits but appear to ignore the severe consequences of this quick-fix for Syria, its population and the entire region.

All indicators suggest partition would be extremely difficult to implement, creating mass displacement and destabilizing the region rather than restoring stability. Thus the political cost of dividing Syria could be significantly higher than the costs involved in pressuring the warring parties, especially the Syrian regime, to begin a political transition in the hope of building a civil, democratic, inclusive and united Syria.

1 See: Wintour, P. (2016) 'John Kerry says partition of Syria could be part of "plan B" if peace talks fail.' London: The Guardian newspaper. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/23/john-kerry-partition-syria-peace-talks. Last accessed on: 30 August 2016.

2 See: http://www.alarabiya.net/ar/politics/2015/12/05/%D8%A3%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A9.html. Last accessed on: 30 August 2016.

3 See: 'Syria's Kurds set to announce federal system in Syrian Kurdistan' posted by Ekurd Daily, Editorial Staff on 16 March 2016. Available at: http://ekurd.net/syria-kurds-to-announce-federal-2016-03-16. Last accessed on: 30 August 2016.

4 See: 'Syria's main opposition rejects federalism proposal' posted by Ekurd Daily, Editorial Staff on 8 March 2016. Available at: http://ekurd.net/syria-opposition-rejects-federalism-2016-03-08. Last accessed on: 30 August 2016.

5 See: http://www.dw.com/ar/%D9%81%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%AF/a-19127856. Last accessed on: 30 August 2016.

6 See: http://xeber24.org/114768.html. Last accessed on: 30 August 2016.

7 See: http://www.sana.sy/?p=354739. Last accessed on: 30 August 2016.

8 See: 'Turkey, Iran discuss terror and future of Syria'. TRT World Reuters posted 19 March 2016. Available at: http://www.trtworld.com/mea/turkey-iran-discuss-terror-and-future-of-syria-70962. Last accessed on: 30 August 2016.

9 See: 'Arab League rejects Kurdish federal region in Syrian Kurdistan' posted by Ekurd Daily, Editorial Staff in Kurdistan on 21 March 2016. Available at: http://ekurd.net/arab-league-rejects-federal-syria-2016-03-21. Last accessed on: 30 August 2016.

10 See: Alexander, D. (2016) 'US rejects self-governed zones in Syria after Kurdish autonomy vote.' Reuters posted 17 March 2016. Available at: http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-usa-idUSKCN0WJ2SS. Last accessed on: 30 August 2016.

11 See: http://daharchives.alhayat.com/issue_archive/Hayat%20INT/2013/1/9/%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%83%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-.html. Last accessed on: 30 August 2016.

12 Op cit.

13 See: http://www.moaar.gov.sy/site_ar/syriamap/lattakia.htm. Last accessed on: 30 August 2016.

The Kurds and the Shifting Borders of the Middle East

Bakr Sidki

Lately, predictions about redrawing the map in the Middle East have proliferated: a new 'Sykes-Picot', a full century after its famous historical predecessor came into effect. Analyses (or guesses) which take this line, state that the multi-level, multi-party conflicts the region has played host to in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq—which started with the so-called Arab Spring revolutions of 2011—now appear impossible to resolve, especially following the involvement of regional and international forces either directly or through local groups.

This position is bolstered by the emergence of forces that seek independence from the centralized control of the state (the Kurds), others that have erased the boundaries between states (Daesh and Hezbollah) and yet others with similar proclivities but which are yet to declare them (Jihadist groups and Syrian Alawites).

In June 2014, in the wake of the assault by Daesh fighters on the Iraqi city of Mosul, the Islamist organization declared the establishment of the so-called Daesh (IS) under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, to whom IS swore allegiance as Caliph of the Muslims. This caliph called on Muslims from around the world to emigrate to his new state to pursue Jihad against its enemies and stated that their primary objective was the capital Baghdad.

A few days after al-Baghdadi's speech his fighters dragged away the land border dividing Iraq from Syria in front of TV cameras, proclaiming the end of the 'Sykes-Picot boundary' between the two countries. But instead of heading for Baghdad as their leader had promised in his inaugural speech, Daesh's forces went north to Arbil, thereby breaking a recent pledge not to target the Kurds. The armed forces of the Kurdish federal region, known as the Peshmerga, quickly crumbled in the face of this surprise attack. The Peshmerga had not fought a war in years and had grown sluggish and weak: their regional capital was in real danger.

It was at this point that the US administration swung into action, announcing the creation of an international coalition of more than sixty countries to counter IS. Air strikes would support local forces fighting Daesh, including the Iraqi army and Peshmerga forces. This was in Iraq. In Syria the coalition had no local partner to rely on in the war on IS, until, that is, the long siege of Kobani and the subsequent battle which lasted from October 2014 to January 2015 and ended with the defeat of Daesh and the liberation of the small Kurdish town on the Turkish border in northern Syria.

The Battle for Kobani and its Political Repercussions

In an albeit slightly different way to what Daesh had done to the Iraq-Syria border, another border line was erased in Kobani, this time the boundary between Turkey and Syria: over here, were Daesh fighters, some masked, firing into the air in celebration, like victors; over there, one saw families fleeing hell—women, children and men in a pitiable state. Bulldozers were flattening earth ramparts that crossed the desert hinterland as far as the eye could see. Elsewhere, in a verdant patch that separated the two sides, barbed wire was being rolled up by hand. Finally, there was the Daesh's multinational fighting force, held together by a shared belief in an extremist interpretation of Sunni Islam and a jihadist creed, and a local population of Kurdish civilians.

The battle for Kobani erased the Turkish-Syrian border in two directions: although the Turkish authorities had closed the border, there were people fleeing the stricken town in search of safety in Turkey, while Kurdish volunteers joined forces with the Kurdish fighters who were defending it.

The fact is that, spurred on by its traditional sensitivity towards its Kurdish population, the Turkish government's actions in respect of the siege of Kobani gave the impression that it was helping a terrorist organisation's forces surround the town. As a consequence thousands of Kurds took to the streets of Turkish cities, including the main centres of Istanbul and Ankara, protesting against the government's position. The security forces met the protest movement with violence and in the subsequent clashes around fifty people were killed in less than a week.

What changed the government's position on the siege were not the popular protests inside Turkey, so much as public American support of the town's resistance. US President Barack Obama called his Turkish counterpart to request that he allow Peshmerga forces from Iraqi Kurdistan to enter Kobani through Turkish territory. And this is what happened.

This move, unprecedented in the region's history, was a further transgression of the already shaky Sykes-Picot dispensation: a long corridor stretching from northern Iraq, through Turkey and into Kobani. Peshmerga forces with all their equipment and weapons in tow crossed large tracts of Turkish territory with Turkish Kurds lining the route and waving victory signs.

The symbolism of this land crossing went beyond an offering of military support for a battle of limited scope and importance, to unite the hearts of a Kurdish diaspora scattered across three countries (excluding those in Iran) and engaging, under direct US protection, in a battle that circumstances conspired to make decisive.

The behaviour of the Turkish government played a major role in this. Both Erdoğan and Davutoğlu had gone to great lengths to make deliberately indecisive statements on Kobani, which made it look as though they were backing Daesh against the Kurds. Moreover, these statements were accompanied by the closing of the border to civilians fleeing the fighting and the aforementioned suppression of Turkish Kurd demonstrations.

Thanks to American (and European) pressure, Turkey had to make a volte-face. The border was opened and Turkey welcomed in an additional two hundred thousand refugees then the government allowed Peshmerga forces to cross through its territory into Kobani. Obama paid no attention to Erdoğan's raging and oft-repeated assertions that the Democratic Union Party (PYD) was a terrorist organisation no different to Daesh. Indeed, Erdogan openly criticised the US for making airdrops of weapons over Kobani to assist the People's Protection Units hold fast against IS assaults and eventually emerge victorious.

Things were to get worse for the Turkish government just months after the end of this decisive battle. The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), considered to be the political wing of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) exploited the impact of the Battle of Kobani in its election campaign and made history in the elections of 7 June 2015 when its list of candidates broke the ten per cent barrier for the first time and became the first Kurdish party with a presence in the Turkish parliament, its seventy MPs a difficult factor to ignore in the country's political equations.

Bakr Sidki is a Syrian author who writes for a number of Arab newspapers and is a regular contributor to the Heinrich Boell Foundation.

To Summarize:

1. Starting with the assault by Daesh on Mount Sinjar, home of the Kurdish-Yazidi minority, and their subsequent advance northwards to Arbil, it was clear how important a role Iraqi Kurdistan played in American calculations. Obama, who had been happy to issue a verbal condemnation of the beheading of the first US hostage by IS, mobilised immediately when Daesh was threatening the capital city of Kurdistan, and formed an international coalition to fight the group, which began airstrikes on its positions instantly.
2. The second point concerns the PKK, which the US regards as a terrorist group. Reinforcements came from Mount Qandeel and northern Syria to help hold Daesh back at Mount Sinjar and there was, notably, a meeting between US officers, PKK field commanders, and members of the PYD-run People's Protection Units in Sinjar.

From that moment on, as far as public opinion went, Kurdish fighters (Barzani's Peshmerga or the Öcalan-loyalist People's Protection Units) became the United States' closest allies, an impression that was reinforced by a series of intensive political meetings between Kurdish and US forces. Although the Americans never officially recognised the 'self-administered' region comprising three 'cantons', which the PYD imposed as a fact on the ground, they never objected to this situation and treated the PYD as an ally (despite the ideological differences between them).

Taken together, these facts injected an unprecedented level of self-confidence into Kurdish public opinion—particularly in Turkey and Syria. Just as the US war in Iraq represented an historic opportunity for the Kurds, who took advantage of the situation to set up their own semi-independent federal region, the Syrian regime's war on its rebellious population and the environment which facilitated the emergence of Daesh then its proclamation of a Caliphate, represented an historic opportunity for Syrian Kurds to realise their dream of independence. This was something both political wings of the Kurdish movement realised: the Kurdish National Council affiliated with Barzani and the pro-Öcalan PYD. However, the latter possessed weapons and trained fighters, not to mention historical ties with the Assad regime, and was able to profit from this fact (following a period of temporary hostility and broken ties between 1998 and 2011) to occupy Kurdish majority areas by force and in coordination with regime forces, who had withdrawn to concentrate their attentions on regions in revolt.

The Battle of Tell Abyad and its Consequences: from Capability to Expansion

The alliance between the Americans and the PYD reached the point where relatively small US bases were constructed in Kobani and Al Jazira. Senior US officials also made repeated visits to areas controlled by Kurdish forces (such as US special envoy to the coalition against IS, Brett McGurk, and CENTCOM commander General Joseph Votel) not to mention the presence of US forces (albeit a token presence) in areas belonging to the PYD.

This high-level political and field coordination, in addition to a French, British and German military presence would encourage the PYD to expand outside their traditional strongholds, leading to the assault on Tell Abyad which lay next to the Turkish border in the al-Raqqa governorate. Daesh fighters were driven out of the Arab-majority town and the surrounding countryside with its mixed Arab, Kurdish and Turkoman population. The PYD was so emboldened by US and Western backing that it proclaimed Tell Abyad part of the 'Kobani Canton' and Amnesty International recorded serious violations committed against the local inhabitants by the People's Protection Units; a number of these amounted to war crimes and crimes against humanity, such as the forcible depopulation of villages whose inhabitants just happened to be Arab. These actions triggered a wave of hostility and hatred towards the PYD which then came to encompass Kurds in general, with public opinion referring to the practices of the People's Protection Units as ethnic cleansing.

However, it was the Turkish government and Turkish nationalists who were most unhappy with the Kurdish liberation of Tell Abyad. They saw that by capturing Tell Abyad the PYD had linked the cantons of Kobani and al-Jazira, creating an unbroken strip of territory which extended all the way from the Turkish-Syrian border to the furthest point east of the Euphrates. The most obvious military-political consequence of this new state of affairs was the agreement by the Turkish government after a full year of prevarication to open the Incirlik airbase to the planes of the international coalition, in exchange for a US-pledge that Kurdish forces would not cross to the west bank of the Euphrates.



SPACES OF REFUGE
The intimate and anonymous space of public restrooms offer a unique opportunity for expression. The clear borders distinguishing 'correct' practices in public from those displayed in private are conveniently blurred. Users display opinions, defiance, sexuality, identity, anger, secrets and biases, enacting the inherent human need for communication.

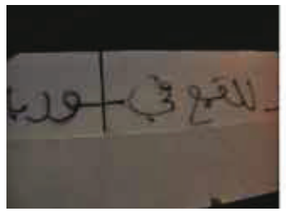
Russia Enters the Syrian War

In mid-September 2015, Russia announced that it would be entering the war in Syria based on an agreement with the Assad regime, with the stated objective of 'fighting terrorism'. And at the end of that same month Russian warplanes did indeed begin to mount attacks on areas outside regime control. On 24 November 2015, Turkish fighters brought down a Russia Sukhoi-24, claiming that it had breached Syrian-Turkish airspace in the Jebel Turkoman region north of Latakia.

In fact, the Russians had harassed Turkish fighters more than once in the lead-up to this incident and Ankara had done no more than summon the Russian ambassador and asked him to convey Turkish protests to his leaders. Furthermore, the Turkish government had always treated Jebel Turkoman as part of its own national security remit, lying as it does along its border, and because of the supposed ethnic bond with the region's Turkoman inhabitants. Friction between Turkey and Russia was inevitable once Russian jets began bombarding revolutionary positions in residential neighbourhoods to support the advance of Assad's forces and their allies, as part of a strategy to secure the Latakia region, which is one of the regime's most significant social and ethnic strongholds.

The downing of the Russian plane gave the PYD the chance to expand beyond the Afrin

AGITATING BELIEFS
Censorhsip of the graffiti «No to Repression in Syria», replacing Syria, in one of the instances with Saudi Arabia.



ORIGINAL: No to repression in Syria



CENSORED: No to repression in ...



EDITED: No to repression in Saudi Arabia



ERASED: blank

Canton besieged by Turkish-backed brigades. Battle raged in the countryside north of Aleppo between the PYD and affiliated Arab groups, and those brigades conventionally referred to as 'moderate Islamist groups', supported by Ankara. The coalition of the Syrian Democratic Forces started to penetrate south and east towards Aleppo and Azaz with Russian air support.

What had embarrassed Obama before his NATO ally Turkey was perfectly acceptable to a wounded Putin, who gave the Kurdish forces free rein north of Aleppo. However the advance of the Kurds and their Arab partners ended as suddenly as it had begun. This was possibly the result of a Russian-US understanding concluded in the framework of the International Working Group on Syria that held two successive meetings in Vienna and which produced a consensus over the Security Council resolution regarding a common policy to war in Syria. Saudi Arabia was given the task of forming the opposition's negotiating delegation in partnership with Syrian opposition groups and bodies. One of the most significant measures taken during the Riyadh conference was to exclude the PYD from taking part.

A few days after the Cairo conference began, the PYD convened a parallel conference in the Syrian city of Rmeilan with the participation of Arab political forces and personalities, which produced a new political entity termed 'The Syrian Democratic Council'. The council was chaired by Haytham Manna and had its own military wing, 'The Syrian Democratic Forces', with the Kurdish People's Protection Units as its backbone.

From the perspective of the regional/international struggle over Syria, this council was Russia's idea. Russia sought to apply pressure on Saudi Arabia and Turkey regarding their creation of an opposition body to participate in the Geneva 3 negotiations. For the PYD the multi-national council gave them cover when they took over territory that did not have a Kurdish-majority population; such as Tell Abyad, which secured the land bridge between al-Jazira and Kobani, or the countryside north of Aleppo, which the PYD wanted in order to secure a corridor linking Afrin and Kobani, thereby cutting Turkey off from the rest of Syria completely.

The US want to liberate Raqqa and first and foremost this will require cutting the city's access to the Turkish border by expelling Daesh from Manbij and Jarablus. This would leave Turkey with a narrow strip along the Azzaz-Marea line.

The vicious clashes taking place around Aleppo point to differences between the Russian agenda and the priorities of the Assad regime and its Iranian allies. Without going into details one can simply state that US-Russian understandings have tended to work to preserve the balance of power on the ground in Aleppo and the surrounding countryside.

What concerns us here is the announcement by the Syrian Democratic Council in March 2016 of the creation of a federation for those regions controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces. This provoked angry responses from Arabs opposed to Assad's regime, and they refused to concede to what was in effect a fait accompli.

At the time there were continuous leaks about potential relations between Turkey and the Syrian regime, following a series of negotiations that were reached in the framework of "correcting" Turkish foreign policy. These talks have included Russia and Israel, and all agree over the danger of a Kurdish entity in northern Syria and southern Turkey.

The Turkish Intervention through Jarablos

On August 24, the opposition forces, fighters of the Free Syrian Army (some of whom had been previously trained by the CIA) entered the border city of Jarablos backed by the Turkish army with its heavy weapons on the ground and the US-led coalition in the sky; IS withdrew its forces from the city without a fight.

These operations have been politically covered by the US and seem to have been agreed upon with Iran and Russia implicitly. In fact, the Jarablos operation must have been planned at least a year before and was first delayed by a disagreement between Ankara and Washington about vision and objectives. Then, the plan was put on the shelf when Turkey shot down the Russian Sukhoi plane on 25 November 25 2015. In retaliation, Moscow installed the advanced S400 anti-missile batteries in its airbase in Khmeimim, preventing the Turkish airforce from flying over Syria. Indeed, Moscow has sought to exclude Turkey altogether from the equation.

When Turkish-Russian relations normalized, this was celebrated at the St. Petersburg summit, which brought together the two presidents. Erdogan obtained the necessary green light to penetrate the border and enter Jarablos as the first direct Turkish military intervention on Syrian territory.

The battle of Jarablos was designed to prevent the establishment of a corridor between Kobani and Afrin under the control of the people's protection units (YPG) yet the pretext was to liberate the city from IS.

The Turkish operation, which was endorsed by all major international powers, undermined the dreams of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) to establish a federal entity connecting the eastern canton of Afrin with the western ones along the Syrian - Turkish border; a move Ankara would view as a threat to its national security. Therefore, PYD's party leader Saleh Muslim has vowed to incur large losses upon the Turkish troops.

Washington for its part is seeking a truce between the parties in an effort to redirect energies to the fight against IS. We cannot expect much, however, as the situation in this region remains unpredictable in light of the internal situation in Turkey and, in particular, the war for the last year between the PKK and the Turkish army in southeastern Anatolia.

So far, there are no signs that this internal war might stop and the parties resume their peace talks. As long as this conflict is unresolved, so the conflict between Turkish forces and the YPG in Syria will remain, a conflict between two of Washington's allies that the latter tries to contain.

To Summarize:

The Kurdish issue dates back to the break-up of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent establishment of the Turkish republic and the modern Arab and Balkan states. While many different national groups were granted their own independent nation-states in the aftermath of the First World War, the Kurds feel cheated that they were denied their own, and that Kurdish society was sliced up between different political entities governed by other nations (Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran). Since the modern Turkish republic was established under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk there have been a series of Kurdish rebellions, the most recent by the PKK in the mid-1980s. Like other uprisings in northern Iraq and Iranian Kurdistan, these were bloodily suppressed.

Not one of these four countries has worked to assimilate the Kurdish presence in a positive way and recognise their identity as a distinct ethnic-cultural community; so far from being solved the Kurdish issue has become more and more intractable.

