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## Architectures of Resistance Negotiating Borders Through Spatial Practices

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The background of the cover is a dark, textured map of the world. Overlaid on the map are various geometric shapes and symbols: a large, light gray circle, a smaller white circle, and several smaller circles of different shades of gray. Some of these circles contain symbols like stars, triangles, and lightning bolts. The map itself is rendered in a light gray tone, with some areas highlighted in a darker gray. The overall aesthetic is modern and academic.

# Architectures of Resistance

Negotiating Borders  
Through Spatial Practices

Angeliki Sioli, Nishat Awan,  
Kristopher Palagi (eds)

LEUVEN UNIVERSITY PRESS



## Architectures of Resistance



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## **Negotiating Borders through Spatial Practices**

*Edited by*

*Angeliki Sioli, Nishat Awan, and Kristopher Palagi*

LEUVEN UNIVERSITY PRESS



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# ARCHITECTURES OF RESISTANCE

## Negotiating Borders through Spatial Practices

*Nishat Awan, Angeliki Sioli, Kristopher Palagi*

*Past the guarded schoolyards, the boarded-up churches, [...] past newspapered windows  
of tenements, along the violated, the prosecuted citizenry, throughout this storied,  
buttressed, scavenged, policed city I call home, in which I am a guest....*

—Li-Young Lee, “The City in Which I Love You”

On March 1, 2020, Greece closed its borders, denying refugees the right to seek political asylum, a reaction to Turkey’s decision to strategically refuse its role as gatekeeper to the European Union. A few weeks later, Italy, France, Belgium, and Spain closed their borders as the global COVID-19 pandemic spread. China had already closed its borders a few weeks earlier and other countries quickly followed suit.<sup>1</sup> As planes were grounded, the stark reality of immobility was revealed to a global class accustomed to frictionless travel across the planet. On a more intimate scale, innumerable citizens, from New Zealand to Brazil, were confined to their homes, with some needing an official permit to simply go out for a walk or to buy food. Invisible boundaries proliferated in public space with the call to maintain a 1.5 meter distance between people to guard against the spread of the respiratory virus. As nationwide lockdowns became the norm, they revealed discrepancies between white-collar workers able to carry on working and earning from the comfort of their homes and frontline workers and laborers who were required to be present physically in their places of work. Such untenable aspects of lockdowns were perhaps more apparent in the global South, where most people rely on daily wages, as well as in those countries that chose to implement restrictions in specific neighborhoods and regions, producing internal divisions that reinforced labor, class, and wealth disparities.

In the midst of the pandemic’s first wave, the US administration announced that international students enrolled in the country’s universities for the 2020–2021 academic year would be deported. With the excuse that Skype, Zoom, Teams, and myriad other online platforms connect people digitally around the globe, the United States attempted to reinforce discriminatory policies against foreigners. The decision was rescinded just a week after its

announcement—due to the strong reaction from the academic world—but it revealed clearly how advances in digital technology are often mobilized to reinforce borders rather than diminish them, contra the false promise of globalization.<sup>2</sup> The excuse of the virus raised new administrative borders, while the more traditional barrier at the US-Mexico border remained firmly in place, built to a height of thirty feet, a dimension that has been described as “ensuring” any intruder’s death in case of a fall.

2020 and 2021 reminded us—cruelly so—that borders at whatever scale, from the geopolitical to the most intimate, are not as gentle or as figurative as our seemingly progressive societies wish or choose to believe. What might be the role of architecture, or spatial practices more broadly, within such a context? Architecture as discipline and profession is often complicit in constructing borders, as the enthusiastic participation in the competition for former president Donald Trump’s border wall so aptly demonstrated.<sup>3</sup> Yet, architecture is also capable of resisting borders through its speculative and propositional potential, mobilized in spatial investigations and design interventions. As the short and admittedly perspectival account above shows us, borders are slippery things—they can be anything and everything—and one of the difficulties in approaching the topic of borders is that there is no one definition of the concept. This book does not seek to describe what a border is; neither does it collate the many ways that borders exclude, separate, and detain. Instead, we have chosen to discuss borders through the forms and practices of resistance we see to such acts. This is a political choice, as much as it is an academic one, and we invite the reader to delve into the many already existing excellent resources on the workings of borders.<sup>4</sup>

## BORDERS AND THEIR REPRESENTATION

That borders are fictional entities is today an accepted fact within border studies and allied disciplines. Even those borders demarcated by physical entities, such as rivers, are understood to have *become* borders through acts of reinforcement, whether these involve patrolling the river’s edge or archiving it in the drawing of maps. The uneasy relationship between maps and borders is best demonstrated through the capricious nature of rivers, which do not stay still but shift their course, defying human attempts to mobilize them in claims to territory.<sup>5</sup> Precisely because maps have the ability to congeal territory, that is to make everchanging and relational conditions appear as if they were static facts on the ground, they are crucial to the construction of borders and the realities they seek to impose. The genealogy of geographical maps can be traced to the colonial endeavor of invading, appropriating, and laying claim to

new territories. Maps were central to all three acts. Columbus's seafaring voyage of colonization was made possible through maps that could help navigate across the Atlantic Ocean. The very act of recording the land and its features was a form of appropriation that produced borders—lines that showed the edges of territorial claims.

While related to the cartographic endeavors described above, architectural mapping as a practice is very different. That is not to say that architectural mapping can deny the uneasy legacy of invasion and colonisation, but it can lay claim to a different and concurrent legacy. Since architecture at its most traditional deals with the design and construction of buildings, forms of drawing and working with buildings have been constitutive of what architectural mapping is today. Architecture embraced the axonometric drawing as a mode of visualizing buildings and objects from two different sides but with a view from nowhere.<sup>6</sup> This was not the bird's eye view of the geographic map but a composite image that created a view that no one could see. If we trace architectural mapping from this point, there is no claim to represent "reality"; instead, reality is always constructed through the act of drawing, meaning that maps become propositional devices. Architectural drawings are also made with the purpose of communication, traditionally between architects, craftsmen and builders, and today between more diverse communities of practice, a claim also made for data and information visualization.<sup>7</sup> Architectural maps can range from the scale of regions and territories to that of a building interior and the intimate scale of the body.<sup>8</sup> This ease with and necessity of switching and combining scales and views in a seamless manner is central to the use of maps in architecture. For studying spatial and geographic phenomena, such mapping can be a powerful form of visual representation that allows the complexity gleaned from ethnographic methods of interviewing, participant observation, etc., to be reproduced visually in ways that complement and add value to research findings.<sup>9</sup> Such spatial visualizations have the potential to contribute to what Tim Ingold calls a "graphic anthropology."<sup>10</sup>

Architectural mapping also has a way of synthesizing and analyzing phenomena through graphical modes, what is often understood as information visualization, but here again architectural visualizations are different. They rely not only on the quantitative but also on a qualitative approach that takes some of the political and synthesizing qualities of maps to produce an argument. An example of such an approach is the image on the front cover of our book, "The Political Equator" by Estudio Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman. The diagram is an argument synthesized in visual language about the nature and geographical location of political conflict around the globe, as well as a call to concentrate our efforts in those parts of the world that are so heavily affected by various forms of injustice. As with most maps, it is a polemical

argument that hints at the reasons for those injustices and the relation they have to their location on the planet; but it does not contain all the answers. As with traditional maps, this requires a critical engagement with the means of its production and the political context within which it engages. The map is made by academics and practitioners based in the USA. Our book begins with a chapter that explains this image and the methodology that it encapsulates for working with border conditions. Starting here in the USA, but with a contribution that unpacks the ways in which USA, UK, and other imperialist and colonial powers have been fundamental to producing a world of divisions, acknowledges that architecture's desire to always remain apolitical is simply not tenable. Cruz and Forman trace the consequences of this observation within the context of a number of highly segregated US cities. They discuss workshops with students from different schools across the country as a form of pedagogical experiment. Using the diagram as a starting point, students proposed strategies in response to local conflicts imagining how small-scale practices can start to corrode borders.

From local contexts in the USA, we move on to the geographical area of the Levant, one of the "Political Equator's" most congested territories, which gives us a zoomed in understanding of the kinds of arguments the diagram is alluding to. Architect and educator Panos Leventis examines the Green Lines of Nicosia, Jerusalem, and Beirut. He discusses examples of street art within these border lines as moments of opposition within the imposed conditions of division. Leventis sheds light on the possible strategies and intentions behind these spontaneously and unofficially occurring practices, studying the places and the buildings on which they appear. By doing so, he identifies similarities among the Green Lines despite the differing sociopolitical conditions that created them. He argues that these similarities are related to citizens' desire to discover the urban identity of their divided cities and to negotiate or undermine the status quo.