Historical experience suggests to the Kurds that there can be no hope of achieving their demands for national recognition without obtaining the support (and consensus) of the major powers that control events in the region. Some Kurds believe that an historic opportunity is at last within their grasp, as circumstances, from the Arab Spring revolutions to the rise in jihadist terrorism in the form of Daesh and al-Qaeda, have conspired to make this possible.

If the Kurdish leadership in Iraq depends on steady support from Washington and other Western capitals in its move towards total independence from the Iraqi state, Öcalan's alliance with Washington seems circumstantial and opportunistic. Russian support, meanwhile, is predicated on the enmity between Russia and Turkey resulting in the shooting down of the Sukhoi-24, and it is too early to predict the future of this relationship following a rapprochement.

However, given that Russia turned a blind eye to the Turkish troops storming the town of Jarablos, we could say that the Russian - Kurdish honeymoon is almost at an end. However, Vladimir Putin will not entirely give up the Kurdish card while it remains useful for Moscow especially when there is a need to put pressure on Turkey. So Kurdish parties need to re-evaluate their allegiances with both Washington and Moscow. Although it has proved useful to deal with both, recently the alliance has begun to look more fragile than the party leaders expected.

But the Kurds, with all their political movements and parties and their dispersal over four nation-states, are not the only anti-centralist element in the 'Sykes-Picot region', if such an expression be permitted. There is a Sunni-Shia binary, actively promoted by Tehran and Riyadh, played out in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Bahrain, not to mention Palestine. There is the Alawite community in Syria who supported the regime against the popular uprising, creating a profound split between themselves and the diverse elements that make up Syrian society: a wound it will take a miracle to heal. And, there is Hezbollah, the Iran-backed group that monopolises the political representation of Lebanon's Shia and crosses national borders to fight for the Syrian regime. Israel tried to keep hold of the Druze card, sometimes playing it, sometimes hiding it in its hand.

Overall, there is a consensus among observers that the Middle East we know is gone for good. Just as direct American intervention in Iraq helped precipitate the disintegration of the Iraqi state's infrastructure, so Washington's refusal to engage in meaningful intervention in Syria has contributed to the dissolution of the Syrian state.

In part this disintegration is related to the damaging struggle between major international and regional powers in their efforts to draw up a new Middle East agreement and apportion influence within this new system: a process that is yet to reach its final settlement.

Translated from the Arabic by Robin Moger

The Dream of Overcoming All Borders

Hanaa Edwar

What has happened to the transnational visions so characteristic for leftist movements? A number of political movements and ideological formations in the Middle East were concerned with ways in which to overcome borders. While Pan-Arabism, essentially a nationalist movement, was focusing on lifting geographic borders, socialist and communist movements scrutinized the social and economic borders within societies and contemplated overcoming class structures and confessional or ethnical divisions. Hanaa Edwar, member of the Iraqi Communist Party and the Iraqi Women's League, joined the Iraqi Peshmerga in 1985 and spoke to us about the dream of overcoming all borders.

In the 1970s, I was living in (East-) Berlin as the Iraqi Women's League representative at the Secretariat of the Women's International Democratic Federation. The plan had been for me to return to Iraq in 1978, but that was just as Saddam Hussein's Baath party began its anti-democratic campaign, closing the offices of the communists, arresting many of our friends and comrades and executing dozens of young communists and democrats. So it was decided I should stay and watch what happened. In 1981, I spent my vacation in Beirut attending military training run by the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). I returned to Berlin to wait for the moment I could return to Baghdad and join the Peshmerga (the armed resistance movement against Saddam Hussein's dictatorial regime). However, after four years I decided enough was enough, I couldn't stay any longer in Berlin and I returned to Baghdad.

It was August 1982 when I returned to Damascus to continue my work with the Iraqi Women's League. At that time I was a member of the Iraqi Communist party (ICP) and looking forward to joining my comrades in the resistance movement. This was a significant moment: women being accepted as Peshmerga fighters under the banner of (ICP). In October 1985 I attended the fourth Congress of the ICP in the mountains of Kurdistan; we numbered over 120. After the congress I stayed and joined the Peshmerga ranks, what we called "Ansar", which had resumed its activities in 1979.

My *nom de guerre* was Nada. I stayed in the area of Khwakork, located in the triangle of borders between Turkey, Iraq and Iran, the base for a number of party politicians, as well as the headquarters of the ICP media, broadcasting and newspapers. As the representative for women's issues I joined the political leaders of the party. We maintained contact with our sisters working inside Iraq under Saddam's regime as well as the *Nasseerat* – female fighters – in Kurdistan. I had been given a Kalashnikov as well as a small pistol containing just five bullets. In our base, we numbered forty people, about twelve of them were women; the numbers changed depending on missions and people moving to different areas. Alongside us, about 10 minutes walk away, was the ICP broadcasting base where a number of young female journalists were working. I was astonished by the number of Iraqis with different social backgrounds who came from different provinces, ethnicities and religions: Arabs, Christians, Ezidis, Kurds, Mandaean, and Turkmens; we didn't feel different we were working as one. Many had had a higher education: PhDs specialising in physics, philosophy, or the arts … Many came from Western countries or had graduated from the Soviet Union. They had escaped from Iraq after 1978 and gone to Algeria, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen then returned to join the armed struggle against the dictatorial regime, to build a democratic Iraq and grant dignity, freedom



Hanaa Edwar holds a law degree from Baghdad University. She has been a Human Rights, Women's Rights and Democracy Activist for 50 years. She is co-founder and Chairperson of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association, a local NGO established in 1992. She is co-founder of the Iraqi Women Network, which was founded in 2004 and comprises more than ninety women's organizations and groups from all over the country. She holds the Sean MacBride Peace Prize 2011 for her contribution 'to the advancement of democracy and human rights', and her 'firm stand against violence and war'. In December 2011, UNAMI recognised her as an outstanding Human Rights Defender in Iraq and in 2013 the TAKREEM Foundation awarded her Arab Woman of the Year.



A picnic near the base with two comrades

and a decent life for its people.

The Vision of Dignity and the Fight for Freedom

Most of the women who joined the *Nasseerat* were unmarried at the time. They were very young and willing to participate in the armed struggle under extremely harsh conditions. They had been assigned a variety of duties, working in telecommunications, the media, nursing and other everyday duties; a small number also fought. Amongst the party's leadership in the mountains, there was one female comrade, Bushra Perto, a member of the ICP's Central Committee. She was with her husband, who was also a member of the ICP Political Bureau and both spent several years in the Peshmerga; she lives now in London.

Our base was in a remote area. There were no markets, no social life, we were completely isolated and transistor radios were our main link with the outside world. From time-to-time we received letters and books through the party's channel. We lived in very primitive conditions; men and women lived separately in shared rooms built from dust and sometimes in tents. The winters were cold, with heavy snow and rain but the sense of camaraderie and the stoves kept us warm. We took our meals together; usually three of us shared one dish. The food was very limited especially in winter: yogurt, cheese, lentils, chickpeas or a bean dish with rice. Sometimes we had honey, eggs and meat maybe once or twice a month. I don't like meat, but many of my comrades looked forward to eating it and would join me so they could eat my share. We also had delicious freshly baked bread in the morning and at midday. Everyone, except the leaders and elderly people, had to take cook twice a month and prepare three meals for everybody in the base.

It was not an easy time for me. I am from Basra, a geographically flat area and relatively warm in winter. It found it hard to climb hills and mountains and to adapt myself to this new, primitive environment. I had difficulty raking wet wood to prepare breakfast for my comrade; it was also hard job for male newcomers to cut wood. However, I enjoyed the lovely colours of the landscape around us, the way it changed in the mornings, afternoons, evenings; throughout the seasons. During my guard duties in the evening or at night, the bright stars and the still of the dark fascinated me, a silence that was only broken by the swish of trees or the whistling of the icy, cold wind.

We were mostly isolated from other people but when people did visit, especially the women, it was good. They looked at us with astonishment: 'These women, what are they doing in this remote area?' - they had met Peshmerga men before but not female Peshmerga. With time, we were able to establish good relations, teaching them about hygiene, how to improve their living conditions and we also raised some awareness of women's rights.

During this time, some couples got married both in our base and at another nearby. We celebrated the wedding and built them a special room. We made gifts from very simple things; like taking empty cans and painting them to look like vases, and we collected flowers.

In the summer of 1986, I remember one guy suffering from severe pain in his abdomen. We were lucky to have a surgeon with us who diagnosed an appendicitis and he needed an operation. But, how? The doctor decided to operate outdoors but after midnight to avoid contamination from dust and insects and using a local anaesthetic. We were all worried. We organized the space very simply and I

volunteered to help, reassuring the patient when he felt pain during the operation. It was a remarkable achievement. After a week, our comrade regained his health and resumed his activities.

Bridging Isolation

Living in an isolated space with other people 24/7 was not easy but I don't remember any major problems. It was like a prison, but open air and of our own choice. We used the time to read, work and debate. We had wonderful times. I remember we celebrated a week of theatre and it was so wonderful, absolutely amazing! We performed a number of plays in the evenings, followed by discussions and music. Of course, we always celebrated International Women's Day and other festivities. These young fighters were honest and ambitious and tolerated these primitive conditions as a result of their devotion and commitment despite being deprived of many basic requirements for years.

One day in June 1986 we were moving from our area, the Soran (the countryside of Erbil) to the Bahdinan area (Dohukk province), that's high up in the mountains where the hawks are. We were passing through very dangerous areas with Iraqi army check points and had to go across a small river to cross the Turkish border; while crossing the stormy water one of the men almost drowned but another was able to save him. I remember we had to walk for more than four nights, passing through villages and staying overnight in different people's homes. We saw the ruins of villages destroyed by Saddam Hussein's campaign of ethnic cleansing in Kurdistan, and we met people who had been displaced, some of them more than once. At the same time we had happy moments when we entered a small town, walked on a paved road and sat in a café and drank tea! That was a great pleasure for us!

We walked for many hours. Even when you're tired, you have to follow the others and just keep on walking. We had few animals to ride on and I was not used to walking in mountainous area. I found it so difficult when we had to climb a mountain, so sometimes they got me a donkey to ride on. But I did enjoy swimming in the cold mountain rivers with other *Nasseerat* in the group.

After three weeks, we returned to our base but one comrade, Mona Lisa, extended her stay. In September 1986, while passing through the Turkish region, the Turkish army fired at them and she was hit, got an infection and died. The comrades couldn't bring her body home and it was a huge loss for us. Originally from Nasiriya province she had been a wonderful young activist who had devoted herself to this struggle and to women's rights.

I would like to mention other members of our *Naseerat* who infiltrated Iraq on party missions. They were hiding with their families and we lost some of them; I remember Zainab, Um Dhikra and Um Lina, one committed suicide to avoid arrest and the other two were caught by security forces and executed.

Turning the Weapons against the Opposition: Saddam Hussein's Regime after the End of the War with Iran

In our group, there were some people from Iran who belonged to Fedaii Khalq and the TUDEH party, leftists. They were a wonderful group of men and women and we felt united in the face of a common cause. We enjoyed cultural and art sessions in the evenings and one of their girls married one of our comrades. When the Iranian troops entered the Iraqi territories, the party leadership decided to move them to the Bahdinan area for their safety and security. Unfortunately, one man, called Abo Ali, insisted on staying with us; he was so committed and funny but was shot by an Iraqi soldier during our comrades' withdrawal from the base in July 1988. I was so sad to lose him. He had been a close friend to me and other *Nasseerat*. He had been away from his family for about five years and was so looking forward to meeting the small son he had left behind in Iran. Some of my comrades gave birth in this situation and it was wonderful to have these babies around and to hear a child's voice after so long.

Chemical Warfare

In 1987, Saddam Hussein began his chemical attacks on areas of Kurdistan. I usually read through the telegrammes and messages received from other places and people were terrified of this fierce campaign. We received a delegation from Halabja who talked about the tragic situation they endured during and after the chemical bombardment of their town on 16 and 17 March 1988. In June of the same year, an Iraqi chemical raid was launched on the ICP's base in Bahdinan, which I had visited a year before. It was horrible. Many comrades suffered from acute respiratory illnesses and chronic skin diseases and some lost their sight for several months. We were on high alert. Meetings were organized to explain the composition of

the chemical weapons, its effects and how to recognize and avoid its threats during the raid. We had to be ready, at any moment, to run. Everyone carried a small bag ready containing what was needed in case of an attack; it was a very difficult time. During my time in the mountains, I witnessed Turkish and Iraqi fighter planes scanning and sometimes attacking our areas. We always had to be on alert.

Of the three years I spent in the mountains, the hardest was 1988. On 18 July, we heard Khomeini's statement that he would 'drink the poison' to end the war with Iraq, which meant he had accepted the ceasefire between Iran and Iraq. We realised that the Iraqi army would turn its weapons against us, against all resistance movements, and they did so immediately.

Adios to Arms

We had to retreat from our base in Perbinan, walking in the heat, staying in the open for 2 – 3 days, and then moving to another. We received news of violent raids by the Iraqi army against the rest of our comrades who had stayed in Perbinan and Khwakork and against other Peshmerga forces. I was so sad and so angry; I was heartbroken. It was a pivotal moment and then I heard a rumour that a decision had been made by the leadership of the party to withdraw the *Nasseerat*, the sick and the elderly from the mountains. I was so emotional during the discussions about our retreat and withdrawal from Kurdistan and as an expression of my anger I washed my hair in a small river in front of everyone.

I remember the day when we, a small group of *Nasseerat,* were sitting in the tent feeling tearful and despondent and a member of the party leadership came to tell us about the decision to leave Kurdistan. We all expressed our dismay and refused to go, he tried to console us with encouraging words but there was nothing for it, we had to leave and soon!

The next day, six or seven *Nasseerat* and I left with our guide. It was so painful to say goodbye to our comrades. We walked for several hours and then the guide asked us to change out of our Khaki uniforms and into the village dresses he had brought for us. Most of us had not worn this kind of dress before and thought we looked funny; it made us laugh and tease each other, which lifted our spirits. We spent a chilly, dark night in the open trying to sleep close to each other to keep warm and when we woke up in the morning we were surrounded by sheep and goats.

There was no problem crossing the Iranian border illegally. We stayed with Kurdish families and it was so pleasant for us to take a bath in a public, Iranian bathroom. This marked the resumption of civilian life. Later on, I was separated from my friends and moved to the city of Naqadeh. After two days I heard the ceasefire between Iran and Iraq had started; it was 8 August 1988. One week later, I took the bus to Tehran accompanied by members of the family that I had been living with. My departure from Tehran went smoothly and within a week I had arrived in Damascus.

Other *Nasseerat* who didn't have valid passports had to take a risk and cross the Iranian borders with the Soviet Union illegally; it was an adventurous, long journey. The majority of *Nasseerat* are scattered across several countries, mostly in the West, in Denmark, Germany, Norway, Sweden, the UK, the Netherlands... Only a few are still in Iraq. They are married and have families, many of them have continued with their studies and settled into their new homeland but always remember fondly the warmth and love of the days of armed struggle.



Hanaa Edwar during a day of her service, 1985

Years later an organization called the *League of Anssar Movement* was formed which made it possible for old comrades to meet periodically. On some occasions special events were organized for the female fighters to come together and revive old friendships. Comrade Ali Rafiq, a filmmaker who spent years in the Anssar movement, made a special documentary about the experience of female fighters in Iraq titled: "AL-NASSEERAT".

I am not saying this experience was ideal. But it is a fact that the ICP was a pioneer in involving women in armed struggle. Unfortunately little is spoken about it and I think we didn't really give it much publicity. Even as we've been speaking it is clear that you thought the Peshmerga was Kurdish. In fact, the number of Kurdish women who joined the movement was small because they were able to stay at home and work in their cities.

Still the Same Dream

Remembering the old days, thirty years on, I still have the same hopes and dreams that we had then, a passionate attachment to meaningful struggle against injustice and oppression and the impetus to fight for freedom, dignity and equality.

I want to stress that ICP has always represented an inclusive image of the Iraqi people, and I am proud that I was a member of this party from early on in my life. I learned a lot of lessons: patience, living and working together on a community basis, caring for others and building intimate relations. Even to this day I continue to be in touch with some of my comrades.

In the light of the difficult situation the Iraqi people are facing today, I feel gratitude towards those who sacrificed their life to pave the way for others to fight with the confidence and determination to turn their dreams into reality through peaceful protest. I think joining the armed struggle has empowered women and proved that, in the face of difficulty, women can be trusted to act responsibly.

Based on our experience, both past and present, we must lobby for more leadership positions for women in order to break the patriarchal mentality and the totalitarian authority that believes in the marginalization and subordination of women.

Written by Dr. Bente Scheller

On the Borders of Dreams - Stories from the Front Lines of Political Partitions

Tamara Qiblawi



Tamara Qiblawi is the co-founder of the transmedia production company KnoozRoom SAL. Drawing on her background in International Affairs and traditional journalism, she engages in creative journalistic projects, focusing on popular histories and knowledge. Tamara's projects include the immersive documentary event 'Shelter' and the digital story series 'Borders'; her latest deals with spies from the 1980s.

It has been one hundred years since a French and a British diplomat marked the borders of the modern Middle East. In so doing, they also marked the contours of our discourse. Not only re-routing our economies and communities, but re-drawing our imaginations. Because since then, the political cantons of our region have steadily multiplied, and much of the region can no longer be seen and touched, only imagined.

The Sykes-Picot agreement put paper to pen and carved up European mandates that would later become nation-states. It was a maelstrom of foreign interests, local wrangling and political philosophies that split the place into the veritable archipelago that it is today. It is a multi-layered, complicated mess, with diplomatic discourse dissolving like a needle into a haystack. But what of the people caught in the middle of all this? Their limbo-like state is not up for debate. It is plain to see, and it highlights the urgent need to reverse the tide of cantonization. These people are not background noise in the diplomatic arena, they present a pressing situation that must be brought to the fore. These are the refugees of the past and present, and the disruptions to their lives ought to form the crux of our histories and current affairs.

This is what my transmedia group KnoozRoom very modestly set out to do with our multimedia project BORDERS, which we produced in 2013 with the support of Heinrich Boell Stiftung Middle East. We went to three different border regions and searched for stories that typified the disruption to human lives caused by the introduction of borders. We used multimedia and code as a means to juxtapose the triviality of borders with the very real repercussions on human lives. We used these new tools to pit the abstract against the visual and political interest against fissures in culture. We traced movement and we recorded songs. We visually captured the lives that refugees stuck in border areas created out of the rubble and tried to lace them with meaningful narrative.

But there was also a selfish reason why the KnoozRoom team went ahead with this project. It is because, increasingly, the places nearest to us are places we can only access through our imaginations. For the last sixty-eight years, we have only known the Palestine south of our Lebanese borders through folk tales and our grandparents' memories. And now, to our East, we only have a keepsake, a Kurdish rug, an Allepan souvenir, to remind us of the all but destroyed Syrian regions. We had nothing more tangible than a desire to know more about our neighbourhoods and this project answered a growing need to make manifest these abstractions.

A Digital Series

The BORDERS project was the second of KnoozRoom's digital series. Our first dealt with musical binaries and posed the question: will we ever be able to transcend the East-West divide, and express in music what is uniquely of our time? Does being an Arab mean that we operate within the perennial parameters of folkloric music? There is an ever-present feeling of entrapment that KnoozRoom tries to break out of by reconstructing our past and present. And we believe that multimedia and transmedia (storytelling through multiple media platforms) is the best—or at least the most engaging—way to do it.

To tell the BORDERS stories, we used text, illustration, loop video, experimental video, and interactive code. So that we could seamlessly blend the mediums, the three creators of the series—Mireille Raad, Ramzi Bashour and myself—needed to collaborate closely across a multi-skilled team. It was breaking new ground and it was uncomfortable, but it was hard to imagine the project going any other way.

A Stroke of a Pen and Forty Years of Movement

Our first section in the three-part series recounted the story of Atef Choufani, a refugee four-times over. Choufani is from a town called Qabil al-Amh, one of Lebanon's 'seven lost villages' near the southern boundaries. These villages were the subject of a major political debate in Lebanon that lasted some decades before it was resolved in 1994. The story of the 'seven lost villages' perhaps typifies, more than most, the arbitrariness of borders and, conversely, the enduring state of limbo that follows.

Qabil al-Amh was meant to be part of France's mandate in Syria, according to the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement. But it was soon drawn into political differences between the British and the Zionists in Palestine, and the French in Syria and what was soon-to-be-Lebanon. Between 1916 and 1923, the boundaries between Palestine and Lebanon shifted numerous times. Still, the dwellers of the contested area went about their daily lives, and when they were finally told that they were citizens of the British mandate of Palestine, there was little protest. That was, of course, until the state of Israel was declared in 1948.

As is now common knowledge, thanks to Israel's New Historians[1] and many a Palestinian academic, over four hundred Palestinian villages were destroyed with the establishment of the Jewish State. The villages of the contentious territory between Palestine and Lebanon







ICONIZING STRUGGLES
Disenfranchised from exercising the Right of Return, Palestinians in refugee camps, reinvent their collective Palestine in a myriad of ways.

were not spared. Thus, those who were at first considered Lebanese, rushed to safety in Lebanon. But this time not as Lebanese citizens, but as Palestinian refugees. People like Choufani were shuttled from refugee camp to refugee camp, survived (or perished in) massacre after massacre, and travelled from country to country just to find the means to survive. Such was the life of a Palestinian refugee in Lebanon. And Choufani's case perhaps exemplifies just how accidental and monumental the status of a refugee can be.

To reconstruct his story, the team had to traverse much of Lebanon's southern boundary. It is hard to imagine a place more poignant and politically charged. The landscape south of the Litani River (the southern-most 10 percent of Lebanon) is perhaps the most serene in all the country and it belies its most turbulent history. Because while the rest of Lebanon saw post-Civil War peace and reconstruction after 1990, the population south of the Litani remained occupied by Israel until 2000. And then again was subject to war with its southern neighbour in 2006, nearly levelling the area to the ground.

Through loop video and coded maps we endeavoured to capture the contentious political context and the quiet tensions. We photographed graffiti on the newly erected separation barrier on Fatima's Gate, renowned as the place through which Israel's last soldiers left Lebanon. We also went through historic villages and newly constructed public playgrounds that stood proudly and defiantly at the border. And through an interactive map, we tried to condense the history of this strange border in a way that people could easily understand; all this to give life to the story of Choufani, and many like him.

Beauty Shop Talk

As part of our cultural research for this project, we came across a famous 1987 Syrian movie named 'Al Hudood' (Borders). Directed by and starring the biting political satirist Dureid Laham, the film speaks of a taxi driver Abdel Wudood who spends his days shuttling between the fictional states of Sharq-el-Stan, Gharb-el-Stan, Shmal-el-Stan and Jnoub-el-Stan (this translates into Eaststan, Weststan, Northstan and Southstan). One day, Abdel Wudood accidentally drops his passport on one of the highways and never finds it again. Subsequently, all of the Stans deny him entry, and Abdel Wudood is stuck at a border crossing. He decides to build his new home and new livelihood (a restaurant) out of car parts he can no longer use.

The restaurant serves as a hotbed of contradictions, adroitly expressing the speciousness of borders and their capacity for chaos. Abdel Wudood marks a border out of rock that runs through his clunky establishment, a border that the border guards from each stan must not cross. Inevitably, Abdel Wudood's predicament attracts the attention of the press and political leaders are then forced to make impassioned statements about the eradication of borders for the sake of national unity. But it comes to nothing and Abdel Wudood must continue with the life of limbo that he has created out of the rubble.

By chance, we found a real life Abdel-Wudood on the Syrian-Lebanon border region of Wadi Khaled. We ventured up there to write and record the stories of refugees from that region who make up ninety percent of the municipality. While moving from refugee encampment to refugee encampment, we happened upon the sole beauty shop in the region. It belonged to Suraya* from Tal Kalakh of the Homs region.

'When I realized that the war was not going to stop any time soon, I decided I had to go on with my life. I sold my gold, and opened the salon,' Suraya told us in 2012, roughly one year after Syria plunged into war.

One fateful morning, Suraya and her family waded across the river between Wadi Khaled and Homs in their pyjamas. Authorities forbade them to leave the Wadi Khaled district and having entered the country illegally, they would be trapped there for some time to come. And so it began, Suraya built an establishment out of the rubble of her displacement.

She hired two Lebanese employees who came over only once or twice a week, and together they would pass the time talking and giggling as they waited for their next customer. They said they would try to cheer Suraya up, try to get her to look at the lighter side of a difficult life.

The villages located south-west of Homs are within earshot of Wadi Khalid, and some of the villages are split down the middle by the international border. During our visit to the river crossing, where we watched smugglers and other travellers through a camera lens, we saw a girl trekking from her sister's house in the Lebanese part of the 'Awayshat village to her parent's house in the Syrian part of the same village. It was a peaceful day, a good time to make the short trip. 'I know [the Syrian district of] Homs much more than I know the rest of Lebanon. But since the fighting in Syria broke out, we cannot go there. I feel lost,' said Muneira, one of Suraya's Lebanese employees.

A year later, immediately before the launch of the project in 2013, we returned to Wadi Khaled to check on the situation there. We found many more refugees like Suraya, who had built establishments and crafted a life out of limbo. They said they had no choice but to continue business as usual amid the limbo, because for them, the diplomatic chat broadcast on TV and radio about alleviating the plight of the refugees was nothing more than beauty shop talk.

Continued Multimedia Work on Borders

KnoozRoom went on to produce another episode about the Bedouins of Wadi Rum in Jordan, whose nomadic lifestyle was rendered obsolete by the borders. We illustrated traditions that had been relegated to touristic artefacts, and we recorded their old songs. It was our last episode in the series but it was not the end of KnoozRoom's tackling of intensifying cantonisation in the region.

Once again drawing on the oral tradition, KnoozRoom teamed up with the alternative media outlet Mashallah News to create a multimedia series on routes. Through text, code and artwork, we documented and published unmapped avenues in the region, those improvised by people and those that no longer exist (e.g: the train network). We sought to bear witness to the increasingly restricted movement currently, by re-imagining a more free-flowing region through testimonies about our past. Through this process we realised that freedom of movement not only means space, but coherence, and, imagining a less cantonised past also means coming to understand our region better.

Websites

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1 The 'New Historians' of Israel is a term used to describe a generation of historians that spawned from the 1970s declassification of secret archives about the establishment of the Jewish State in 1948.

The Myth of Demographic Purity

Mohammed Dibo



Mohammed Dibo is an author, researcher and poet. He is currently the editor in chief of the website 'Syria Untold', which is an independent digital media project highlighting the diverse forms of resistance currently taking place. He writes opinion articles and undertakes specialist research for various Arabic and overseas newspapers and magazines. Among his Arabic literary works are: Electoral mistake (2008), and If a friend betrays you (2008). Mohammed's latest work is an autobiographical book, Like He Who Witnesses His Own Death, about his experience in prison during the early days of the Syrian uprising. He is a regular contributor to many Arab and international newspapers.

A year ago or maybe more, the world's most pressing problems suddenly took a step backwards leaving two issues to take centre stage: Daesh and the issue of refugees and immigrants in the West. The dangers of dictatorships, social inequalities and climate change all faded into the background and the fascination with the Arab Spring—now turning into Autumn—began to dwindle. Even the issue of terrorism was reduced to that of the Islamic State.

Yet none of this materialised out of thin air; rather, it had to do with age-old problems that the world's decision-makers have long ignored, coupled with other issues that have forced themselves into our consciousness as a result of overblown claims by Arab revolutions and the terrorism that took root in their shadow. Europe got burned, too, courtesy of refugees and terrorism. This, among other things, led to a change in the continent's priorities from combating despotism and promoting democracy and human rights, to throwing up walls around the continent to protect against the influx of displaced persons/refugees and terrorism. Within the fortress, meanwhile, old questions were revived concerning immigration, European identity, the state, the right of refuge, human rights, and the twin political poles of Left and Right. All of this was taking place at a moment of instability[1] on a number of fronts, including:

Geopolitical: With the US turning its attention to China in Central Asia and the Pacific at the same time as Iran and Russia moved to fill the void amid troubling European inaction—the Mediterranean being Southern Europe, after all—we watched as Europe turned its back on the issue and passed the buck; much like the EU's agreement with Turkey regarding refugees or leaving Russia to deal with Syria; an insult to injury.

Ideological: Putinism garners ever more support around the world, even as the extreme right and anti-immigrant groups gain traction in Europe and the Trump phenomenon takes off in the US. Meanwhile in our region a discourse that talks about the War on Terror and the importance of safeguarding the state (utterly divorced from discussion of the ills of despotism which provide a perfect environment for extremism and terrorism) is widely deployed; feeding the flow of refugees and terrorism instead of stemming it. Taken together these ideological discourses work against the discourse of human rights and democracy and, of course, against revolution. More worryingly, they have begun to be echoed by supporters of the latter as interests begin to take precedence over principle.

Globalised identities and national identities in the shadow of globalisation: Even though globalisation is a process of abolishing borders and demarcations in various ways, widening non-normative margins and breaking down state sovereignty in a number of areas, it is nevertheless narrower and more constricting for the world's poorer citizens. Saskia Sassen professor of sociology at Columbia University states that,

our economic system is no longer capable of assimilation and has switched over to expulsion and exclusion. In the latter half of the twentieth century the economy was able to assimilate the majority of the population and created a secure and prosperous middle class. The logic of privatisation and the free market, as well as the erasure of national borders which was pushed for by major companies, all fed into this dynamic of expulsion and exclusion. Instances of this phenomenon in the West are the poor wages received by workers and the unemployed losing their social security benefits and unemployment pay. The 2008 subprime mortgage crisis in the US saw fourteen million families made homeless and turned bank loans into insecure bonds. Millions of farmers have been thrown off their land since investors and foreign governments started taking possession of 200 million hectares in 2006.[2]

At the same time the very concept of the state is under attack. A state is based on the government's sovereignty over territory with carefully defined borders and these borders are penetrated on a symbolic level by the logic of globalisation, which rejects boundaries and demarcations of any kind, and by refugees and immigrants who physically cross over; not forgetting terrorism which always finds a window of opportunity. French thinker Olivier Roy addressed this very point when he said,

This is not a struggle for legitimacy between religion and state, but rather evidence of the emergence of new spaces that escape assimilation into a region, a society, a people and a state. Just like the EU itself, the religious contributes to the erasure of those very spaces which created the nation-state.[3]

Elsewhere Roy states: 'It is globalisation's role to promote the spread of fundamentalisms even as it weakens the state model which facilitated the rise of secularism.'[4] What does the impotence of the state and its borders mean? What questions does it raise about the function of borders in our world? What does it mean for the state itself? Is the state the same as it always was? Does it need to be re-evaluated?

The State, Borders and the Right to Refuge

The emergence of the concept of the nation-state following the Treaty of Westphalia still has a powerful impact on the world we live in. It did away with the imperial model, based on diversity and changing borders, and replaced it with a state that had borders, a flag, and sovereignty over a territory inhabited by a single people or nation. It was incumbent upon the state to act as guarantor for the demands of this people, and to protect them.

However, changes to the global socio-economic set-up following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the increasing pace of globalisation and its destructive impact on national borders, endless wars, and the globalisation of the discourse of human rights and freedoms together created serious challenges to the state, which seemed incapable of mounting a clear-cut response. Should the state remain loyal to its population without taking the developments outside its borders into account (i.e. avoiding confrontation with the mechanics of globalisation and rights and democratic discourse) or should it become more global (or rather, globalised) and treat the interests of the wider world on an equal footing with those of its people?

This dilemma is evident in the state's approach to the issues of refugees and immigration, since human rights discourse simply asserts, without argument, that anyone facing any form of threat has the right to take refuge in any state. Many states, however, refuse to take in large numbers of refugees on the pretext that they don't have the capacity to cope. In other words, they fear that the presence of the refugees/immigrants will have an impact

on the state's ability to serve its people and meet their needs, particularly when it comes to employment and welfare; or, else, that these incomers will affect the 'identity' of the 'nation' that inhabits this territory. This is because, since its inception, the concept of the state has largely coalesced around that of the nation-state, a fact echoed internally by groups that champion anti-refugee slogans. Sometimes it is on the pretext that the refugees threaten the nation's identity, at others because these refugees appropriate job opportunities and place the state's ability to provide social welfare services to its citizens under strain. In other words, there is a kind of mentality that pits the state against the refugees on the grounds a belief that the latter are impeding the smooth functioning of the former, or violating its founding principles.

The fact that the concept of the state revolves around ideas such as 'the people', ethnicity and nationalism, makes it restrictive and prone to generating a degree of xenophobia. After all its focus is turned on 'its people' and 'its borders' with no interest in other world populations. This creates a clear incongruity, one exposed by the state's arch enemy, globalisation. After all, a significant number of state policies are designed to safeguard the interests of one population regardless of whether this comes at the expense of another; an attitude that can be characterised as realpolitik: interests taking precedence over principle. This is something that can be readily observed in the relationship between the global North and South, where the policies of northern states aim to secure the interests of their populations without considering those of the rest of the world. Worse, there is a clear incongruity between the way the state deals with its population internally and with the wider world beyond its borders. Internally, it respects human rights and democracy, while its conduct abroad involves overtly illegal policies. We see this in the policies of countries such as the US, France and Great Britain. The fact is, that these policies spring from a restrictive conception of the state revolving around serving 'its people' to the exclusion of others, something that has a significantly xenophobic dimension as it presupposes that its people must be superior and more important than others.

This enables us to understand certain worldviews opposed to immigration, immigrants and refugees. For those who endorse these views, the immigrant violates the innocence of their state or taints the purity of its national characteristics. This is what pushes the state to apply human rights principles to those within its borders and to use this fact as a political slogan when promoting itself overseas, yet it fails to apply these same principles when another population is exposed to war or is at risk of annihilation by another regime and forced to migrate and seek refuge. When this happens, the borders are closed even though in doing so they know they are violating the very principles they champion so loudly. A piece by Dresden-Balkan Konvoi, a German NGO who organises convoys to help refugees after three weeks spent in Greece at the Idomeni refugee camp on the Macedonian border, illustrates this point:

Strategists in Brussels took the decision to close the route to the Balkans and shuffle the refugees around like pawns in and out of Greece. The redistribution programme by which people are parcelled out among the different European states seems to be impossible to implement on practical grounds. At certain times (three hours a week), the refugees are able to submit their requests for refugee status. Worse yet, the programme completely ignores the reasons for the requests being made and the right to refuge, evaluating applicants on the basis of their 'usefulness'. We ask ourselves whether we have really understood the meaning of the world 'human' in the EU's treaty.[5]

This is the result of narrow thinking, which assumes that state territory is the sole preserve of the resident 'nation' and that any incursion into that territory constitutes a threat; whereas of course the world should be a home for all and we should have the right to move freely and request refuge anywhere. The concept of state here is revealed to be excessively constricting and, even more incongruously, growing narrower as globalisation undermines what sovereignty the state still possesses. What then are the intellectual and cultural roots from which these ideas spring?

The State, Nationalism and Globalisation: Dividing Walls

In late 2015, I attended a workshop run by Nobel Peace Prize-winner Leymah Gbowee where a film about the Liberian civil war was screened. As I watched I remembered that ten years before I had been sitting at home in my village on the coast listening to reports about Liberia. I hadn't been that interested or shocked by what I heard and the thought led me to a frightening conclusion; many people around the world today respond to reports about Syria in an identical manner.

After the shame and distress, I started asking questions: Why is it we humans fail to show solidarity with people who are being murdered on the other side of the world? Why do we find ourselves automatically standing up for people who share our nationality and religion, or who come from the same neighbourhood, or country, and yet show less support for any 'others' who might be suffering similarly? Aren't we all human? Shouldn't our fellow feeling mean that we not only extend our sympathies to those being killed but that we also do our utmost to help them? So, why the indifference? Why is it our humanity is untouched? How is it that we manage to avoid the pricking of our conscience, or that our conscience evades us?

After considerable thought I reached some initial conclusions (i.e. ones that I am still examining). In the world today there are a great number of ideologies, systems of thought and cultures, all of which form invisible walls which block people off from one another, increase their isolation and reduce the sympathy they might otherwise feel for one another. Sometimes, in fact, they actively generate prejudices that are used to justify inhuman behaviour towards other people. More worrying still, we regard many of these ideas in a positive light, indeed some are sacred: after all, who dares speak ill of things like nationalism or patriotism or globalisation or the state? And can these concepts, just as they take shape in our minds, come to form barriers against, and generate prejudice towards, others?

There are two basic models in the relationship between nation and state. The first, is a nation that predates the state, with the state then granting this nation a political carapace known as the nation-state. Then second, there are states that have been formed in the absence of a nation. In these instances the state works hard to form its own nation or specific kind of identity and its people come to possess the inclusive national identity that the



POSITIONING THE NATION
Whether through the production of its physical spaces or its mass images, the country is being modelled and advertised as a haven for investors and luxury tourism. Objecting to this exclusionary growth model, activists sprayed the city with the slogan «Beirut is not Dubai». In another instance, a graffiti artist subverted an advert by the Ministry of tourism that used images of women as sexual objectification, by placing the Ministry's logo that reads 'Lebanon' between spread legs.

state creates. In both instances this new identity is transformed through education, upbringing, culture, media, etc, into a kind of prison in which the citizen learns to hold the nation sacred, to care for it and to yearn to belong to it. Though this has a positive impact, in the sense of nurturing patriotism and nationalism, it is in most instances a contorted consciousness confined by the limits of a restrictive identity that functions as a barrier to block others out and any attempt to sympathise with their tragedy. The citizen becomes indoctrinated and is only concerned with what takes place within the ambit of his national or patriotic affiliation becoming indifferent to whatever else is happening. This explains the ease and speed with which we sympathise and engage with those who share our national or religious identities when they come under attack, yet choose to ignore events in distant countries. This is because we have acquired our epistemological and value-based systems in the wrong way: we have learned not to care, that it is not our duty to care about what happens elsewhere, and so we feel little guilt and our conscience is clear.

Of course things are not this simple: after all, many factors contribute to the formation of our awareness, such as political and global forces that work to delay the process of understanding since it constitutes a threat to their interests. These forces (i.e. the authorities, companies, forces of globalisation, governments etc.) manipulate the media to conceal what is really going on or to present it in such a way that it does not arouse sympathy. The non-state media today (usually owned by those who deploy it exclusively in the service of their own interests) has become one of the most important tools used by forces opposed to change in the world to conceal facts and prevent us from discovering the truth. In this way we are prevented from sympathising with the persecuted and oppressed wherever they might be. The media tends to present things back-to-front, in a way that obstructs understanding and cooperation between different nations, and against immigrants and refugees who are depicted as threatening; although of course, not all media outlets are the same.