Understanding border geographies through their representation is an underlying concern across all chapters, and in the following two contributions they are explored through literature and art practice. Architect and educator Angeliki Sioli discusses three dystopian novels where the frightening conditions of borders provoke moments of resistance. She examines *We* (1921) by Yevgeny Zamyatin, *1984* (1949) by George Orwell, and *The Not Yet* (2014) by Moira Crone, unpacking in each case the way the story's protagonist engages with the architecture of the city to challenge the established political regime. Sioli discusses the role of walls as divisions and as agents of surveillance while extracting the small acts of resistance performed by citizens and connecting these fictional examples to contemporary border practices. This chapter is followed by a visual essay by artist and architect Mohamad Hafeda, who engages

with the city of Beirut through the stories of displacement of four people. He invites each of them to sew over existing maps in ways that defy and resist official borders by representing instead their own experiences of living in borders, crossing borders, and remembering borders. The new maps made through a practice of stitching that is the making and unmaking of borders document small acts of resistance against the divisions and political uncertainties that are part of everyday life in Beirut.

Thus, if we agree that the production of borders is related to their representation, then to be able to intervene in those forms of representation is an important act in questioning the fictions upon which the power of borders is based. Sioli's and Hafeda's contributions both show that while it is very difficult to deny the geopolitical realities that underpin contemporary borders, it is also crucial to realize that borders are much more than their instantiation within nation state discourse. In our contemporary world, it is often commercial interests that are producing new borders that overlay and intensify the effects of national borders. Commercial activities such as mining and oil drilling, land reclamation projects of the sort we see in the Gulf, or the large-scale destruction and construction of buildings for economic gain are all producing new types of borders through mobilizing new forms of representation. Satellite imagery and maps produced with remote sensing technologies are being used across geomatics, architecture, engineering, and surveying. These have transformed maps from two-dimensional representations of surfaces to a concern with three or even four-dimensional volumetric space.<sup>11</sup>

Critical scholarship too has turned toward volume as a way of analyzing territorial claims. Just as historical maps and atlases were implicated in the production of territory, so the demarcation of borders in three dimensions is claimed to produce novel sovereignties.<sup>12</sup> Some of these discussions have emerged in the literature around volumetric geographies where the political consequences of extruding the atlas have been explored in relation to sovereign claims by states and private entities. According to Frank Billé, historically in Europe there was a general agreement on the volumetric nature of land ownership, as can be discerned from the Latin maxim, *Cuius est solum, eius est usque ad coelum et ad inferos*, or "Whoever's is the soil, it is theirs all the way to Heaven and all the way to Hell."<sup>13</sup> In common law, this meant that ownership of a parcel of land automatically assumed that it included everything that was above and below it, but in practice without the advent of technologies that could reach and exploit far from the ground this was not a live concern. Advances in building technology have since opened up the subterranean realm for property, as can be seen in the construction of mega basements in wealthy areas of London, as well as making the skies open to property claims, as is the case with selling "air rights" in New York that allow adjacent buildings to

cantilever above a lower building.<sup>14</sup> Currently, sensing and mapping technologies are also transforming the deep sea and near-Earth orbit into economically lucrative locations. For example, claims to the seabed beyond each nation's Exclusive Economic Zone—an area of two hundred nautical miles from the coastline—are contested heavily by those involved in deep sea mining that would attempt to extract minerals from the seabed.

## SITUATED, MATERIAL, AND RELATIONAL BORDERS

While borders have never functioned as simple lines in the sand, the above discussion demonstrates how they have complexified with the advent of new technologies, as well as through the neoliberal entanglements of commercial interests with geopolitics. Scholarship since the mid-1990s has sought to decouple the border from territory understood in purely physical terms, and therefore from an understanding of it only as a technology of separation.<sup>15</sup> Instead, focus has shifted to the processes that produce and are productive of the border through the concept of bordering.<sup>16</sup> This dislocation of the border has also included an acknowledgement of its dispersed nature, with attention shifting to questions of surveillance, biometrics, and the use of data in policing the border.<sup>17</sup> Particularly, in the case of maritime borders this diffusion is used to manipulate legal jurisdictions to either evade responsibility, as has been shown in the case of the “Left-to-Die” boat in the Mediterranean, or to deliberately intercept boats in order to turn them back before they reach land and bestow rights upon their passengers.<sup>18</sup> While such scholarship foregrounds the legal, bureaucratic, and technologized underpinnings of borders, another term, “borderescapes,” complements this work by arguing for a way of thinking about the border through a phenomenological perspective that includes the representations and experiences of migrants at the border.<sup>19</sup> Bringing such an embodied and situated perspective to the study of borders is an important ethical concern. Gloria Anzaldúa famously described the US-Mexico border as “*una herida abierta* [an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds.”<sup>20</sup> In this sense, borders become important sites for understanding the highly unequal conditions that many have to endure in the name of national security. Anzaldúa also reminds us that some people always carry the border within them wherever they go. While this may refer to exclusionary and discriminatory practices of all sorts, we also see the repercussions of being a border carrier in the way the dispersed border suddenly appears for racialized people who are asked to prove their right to be somewhere through identity checks. Thus, addressing borders requires a simultaneous appreciation of their situated and embodied quality, as well as a comprehension of their dispersed nature.

In concrete terms, this might mean attending to the way borders are produced through the bureaucracies and technologies of spatial control, and how they reconfigure and reproduce space, while being aware that such spaces may not exist for all. The geographies of bordering are often invisible, felt only by those who are addressed by the exclusions they perform. This means we must always be attendant to the communities that coalesce around the border and the new spatial and social practices they induce. The middle part of the book addresses different forms of border crossing and their implications for architects, urbanists, and spatial practitioners. Two chapters are concerned with refugees making their way across hostile borders and how architecture as practice can respond to this urgent condition. Architects and educators Ursula Emery-McClure, Marisa Gomez Nordyke, and Paul Holmquist suggest that the speculative and propositional nature of architectural thinking can help us respond to the hardening of borders. Their discussion of design studios engaging with the area of Rio Grande/Bravo del Norte between the United States and Mexico shows how the landscape itself has been weaponized against border crossers. Studying the building typology of the “way-station” and the notion of “asylum,” the students in each studio designed architectural interventions that could facilitate the movement of people. They did this while respecting and working with the sociocultural differences and similarities between the countries on both sides of the border. The hostile environments of many border areas are made lethal by specific practices of border securitization, such as closing off routes so people are forced to take more dangerous paths. In this context, designs that help mitigate these dangers are acts of resistance since the landscape and the seascape, often understood as actors within the construction of borders, are ambivalent. That is not to say that they are mere backdrops; rather, as relational entities they can become entangled within projects of border security, as well as in the emancipatory projects described in this book.

Just as the environment and ecology bring a relational element to borders that is often overlooked, Nishat Awan’s contribution brings the often-overlooked temporal dimension of borders. In her essay, she suggests that the very understanding of architecture might have to be rethought through experiences of displacement and the way they affect our relation to time and temporality— aspects often expunged from a discipline so heavily focused on settlement and space. Awan examines mapping as a key practice and method for an expanded remit of architecture’s engagement with the complex nature of borders. She ends with an invitation to architects, planners, and policymakers to think actively about the processes of bordering and to propose ways of supporting those displaced by the current racialized regimes of securitization that are designed to keep certain people out, turning citizens into noncitizens and criminalizing the other. What displacement and the act of crossing itself might

mean for our understanding of architecture are also concerns that can be discerned in Sofia Dona's examples of imaginary passages across borders. Dona discusses her corpus of work that focuses on the cultural, political, social, and personal parameters surrounding movements through borders. Her work is based on discovering, creating, and recording passages through highly political spatial borderlines. She performs and examines crossings that bring together elements from the different cultures placed at the opposite sides of these passages. In this way, she attempts to create connections through cultural and practical similarities. Her contribution is an insider's look into her own artistic practice that brings to the surface surprising and unexpected connections but also unifying conditions that undermine borders.