Yet before governments, regimes and the media get involved, the nationalist and patriotic ideas we are raised on and which constitute a part of our value systems and way of thinking, contain a flaw in their roots that makes them grow crooked and curl in on themselves. This is why nationalists and bigots and the overtly religious always feel that the 'other' forms a threat to their nationalism or religion and they instinctively move to confront anything that poses this threat and is regarded as an enemy. After all, nationalism, patriotism and the state are structurally opposed to human fellow feeling, being focussed on realising the interests of its people to the exclusion of others.

For instance, anyone raised from childhood with a conservative worldview will find when he grows older that any other national or religious identity poses a threat to him. We see this in the current wave of Islamophobia in France. Even though everyone who is raised as French is not necessarily Catholic or secular: French identity is in fact an open-ended proposition and should be more accepting of refugees and immigrants, leading us from nationalist, religious or ideological thought based on ethnicity or religion to an inclusive humanist vision. In other words, critiquing current nationalisms and patriotisms to bolster national, patriotic and cultural identities that are open to the 'other': treating planet earth as the home of all mankind, with all who live here having the right to shelter, water and food. Naturally, this necessitates an alternative understanding of nationalism, patriotism and the state, not in either the global North or South but in both concurrently. Refugees and immigrants also encounter problems linked to their inability to assimilate and this stems from the powerful grip of religious and/or national customs and traditions. Not only does this hinder assimilation, it is met on the other side by thinking which views the culture of these incomers as a threat to a national identity that is held to be fixed and immutable.

The concern here is that, even as globalisation is seen as a positive factor forcing national identities and states to be more open and accepting of the 'other' by breaking through many of the borders that confine us, increasing our capacity to generate revenue and facilitating easy access to labour markets, it has also become in some senses a barrier. It is one of the factors behind the rising numbers of displaced, marginalised and excluded people. The result is a group made up of those who have been marginalised and excluded by the mechanisms of globalisation, added to those displaced by wars and dictatorships and terrorism. Both groups suffer the consequences of a misunderstanding which is itself the consequence of narrow systems of thought that violate human rights and basic humanity, even as they claim the opposite.

When Nations, Nationalities and Identities Shrink

One of the arguments advanced by those opposed to refugees, migrants and assimilation concerns their fears that the identity of the host country, or the demographics of its population, will be changed. This argument is common with those who view Europe as intrinsically Christian, say, or France as secular, or the Arab world as Islamic, or Africa as a continent of black people. The danger of such ideas do not stem from their ignorance alone, but also from their failure to take on board that they are swimming against the tide of an ever-changing history. No identity, no state, is fixed and immutable. We need only examine a map of the world as it was a hundred years ago (hardly the distant past) to see the scale of the change that, say, French identity has undergone—the very identity that the far right throws in the face of immigrants, fearful of the Islamization of Europe.

One hundred years ago or so, Syria—which today pumps out refugees and immigrants to every corner of the world—did not exist as the geographical entity with fixed borders that we know today; an entity which came into being in 1920. Nevertheless, this parcel of land has welcomed Armenians, Kurds and Assyrians fleeing Ottoman slaughters, Lebanese citizens escaping the civil wars of 1948, 1960 and 1975, Palestinians running from Israeli massacres (1948-1967), the Iraqis in 2003, followed by yet more Lebanese in the wake of the Israeli assault on Southern Lebanon in 2006. Going further back into history we find that Alawites, Druze and Muslims themselves have all come from outside Syria, as well as individuals with Chechen, Balkan and even Italian roots. Indeed, there is a neighbourhood in Damascus know as the Italian quarter after its former inhabitants; so like every other country Syria's population is also descended from immigrants.

What makes Syria interesting is that up until 2011 the identity of Kurds, Armenians, Arabs, Assyrians, Circassians and Turkmen was not disputed: they, to different degrees, became part of Syrian identity, which was itself enriched by their presence and evolved

accordingly. This shows that in real terms, identity is in perpetual flux: identity remains as it is and there is no demographic purity for us to safeguard in the first place. Terms like demographic purity or fixed identity, are the product of racist, backward thinking that stands powerless before the onward march of history. Once more we return to the idea that when nationalisms and patriotisms narrow they turn into sectarian ghettos which produce further misunderstanding and, occasionally, conflict. Whenever the social actors in any given country (i.e. unions, civil society, political parties, environmental organisations, the political system) have an understanding that transcends these narrow identities, it makes absorbing sudden change, such as an influx of refugees or immigrants, possible and socially acceptable.

Sadiq Khan's recent victory in London's mayoral race gives great hope for humanity's ability to assimilate and engage, free of restrictive identities and in the interest of a single, open and mutable global identity. Nor can Khan's victory be discussed in isolation from the nature of Britain's political system and its social actors. At Heathrow airport, for instance we encounter a young employee wearing the hijab and we realise what it means to be in London, 'the world's most ethnically and religiously diverse city.'[6] Meanwhile in France, Prime Minister Manuel Valls is considering banning women in hijabs from university campuses, while Germany's Chancellor Merkel welcomes the presence of immigrants and refugees and is trying to ensure that they are assimilated.

It is impossible to separate the electorate's ideas from the thinking of the political elite. The elite's approach is, one way or another, the product of the base, whose zeitgeist sends out indicators of the relative strength of racist, anti-immigration ideas versus that of open-minded, liberal thinking. Valls' statement is a sign that there is an entrenched anti-change mind-set at work that still requires work for it to be broken down: an attitude evident in the fear of Islam that troubles the very heart of French society. There are French elites that believe Islam threatens France's venerable secularist tradition. As Roy states: "French secularism feels a distinctive kind of fear towards Islam, attempting to reject immigration and generations of French citizens with Muslim roots, on the grounds of a purported contradiction between Islam and Western values."[7] The reaction, therefore, is of a mind-set that assumes French identity is something fixed and must remain so. But this is a myth: identity is mutable and the French of yesterday are not the French of today, nor are the first generation of immigrants the same as the second or third. There is transformation at work, changing identity with every day that passes and this terrifies those who are unable to understand these transformations, Roy again:

Does it go back to the nature of Muslim theology or is it something more prosaic, the fact that Islam is the religion of the immigrants, thus casting the shadow of Middle East conflicts over our country? Needless to say, all these things are muddled together, and inescapably so, since Islam in the West is, from one perspective, a demographic phenomenon, the product of a recent, intensive and solicited wave of immigration from Muslim countries.[8]

What the recently elected mayor of London Sadiq Khan said after his victory is very telling in this context: 'I am proud that today London chose hope over fear… the politics of fear is simply not welcome in our city.'[9] Fear is one of the prime generators of racist and extremist thought, since it begins with fear for one's identity, or country, or secularism, or nationalism at the hands of the foreigner/other. And this problem stems from the nature of the consciousness that leads one to fear an 'other', a fear that is promoted by many authorities and agencies of power because change poses a threat to their interests. Social actors all over the world must therefore work to unify global forces against these powers and to focus on the wider good of the world as a whole and the need for all humanity to enjoy their most basic rights,

starting with food, education and security and encompassing freedom and human rights. This is not imposed just by issues of immigration and refugees but by other global issues that threaten the entire planet, such as climate change, ecological imbalance, the depletion of natural resources and water loss. All these things demand an examination of global issues and problems from a global perspective which takes the local into account.

Conclusion

The argument here demonstrates that political action alone is insufficient to create a solution for immigration and refugees. Those who want to protect the welfare state from immigration and want to keep refugees out in order not to share their wealth, also want to be among the winners of globalization; taking all the economic advantage but not addressing the consequences and without recognising that it is all interrelated. Work must take place on a cultural and epistemological level to deconstruct the many systems of thought we regard as positive, but which possess a racist and reactionary core. We have to reject the narrow concept of homelands that conceals from us the fact that standing alongside our fellow citizens is inhuman when it in any way harms the right of other populations to a life of dignity. We must escape narrow national and patriotic identities and embrace an open-ended, global identity: moving from a narrow national citizenship to a global citizenship which takes all the earth's citizens into account, from the furthest south to the furthest north. If we do not embrace this step, mankind will never quit its brutal, shadowed nature: it does not matter that we are in the twenty-first century. The fact that the world stands by, powerless to intervene in endlessly shifting conflicts and dictatorships that expel their populations, and terrorism that violates all human feeling, is ample evidence of this.



OBSTRUCTING MOBILITY
Construction of highways around Bachoura distanced it from its surrounding neighborhoods.

1 Amin Maalouf discusses these ideas at length in Disordered World.
2 Sassen, S. (2016) 'The Political, Economic and Social Order Replaces Assimilation with Expulsion and Exclusion', Al-Hayat, 17 February 2016, translated from an article in French newspaper Liberation, on 5 February 2016. Available at: www.alhayat.com/m/opinion/14004666A. Last accessed 14 September 2016.
3 Roy, O. (2016) Islam and Secularism, Dar Saqi, (translation by Saleh Al Ashmar of Islam Confronts Secularism), p.26.
4 Ibid: 107-108. On page 115, Roy writes: 'The West today wavers between the demands of a nanny state which protects a given national community and the slowly developing concept of civil society, in which the state plays the role of a slightly wary referee.'
5 See: Mud, Tea, Europe: Three Weeks in Idomeni (translated by Ahmed Hamam), 10 May 2016. Available at: http://aljumhuriya.net/34961. Last accessed 14 September 2016.
6 Muslim Labour candidate Sadiq Khan elected Mayor of London, 7 May 2016: available at: www.bbc.com/arabic/worldnews/2016/05/160506_london_mayor_khan_winsle Last accessed 14 September 2016.
7 Roy 2016: 63.
8 Ibid. pp. 9-10.
9 Muslim Labour candidate Sadiq Khan elected Mayor of London, Ibid.

Translated from the Arabic by Robin Moger

Frontières Fluides

Katrin Ströbel & Mohammed Laouli



Since 2013 the artists Katrin Ströbel (*1975 Germany) and Mohammed Laouli (*1972 Morocco) have been developing their ongoing project 'Frontières Fluides – fluid boundaries'. This project takes the theme of migration and transit as a starting point to examine the cultural, social and economic impacts of colonialism and European migration politics in Europe and North Africa. At the same time it explores how these issues influence the identity and everyday life of artists in a globalized art world.

The artists have developed an installation of a "nomadic-boat" (a temporary shelter built on local boats) as a symbol for the voluntary as well as involuntary forms of nomadic life today: unstable, temporary, precarious, always in motion, in transit.

Making passages, overcoming or accepting borders has become an important part of everyday life for artists, but it describes also the reality of thousands of migrants that crossed the seas in the last centuries: From Europe to America, from Africa to Europe, from Old Europe to the New World, from one life to another, back and forth.

Until now, the project in progress took place in Rabat/Salé, Playa Blanca, Amsterdam, Marseille and at Lake Constance (The only area in Europe where no borders exist, because there is no legally binding agreement as to where the borders lie between Switzerland, Germany and Austria)

The project has been shown in different art institutions in Europe and Morocco and is currently shown at Grassi Museum, Leipzig, Germany. Two publications with texts by Karima Boudou, Claudia Emmert and Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung accompagny the project.

ABDERRAHIM

'I will tell you about something I experienced; it all started when I saw people coming back from Europe with cars, buying houses. They were rich; they were different. We said to ourselves that we also wanted to immigrate and go to the places where people get all this money from. We also wanted to get a piece of the cake; we wanted to become rich and have a good life.

So I had the idea to immigrate to a European country, a country where people work and earn money. I kept this idea in my head and I was programming myself to leave. I went to Tangier. I went directly to the harbour and I stayed there for one night. The situation was difficult. There were a lot of young people from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and from other nations. Everyone tried to find a solution, a way to get over the border. There were a lot of big trucks waiting to embark to Europe [. . .]. Everything was under surveillance. But it was easy for me, because I was young, athletic, and I was a considering everything very well. So I tried to find a way to cross the border, and around 7 p.m., just after dusk, I jumped under a truck. I hung myself from the bottom of the truck. The truck stopped in front of the ferry boat. There were a lot of policemen and watchdogs, but you simply have to not be afraid, and it will work out. The truck entered the boat. I stayed underneath the truck until I heard the gates of the boat being closed. I felt how the boat got on its way. I left my hiding place because I wanted to see if there were some of the guys that I had met at the harbour, but there wasn't anybody else. I was the only one to cross over. And I was thirsty. I looked for some water in the storage of the boat and found a bottle of water. I drank, I smoked a cigarette, and I told myself: Now I am really on the road; it's not a dream. Indeed the boat navigated for about seven or eight hours and then arrived. I hid again under another truck like the first time. Then the truck left the ferry boat, and I noticed that it stopped in the middle of the harbour. I got off and checked out the right side and the left side of the truck. Nobody around, apart from a couple of drivers, chatting. I jumped, I ran, I climbed a fence. This was the harbour of Cadiz. This had been easy.

So I was finally on the other side [of the Mediterranean Sea], even if I was full of grease. I was sneaking through the little streets; I was dirty. I had a bit of money that I already had prepared for the trip. At this time, the euro didn't exit yet. I had a bit of French and Spanish money. It was summer, so I took the path to the beach. But before I went there, I bought some soap and shampoo at a shop to clean myself. After having walked to the end of the beach, I found a corner where I could wash myself, then I washed my clothes and let them dry. The same evening, I went straight to the train station because you shouldn't hang around or stroll if you have a goal that you want to achieve.

I asked for a ticket to Madrid because I was still in Cadiz and the south is difficult. I had to get to a safe place somewhere in the interior of the country. I arrived in Madrid and stayed there for a day, but I wanted to take another train to get to the border between Spain and France because at that time I didn't like Spain. I looked around and nothing looked like Europe to me. I realised that it was still an underdeveloped country, that was in 1994. There were no trains to Madrid that late, so I had to wait until the next morning. I met some tourists at the station and, being a smoker, I had a peace of hashish and I stayed with the tourists. I rolled a joint and we smoked it together and we talked because I was speaking French. I had learned French at school in Morocco and the tourists were glad to talk a bit. I sold them a piece of hashish and they paid me in Spanish currency.

The next morning, I took the train to the Spanish-French border, direction Irun. Irun is situated just across from Hendaye at the border between France and Spain. I stopped at Irun to plan my border crossing, because you should never go there directly. I noticed that there were a lot of watchtowers at the border, very high watchtowers. They observed the whole borderline. I didn't know what to do.

But suddenly I thought to myself: If I want to cross the border, I have to cross it at night, so I waited until dusk. And as the railway connected Irun and Hendaye, I sneaked secretly over the border by following the railways. Even if the guards were up there, they couldn't see me. I went to the train station of Hendaye and bought a ticket to Paris. I arrived there well. I had a rest, then I called my family because they were worrying about me. I had left my mother and my sister without saying a word, so I told them that I was now in Paris. My mother was very upset; she said that I was still young and that I shouldn't immigrate and she cried on the phone. But I explained her that I would work and search for money. I felt sorry for her, but I couldn't go back. I had to make my own experiences and discover life abroad. I stayed in Paris, went for a walk along the Champs-Élysées and then in the area of Barbès, and I saw the souks with a lot of Blacks and Arabs, shouting in their megaphones, and I asked myself: Where the hell am I? Am I still in Morocco? [. . .]

I stayed the night in a park. The morning

after I took a train to Lille. I took a train to the border because I don't like to be stuck in the middle of a country [I have to see the border], because when I contemplate something, I understand how it works. So I arrived in Lille and stayed there for four nights. That was not too bad. I liked it. The Moroccans over there are better than the Moroccans of Paris. But as I was already so close to Belgium, I wanted to go there as well – or to Holland. Actually I had wanted to go to Holland from the beginning, because when I was in Morocco, I did a lot of sports and I had some Dutch sport friends from Amsterdam. Since then, I had kept the idea to visit them in Amsterdam in my mind, so I took the train to Antwerp, without any problems. Because going up from Belgium, the borders become more fluid; there are no controls like between Spain and France. I arrived well at Antwerp, I walked around, and I liked it. It's nice there. For the first time in my life, I saw Jews with their big hats and their side curls. And I thought: Now that I am so close to Amsterdam, I have to go there. There was not much money left, so I decided to *hreg* [Moroccan dialect for "to cheat"] on the train. I took the train from Antwerp to Amsterdam; it was empty, hardly any passengers. I stayed some time in a seat, then I hid in the lavatory, then I went back to the seat. But suddenly, I saw the controller coming towards me; that was hard. I didn't know what to do, so I hid under the seats. The controller knew that I was there, but he didn't know where I was hiding. When I left my hiding place, he got me and asked me to show him my ticket. I told him that I had no ticket and that I had just entered the train in Utrecht. But luckily, I had some Dutch coins that I had found in the truck when I was on the ferry boat. So I paid for my ticket; we were already close to Amsterdam. The train stopped and I got off at Amsterdam Centraal railway station. It was summer. I saw different people, young people chatting with their friends, Rastas, hippies – it was wonderful! An atmosphere like I have never seen before. Very relaxed. I felt very free and I said to myself: This is Europe. And I really felt that I was finally in Europe.'

AHMAD

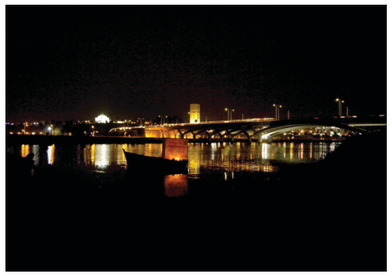
'Hi, my name is A. I was born on 6 January 1976 in Rabat, Morocco. I grew up nice and good, you know. [A couple of years ago] I went to South Africa on holiday; at that time I was very young and I stayed over there. I met some friends and good people. I got married to a coloured lady, and I applied for a work permit in order to live in South Africa. I was accepted for the work permit, and later they gave me a residence permit.

Then, after a few years, I did have problems with the wife I got married to [. . .] in South Africa. The problem was . . . personal, actually, well . . . From 1996 to 1998 I lived with her two years, then we got separated. I stayed there [in South Africa], and it was okay. I applied for a residence permit and they accepted me.

I had a lawyer, and the lawyer was doing everything, you know, paperwork and all that. So I got a residence permit in South Africa; they gave it to me two years later, I think, in 1998. In 1999 I met a woman, a British woman living in South Africa, her and her family. We started a relationship and got married. She invited me to go back to England and to live over there, me and her, to start a new future and all that. I also had the opportunity to go to America because I applied for a Green Card, and I was okay with them, for they also accepted me. But the British woman said to me that she didn't want to go to America, so we moved to England with my South African passport [. . .] well, at that time I had a South African passport. In 2000, I still had a South African passport.

And we went to Morocco, me and her – for a month and a half, I think, at that time – and we went back to London and stayed over there. Then we got married [again, according to British law] in London; we stayed over there for about four years together. I applied for my residence permit in the UK. Well, in 2001 I applied to the Home Office[1] and they accepted me [. . .] Which means that you can remain in the UK and work and do business. After a year I started applying to live in the UK permanently, to definitely remain in the UK. I sent them my passport; I sent them all my documents and they accepted me. I was travelling [back and forth at that time]! Every year I travelled twice to Morocco; every year I went to visit my family. Usually once a year or twice a year, you know, and I lived there [in the UK] from about 2001 till 2005. Then we had some problems, me and the British woman, the woman I got married to, who had moved me into England; she said . . . well, we had a problem. Personal problems. We got separated, everyone went to . . . wherever . . . and we got divorced and I stayed in the UK, you know, from 2004 I stayed alone, I was travelling alone. I would go to Morocco whenever I could. No problems. Until 2006, in August, when I went on holiday to Morocco and I spent about a month there. And when I was going back to London to my job and all that, all of a sudden [the border police] held me at the airport. They took me to the prison, they took all my documents, and they said to me: "This is a fake passport, which you are using to travel over to the UK. How did you come here?" . . . and how this and how that. . . . They knew that I had been over there for all these years. Nobody listened. They said: "You will just have more problems. We can send you back to Morocco if you are really Moroccan, because you have dual nationality; you are Moroccan with a South African passport." And I thought, you know, at this time I thought maybe . . . you know, I didn't know what to do. They are holding you, they can do anything with you, they can even send you to a place that [you don't even know]?! I was totally scared! And after four, five days in the prison I had some problems with the guard and they called [someone from the immigration office] and they asked me: "You want to go back to Morocco?" And they sent me back with a Moroccan passport and they took the South African passport, saying: "You can't have this because it is fake." But that is not fake; this is my passport! I had it in South Africa, I brought it with me from South Africa to Morocco, I travelled over seven years with it, from South Africa to Morocco, from Morocco to England . . . How come, in the beginning, when I applied for a residency in the UK, how come they didn't think it was fake back then? But now suddenly after seven years? Then it's fake?! I don't know what kind of . . . what kind of . . . I am not going to say a bad word or a rude word or something, but there is no law over there, you know. Law should be done in a proper way. That is very sad. It's devastating, you know. You are holding a document which the country gives you to stay in it, and you have been working hard for seven years, so you think that this is









Maybe we all deserve a paradise somehow. That's our right, our legitimate right. For all of us.
ربما كلنا نستحق الجنة , انه حقنا المشروع ,جميعنا.

1 The Home Office (HO) is a ministerial department of the UK government, responsible for immigration and security.

your country. You work, you pay taxes, you pay national insurance, you help out their economy [. . .], you pay for houses, you know . . . well you live *there*, you know? Whatever you earn, you spend it over there! You support their country. And after seven years they choke you out like a piece of shit – sorry for my language! And they sent me back to Morocco in 2006, on the first of . . . of . . . anyway they sent me to Morocco in 2006 when I came back from my holidays. I don't know why they did that. When they brought me back to Morocco, they gave me the Moroccan passport at the Mohammed V Airport. I didn't [even] know that I was [already] travelling with the Moroccan passport . . . It was no problem between me and the Moroccan government, you know, everything was fine. They even felt sorry for me. I came to my house in Rabat. Actually, once a person goes for all this, it is devastating. I didn't know where to go, who to talk to. You feel very bad, you know [. . .] you used to live in a country, then they bring you back to Morocco . . . You have no job, you have nothing here, you don't belong here – well you belong here, but you have nothing here! And I was trying to go to the embassy to solve the problem so I could go back but they . . . they . . . well, nobody listens to you. I applied for a first time, they said: "You are not supposed to apply for a visa; you should apply to definitely remain in the UK, [because that's] the status you had." They asked me to bring some papers, but most of them were over there. A lot of things like your friends' addresses, [or] people from the company send you letters stating that you are a good person and that they want you back. But it's difficult because you are on your own here with no contacts. Since then I have been here in Morocco, with nobody to listen, nobody to help you out of this misery, to help me with these problems I have been through. Really, it's devastating. It's hard for me to explain to you how it was to leave [. . .] it's difficult. Very difficult. And I hope that maybe someone will listen to my story and feel sorry for me, so you can do something for me – I would appreciate it. And thank you for listening to my story. I wish you a good life.'

BAHJA

'Bismillah Rahmani Rahim [In the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful]:

The lifeline of a city . . . wait, I'll start again . . . I think rivers which run through the centre of a city can be considered as their artery. These arteries unite the inhabitants of the city, who create the history of this region.

And right here, we have two cities: Rabat and Salé, and a river that unites them, the Bouregreg River. This river has a long history, and I think most of us probably ignore it. The history of a city is not created by its walls, but by its river. A river links communities, tribes, even peoples. For example, the Bouregreg has a long history that left traces in the city, but we are not aware of it. This means: since the Moorish era until today, we have ignored the events that took place along this river, the events and what they mean for the cities of Rabat and Salé.

Today the river is the source of breadwinning for the people who live close to it. [. . .] That's what we know about the river, but its history is bigger than that: A lot of civilisations have been built around rivers, old cities in the Orient and Occident. But we neglected the river until it became a marsh area without any function, apart from housing excluded people who move between the two riversides: Marginalised people, who work as oarsmen or steersmen, who cross the river all day in order to earn their staff of life with a traditional form of work that does not correspond to our times anymore, that doesn't fit to the progress of today's society. [. . .]

A couple of projects had been developed, but none really appreciated the value of this river. What is the role of this river? And what is its function in the future? How to develop tourism in a city whose economy is not based on tourism at all? Rabat is an administrative city, and Salé is a very old city, one of the most ancient cities in Morocco. And [in both of them] you won't even find a small museum that documents the history of the Bouregreg River or its role in the cultural history of the Moroccan Kingdom. Or . . . how do you say . . . the political and economic impact it had.

However, we watch on television broadcasts about faraway countries that know very well to value the potential of their rivers, even if they are only little rivers without a big history.

Besides, our river has become the sewerage of the city where we dump all our garbage. So what does this all mean? It means that we are not aware of the value of this river. Its real value is that it is a kind of archive of all the civilisations that lived in Morocco, since the Romans until today.

Today, if you ask people about the role of the river, they will answer you that its function was to extract salt in the era of Mellah and still today potters get their clay from there. For others, it a place to fish, that's all.

The Bouregreg River is one of the biggest rivers in Morocco. A big harbour with around ten ocean-going vessels has been situated here, where the river leads out into the Atlantic Ocean. It also used to be a place for trading, and it has been a hiding place for pirates, too. Or, as we say, for the maritime Jihad. We were told that the Dutch captured European vessels and they forced their prisoners to build the city walls of Salé. History is always there, even if we ignore it, but I think we have to reread it at a given time. [. . .]

Colonialism came to Morocco by sea and not by land. The harbours were the first places that colonialism occupied, amongst them the Bouregreg harbour. They built their first bases here. They constructed the railways here in order to invade the country. We ignore this part of history, but we should know it! What was the role of the Bouregreg River during colonialism? When the colonialists left, they demolished [the infrastructure] of the river, because they were very aware of its military and political function. There were also . . . well . . . the Orientalists, those people who came before the colonialists. Because the colonialism didn't enter the country in military boots, as we say. That means, they didn't come all at once. [. . .]

What do you want me to say? It's difficult to earn your life by your own physical or intellectual effort. You might be even able to move mountains and nobody even cares, you know? If you are a socially engaged poet or if your poetry criticises the society, you are dead! They won't leave a single trace of you. Do you understand? The human being is not born to be humiliated; the human being wants to live in freedom, also in freedom of mind. The sea is a retreat, a haven. Or as we say: Water is a place of safeness. [. . .]

I swear, sometimes, when I am on the water, I feel that the river is suffering. When the nature is not well, the humans are not well either. [. . .]

The *hreg*, the *hreg* [Moroccan dialect for "illegal or clandestine migration"] . . . oh dear! How can this even exist? This is really a strange phenomenon. You can't even imagine that it arrived right here. It's actually far from our context here. And it's also far away from the country people want to go to. Where is Rabat or Salé in relation to Spain?! Of course you are always afraid that your boat will be stolen by *haragas* [people who want to cross the Mediterranean Sea]. And suddenly, only you and the clouds are left. Do you get the problem? You live from day to day – carpe diem. Everything was fine before the *hreg* began.

We often heard stories of *haragas* that were caught on the run, or stories of boats that drowned . . .

And one of this stories is that I lost my boat, too. So be it. One summer night, I repaired my fishnet at home. They morning after, a fishermen who works with me told me that the boat was not at its place. I said: "How come it's not there?" It was on a Saturday. I started to look for my boat all along the river. What happened? I asked myself. So I went to the police. Then I went to the constabulary in order to declare my boat as stolen. Then I went back to the river, searching for my boat, and after that I made a declaration at the royal marine. I gave the matriculation number of my boat to a marine officer and he confirmed to me that they had found my boat at the coast near Mehdia. What happened? I went to the constabulary of Sidi Lâabed, between Kenitra and Rabat. I asked the policemen: "Where's my boat?" They answered me: "We burnt it." I said: "Oh my god! What?! You burnt it?" They told me that they couldn't leave it over there Saturday and Sunday because they were afraid the *haragas* would try to get it back. "But that's against the law!" I said. "You are supposed to establish law and order! Why did you burn my boat? You should arrest the *haragas*, you should confiscate the boat, and you should do your job!" Subsequently they suspected me to be an accomplice of the *haraga* mafia. They started to ask me: "Are you working with them?" The policemen asked the guys that they arrested with the stolen boat: "Do you know this man?" [. . .]

The two [arrested] guys told the police that they were a group of twenty people, and when they jumped on the boat the weight of the footsteps had quite an impact on the planks, but at that moment nobody paid attention. When they were [out at sea] a couple of kilometres away from the Bouregreg River, the water started to enter into the boat. And since they didn't have a bucket in order to get the water out of the boat, it began to sink. That's what one of the guys told me. When [the police] found the boat, they caught the two. The others managed to escape. Luckily nobody died. I asked the two guys if they could swim, and they told me that none of them could swim! I asked one of them how much they paid for the crossing. He answered: 20,000 dirhams [1,800 euros]. I said to him that with this money he should have bought and sold needles and pins here in Morocco and he would have already made a business that pays. Even just with parsley and coriander!'

Willi Böhler

'Well, I was born in Yugoslavia on 3 September 1927, ten kilometres away from Belgrade close to the Danube. We had to leave from home on 6 October 1944. At that time the German military forcibly recruited everybody who was somehow German; they announced it only one day before. War times. So my family and I left. I was five days on the road with a kind of track until we arrived at the border to Hungary, in the area where the river Drava flows into the Danube. There was the border somewhere and we all had to cross over the bridge. Suddenly there was German military and they took all men from seventeen to sixty years down from the vehicles. First they told us to get back home to get the cattle and everything, just to avoid that partisans and the Russians would get them. I was one of them. I was almost seventeen. But everything came quite differently. [. . .]

They dressed us as soldiers, and then we had to move the front constantly, in order to avoid that the front would be attacked from behind. On the 8th of May, we had been up north in Slovenia; we constantly moved on the right side of the Danube River, downriver. We got there and then the war had just ended. We continued to sneak in the forest that was more or less part of Yugoslavia, the German name was Cilli, in Yugoslavian the placed was called Celje [. . .]

So we just threw away our weapons except for a few hand grenades, left the guns there, and then we continued three or four days through the woods, slowly, because we only moved forward at night until we ended up in Austria, in Lienz. Since the British were already there, we just ran into them, but they didn't really care. We didn't even see the border yet, but all the other soldiers were hiding there: the Italians were there, they just had to wait until we would cross . . . And so we all came in a camp. After a week, they took us to a large transit camp, close to Villach. There we stayed in captivity. [. . .]

I was quite young; I had no clue of all these things. Then a company from Villach showed up, looking for people to clean up, bombs and everything, etc. We were allowed to leave the camp in order to work for them.

My parents heard about that somehow. After a trip of five weeks my parents had arrived in Upper Austria, with their horse and the buggy. They were in Marchtrenk. They had heard that I was in the camp, and my mother and grandmother had kept a few civilian clothes of mine [. . .] The border soldiers, whether they were American or English, didn't really care; they just wanted be left alone. So we sneaked illegally on secret paths away from the British Zone, until we came to Upper Austria up to Marchtrenk where we stayed. [. . .]

I had learned the trade of miller in Yugoslavia. Close to Wels, a mill had been built. One of the carpenters who worked there was from our hometown; he had heard that I was around, so he spoke to me, and I went to the mill and I was immediately hired and worked as a miller for one year. And from there I moved on to Bavaria, to Garmisch-Partenkirchen, and then I came to Friedrichshafen in 1950 and from then I started to work. I worked forty years in road construction, and in 1963 I built this house.[. . .]

I don't speak perfect Yugoslavian, but I can communicate without problems. The place where I was born had 2,000 inhabitants: 1,000 German and 1,000 Croats. Serbo-Croatian, you know, for Croatia actually emerged only in 1941, after Adolf Hitler invaded. […] Serbia was under German administration. We were Croats, we lived on the Croatian territory, we also had another currency. And the Serbs had the dinar. It used to be like that. I never went back home, but I was once in Yugoslavia again. But my sisters went back home once. It had totally changed. What a jumble: my sister had married someone from the German minority in Hungary [. . .] and so they went to Hungary and from Hungary to Yugoslavia, and they visited our home. Of course they met only strangers. But they had been welcomed warmly, so they were really glad about their encounters. [. . .] But to get back to when I was born: the neighbouring village was a village with 8,000 German souls. And the village three kilometres upstream along the Danube, where I learned as a miller, was a Serbian village. If you went six kilometres further down the Danube, everything was already really mixed, because it is already near Belgrade: there were Slovaks, Serbs, Croats, fewer Germans. But then, very close to the Belgrade area, there were a lot of Germans again. The Germans live pretty close to the Danube. Everything grew very well in this area, so we had everything: melons, wine, and everything. We didn't suffer from poverty; all in all we were doing fine. No problems. When we left home, we still had enough food, not like in Belgrade. [. . .]

But even in Belgrade you could buy everything at the market. My parents were merchants, who bought butter, hens, and eggs from the farmers of our village. And once a week my father went to Belgrade on the large market, the Kalemegdan market, where he sold his merchandise. On days like



The sea is a retreat. Or as we say: Water is a place of safeness.
البحر ملاذ ،أو كما نقول : الماء أمان .

Christmas and Easter, or if the Jews were having their holidays, he went there even twice. So we still had enough of everything. A butcher came the day before we left home, to butcher a pig. We cooked it in a big cauldron and put it into containers. During their flight, my parents lived better than some of the farmers in Austria. We took a sack of wheat, had taken flour, oats, everything you need.[. . .] You know, the case was closed for me. In the beginning, you weren't allowed to go back. When Tito ruled, it was complicated anyway. We were in Yugoslavia once during the Tito regime, but we went there with an excursion group and we were only allowed to follow a defined route. You know, we had no enemies back home, let's put it like that. We lived peacefully together, also with the Serbs, that's the truth. Of course there were always disputes between the Serbs and the Croats. And often Croats rather got the right on their side. I can't even tell you for what reasons or where those tensions were coming from.

But that's how we lived at that time. It had been quite normal that some of us spoke Serbian and some Croats spoke German. Those were the days! There were times when we were happy. There were times when we were not happy with the whole situation, but all in all it was okay for me, with all the circumstances.

When you are young, you take things easier.'

Emmanuel

'The first thing to say is that in reality, at this point of my life, I'm also in a place of fragmentation. It's almost been two months now that I have been in Morocco. When I left the U.S., which is where I have been the last two years, I had decided that for the next six months I'd be traveling, you know. I'll be moving from country to country, from place to place, just like writing, to find support systems, the structures that would allowed me to write without thinking about money.

And I'm really grateful that it's happening. But I want to start off by explaining how the question of movement and migration, for me, is structured around the notion of fragmentation.

Two things come to mind when I think about fragmentation, or two ideas. The first one is a statement that was made by Driss ben Hamed Charhadi at the beginning of A Life Full of Holes. Do you know this famous book, which was translated from Maghrebi Arabic by Paul Bowles? The important statement of this book, which is: "Even a life full of holes, a life full of nothing but waiting, is better than no life at all." And so the idea is one of waiting, of being in in-between spaces, and what Emeka Okereke and I talked about as a parenthesis: You are waiting in a kind of limbo where you are not in a destination and you are not in a home, right?

For me that's an important way to think about the question of movement.

And secondly, a statement that was also made by John Berger, which is: "Without a home, everything is fragmentation."

And so the idea of a home is not simply a building, of course, but a spiritual location, a secret place, a place where your soul is rooted. And for many people that revolves around family, or that revolves around a village, or that revolves around ancestry. Your parents and all of that, through which you can trace your roots, the roots of your personality, to a place.

But it's not only location as a physical place that makes a home important; I mean, nomads could move and still feel at home, because what was important was not that they simply had a tent, but they had people who could camp with them in a tent. And that was home. So the notion of fragmentation always results from the absence of a home, right? I think about it this way, and I think about how movement in general today is linked to fragmentation and to parenthesis.

Now, what's equally important for me as a writer, as I said in the talk yesterday, is that I feel that I belong to two traditions: the tradition of storytelling, which can be fiction or can be narrative non-fiction, and also the tradition of art criticism, which is simply looking at visual art and thinking about it as a writer. How can the notions of fragmentation inform the way I write, within these traditions?

The response to this is that I think I belong to two traditions as a writer. I'm always conscious of all these traditions.

The first, the tradition of storytelling, simply implies telling a good, believable story, which sometimes doesn't have to do with your own opinion but simply with listening. And you know, because of the work you have done, you simply listen to something and report it. But secondly, my interest also is art criticism, in looking at art, looking specially at photography, or other forms of imagery, contemporary image practices, and thinking about them, and saying, "What does it mean to me as person? How does it speak to my place in the world? How does it speak to the political system? The political structures? How does it speak to the political class? How does speak to power?" And what is important for me, and how all of this is connected to what I was saying, is that my own book is structured as a fragment, because . . .

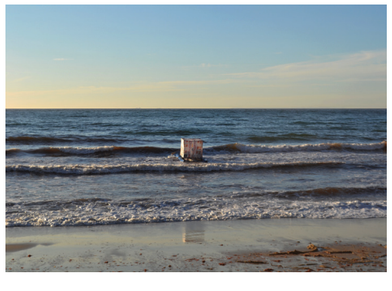
Because for me I don't want it to be resolved, right, so I don't want to say, "oh okay, the story, began here and ended here, or this is the arch of the story, it reached a climax and everything is fine." No, I want to evoke that condition of waiting, as I said, and a life full of holes.'



These days, it is difficult to live in the center of society.
في هذه الأيام من الصعب العيش وسط المجتمع.







Jamil

'Well, it's difficult to start with Algeria. I prefer to start with the end. I am fine in Marseille! Being in Marseille is to be everywhere! And to be in Marseille is also to be in Algeria! It's . . . the whole Mediterranean, if you want! It jostles in the head. I had to come thirty times to Marseille before finally moving here. Once I saw graffiti on a wall, someone wrote: "You don't come to Marseille, you just add yourself to it." And I said to myself, "That's good, that's an addition." Switzerland, in contrast, is a subtraction: you go there and you get subtracted when you arrive! And that's why Marseille is *the* world city. It's a world city – you walk from one street to another and it's like a whole journey.

That was not the purpose of the trip; my travels have no goal, zero, never. Actually, I did not have a goal, even in Algeria. But to come there, retrospectively, I would say, this could have been a goal, somehow.