Tying together all these engagements is an understanding of the border as a relational entity that is constituted by the techniques and apparatuses of bordering as much as it is fundamental to the development of such processes—what has been described as the topological nature of borders.<sup>21</sup> As Celia Lury has pointed out, topological thinking is important for the study of social and cultural phenomena, as it shows that

we no longer live in or experience “movement” as the transmission of fixed forms in space and time but rather movement—organized in terms of the topological invariants of ordering and continuity of transformation—composes the forms of social and cultural life themselves.<sup>22</sup>

This observation is fundamental to our understanding of the way borders and the displacements they enact operate, requiring forms of methodological engagement beyond the traditional mode of cause and effect. Instead, the intensive nature of border production requires the situated and embodied perspective highlighted above. As people located within the privileged spaces of the global North, we know that borders are already working to protect our privilege and therefore inevitably affect the ways in which we might apprehend them. Being aware of such entanglements is key to any ethical engagement with borders, as reflected in architect and educator Marc Schoonderbeek's contribution, in which he calls upon us to attend to the border as a space of simultaneity. “The Border Complex” has a highly polemical tone and can be read as a manifesto. Given the nature of the book's topic, the format of a manifesto—a strong manifesto against borders—addresses a heated conversation in an equally heated way. Schoonderbeek departs from four axioms on borders and challenges the prevailing misconception that the border coincides with a line that can be replaced or substituted. He goes beyond specific borders to examine the theoretical discourse that surrounds them and suggests ways to map them, confirming and resisting social networks, juridical practices, and



political ideologies. The topological nature of borders is also present in urban geographer Eugene McCann's account of how urban policies move across borders, and the way in which such movement allows us to get to know the workings of cities while simultaneously producing the city as we know it. Examining the regulations around supervised consumption sites for drugs, McCann shows how ideas cross borders and enable possibilities to resist the established norms of urban appropriation and understanding. Through an anthropological perspective on policy mobilization, he discusses the wide range of actors involved in this work that dissolves borders. He demonstrates how policy mobility transcends topographical distances and brings ideas from elsewhere into new places, challenging the existing status quo by disrupting entrenched systems of power.

Despite the topological nature of borders, they often emerge in our consciousness as physical and material entities. The last set of contributions to be discussed here shows how such physical instantiations can be read as privileged sites for unpacking the relational qualities of borders. Aleksandar Staničić examines the landmark building of the Gevgelija border crossing on the Greek-North Macedonian border. The building has experienced numerous transformations in program and use over the years, which the article presents in detail. Moreover, Staničić discusses how these transformations reflect significant changes in the politics and practices of border crossing and how architecture becomes a form of resistance to strict political dividing lines. Nicolas Serrano's essay examines the urban planning strategy of greenways as borders in the post-World War II urban development of southern US states. He argues that although greenways gained widespread popularity with the rise of an ecological consciousness in the late 1960s and '70s, this is not the only reason they were implemented so extensively. Rather, greenways were a derivative of the idea of spatial distance integral to suburban neighborhood design, functioning as buffers between areas. Serrano argues that greenways were central to the White spatial imagination of postwar urban form and its desire for segregation along color lines. Through this observation, he urges us to resist the dominant logics of urban and landscape planning that often hide their bordering agendas behind seemingly progressive policies. Lastly, in Aya Musmar's visual essay of the Za'atri refugee camp in Jordan, we are reminded again of the need to address borders from a situated and material perspective that also considers the entanglements of social, political, and environmental relations. Through discussing the fraught act of taking photographs in a refugee camp, Musmar shows the complexity of social and spatial borders at an intimate scale. She describes her own feelings of shame while photographing refugees and their temporary living conditions that do not afford much privacy. Musmar narrates encounters with officials who control access to the camp as well as with

refugees who live there, reflecting on how she negotiated these complex interactions, which reveal the role of borders in regulating behaviors as much as they serve to protect and shield by keeping out that which is unwanted.

## ARCHITECTURES OF RESISTANCE

*Architectures of Resistance* brings together architects, landscape architects, urban planners, human geographers, political scientists, and artists who consider borders as places of meaningful encounter between *others* (other cultures, other nations, other perspectives). Instead of approaching borders as harsh divisions or impenetrable lines, the contributors to this book look at spatial boundaries as places where social and political conditions are intensified through the overlapping of different relations and as places where new spatial practices arise. These practices are often new forms of social resistance connected to space. The book studies and analyzes these types of resistance from an architectural perspective, as they manifest amid landscapes of division. The book is built on a tripartite structure—In the Borders, Through the Borders, Beyond the Borders—working across different relations and scales of engagement with borders. Besides being an organizational principle, these three levels also indicate the fluidity of the border as an entity and reinforce the argument that borders are intensive in the way they operate. The essays presented in part 1, “*In the Borders*” study the space of the border from the perspective of the people who inhabit and interact with it. The essays in “*Through the Borders*” address spaces at both ends of the border through the experience of those who cross them. Part 3, “*Beyond the Borders*,” studies the wider geographical area surrounding borders through the people who map them and engage with them in policymaking. The book is interspersed with three photo essays, which touch on the conditions *in*, *through*, and *beyond* borders. These interventions provide a different way of addressing borders through artistic engagements and visual culture, bringing to the fore the affective nature of borders and the resistance to them enacted by ordinary people in everyday life. In one way or another, all the chapters in this book are an attempt to find the cracks in the hardened walls we have built everywhere. Whether it is the small, ordinary practices, the lines of flight found in artists’ responses, or the excavation of complex situations, these are all glimpses into other possible worlds.

## NOTES

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9. See for example the work of Suzanne Hall: Suzanne Hall, Julia King, and Robin Finaly, “Envisioning Migration: Drawing the Infrastructure of Stapleton Road, Bristol,” *New Diversities* 17, no. 2 (2015), [http://newdiversities.mmg.mpg.de/?page\\_id=2186](http://newdiversities.mmg.mpg.de/?page_id=2186); Suzanne M. Hall, *The Migrant’s Paradox: Street Livelihoods and Marginal Citizenship in Britain* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021).

10. Tim Ingold, *Redrawing Anthropology: Materials, Movements, Lines* (London: Ashgate, 2011), 2.
11. The fourth dimension in such practices emerges from the information attached to three-dimensional models that can also be used to examine and interrogate the model. A good example of this from professional architectural practice is the Building Information Model, more commonly referred to through its acronym, BIM. For more on this argument see: Nishat Awan, "The Atlas Otherwise: Navigating across [Im]Permeable Surfaces and Shaky Grounds," in *The Routledge Handbook of Architecture, Urban Space and Politics: Ecology, Social Participation and Marginalities*, ed. Nikolina Bobic and Farzaneh Haghighi (London; New York: Routledge, 2024), 499–513.
12. Franck Billé, ed., *Voluminous States: Sovereignty, Materiality, and the Territorial Imagination* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2020).
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19. Chiara Brambilla, "Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept," *Geopolitics* 20, no. 1 (2015): 14–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2014.884561>; Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr, eds., *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
20. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters, 1987), 3.
21. Topology is a branch of mathematics concerned with "the study of geometrical properties and spatial relations unaffected by the continuous change of shape or size of figures." See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "topology," <http://www.oed.com/>; Nishat Awan, "Introduction to Border Topologies," *GeoHumanities* 2, no. 2 (2016): 279–83.
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**PART 1**