The real journey is seeking to lose yourself, while the other tells you if you're on track or not. It's a story of fear that you face every time. In my life fear has defined very much what I was doing, or what I am.

When you're afraid of something, I think this is the place to go. I was very afraid of Europe. I am Algerian. I came to France. France means a lot to Algerians and it means a lot of fear, and I had to face it. France broke my grandparents, my parents, too. It's very close. They have communicated a picture to you, not verbally but with their lives. They do not talk about it; you'll have to invent your words for their experiences: hunger, family dismemberment.

You arrive at the enemy, okay, and you choose to go because you tell yourself, there you'll have more rights. You see, it's very paradoxical; it is both the enemy and the friend, because it is he who will allow you to do your stuff. I could not do films in Algeria, so I tried to make a film school here, which was already a mistake.

[. . .] You see, that's it: I confront myself with my own fear of learning, not at home, but over here. And here in France I decided to quit film school, saying to myself: "It is useless to seek to damage my eye. Here it's a colonial sight, the cinema as any writing is read from left to right: I am an Arab, from right to left. Any reading is reversed." So one day I asked myself: "What am I trying to get in my head?"

So you're going to travel to confront your fear and to discover yourself. It's like a loop; it's like that in every country.

I did a film school in my head in Algeria. This

is the best school, the one you create yourself all alone . . . the best school is the frustration when you're frustrated; you are able to learn everything, because you're offended in your *amour propre*, your self-love.

But basically, I did lots of visa applications, because at one time, Algeria in the 1990s, as everyone knows, was an Algeria of attacks and all that. I was working in a hospital at the time, and I questioned myself a lot, because I was tired of this kind of positioning: Are you for or against? I'm in the middle, so this classification bothered me. In the end, I pulled the safety brake, I told myself: "I must go elsewhere, on neutral ground." Finally the ground was not that neutral: France. I applied to thirty countries; the goal was to see something else, and France replied affirmatively. So I went to France. I arrived in France from one day to the next, in Paris. Paris was a coincidence.

I got a French visa, I went to Air Algeria and said "first ticket to France". It could be Lille, Lyon, Grenoble, Marseille, but the clerk told me: "Flight to Paris, in three days, take it!" This is how I left. No one knew about my plans at home, so I came home to say:

"I'm leaving in three days."

"What happened to you?"

"Nothing, I wanna see something else."

It was a shock for them and for me, but not assumed. I realise that years later. It was . . . it had to be like this, I felt like that, and later when you think about it, you find the words for your experiences. [. . .]

Paris was a shock. Later, I thought the shock was especially for Algerians. I hadn't travelled much before, so all I knew was Algeria. It's the famous story of a blind person who doesn't stop asking God: "How is life?" So God offers him sight for ten seconds, he sees a rat, then he becomes blind again, and he spends the rest of his life comparing all to the rat. It's his reference. I was comparing everything to Algeria, that was my reference: there is olive oil, but it is not like ours. The theatre is not like ours! The street is not like the one at home. Later you create other references for yourself; you see other rats, in fact. God gives you several ten seconds.

It was very complicated for me at the beginning. I didn't understand how everything worked, the work rhythm . . . I come from Algeria, I walk slowly, I daydream, I stroll, I linger. I arrived in Paris and six months later, I found myself galloping to a subway, running around. I said to myself: "I'm going crazy, it's going too fast, it is not my rhythm." It is no coincidence that I am here in Marseille, after years. Geneva. The same fear. An orderly country par excellence, like the cliché. I arrive, and there I find out that's it's only half of the truth: it definitely is very orderly, but human relationships are very hard and difficult to manage. Geneva is very special, after ten years, [Switzerland] is a country that I have seen without knowing, I left without knowing. It's like a person with whom you live for ten years, and after ten years you never see her again.

[. . .] Switzerland for me is a mystery; it's really a country outside Europe. I understand that it is not in Europe, because after I travelled through Spain, Italy, that's very similar, there is the same energy. Switzerland is a country apart.

I left with this precise idea of finding the conditions or means to make movies. That's why I went to France in order to learn, but actually I already knew everything. The ideas which lead you to make a film are really always in you. [. . .]



I never had even the idea to stay there, because I knew that I wouldn't find a better place than my home country.
لم افكر قط في البقاء هناك لانني كنت اعرف انه
لا يوجد بلد أفضل من بلدي ، الجزائر .

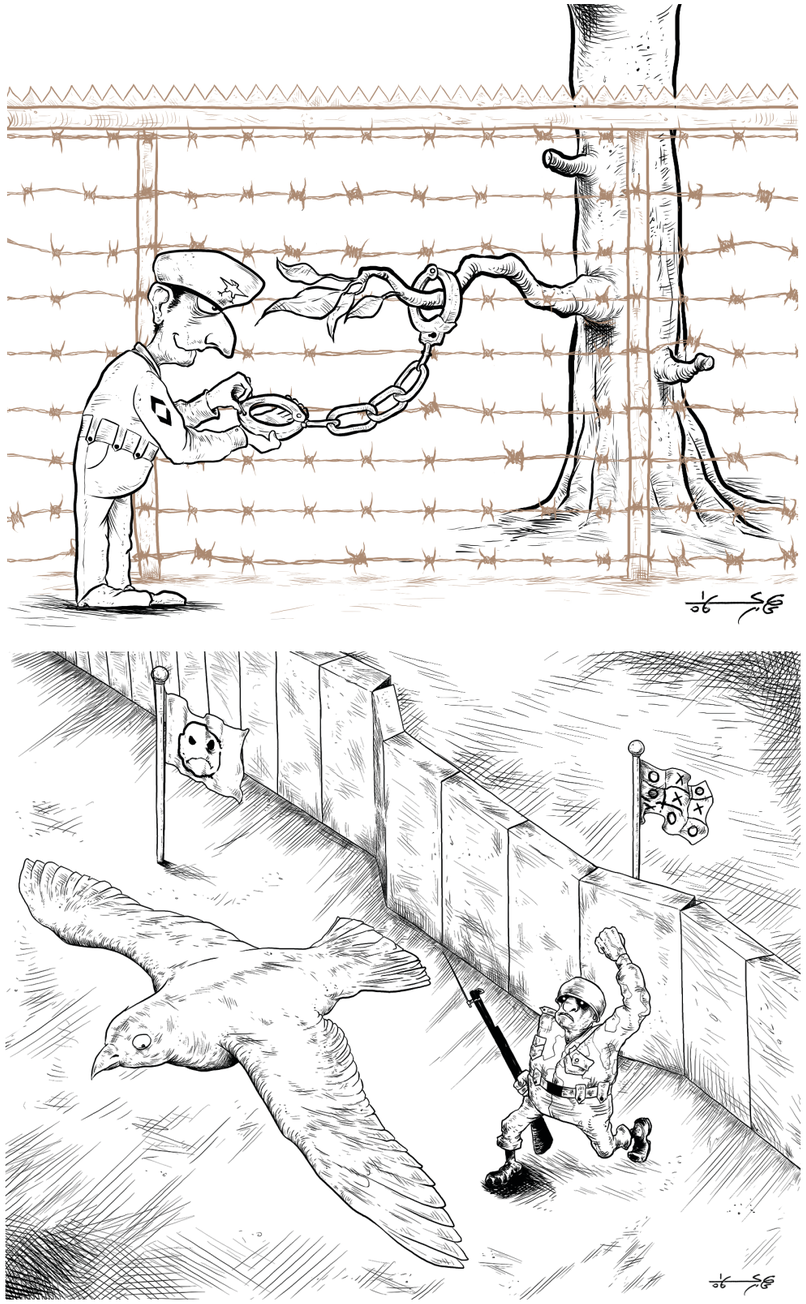
I tell you, Marseille is an incredible city and I feel good here. There are people who will tell you: "I cannot stand Marseille, a shitty city; I do not feel at ease there." Well, to each his own. It's like when you enter a house, you do not know why you feel good or not, it's coincidence. [. . .]

Marseille is very beautiful, it goes in all directions, I like it a lot. Here you go from one street to another, you can do Senegal, Algeria, Morocco, and Mexico in 500 meters.

Ah, the sea! You know, I arrived in Paris for a year. In Algiers, I was often on time, yet this is weird! Even if time is elastic, you know, we do not define precisely the hour when we make appointments [. . .] I arrived in Paris, and there they called me "Jamil Delay", which means: the one who is always late. You know why, because I was getting lost all the time. I could not find my way. And one day I met a friend, who was a psychiatrist, who had come to Paris because he studied "suicidal behaviour in Algeria", etc. [. . .] And as he is interested in psychology, I started to chat with him, and I said: "You know what? I get lost all the time, why?" And then, while discussing, I suddenly said: "There is no *sea* here." The sea is my benchmark! Marseille . . . I'm not lost as long as I look at the sea: I know where I am. In Paris, it took me one and a half years to orientate, because I was told to take streets and avenues as benchmarks. I have never done this, do not have this ability [. . .] In Algiers I never lose myself. Even in a neighbourhood that I don't know, I do not lose myself . . .'







Hungary Successfully Stops Birds' Attempt to Migrate to Europe

Al Hudood Team

In an official statement Hungarian authorities announced that border guards had prevented a flock of pigeons, escaping from the Middle East, from infiltrating the Hungarian skies thereby averting any danger to the Hungarian people created by the flock.

The statement also claimed that for many years the authorities have been watching these birds crossing the Hungarian skies, drinking its water and feeding on its resources, but this time the authorities used anti-aircraft missiles to bring them down. Survivors were arrested and had their wings trimmed in preparation for deportation back to the Mediterranean so preventing their return and serving as an example for others.

The Hungarian President, Viktor Orbán, expressed his pride in the border guard forces, thanking them for their hard work in preventing anything from entering the country, and making Hungary Great Again.

He added: 'Hungary is for the Hungarians, be they humans, animals or inanimate objects. We do not know what these birds might be carrying; it could be disease or poison. And even if they are healthy and safe, we must prevent them from mating with our birds in order to preserve the purity of our breeds. We also cannot ignore the possibility of an external motivation for these birds infiltrating our country, or the possibility that this is just one more way of spying on us.'

Trusted sources said that the government is considering replacing existing fencing borders with a giant glass dome to cover the entire country thereby preventing anything, even the air itself, from entering Hungary.

Bird migration expert, Dr. Saad Malahis, commented that recently there had been an unprecedented increase in the rate of birds migrating to Europe, citing the cause as missiles and shrapnel in the Middle East preventing the birds from flying safely.

* Borders: Very real lines conceived by mankind because urination, as a means of proclaiming control over land, spreads repugnant odours.

Translated from the Arabic by Carol Khoury

الحدود
نحو مستقبل ما

Al Hudood is an Arab original content provider employing satire and comedy to shed light on current and dominant issues related to the Middle East. Al Hudood creatively tackles political, social and economic issues that affect the daily lives and interests of people in the region.

If Europe is a Fortress, then its Walls are Full of Cracks: the Case of Sub-Saharan Migrants in Morocco

Mehdi Alioua



Dr. Mehdi Alioua is an Assistant Professor at the International University of Rabat. A sociologist concerned with international migration and an urban anthropologist, his research focuses on the traffic patterns of migration, the self-organisation of migrant marginality and the consequences for socio-political reconfigurations at a local, national and global level. He is the author of several articles that have focused on sub-Saharan trans-migrants, poverty and marginality.

The Stopover: the Best Place to Observe and Understand so-called 'Transit' Transnational Migrations

We see them daily in the news. Masses of black bodies, cramped together on unseaworthy boats, bodies in rags lying, helpless, exhausted, on the white sand. No face. No name. Such images reproduce, time and again, an imaginary of the invasion of Europe by its radical 'Other'; an imaginary that, in turn, justifies exceptional measures – the militarized and arbitrary government of migration. Here too, images are, identical, interchangeable: military ships, circling radars, men in uniforms and gloves intercepting desperate bodies. We see these images so often. There is nothing left to see or think; or do: both this 'flow' of people and the violent reaction of the state to the crossing of its borders seem unstoppable. Flip the page, zap. And yet it is precisely this 'flow' of people that I have sought to present differently: I'll try to show that far from being a uni-directional, violent, and massive 'invasion,' the transnational migration of Sub-Saharan Africans in the Maghreb has evolved according to complex patterns, often over several years, and is shaped by multiple forms of agency and collaboration enacted by migrants.

Since the 1990s, with the instigation of the visa regime across the Schengen area and its resultant restrictive practices, transnational migration carried out in stages has become a regular experience for African migrants; opening or reopening[1] new migratory routes from Sub-Saharan Africa, through the Maghreb, to Europe. While the need for immigrant labour in many sectors remains high in Europe, these increasingly controlling migratory policies are paradoxical and have to some extent encouraged a number of Africans to embark on the route to what they call 'the adventure', and what the media and politicians call 'illegal immigration' or 'staged migration'. While this is not the only determining factor, a great many of these Sub-Saharan migrants would have flown directly to Europe if they had been able to do so. However, the EU is neither a fortress nor a sieve. The numbers of people, male and female, who manage either legally or illegally, to cross the frontiers and the numbers of those who remain stuck *en route*, in countries where they had not planned to settle, gives us some idea of the complexity of migration where people's thought worlds, their ambitions surrounding it must absolutely be taken into account.

However, while this migratory movement begins in a variety of ways, in terms of place, reason and situation, once these people have embarked on their personal migratory project, they reorganise themselves collectively during the stopovers which punctuate their journey. In order to connect with these spaces, the migrants must collectively[2] make up for the absence of territory by channelling their individual desire for mobility. So, having crossed Africa from south to north, thousands of Sub-Saharan transmigrants enter Maghreb every year collectively relocating and setting up stopovers. Since their establishment in the 1990s, these stopovers have continued to serve as migratory staging posts for newcomers and a social history has gradually built up along the migratory trajectories. Founded upon the experiences of the first transmigrants, who organised themselves into collectives, this knowledge has been passed on and shared throughout the migratory network and relies on migrants' strong social skills and the ability to learn new ones.

This network has made transnational migration possible: it is the relational structure which allows the migratory project and the trajectories deriving from it to be steered, weaving de-territorialised relationships on the basis of a shared thought world. Based on their individual experiences, migrants passing from one regulated area to another signpost the way for those who follow. But this suggests that the signs marking out these routes are recognisable to all, in other words a collective thought world brings all these individuals together, allowing players to interpret the codes they have come to understand. Through the constant repetition of migratory journeys, routes are also 'traced' in social terms: like the fairytale character Hop O' My Thumb, they leave little markers behind as guides for others to see. Distributing information in this manner enables migrants to acquire one dimension of nomadic know-how: namely, how to set up a means of communication through the marking out of routes or the drawing up of new ones so that they can be found again and can help new migrants to navigate their way. These 'venturers'[3] are modern nomads who I call *transmigrants*.

Transit, a Concept Produced by European Migration Policies

In order to keep this information flowing, staging posts are needed in which these 'venturers' can get their bearings and find all the information, connections and resources (economic, social and symbolic) needed for survival and to prepare them for the next stage of their journey. In the case of Sub-Saharan Africans in Morocco who want to go to Europe but feel 'stuck', priority in sociological terms could be given to the original migratory projects or at least to those acknowledged by individuals. There might also be a temptation to reduce this type of migration to simple 'transit' and to talk of Morocco as a 'transit country', of this movement as a 'transit migration' and of these people as 'transit migrants'. But here we should like to distance ourselves from these terminologies, which, in terms of our sociological understanding, is both unsatisfactory but also sufficiently ambiguous politically to mislead the researcher.

The term 'transit' is really not adequate for the sociology of migration since it has a rather restrictive definition from the space-time point of view. From our perspective, 'transit' is first and foremost the time you spend wandering about. For example, in the terminal building at an international airport where, waiting for a flight, you stroll around disorientated by the time difference, gaping through the windows of 'tax-free' shops. This term also assumes subjective realities that vary depending on whether you are a migrant, a journalist, a politician, a lawyer, or even according to the country in which you find yourself. This restrictive understanding of transit matches the place it occupies today within our societies, whether as a subject for discussion by 'experts' or as an issue for public debate.[4] For example, in Europe, curiously the term 'transit country' is commonly used to describe those countries on the fringes of the EU, accentuating still further the presumption that these countries have an outsider status and the idea that a 'natural' border separates the EU from the rest of the world. However, it should be remembered that countries such as Spain and Italy were considered transit countries in the 1990s before becoming important sites for immigration. Furthermore, countries formerly known as 'transit' countries, such as Cyprus or Malta, have changed status simply because they joined the union, becoming 'countries of first entry into the EU'; even though we are well aware that the majority of migrants do not wish to settle there and are trying to get into the Schengen area!

It is partly for this reason that we prefer the notion of stopover as it better conveys the complexity of migratory routes and does not diminish the waiting process to a 'non-place', where little interaction occurs before the migrant moves on. Rather the stopover is a much longer, more complex period during which social interactions and immersion have the capacity to transform, or at least to influence, both migrants and observers. Stopovers bring people together who do not know one another; who have developed their migratory project individually and independently within their own social environment, but who must now negotiate and organise themselves collectively. They bring together all the players in the process who can be distinguished from one another by their origins and their ambitions: staged transnational migration then becomes a vehicle for *value* where cohesion is something which moving players have to achieve; because just as life and biographical trajectories are made up of setbacks, bumps, frustrations and adjustments, migratory trajectories are not smooth and often run into obstacles. In the case that concerns us here these trajectories are governed by transnational networks, which are affected by countries' border control policies particularly those in Europe. Migrants must

therefore reorganise themselves, working out strategies during their stay at the stopovers to combat dissuasive policies thereby revealing the strength of their social networks. During their stopovers, Sub-Saharan migrants, who are almost nomadic and set apart from the societies they move through, must of necessity acquire know-how and social skills during their process of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation, of *engagement in* and *disengagement from* new social relationships. This encourages a certain distancing from so-called 'ethnic' belonging, which is all too often seen by researchers as irrevocable and insurmountable.

Clandestinity as a Common Destiny: the Violent Confrontation of Migrant and State

First, we can only begin by insisting that the migratory movements with which we are confronted globally today must be understood in light of the astounding erosion of the political limits of democracy, a limit which is questioned by the presence of the foreign migrant. On a planetary level, the desire for individual emancipation and the rationalities that underlie them, as well as the strategies that are put into place to realize them, underline the degree to which the social order instituted by the nation-states is being reworked. Profoundly modified by dynamics, defined by increasing individualization of social life and the construction of new aggregative forms of collective life, in which collective and individual rationalities crisscross in increasingly complex places, often outside of national institutions and frameworks of identity-production. For the transnational migration of sub-Saharan Africans, one must bear in mind that we are in the presence of opposing rationalities, in a veritable face-off: the logics of the state are in direct opposition to the logics of individual emancipation. In the face of rationalities of security and sovereignty imposed 'from above' by the state, individuals are motivated to act outside the dictated rules, rules that they perceive as imposed upon them. In a move against the state's rule of law, the collectives of transmigrants seize the right to use the spaces left vacant by state control, at least for the length of time they need to reorganize and start all over again. These transmigrants partially escape the alienation of the state by learning to cross borders, all borders: those set by the sovereign state as well as those determined by social relations. Irreducible to the rationality of locality and normalcy, the transmigrants known as 'clandestines' appear threatening in the eyes of the nation-state, whose power is founded on territoriality, centralism and sedentarity.