# **IN THE BORDERS**



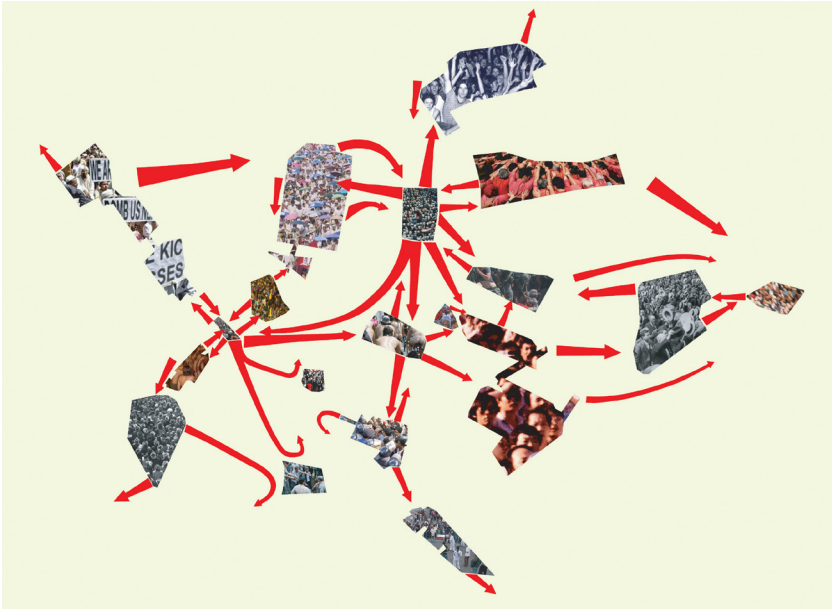
# THE POLITICAL EQUATOR

*Fonna Forman and Teddy Cruz*

The human rights of migrant populations are in jeopardy across the globe right now, and too many cities are closing their doors to them. Our world is veering dangerously away from the norms of human dignity. The nativist mentality that once characterized the political fringe has gone mainstream, legitimizing an open racism not seen since the middle of the twentieth century. We are witnessing an urge to build walls that are higher and stronger, to resist “infestation,” and to protect national resources from an endless flow of “parasites.”<sup>1</sup> Populist language that portrays migrant populations as less-than-human resonates with a long history of political violence against ethnic and religious groups, enflamed and socially legitimated by strategies of dehumanization that help to deepen social cleavages and legitimate group violence.

We live and work at the border between San Diego, California, and Tijuana, Mexico—the main site of arrival for people seeking asylum from Central American violence, poverty, and the accelerating impacts of climate change. The continental border between the United States and Mexico is another nineteenth-century story of annexation and partition, with a long legacy of dehumanization, violence, and radical disparity. Throughout most of the twentieth century, the border manifested as a line in the sand, with obelisks and later low chain-link and corrugated metal fences indicating where one country began and the other ended. At this time, the border performed as demarcation, and people in border towns moved back and forth quite freely to work or to visit family and friends. But in the last decades, the border has grown thick with massive military force and surveillance infrastructure. Now we have concrete pylon walls, crowned with electrified coils and panoptic night-vision cameras. Today’s border performs more like a partition than a boundary because its purpose is less to demarcate than to separate, and to willfully obstruct the flows that have always defined life in this region.

For us, this zone has been an amazing laboratory for political, urban, and architectural creativity.<sup>2</sup> Our research-based practice, Estudio Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman, is an unconventional partnership between a political theorist and an architect. Merging research, practice, and pedagogy, our studio is based inside a public research university, the University of California, San Diego. We have committed over many years to mobilizing the resources, research capacity, and social capital of this public institution to partner with border communities to address social, environmental, and urban challenges



**Figure 1-1** Estudio Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman, *Debor(er) I*, 2012.

and opportunities. We have designed a system that connects our design lab on the campus with conditions in the field and have built a network of sanctuary spaces on both sides of the wall called the UCSD Community Stations.<sup>3</sup> Here, universities and communities meet to share knowledges and resources, and to collaborate on research, dialogue, cultural and educational activities, advocacy, and urban interventions, including green infrastructure and migrant housing—including what has become the largest refugee sanctuary in the US-Mexico border region, housing eighteen hundred people.<sup>4</sup>

Several core commitments, what we call building blocks, ground our research-based practice.<sup>5</sup> We would like to highlight a few of them here.

First, our work localizes the global: we have always resisted the idea that global justice is something that happens “out there” in the world somewhere. Living and working where we do, we don’t need to go far away to engage with territorial conflict, migration, poverty, and climate injustice. We are minutes away from an international border in crisis, and this enables an amazing proximity between studio and field, between theory and practice—what we think of as a “critical proximity.”

Second, of course, going local in San Diego-Tijuana means recognizing ourselves as a region: we are a site of interdependence and cooperation. Despite the wall and the ugly political rhetoric designed to divide us, we are a

binational ecology of flows and circulation, and our future is intertwined. Air, water, waste, health, culture, money, hope, love, justice—these things don't stop at walls. Borders zones are unrelentingly porous things, and these flows shape the transgressive, hybrid identities and everyday practices in this part of the world. Our work reimagines the US-Mexico border as a tissue of social and spatial ecologies, a mesh of systems rather than a hard jurisdictional line. Rather than two cities divided by a wall, San Diego and Tijuana constitute a binational region, a complex web of flows and interdependencies.

Third, we are committed to *decolonizing knowledge*: we are keenly attuned to power dynamics when universities arrive in communities and are critical of both extractive research methods and humanitarian problem-solving missions. We don't do applied research, and we don't do charity. Academic culture is filled with vertical assumptions that *we* know more, that *we* are trained to solve the world's problems in our studios and labs (if only *they* would listen to us). We are committed to horizontal practices of *co-production*, engaging communities as partners with knowledges and agency. Everyone contributes, everyone learns, and we do things together in the border region, both big and small, that no one could do alone.

Institutions with power too often take for granted the resources communities invest when they work with us—time, space, social capital, labor, and knowledge. As a matter of epistemic justice and labor equity, these contributions need to be validated and compensated. So we are building trust-bridges, long-term partnerships between our university and border communities. We are there for the long haul.

Fourth, relatedly, we are committed to learning from the *bottom-up*: we condemn the economic forces that marginalize people into slums, but we are continually inspired by ingenious resilience of communities confronting marginalization, scarcity, and danger—their self-built logics, the vibrancy of their informal market dynamics, and their solidarity. Too often sites of scarcity are sidelined by formal planners and policymakers as ugly, criminal, neglected, to be avoided, to be cleaned up, to be cleared. But our orientation is very different. We observe intensely active, creative urban agents who challenge the dominant paradigms of urban growth that exclude them, who demonstrate other, more inclusive, collective, and sustainable ways of inhabiting the city.

Fifth, resilient as they are, however, these communities need public support to fortify and scale these capacities: we believe university researchers and designers can help channel this bottom-up knowledge upward to help top-down agencies produce responsive policy and allocate scarce resources more intelligently. In this sense, our UCSD Community Stations are a model of urban co-development between public universities, municipalities, and community-based organizations to build spaces of dignity and sanctuary in the city's periphery. At bottom, we decided long ago that tackling urban inequality cannot

wait for the client and the brief. We *co-produce* the brief with communities, understood not as clients but as co-developers. And together we summon the bottom-up energies and top-down institutions that are needed to realize a project in the absence of formal public support. All our projects leverage the social capital, financial resources, and programmatic capacity of our public university. In essence, we have conceptualized a new financial pro forma for community-owned housing, co-developed between university and community.

Sixth, ultimately, we are engaged in a cultural project of building a cross-border *citizenship culture* in the San Diego-Tijuana border region. We look to build a sense of belonging that is defined not by the nation-state or the documents in one's pocket but by the shared interests and aspirations among people who inhabit a violently disrupted civic space. We reject ideas of citizenship that fragment and divide us rather than unite us. We seek to inspire more inclusive imaginaries of belonging and coexistence in this contested territory. Border regions are a natural laboratory for reimagining citizenship along these lines.

## 01. THE POLITICAL EQUATOR: VISUALIZING CONFLICT

We are often invited by architecture and design schools, cultural institutions, and municipalities across the world to lead studios, workshops and masterclasses that introduce students and participants to the tools of our research-based practice embedded at the San Diego-Tijuana border. The sites of critical investigation and proposition of these convenings have been wildly diverse, including Kyiv, Baton Rouge, Barcelona, Gaza / Palestine, Miami, Mexico City, Medellín, San José, Northwest Arkansas, County Cork, New York City, and Brussels, among many others. Occasionally we are asked to immerse participants in our own local border conditions at San Diego-Tijuana. Given accelerating geopolitical tensions here in recent years, there has been a significant uptick in interest in the US-Mexico border within architecture and design schools. This trend is understandable and admirable, but for ethical and epistemic reasons we have become increasingly wary of “edutourism” and only rarely lead outside groups into the field here.<sup>6</sup> These activities are typically fleeting, often extractive in their aspirations and methods, and are ultimately a blessing of unmanageable proportions for stakeholders in the region who are preoccupied with local crises. We typically work with our own students at home; and when we are invited elsewhere, we carry our questions, insights, and strategies with us into new urban or border conditions, to inspire students to think in fresh ways about border dynamics in their particular contexts and sites of interest. Wherever a studio or workshop happens to be, local conditions become an entry point into investigating border dynamics.