Second, one must remember that at the level of state policy the individual dimension of migration is usually ignored. The desires, ambitions, projects and strategies of the migrants appear unimportant, both in immigration policies (those concerning recruitment and entry) and in the restrictive policies that seek to halt or regulate migration. We are often inclined to conceive of migration as a strictly collective phenomenon. Everyday language is full of expressions referring to 'flows,' 'waves,' 'invasions,' 'cohorts,' 'assaults.' However, like so many other human phenomena, migration is initially viewed as an individual project. Subsequently, it is the outcome of a continuous interaction between individual decisions, personal ambitions; the advent of the migration project on the one hand, and the social constraints that weigh on it and the environment in which it takes place on the other. A human being is never simply a pawn on a playing board over which he or she has no control; a human being is never merely a victim. She is also a strategist for both herself and her loved ones, constantly trying to find the next step that will result in an improvement of her condition. She tirelessly negotiates her position according to rationalities of action that cannot be strictly understood by the sole fact of allegiance to instituted social orders, or to other orders in the course of constitution: they are neither those of the nation-state's local hierarchies alone, nor only those of territorial recomposition and the economic globalization of capitalism.

This approach brings to the fore an increasingly frequent characteristic of migration on a planetary level, namely clandestinity as a common purpose. The systematic policies for the repression of so-called 'irregular' migration not only do nothing to address the economic, political and social needs expressed by these actors in movement, sometimes even denying their fundamental rights, they are ineffective since transmigrants know how to use borders in order to organize crossing networks, or to institute underground commercial activities. In the face of repressive policies, there is the knowledge of the transmigrants and their capacity to adapt to the control devices by reorganizing their patterns of circulation, their 'border-crossing know-how.' These repressive policies often contribute only to push the border crossings back, distancing them ever further by the externalization of controls.

'Crossing the border' becomes an increasingly perilous exercise that unfolds ever further from European frontiers, augmenting the toll of victims: the dead and wounded number in the thousands. The EU is imposing a *cordon sanitaire* on Africa. The transmigrants are thus the victims of policies imposed 'from above,' by technocrats who do not understand them and who treat them as undesirables. They are the victims of the fences and their ever-increasing height and of the technologies and human forces that are mobilized in their path. In short, they are the victims of a war waged against them.

As such, authorities, rather than trying to implement the central government's politics of repression, set out to control the movement of migrants in a particular way: illegally they are given the opportunity to take on casual work. In the face of such a precarious legal and social condition that allows the agricultural industry to better exploit them, with little cost to the state, but which is also presented as an opportunity for illegalized migrants. The borders of the EU are thus not only undermined by the crossing of migrants but by other actors whose interests conflict with those of the state. The result of these contradictions is the inclusion of migrants through clandestinization, rather then complete closure to their mobility

Opening Cracks in the Euro-African Migration Regime

Different forms of transnational political activism have widened the cracks in the Euro-African migration regime. This is because in addition to the globalization of the economy and that of migration, another major transformation of international relations counterbalances the power of the state to control migration, the increasing number and power of judicial regimes relating to human rights and the ongoing struggle of activists who strive to impose them on reluctant states.[5] If the shifting borders of the EU slither through the Maghreb, stripping many migrants of the right to have rights, their very movement opens up the possibility to actively resist and contest them, often using the democratic values proclaimed by the EU. The migrants discussed here, who I call transmigrants, play a central role in this transnational mobilization for, since the destruction of informal camps and the mass deportations of 2005 they have increasingly organized themselves politically, a relatively easy step because they were already well organized socially. They have formed militant associations such as the Council of Sub-Saharan Migrants in Morocco, the largest and most militant, and the Association of Congolese Refugees in Morocco (ARCOM) or the Refugees' Collective.[6] Maintaining close ties beyond borders, through, e.g. electronic correspondence, Sub-Saharan transmigrants and European activists have formed a transnational network of resistance.[7] Within these networks, structured around a common political objective, information and services are exchanged to promote the respect of human rights and asylum law, and a demand for the right to freedom of movement. This highlights another sociopolitical reconfiguration at work within globalization: against, across, and beyond national and territorialized citizenship, new forms of belonging and political action emerge around the values of human rights and in the experience of the common struggle to obtain them.

I have tried here to demonstrate the falsity of the 'transit migration' and the 'myth of the invasion'. Far from being a direct and violent movement as suggested by the image of 'invasion,' the transmigration of Sub-Saharan Africans in the Maghreb has evolved along complex lines over long periods of time, finding temporary refuge at moments within this process. Along the way they have created new forms of deterritorialized social organization from which emerge new cosmopolitan associations. However militarized they may be, no migration policy can stop them in their 'adventure'. Their mobility is not governable by a single institution, but is shaped by a multiple and conflicting politics of migration. We need to substitute a more complex configuration for the image of complete closure implied in the term 'fortress Europe'. If the EU is a fortress, then its walls are full of cracks, mobile and disseminated, selective and ambivalent; its unity undermined by multiple, contradictory actors. Shifting our emphasis from migration towards other forms of mobility (the movement of human beings but also of capital and goods alongside the repression of migration and that of human rights activists) we see at work multiple mobility regimes forming different yet overlapping and intersecting 'zones' which, having both material and symbolic dimensions, do not necessarily correspond to the boundaries of nation states nor are they subject to jurisdiction. And, it is precisely these kind of messy relations we need to untangle if we wish to understand the actors and processes that determine who can move and how.

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APPROPRIATING SPACE

Football players reinvented an existing private property, turning it into their football field by acts of transgression.

Borders, Drugs and Migrants in Northern Morocco

Khalid Mouna

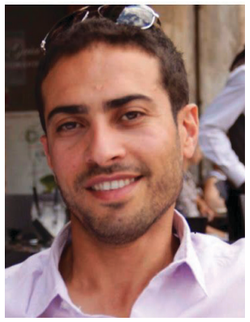
Although the concept of borders has a long history, a definition remains quite ambiguous. It relies on a multitude of complex socio-political and economic elements that are at times contradictory. This is primarily due to the difficulty in establishing the shape and function of borders, since they are constantly changing and evolving. Thus, the concept of borders changes as you move between academic disciplines. There are a number of diverse approaches to the concept and each field employs ideas and philosophies specific to it; whether that is historical, geographical, political, sociological, anthropological, psychological or other, it is evident that there is no single definition. Nevertheless, the notion of the border relies heavily on John Locke's notion of natural law and the demarcation of private property rights. It is a concept at the heart of knowledge production in the social sciences and has currency in the field of international relations.

This article will not, however, investigate the definition of borders nor their complexity in international relations. The aim is to understand borders on a practical, day-to-day level. It highlights the interpretive flexibility in the concept of borders and its connections to concrete issues like migration and drugs. Countries around the world must face the fact that with the increase globally in migration and drug trafficking, border management has risen in importance. An example of this is the closed border between Morocco and Algeria. According to the Algerians the closure is due to the traffic of drugs from Morocco, yet, ironically, the closure only benefits the traffickers further. Another example can be seen in the agreements on border management signed by Morocco and the EU. Their purpose is to control the flow of migrants and shows how the notion of borders can shift for Morocco is not geographically a part of Europe yet it finds itself acting as a EU border patrol agent.

The data I have collected on field trips will be used to discuss the practical use of borders. In this sense, it is the opinions of those involved rather than the abstract concept that will be debated in this article. I have chosen to analyse the northern borders of Morocco in relation to migration and drugs. Both issues force the state to review the policies it employs in controlling borders. While the EU almost never questions Morocco on its border controls for drug trafficking, it is very interested in Morocco's procedures for policing the common borders when it comes to migration. The collective attempts of migrants to cross the borders at Ceuta and Melilla make us question the physical and symbolic function of borders. How do migrants view borders? How are they experienced, imagined and viewed by players in the drug trafficking business?

Borders, a Source of Tension

Morocco's location geographically makes it an obvious entry point to Africa and there have always been tensions along its borders, particularly with its northern neighbour Spain. The Mediterranean Sea has played a dual role throughout history, creating relationships for social, economic and cultural exchange while also being the source of tension and geopolitical conflict. The question of how to control this area has contributed to the divide between the North and South, a divide that can only truly be understood within a historical context. Against this backdrop of tension, borders have an important role to play in enabling us to understand their imbalance and asymmetry, a way of understanding the complex nature of



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social, economic, and political relationships and how the actors within this perceive the borders.

Before 1991 and the introduction of visas in Spain, movement between Morocco and its northern neighbour were free and fluid. When Spain entered the Schengen zone, visas were required for people from North Africa, thereby, permanently changing their relationship with the EU borders. Suddenly, there was an imbalance in the way people experienced the invisible lines that separated countries; Spanish citizens could enter Morocco without a visa while Moroccans had to request a visa and justify their stay in Spain.

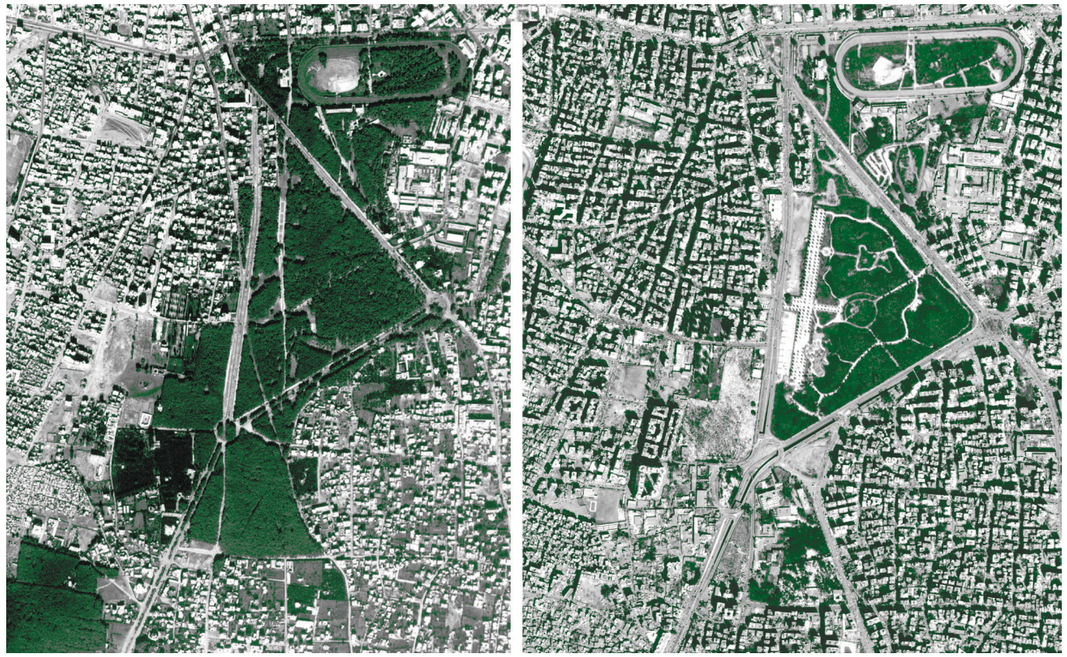
Since then, waves of primarily Moroccan illegal migration have increased, leading to moments of tension between both countries. In 2002, border management created a diplomatic crisis between the two following a reference by Spain to Morocco's apparent 'laxness.' As a result of increased Moroccan illegal immigration in the 1990s and early 2000s, Sub-Saharan migration has now become the primary source of tension. Migrants arrive in northern Morocco at border cities like Tangier or near Ceuta and Melilla and wait for a chance to cross.

Illegal immigration on boats leaving northern Morocco has resulted in Spain exerting pressure on Morocco to police its northern border in an attempt to prevent migrants from entering Spain illegally; the 2000s were marked by the pressure placed on Morocco and led to it becoming a Buffer State for the EU.

Despite the drastic control measures put in place by both Rabat and Madrid, each year there are new bids to cross the barrier separating the two Spanish enclaves from mainland Morocco. Estimates suggest that 20,000 people try to cross the border each year, and more recently, Sub-Saharan migrants have been joined by ranks of refugees and asylum seekers from conflicts in Syria, Libya and Iraq.

The barriers around the two Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, located on Moroccan soil, evidence the way in which Europe uses its borders against migration from the South. Despite the fences, migrants live in the surrounding forests, isolated from the local population and waiting for the right moment to cross. Collectively they develop strategies to evade the controls on the fences that separate them from their final destination: Europe. Waiting encourages them to learn patience but also to better understand borders. They move freely between the border cities of the North: Tangier, Tetouan and Nador and depending on the seasons, summer or winter, they choose their moment to cross.

Sub-Saharan migrants in Tangier have a totally different experience to those who attempt to cross at Ceuta and Melilla. Between 2014 and 2015,[1] during the course of our investigation of Tangier as a border town, we discovered that the city has a double border. There is the external, physical border that leads to Europe and then there is the internal, social border that separates the migrants from the local Moroccan population in Tangier. Sub-Saharan and European migrants' experience of these borders is qualitatively different. As a port city, Tangier receives daily boats coming in from Gibraltar and Tarifa. Although these borders are closed to Sub-Saharans and Moroccans, Spanish migrants and tourists cross them easily. Spanish citizens who work in Tangier during the week return easily to Spain for the weekend, even if, as our study showed, they work on an irregular basis in Morocco. In stark contrast to Sub-Saharans, neither the Moroccan authorities nor the local population view the Spanish as illegal immigrants crossing a border.



DELINEATING NATURE
The pine forest, a natural open space, transfomed into a gated municipal park that was closed off to the public for 20 years

Border here is read as 'barrier', a barrier to stop migration. This perception of borders relies heavily on seventeenth century thinking, which saw them as the furthest extremities of the kingdom and provinces to be protected from enemies. In order to cross these borders Sub-Saharan migrants make contact with so-called 'spotters' who are for the most part Moroccan. The role of the spotter is to collect information on the position of the Moroccan Navy and on the best route to breach the borders whether by land (Ceuta and Melilla) or by sea. This information costs about 1,000 MAD (100 Euros) and works as a kind of subscription service that must be paid prior to making the attempt to cross.

These borders are primarily political but they also serve to reveal the tensions between migrants and the local population since they put into question the borders that public policy creates to manage migration. The desire to cross the border is fed by a few successful attempts made by migrants, mainly in the summer. On 12 August 2014, cities in the south of Spain witnessed a huge influx of migrants. National newspapers like *El Pais* and *El Mundo* spoke of about 900 people rescued from the sea by the Coast Guard in Tarifa and nearly 1,200 people travelling in *pateras* picked up off the Spanish coast. According to newspapers, it was the result of an attempt by Moroccan authorities to reduce the pressure of migrants in the north of the country. However, this wave coincided with a major diplomatic incident, the King of Morocco's yacht was intercepted by the Spanish coast guard off the coast of Ceuta on 7 August 2014. The issue was swiftly resolved through the intervention of the Spanish interior minister in the minutes following the incident, and the governor of Ceuta went to present official apologies in person to the King. Several Spanish newspapers, however, made the connection between the arrival of so many migrants and the incident in Ceuta. They attempted to show that Morocco had sent a message by allowing the boats to leave the northern coast for Spain, and that it was vital to view borders as a politico-territorial issue.

These borders, which represent entry points into Europe, are primarily entry points to a huge labour market. As such, borders separate the north from the south and demarcate the political and economic imbalance between the two coasts of the Mediterranean. Borders in this sense do not converge but act as a means of separation.

Borders and Drugs

If borders and migration both separate and connect Spain and Morocco in their attempts to fight illegal immigration, drugs are another issue that challenges the concept of borders. The northern borders, in particular those with Ceuta and Melilla, are part of the daily lives and practices of the local population. They play an important economic role both for legal trade and illegal exchanges, particularly smuggling. Since the 1960s, this close connection between the borders and the local population facilitated the trade of Moroccan cannabis to Spain.

Cannabis took the same route as contraband products to cross the Strait of Gibraltar.

Despite strict checks and controls on the borders, the trade in cannabis from Morocco has not stopped. During our research, we learned that Tangier's prison holds over eighty young Spanish citizens arrested for having attempted to smuggle mostly small amounts of cannabis into Spain. The proximity of Tangier to Spain gives the impression that crossing borders is quite easy and yet the prison in Tangier is not only home to young Spaniards, but also to Belgian and French citizens. These are people who agreed to be a 'mule' in order to earn a little money either by bringing back a few grams or kilos of cannabis in their cars, camper-vans, or by swallowing small quantities of olive-shaped capsules on behalf of traffickers or for their own use. Drug mules moving between Morocco and Spain are, for the most part, Europeans, recruited by traffickers because they have a better chance of getting through undetected while Moroccans are viewed with suspicion by local and Spanish officials. In the Moroccan media Europeans are portrayed as the victims of traffickers, while Moroccans are presented in an unfavourable light.

That said, substantial drug seizures are also made at the port of Tangier Med highlighting the position Tangier holds on the trafficking circuit despite the opening of other routes. Cannabis can easily be hidden in trucks transporting products manufactured in the Free Trade Zones, which leave from Tangier Med for Europe. While the arrival of a large truck scanner has reduced the flow of drugs, it hasn't stopped drug seizures altogether. Tangier's border is that of a truly transnational city. It is a crossing point for products 'Made in Morocco' but also for drugs, whether locally produced cannabis or imported cocaine. The movement of drugs across borders requires Mafia-like organisation, but also the complicity of a number of Moroccan and Spanish officials.

In Spain in July 2015 a particularly large seizure was made. It involved two articulated lorries from Tangier Med carrying fifty tons of cannabis and was the largest drug haul in Spanish history. Cannabis leaving Tangier travels on to the EU's capital cities via Spain. For example, in October 2015, 7.1 tons of cannabis from Morocco was seized in Paris. Drug trafficking provides a very different perception of borders than that provided by politicians.

The permeability of borders, in part due to economic fragility and political corruption, enables drug traffickers to create new pathways for their merchandise. If the traditional route for drugs is through Spain, it is not surprising to see that traffickers are opening up new parallel pathways, for example, through Libya. While these routes may be less direct and more costly, they are less dangerous for the merchandise. This shift has led to migrant smugglers diversifying their activities with those skilled in crossing the Mediterranean hiring out their services to drug traffickers.

Whether it is a report on drugs or migrants, the media tends to focus heavily on figures so we become used to hearing headlines such as: '1 ton of cannabis seized on the border between Morocco and Spain.' Or, '100 migrants attempting to cross the border arrested.' Drugs, like migrants are represented solely in figures to underline the efficiency, or lack thereof, of state border controls.

When looked at through the lens of migration and drug trafficking, borders seem like spaces of uncertainty, working outside of the standard state logic. They reveal how our concrete relationships with borders are only made apparent when they acquire a strategic importance for those involved. An analysis of socio-economic practices on borders forces us to think beyond simplistic interpretation, encouraging us to see them as dynamic fields of action

1 See: http://amerm.ma/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Espace-imagin%C3%A9-espace-v%C3%A9cu-et-espace-n%C3%A9goci%C3%A9-Mouna-Khalid.pdf. Accessed 6 September 2016.

Translated from the French by NATSeuropa in Rabat



LEGALIZING SUB-STANDARDS

Before the 2004 building law, a space could only be defined as a bedroom, when it met a minimum of habitable standards, including specifications on room area, window measurements and exits. All necessary for proper ventilation, lighting and safety procedures.



ESCAPING CRIMINALIZATION

The Kafala (Sponsorship) system in Lebanon has been associated with a contemporary form of slavery, given the subjective power it delegates to employers over migrant workers. The system denies the migrant worker the basic human right to freedom of movement, whilst creating an inherent potential for the violation of workers' rights.

On More Subtle Borders

A Discussion with Author, Director and Performer Sawsan Bou Khaled

Abraham Zeitoun

On a sun-filled and breezy afternoon in May, Sawsan Bou Khaled sits quietly in a corner of a Beirut café gazing at a photo she took of Kinkaku-Ji, Temple of the Golden Pavilion, in Kyoto. The temple is elaborate, covered in gold and adorned with gilded leaves; it was designed not only to alleviate and dispel negative thoughts and feelings about death but also to create a backdrop of visual excess. Sawsan has recently returned from Japan, where she took part in the World Theatre Festival in Shizuoka with her latest theatre performance entitled 'Alice', and her artistic world appears closely tied to the spirit of Kinkaku-Ji. Just as the temple's shimmering excess is deployed to promote an acceptance of death, so Sawsan embraces a similar philosophy in both her directing and performance where visual display is harnessed to present death on stage. They are worlds and forms apart but a common thread runs between them providing the basis for new narratives.

However, the story here is different focusing on the views of the young author, director and performer in relation to a situation of limitations: that of borders across the discipline of art. It is important to note that Sawsan has performed in a number of countries including Algeria, Belgium, Egypt, France, Japan, Jordan, Luxembourg, Sweden, Syria, Tunisia, and her native Lebanon. Having crossed borders to present her work and collaborate with other (performance) artists, the main border that Sawsan Bou Khaled faces today remains – quite literally – close to her heart.



Abraham H Zeitoun is an architect by trade, a creator of collage by choice, and a patron of words by necessity. He has worked in the domains of architecture, theatre, communication and the visual arts. Born in Sydney, he lives between Berlin – where his mind is currently settled – and Beirut – where his heart lingers.

Personal Borders

A.Z: What is the border that you feel is most present within your work, and how does it create restrictions or grant you access to new territories?

S.BK: When I think about how a border can impact upon me artistically, the first border that comes to mind is that of my own body. I think most performance artists have a powerful relationship with their body - one that they try to break or strengthen. Personally, the first border to cross is my own and my work focuses on that dichotomy of sorts. What lies beyond my body? Just as one might be faced with a physical border, exploiting what lies within my being and transforming, distorting and reshaping it after experimenting with its limitations is a difficult task. At the same time it brings me much needed security. Once on stage, you'll often hear performers say that they are naked – even if not literally. When I'm performing in public after weeks or months in private, it is my body that unconsciously takes control and not my mind. There lies a parallel time and space where I am conscious about what I am doing and saying while surrendering to my physical self. On stage, the border of the body is opened and access is through communication. But once my body fails me, I know I'll no longer be able to perform as an artist.

A.Z: How so?

S.BK: Well my body as a border has a continuously evolving form and space. However, if this process of constant experimentation should end, no longer enabling me to engage in an honest and engaging dialogue, then I believe that I would have nothing more to share.

A.Z: This border you are speaking of; how does it shape an audience's perception of your performance?

S.BK: The fact that my work draws on all those personal experiences that have formed the person I am today enables me to create a performance that is not just a one-dimensional transmission of a particular message or image. I work hard on the visual aspect of any artistic creation to create an impact on the audience and I draw heavily on the use of personal symbols that represent moments of my childhood and life in general. The physical border here is the stage, or the site in which the performance takes place, it delimits the audience's physical involvement, at the same time as providing a space for them to observe and communicate with what they see and hear.

I have no interest in inviting an audience to feel compassionate towards me, or my work. What excites me about performance art is the space in between that you can develop and manipulate to create abstract ties with the public. I want the audience to reflect upon their own monsters and personal narratives as opposed to putting themselves in my shoes to feel emotion. The border that is my body – the first border I face – is open on stage and used as a tool to encourage myself and others to discover a new dimension. The border I draw on stage is permeable and is crossed when the audience and I enter into communication.

A.Z: What are your own monsters?

S.BK: I have many, and they all play into the central theme of death that is omnipresent in my work and which I believe lies at the core of theatre more generally. My work is not focused on a situation that is relevant in time, and many of my fears and desires – if not all – form an integral part of my

statement as a performer. Another central theme, or monster, is injustice. I am looking for a fairer, more just world.

I live in a region plagued with injustices and there is no way of ignoring that artistically. I feel a certain responsibility for these injustices and it is important that I position myself as someone who recognizes how historical and contemporary power-struggles have created the current situation. The centres of power are spread unevenly globally, and people from different cities, nations, and continents don't feel involved with or culpable for what happens to their neighbours. That – to me – is a supreme injustice.

Artistic Limitations and Culture Vultures

Artistic limitations may be dangerous. These fragile lines of separation presume that what occurs here is irrespective of what happens there. The most intangible of borders are also the sites of interaction and dialogue within the global art scene. A place where artists and their works travel to be exhibited within certain frameworks and an understanding of what art is. As Sawsan and I deliberated over these specific limitations our conversation moved into a discussion around the power of culture-specific borders and crossings.

A.Z: Could you tell me a little more about the borders of nations in relationship to your work as a female artist from Lebanon?

S.BK: I don't refer to myself as a female artist from Lebanon. I believe that labelling yourself in terms of sex and geography provides others with a tool that they may use to form a perception of your work, an approach that I am not comfortable with. I want others to engage with my work through their own understanding of it, of course, but also through the hand that I extend to guide their way. Ultimately, it is up to each member of the audience to decide whether or not they wish to accept the invitation. I also believe that such labels are used to reinforce the binary relationship of powerful versus weak.

A.Z: How so?

S.BK: There are many instances. For example, the West is more inclined to view itself, as it always has historically, as the benchmark for cultural superiority. Colonization, and the remnants of its legacy, puts us in an awkward position as artists. The times my work has travelled to Europe to be exhibited have been enriching, albeit disturbing at times. I think that the borders Europe has set in place aren't so much physical as cultural, and people need to traverse a less customary path to form a clearer understanding of what the world is like on the other side. Artistically-speaking, I believe this would really enrich people's perception of the region in terms of reshaping the viewing-angle with which they measure artistic creations. I have no interest in playing the victim in the context of exoticized war and violence, and too often that is the case when work that happens to be from the Arab World is exhibited. The level of critique usually applied to artists from a more privileged world doesn't appear to be employed when reviewing the work of less fortunate artists.

At the same time, the art world is like a market enclosed by pretty fencing. There, curators, programmers, and institutions invite artists to sell their work. Some look attractive, others a little less so. Some are relevant to what is currently in vogue and others are irrelevant to what is in vogue from the outset. Some markets are also better than others, or at least are believed to be, and having your 'produce' presented there is a long process. I just don't have much that I'd like to sell.

A.Z: Having your work shown at prestigious festivals may very well enable it to travel further and reach other audiences. Are you suggesting that the border to cross in order to present your work in the West is not a border worth treading?

S.BK: I'd love nothing more than to establish lines of communication with extended audiences, to have my work resonate with diverse crowds and to see the ways in which different people react and respond. Disrupting expected responses and confirming others… At the same time, I try to remember the reasons my work travels abroad. In my opinion, my work should only go abroad if it might actually resonate with an audience or provide a new territory for exploration rather than crossing boundaries simply because I'm a performer of a certain calibre, ethnicity or region. Furthermore, there's a limitation imposed on artists from the region, they either fall into the category of 'victim' or 'ally'. People on either side seem to refuse the idea that our fates are all interconnected despite the terrains and oceans that set us apart. It is important that, in cases where this happens, the public is aware of their responsibility. I want to promote the idea that we are all a part of the world's glory and its demise – and I want the audience to think about the part they have to play within this.

I'm also aware that if I become a successful performer abroad, the chances of me touring the region could and would grow exponentially, and that frightens me.

Regional Deception

A.Z: And within the region itself: do you think it is possible to grow and share with artists and groups from other nations? What are the obstacles?

S.BK: The ministries of culture in our region have weak cultural policies and don't equitably finance artists and artist spaces. Instead, we have institutions and associations that work more seriously to distribute funds and provide grants. Many of these entities happen to be European and American, and a number of others receive funding from organizations in the West. Thanks to these organizations, many artists are able to create and flourish. I happen to be working more on the edge here, searching for different ways to evolve and connect. It's just unfortunate that although the opportunities are there, many artists feel they need to reshape their designs in order to fit the application brief, eventually resulting in works and subjects that have been adapted to cater for what is desired.

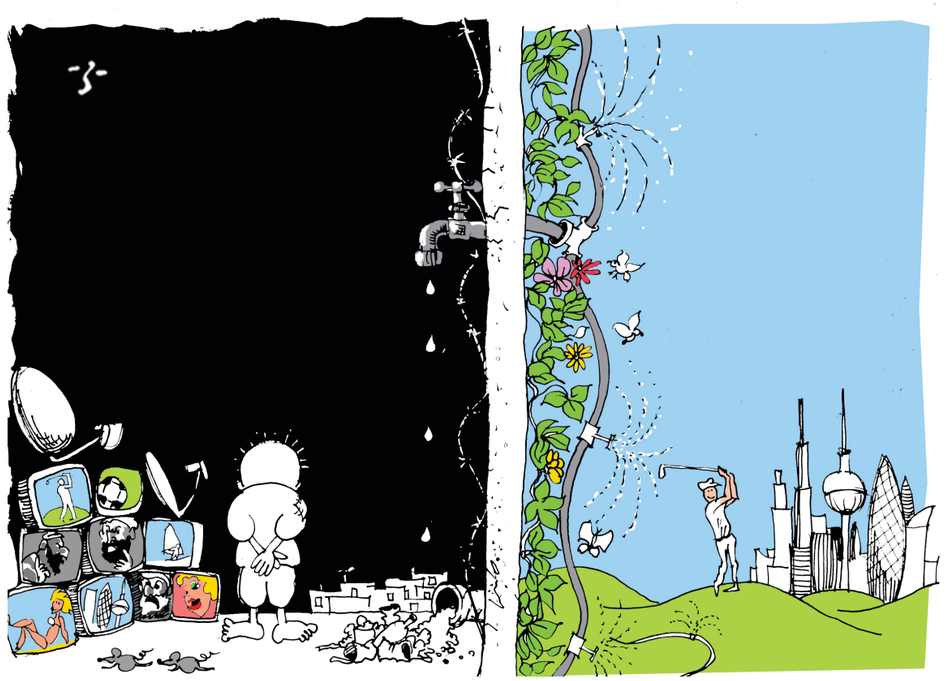
Making connections on one's own is rather difficult, and a large number of these collaborations are low-key (that is not to say that they are in any way less important!). I think that one of the main obstacles in the region is that of corruption and the situation we are in as nations and societies is a direct result of dire policies and cultural hegemony from abroad. It is also striking to see how we still hold on to our colonial history in a desire for better times. In many ways we also seem to use this to evaluate ourselves artistically and I think that's really quite tragic.

A.Z: Any hope that this will change? Will the cultural borders of the Arab World open up and organically branch out?

S.BK: Although it is slow, I do believe that it is already happening. At one point, with the seemingly blossoming Arab Spring, we began building hope and bridges with one another across the region. We had the intention and the desire to connect and create a more prosperous region thereby reaffirming our multiple and rich identities. There's no need to review where we are now, as despite the progress that has been made, there have also been many setbacks to overcome. But there is always hope!

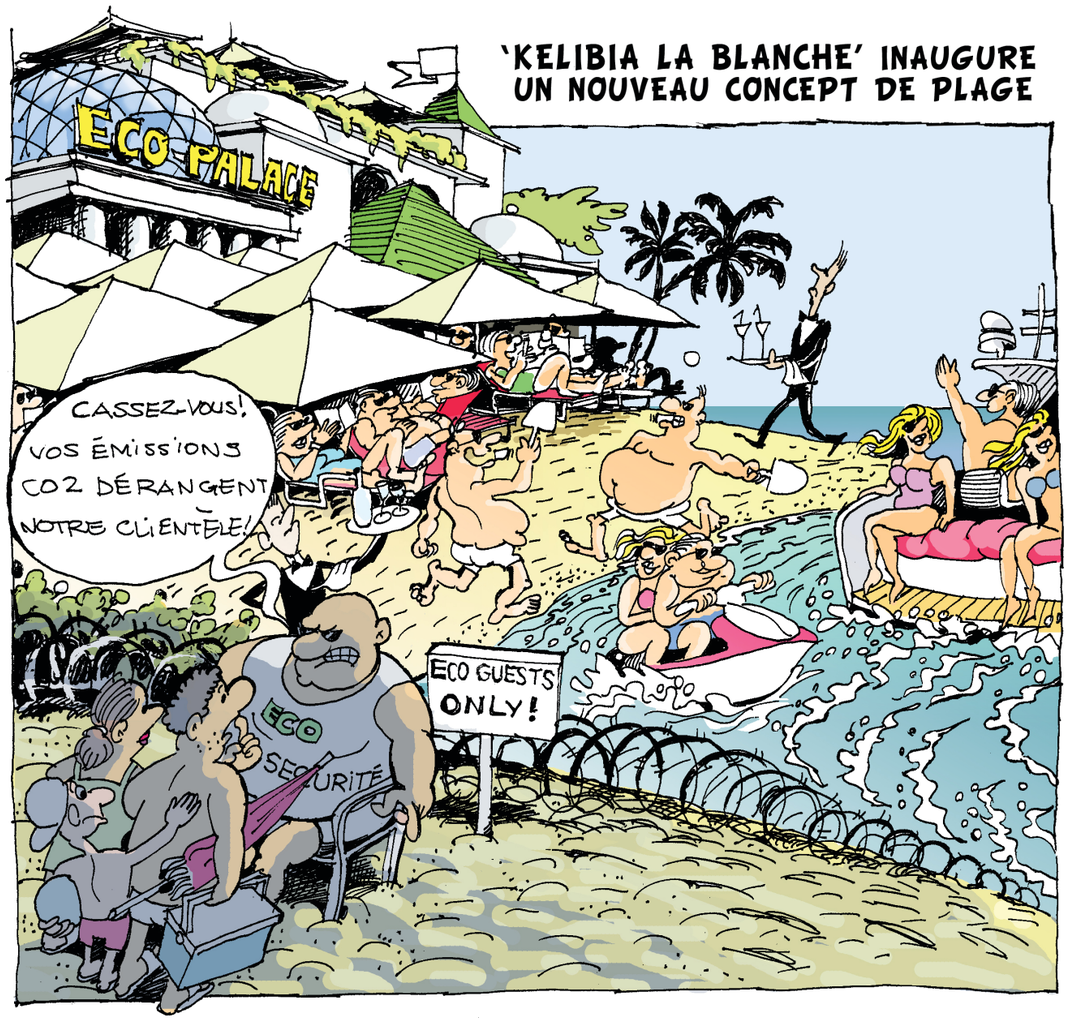
Hours have passed and the sun begins to set, projecting rays of gold on the off-white walls of the apartment building facing the café. A friend has arrived and asked to join us on the table, to which we agree without hesitation. 'If I say border, what's the first thing that comes to mind?' – I ask, to which he replies 'Borderless!' Ah, to live in a world that is free of borders…

The United Arab Emirates are implementing giant urban projects in Tunisia, advertising for them pointing to their social value (creating jobs) and being ecological (eco-tourism). For –X-, the initiators of these mega-projects are justifying themselves as promoters of peace and developers of the ecosystem.
–X-'s drawings point to the fact that these urban megaprojects "à la Disney" exclusively address the wealthy and thereby amplify social divisions and accentuate them.





-Z-, a Tunisian political cartoonist, conceals his identity from all but a few friends to avoid self-censorship. Initially an architect, he became interested in Tunisian politics in 2007, mostly due to the impact of urban mega projects built up in the south of Tunis. He started drawing a running commentary of life in Tunisia on his blog www.debatunisie.com. A year later, his website was censored by the Ben Ali regime. -Z- continues drawing and has become a strong critical voice of the Tunisian revolution. -Z- lives between Paris and Tunis.



Editor: Josephine Borradaile

Layout: Rachad Chamoun

Cover Design: Nadine Bekdache

Illustrations: Pages 4, 8, 10, 19, 25, 28, 48, 50 and 53 by Nadine Bekdache, page 42 by al-Hudood, pages 14 and 16 by Hanaa Edwar, pages 32, 33, 36, 38, 39, 40 and 41 by Katrin Ströbel & Mohammed Laouli and pages 59 and 60 by -Z-

Opinions expressed in the articles are those of the respective authors and interviewees, and not the Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

Published by the Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2016

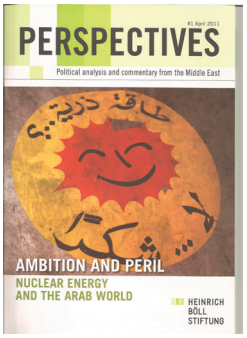
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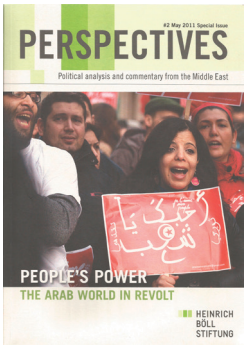
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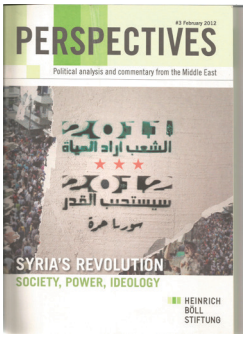
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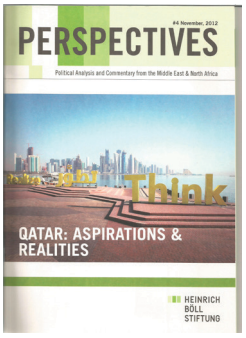
Our foremost task is civic education in Germany and abroad with the aim of promoting informed democratic opinion, socio-political commitment and mutual understanding. In addition, the Heinrich Böll Foundation supports artistic, cultural and scholarly projects, as well as cooperation in the development field. The political values of ecology, democracy, gender democracy, solidarity and non-violence are our chief points of reference. Heinrich Böll's belief in and promotion of citizen participation in politics is the model for the foundation's work.

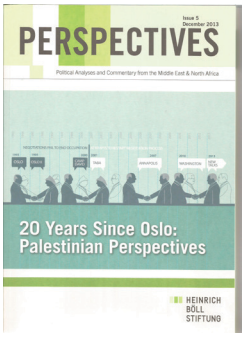
This edition is published jointly by the offices of Heinrich Böll Stiftung in Beirut, Rabat, Ramallah and Tunis.

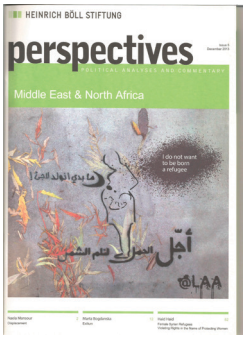


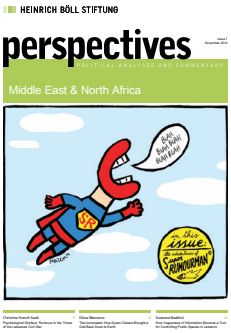


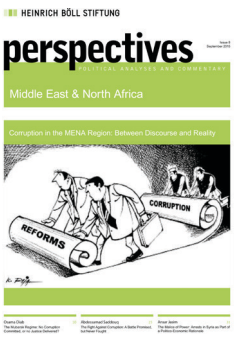














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