Every visit begins with a critical pause: What are the social, political, economic, and cultural forces embedded in a site? A guiding assumption in every studio or workshop we lead is that global crisis always “hits the ground” and is experienced by people in local places, at various scales of impact. We illustrate this by introducing the territorial scaffold of our practice, a nested spatial ecology that descends in geographic scale, from the global border to the border neighborhood. We see our local site at San Diego-Tijuana as a sort of microcosm of all the conflicts and deprivations that globalization has inflicted on the world’s most vulnerable people: poverty, climate change, forced migration, human trafficking, gender violence, explosive urbanization, privatization. Every local site thus becomes a microcosm of global dynamics; and our challenge is to identify how these forces manifest in particular ways.

We stimulate thinking about these global-local convergences with a visualization device called the *Political Equator* diagram. Tracing an imaginary line across the world, the Political Equator presents a corridor of global conflict between the 30–38 parallels north. Along its trajectory lie some of the world’s most contested thresholds, including the US-Mexico border at San Diego/Tijuana, the most-trafficked international border checkpoint in the world and the main migration route from Latin America into the United States; the Strait of Gibraltar and the Mediterranean, the main route from North Africa into “Fortress Europe,” thickened in recent years to contain flows from Lampedusa into Italy and from Lesbos into Greece; the Israeli-Palestinian border that

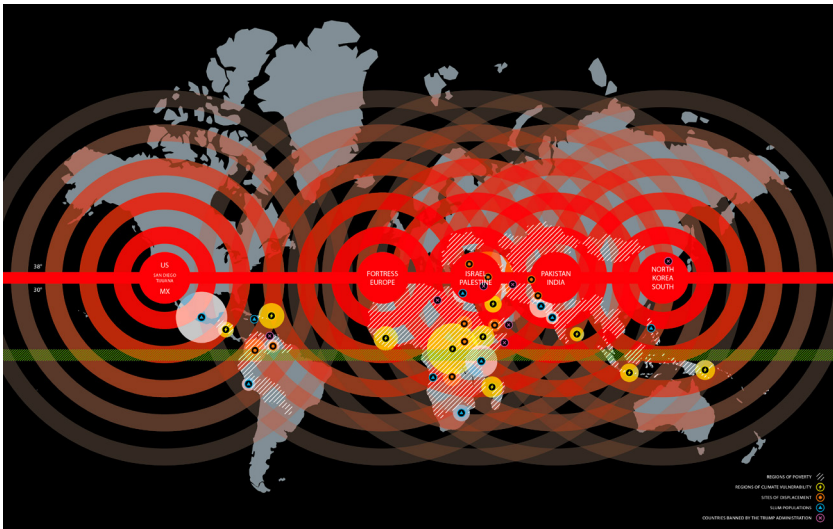


Figure 1-2 Estudio Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman, The Political Equator, 2015.

divides the Middle East, emblemized by Israel's fifty-year military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza; India/Kashmir, a site of intense and enduring territorial conflict between Pakistan and India since the British partition of India in 1947; the border between North and South Korea, which represents decades of intractable Cold War conflict; and the South China Sea, including Hong Kong and Taiwan, characterized by China's accelerating militarization. Visualizing the Political Equator alongside the Climatic Equator reveals the convergence of environmental and social injustice across the world. Communities most impacted by political conflict and border closure often bear the brunt of other stressors and threat multipliers, like accelerating climate change. The ribbon in between these two equators, give or take a few degrees, contains our planet's most populous slums, its sites of greatest natural resource extraction and export, and its zones of greatest political instability, climate vulnerability, and human displacement. And when these parallel equators are applied to the Pierce Quincuncial projection from above, melting Arctic ice caps detonate sea-level rise, dramatic coastal vulnerability, and human displacement. The collision of nationalism with border-building, environmental catastrophe, and forced migration is the global injustice trifecta of our time.

But these collisions always happen somewhere, in some local place. They are magnified and spatialized, transforming the territory, the city, and the neighborhood into local sites of global contestation. Based on the insight that the global is local we encourage students to think about transgressive flows and about the porosity and penetrability of urban border conditions everywhere. For example, in Fonna Forman's workshop "Political Equator: Baton Rouge" at the Louisiana State University School of Architecture and Design in winter 2019, students were invited to consider urban conflict as a creative tool to re-think strategies of architectural intervention in a set of urban border conditions across the city of Baton Rouge. In "Political Equator: Arkansas" at the Fay School of Architecture at the University of Arkansas in spring 2021, students were asked to identify borders and socioeconomic thresholds across the state and to address the question of how the School of Architecture and Design, in relatively privileged northwest Arkansas, could become a more proactive agent of social and environmental equity across the state.<sup>7</sup>

## 02. CONFLICT AS A CREATIVE TOOL

We believe architecture must attend to the social, political, and economic forces that are rapidly reshaping the urban field. Mass migration driven by political and environmental conflict, together with unprecedented urbanization across the world, are generating new conditions that call into question



traditional methods of urban and architectural research and intervention. By localizing the global in a specific place, we engage the specificity of spatial, territorial, and environmental conditions across critical thresholds, from global border zones to specific local urban and regional zones of conflict, where the current politics and economics of exclusion and control, labor and immigration, and the conflicts between density and sprawl, metropolitan and rural dynamics are physicalized.

We proceed from a basic idea that urban conflict is a creative tool and that by identifying it, and visualizing it, we can open zones of opportunity for urban and architectural intervention. Or put another way, intervening in the city must begin with visualizing the conflicts and borders embedded in a site. Very often these conflicts are invisible, deeply complex, and pathological. They often remain unarticulated, silent, remnants of history, pain, or shame that remain unspoken. Histories of racist redlining practices continue to carve cities up into enclaves of wealth and poverty; vivid experiences of police brutality, infrastructural defunding, and educational and health disparities overshadow official urban narratives of diversity and equality. Borders penetrate the mind, reinforcing perceptions of superiority in some, unwantedness and radical otherness in others. Visualizing conflict, naming it, narrativizing it also produces a new language for talking about it and ultimately designing proposals as architects and urbanists to respond to it, to confront it, transgress it, intervene into it, and even resolve it.

The workshop typically balances lectures, readings, and discussions with design assignments that introduce students to the theory and practice of *Conflict Diagrams*. A Conflict Diagram is a visual narrative composed of text, images, and graphic elements that (1) presents a relational cartography of the multiple actors, vectors of exclusionary power, and conditions of a contested site, and (2) identifies opportunities, creative possibilities, and fertile zones for investigation and strategic urban / architectural / programmatic intervention. A Conflict Diagram is an anticipatory framework that sets up the terms for intervention. It provokes critique and revision of our conventional architectural methods for intervention and illuminates the detours we must take to engage domains conventionally peripheral to design, but essential for social transformation. The Conflict Diagram is a scaffold for spatial and political action, a machine of provocations and controversies, a generative tool for propositions that are rooted in the contingencies and opportunities of a site.

The Conflict Diagram yields particular projects, initiatives, and processes, with particular spatial, programmatic compositions and stakeholders. Typical spatial typologies we have identified include friction zones where immigrants concentrate; enclaves of wealth and gentrification and zones of poverty and underrepresentation; large-scale infrastructure and small-scale communities;

formal and informal densities and economies; and internal borders within the urban or rural fabric that are produced either by physical discrepancies and odd juxtapositions or by socioeconomic inequalities. Students are encouraged to research and analyze a variety of urban conflicts between top-down forces of urban planning and bottom-up social and ecological dynamics, such as: the conflict between formal development and the natural topography; the conflict between urban sprawl and social practices; the conflict between military and environmental zones; the conflict between formal and informal urbanization—and in our specific border zone, the conflict between two cities divided by a wall; the conflict between surveillance infrastructure and the Tijuana River that traverses the territory; the conflicts between multinational factories and emergency housing; and many others.<sup>8</sup>

After students develop these research-based urban narratives, they go on to develop their proposals to intervene in a specific site. Our greatest aspiration is to demonstrate that architects can design more than buildings and things; that they can also design social, economic, and political processes. For this reason, we always provoke students to reflect on mechanisms for inclusion as they are designing physical systems. In our field internships programs in the UCSD Center on Global Justice, we challenge our students to design solutions to the shared environmental challenges faced by the border cities of San Diego and Tijuana. While students are tasked with designing hybrid infrastructural / landscape / architectural interventions in the informal Tijuana settlements adjacent to the border wall, we also provoke them to consider the collaborative programmatic activity necessary to transform these sites into inclusive public spaces and civic / pedagogic nodes. In other words, we always ask students to design physical systems in tandem with social protocols: the programs and economies, the cross-sector collaborations and forms of governance and management that can make those spaces sustainable.

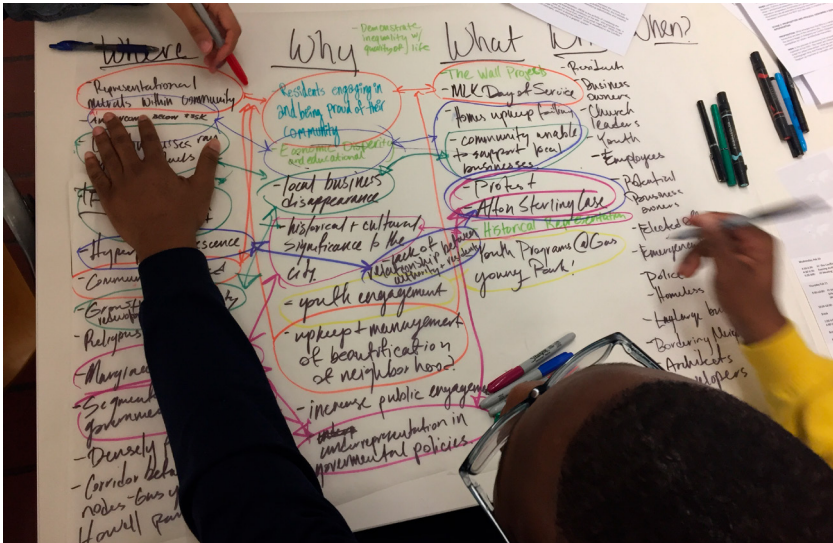
To model what we mean by designing physical space and protocols simultaneously, our student interns are embedded in the UCSD Community Stations, a network of field stations located in marginalized neighborhoods on both sides of the wall, where research, teaching, and civic advocacy are conducted collaboratively between university researchers, designers, and community-based nonprofit partners.<sup>9</sup> The Community Stations demonstrate a fundamental commitment of our practice: to reimagine public space as a space of knowledge production that increases a community's capacity for political and environmental action.

### 03. THE CONFLICT DIAGRAM: 5WS + HOW

As architects we typically respond to a client and a brief, and design within a given site and budget. The Conflict Diagram provokes an alternative approach, since it is a tool intended to design the client and the brief—an urban script for engaging the stakeholders and institutions, the political, social, and economic processes that are necessary to spatialize justice; to summon all the voices and materials necessary to propose more equitable, sustainable, and civically relevant spatial interventions; and to co-produce the city with others. Designing a Conflict Diagram proceeds in two stages.

#### STEP 1: A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION OF CONFLICTS: THE 5WS

Developing a Conflict Diagram begins with asking critical questions about a proposed site of intervention, and why we might wish to intervene there, as architects committed to equity and social justice. Students typically work in teams and orient their work together around a shared case study. The activity is not just about gathering data or images but about subjecting that data to a set of critical questions, which we refer to as the 5Ws: Where, Why, What, Who, and When.



**Figure 1-3** Estudio Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman, Political Equator: Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University School of Architecture, 2019. Students developed 5W tables before proposing architectural interventions to penetrate urban borders in the city of Baton Rouge.

**WHERE** refers to the space, site, zone, and geography of investigation and potential intervention. As much as this has to do with physical space, and all the ways we learn as architects to represent place, it also has to do with non-place. In other words, **WHERE** must engage the geography, but also, more critically, the power dynamics inscribed in that geography: the varied allegorical and metaphorical meanings held within a place for different actors, the institutional entanglements, the regulatory frameworks, the jurisdictional designations, the economic interests, the cultural meanings, and networks of control. What are the visible and invisible conditions that constitute the location—the conceptual, material, infrastructural, environmental, institutional, political, jurisdictional, regulatory, economic, historical, cultural, and social forces that define the territory and the objects it contains?

**WHY** pertains to the critical issues, the questions, challenges, conflicts, controversies, provocations, violations, injustices, and indignities that arise in a site, sometimes visibly, sometimes invisibly. **WHY** motivates the urban / architectural proposition. **WHY** will you propose what you propose? And **WHY** should others support it? **WHY** refers to the issues of concern, the urgencies—political, ethical, social, cultural, economic, environmental—embedded in your case, the fire behind your investigation and your architectural proposition. **WHY** do you care? **WHY** should others care?

**WHAT** refers to the impacts of the **WHY**, on real people, on communities, on the environment, on the public. If the **WHY** is racial injustice, for example, the **WHAT** refers to the impacts of this: perhaps higher rates of disease and mortality, poorly funded schools, disproportionate climate change impacts, neighborhood divestment, decay, abandoned buildings, homelessness, gentrification, perhaps despair, loss of hope. The **WHAT** is the evidence of the **WHY**. The **WHAT** is the causal output or detritus of the **WHY** that animates both interest in the site and the possible urban / architectural interventions proposed. The **WHAT** can be about visible material things, objects, but also about invisible ephemeral, emotional, or aspirational things.

**WHO** pertains to the people and groups invested in the site, who are impacted by its evolution over time, who have capacities to alter the conditions, and who are the potential audiences of your proposal. **WHO** is harmed and **WHO** benefits from the status quo, and from a change in the status quo? **WHO** must be negotiated with, exchanged with, persuaded, infiltrated? **WHO** are the institutions one must “deal” with, learn from, utilize, disrupt, encroach into? **WHO** must be engaged in any potential proposition? There may be people / institutions / stakeholders that don’t yet exist. Sometimes **WHO** needs to be

imagined, narrativized, designed, created, incubated, choreographed, manipulated. As architects and urbanists, we are part of the **WHO**: How can we identify, understand, translate, communicate, narrativize, visualize, represent the impacts, if we are newcomers to the contested site? **WHO** is best situated to represent the **WHAT**? **WHO** narrates the city?

**WHEN** pertains to the temporal dimensions of the condition—the histories, sequences, durations, rhythms, processes, that constitute the condition and must drive any potential urban / architectural proposition. Slow, “laggy,” early, late, rapid, urgent, regressive, progressive, incremental, and gradual, anticipatory, innovative, reactionary, revolutionary are all examples of temporal descriptors. The temporalization of space is necessary to understand the **WHY** and ultimately to manifest your vision.

## STEP 2: PROPOSITION AND PROCESS: DESIGNING A SCRIPT FOR URBAN INTERVENTION

The second stage reorganizes and visualizes the content of the 5Ws into a relational cartography that illuminates opportunities and strategies for intervention. What emerges from the 5Ws is a narrative that exposes the vectors, forces, and borders that define a contested site, and where urban and architectural intervention can be most productive. These conflicts and convergences become the materials for the second stage of designing the Conflict Diagram: identifying opportunities and creative possibilities for urban and architectural intervention.

Conflict diagrams point to the **HOW**? **HOW** is the process of advancing your proposition. **HOW** is the activity of mobilizing the materials of the 5Ws—the varied and intersecting conditions of the site—into a process map, a script for urban intervention. **HOW** do we move from what is to what might be? **HOW** do we choreograph time and things to perform a desired effect? **HOW** is visualized as machine of concepts, animated by a graphic system.

At the end of every studio or workshop, whether it takes place over a week-end or over a semester, each team produces a Conflict Diagram, which is pinned up and presented in a group exhibit.

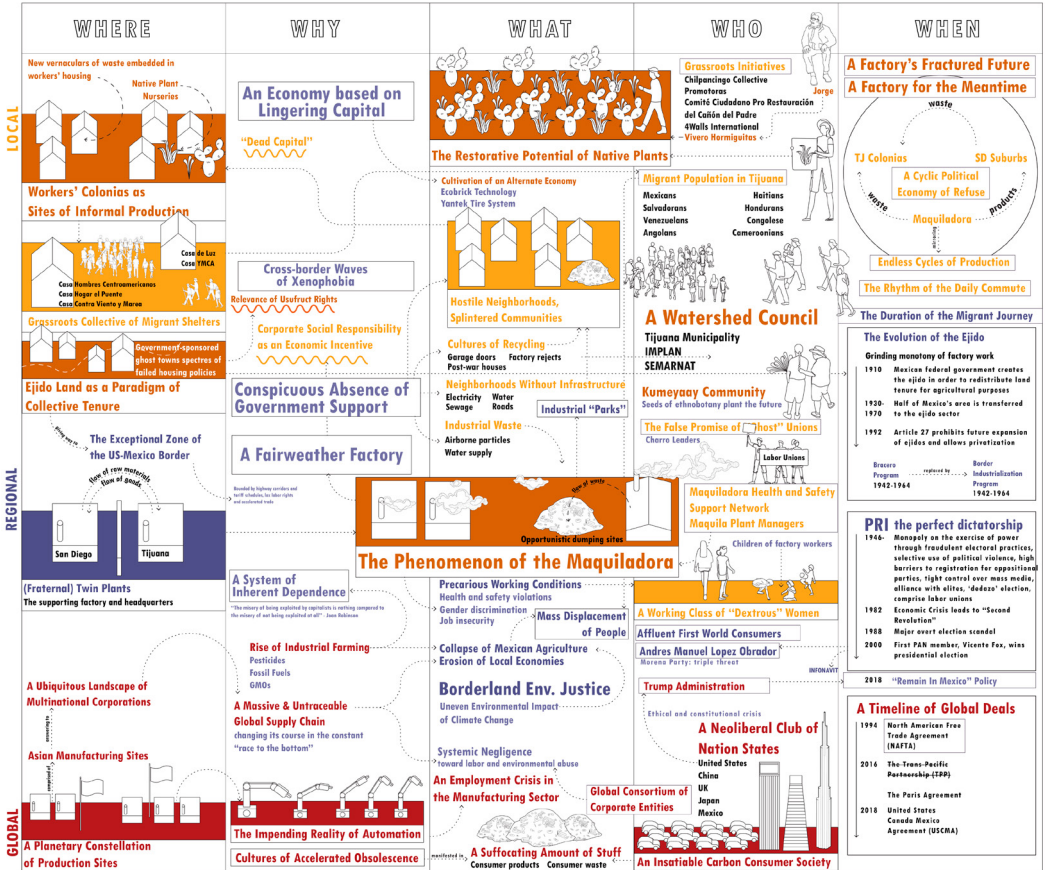


Figure 1-4 Estudio Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman, Cross-Border Commons: A Geography of Interdependence, Yale University School of Architecture, 2019. A 5W table that investigates the social and environmental impacts of neoliberal globalization and multinational corporations.

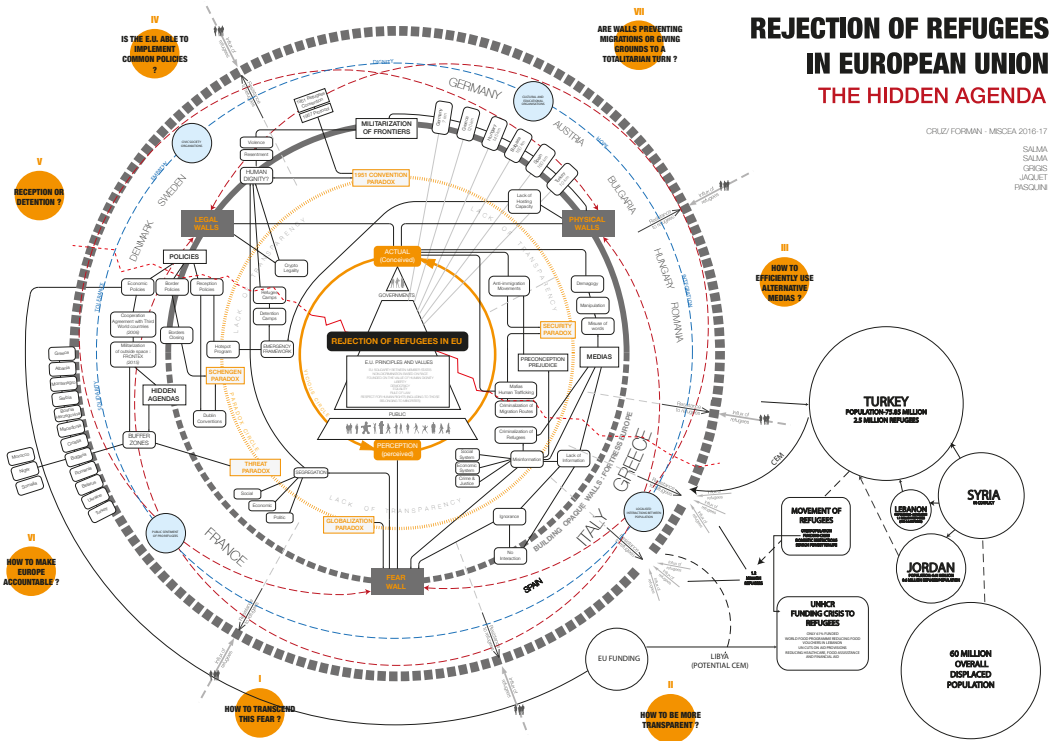


Figure 1-5 Estudio Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman, Mapping Conflict, at Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Barcelona, Master's Program in Sustainable Emergency Architecture, 2016. A Conflict Diagram exploring the refugee crisis in 2016, and proposing new strategies.



## 04. TOWARD A GROUNDED AND ENGAGED ARCHITECTURE

Seeing conflict as a creative tool challenges architectural conventions of designing buildings as isolated objects. We question the pursuit of aesthetics for aesthetics' sake. We are not saying beautiful buildings don't matter. Any city benefits from them and our commitment to beauty is something that architects, cultural producers, and even politicians must embrace. But when the pursuit of beauty comes at the expense of collective well-being, then it can quickly become a veneer that camouflages urban injustice. We want to inspire students to think differently about what architects and designers can do. We believe they can engage:

1. The normative—the beliefs, biases, meanings, cultural patterns, habits, urban pathologies, and social practices of the city. The way people see the city, and experience collective life in the city, has a huge impact on how they envision what can be. Designing strategies to reinvest people in civic life, to value public goods and solidarity, to overcome despair in many cases, is essential to advancing spatial justice in our cities.
2. The institutional—the protocols of institutions of power that engage sites of scarcity and marginalization—including municipalities, universities and schools, foundations and philanthropies, and cultural institutions like museums and libraries. Different institutions—academic, political, civic, and cultural—have different pathologies, dysfunctions, or their own blindness. Whatever sort of institution one inhabits, we need to be critical of our own protocols, our own certainties and conservatisms, and the way we conceive our relations with sites of scarcity.
3. The spatial—the conventional domain of architectural practice. We find ourselves at a critical moment in history defined by unprecedented ecological crises that call into question traditional methods of architectural intervention in the city. Our position has always been that the design fields are uniquely positioned to advocate for more experiential dimensions of space, based less on visual quality and more on social vibrancy, encounter, and coexistence with others—conditions that embrace contradiction and risk and emerge from inclusiveness.<sup>10</sup>

For us architecture is not only about designing beautiful buildings. We are not saying beautiful buildings don't matter. Any city benefits from them and our commitment to beauty is something that architects, cultural producers and even politicians must embrace. But when the pursuit of beauty comes at the expense of collective well-being then it becomes a veneer. We believe architecture must attend to the social, political, and economic forces that shape the urban field. Designing urban justice demands a more expansive view of what



architects and designers can do. The city has become increasingly defined by urbanisms of beautification and lifestyle, where architecture wraps and camouflages exclusionary urban development with hyper aesthetics and forms, fake agoras and parametric dreamlands that displace communities for the sake of economic progress and cater to autocracies, corporations, or the 1 percent.

Our position has always been that the design fields are uniquely positioned to advocate for more experiential dimensions of beauty, based less on visual quality and more on social vibrancy, on encountering and coexisting with others. In our workshops we encourage participants to engage actors other than private developers to co-produce the city; to imagine other forms of ownership and other financial arrangements that advance social and economic inclusion. At bottom, we need to reclaim the public. The unprecedented urban inequality of the last three decades is all the evidence we need: the “free market” will never assure social and economic justice.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## NOTES

1. Ben Zimmer, “What Trump Talks about When He Talks about Infestations: The Frightening Political History of the Word ‘Infest,’” *Politico*, July 29, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/07/29/trump-baltimore-infest-tweet-cummings-racist-227485/>.
2. See Fonna Forman, “Unwalling Citizenship,” in *Democratic Multiplicity: Perceiving, Enacting and Integrating Democratic Diversity*, ed. James Tully et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 127–51; Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman, *Socializing Architecture: Top-Down / Bottom-Up* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2023).
3. Cruz and Forman, *Socializing Architecture*, especially pt. 2, chap. 6.
4. See Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman, “Citizenship Culture and the Transnational Environmental Commons,” in *Nature’s Nation: American Art and Environment*, ed. Karl Kusserow and Alan Braddock (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 416–27. “largest refugee sanctuary”: Alastair Gordon, “A Sanctuary Takes Shape, Framed around Migrants,” *New York Times*, September 2, 2021. See also Jackie Bryant, “PHOTOS: The Growing, UCSD-Backed Migrant Community in Tijuana,” *San Diego Magazine*, January 18, 2023, <https://sandiegomagazine.com/features/photos-the-growing-ucsd-backed-migrant-community-in-tijuana/>.
5. For a full account of the building blocks that ground our research-based practice, see Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman, *Spatializing Justice: Building Blocks* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2022).
6. For further discussion see Forman, “Unwalling Citizenship.”
7. In spring 2021 we were the John G. Williams distinguished visiting professors at the Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design, University of Arkansas.
8. For discussion of urban conflicts see Cruz and Forman, *Socializing Architecture*, especially pt. 1, chap. 6.
9. For discussion of the UCSD Community Stations see *ibid.*
10. For more see Cruz and Forman, *Spatializing Justice*.

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# RECOLORING THE GREEN LINES

## Street Art and Urban Identity in the Levant, 2000-2020

*Panos Leventis*

The cities of Beirut, Jerusalem, and Nicosia have invariably been experienced as fragmented urban landscapes of conflict. From the colonial-era creation of the states of Lebanon (1943), Israel (1948), and Cyprus (1960) through constitutional, political, religious, and military crises, multiple opposing sectors of each city have uncomfortably existed side by side, often engaging in open warfare. Concurrently, other voices, via street art and urban creativity initiatives such as performances, festivals, etc., have engaged in actions that weave alternative and often unifying urban and cultural narratives. I propose that these initiatives are important attempts at combining disparate sociourban identities and at interjecting in the processes of history and conflict remembrance and erasure. They are contemporary examples in a long line of textual and visual narrative initiatives created in urban spaces with similar intent.<sup>1</sup> I will discuss and interpret examples of street art found in or adjacent to the three cities' "Green Lines," zones that separate ethnicities or conflicting factions by dividing and further fragmenting urban space. I will highlight how the architectural context plays a complementary but significant role in the communication of messages that the street art case studies convey to audiences.

I start by briefly introducing the historical contexts of the three Green Lines. Despite their uniqueness, my contribution illustrates that there are similarities in the way urban creativity initiatives have engaged these spaces of conflict. On the one hand, it becomes clear that across these diverse contexts there exist persistent policies of erasure of the Green Lines. These policies, and their urban manifestations, what I term "mural colonialism," are imposed via top-down initiatives by national or international institutions. Mural colonialism recolors the Green Lines in rainbow hues and cloaks them in a revisionist narrative of "just as before, they all lived happily ever after," veiling the gray reality of a late capitalist, neoliberal city.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, it also becomes evident that bottom-up approaches use graffiti and street art in or near the Green Lines as acts not of erasure or of appeasement but of resistance and remembrance. This is a remembrance of both pre-conflict and conflict periods, an attempt to forge new urban narratives that strive to overcome the effects of division. Acting in opposition to the initiatives of erasure, these voices

recolored the Green Lines with vibrant and varied truths witnessed and experienced by diverse artists and urban populations.

## 01. PARALLEL HI/STORIES: MANIFESTING THE GREEN LINES

Apparently, Jerusalem was the first city where a “Green Line” was drawn on a map during the UN-proposed division of the city in the late 1940s. The term reappeared in Nicosia during the ’50s and ’60s, and in Beirut during the ’70s and ’80s.<sup>3</sup> Experientially, these zones manifested not as theoretical boundaries on maps but as lived, feared, and harrowing territories. They remain as physical wounds in the urban fabric, and as psychological scars for citizens who more commonly use terms like “Seam” in Jerusalem, “Dead Zone” in Nicosia, and “Points of Contact” in Beirut.

*Beirut* The Lebanese state was created in 1943, with a French-mandated constitution dictating that power be shared between eighteen different ethno-religious groups. This seemingly appeased opposing factions but in hindsight also facilitated prolonged conflict. After the outbreak of civil war in 1975, a north-south linear corridor emerged, separating Muslim West Beirut from Christian East Beirut. Continuous fighting widened this corridor until it enveloped all of downtown.<sup>4</sup> From there, this “Green Line” narrowed as it continued south along Damascus Road, through the Sodeco quarter and the Hippodrome, and extended further into the southern ridges and surrounding topography. In 1994, the downtown part of the Green Line was taken over by Solidère, a private development company created by government decree to reconstruct the center of Beirut.<sup>5</sup> The 2005 assassination of former prime minister Rafic Hariri, who had dictated Solidère’s founding, and the Israeli invasion of 2006 slowed the project. Perpetual government crises and the October 2019 uprising renewed a questioning of Solidère’s project, which was by then largely realized with destructive effects for the Green Line’s urban and cultural fabric.

*Jerusalem* Following the 1948 creation of Israel by the major colonial powers via the UN, the armistice agreement line cut the city of Jerusalem in two. West Jerusalem was to be part of the Israeli state, and East Jerusalem, which included the Old City as an international heritage zone, was part of Palestinian lands to be administered by Jordan. During and after the 1967 Six Day War, Israel occupied and unified Jerusalem under its own civic and military control by effectively detaching the eastern half of the city from what it unilaterally considered the remaining Palestinian territories. The Green Line thus remained as a border only in theory. Following the Oslo Accords of 1993–1995, seen by some as a treaty

that could allow positive change, nongovernmental organizations proposed that the Green Line could serve as a space of meeting, creativity, and reconciliation. As that period of hope effectively ended in 2006 with renewed militarization and polarization, the Green Line has since been largely erased, becoming increasingly populated by planned settlements and Israeli infrastructure.

*Nicosia*— In 1958, two years before the creation of the Cypriot state with a British-mandated constitution, British colonial rulers established two separate municipal authorities in Nicosia. This was one of numerous policies that accentuated divisions between the island's two main ethnic-religious groups, the majority Greek-speaking Christians and the minority Turkish-speaking Muslims. By 1963, when extremism on both sides led to the arrival of a UN peacekeeping mission, Nicosia was already divided into a Greek south and a Turkish north. The Green Line traversed the middle of the old city, along the commercial artery of Hermes Street. In 1974, when Turkey invaded and ethnically cleansed the island's north of Greek Cypriots, Nicosia's Green Line solidified and was extended to divide the whole island, with the blessings of Great Britain and the UN. The first contact between the city's two halves came thirty years later, when in 2003 the Turkish military allowed the gradual opening of several checkpoints along the Green Line, two of which are in Nicosia. The Green Line has since been perforated and made more porous, but the expanse and ruins of its urban territory remain uninhabitable and unapproachable.

## 02. ERASING THE PAST BY MURAL COLONIALISM

The practice of using large-scale street art in the form of commissioned murals as a tool to advance specific agendas of political and cultural institutions has been widely documented.<sup>6</sup> By carefully selecting sites and contexts while taking into consideration visibility, accessibility, and specific target audiences, governments and corporations have commissioned murals to promote initiatives, opinions, products, and policies. In this section, I illustrate how national and international organizations have used walls and mural art in the vicinity of the Green Lines to promote specific sociopolitical narratives in each city. These narratives reimagine and reconstruct past and present histories of conflict, colonizing the cities' urban realities by shifting citizens' viewpoints and beliefs. I term this practice mural colonialism. For each city, I first discuss redevelopment in and around the Green Lines during periods of relative calm, and then interpret examples of a process of mural colonialism that alters the social and constructed realities of the lines by veiling, reshaping, or erasing the context of conflict.

*Beirut: Demolitions and Fictional Walls*—The desolate post-civil war center of Beirut mirrored the destruction of Lebanese society itself. Often characterized as a neutral setting or zone,<sup>7</sup> prewar downtown had functioned as a diversified urban core where a multicultural society's varied components could engage each other. When it was established, Solidère began to erase not only the memory of war but the memory and identity of downtown Beirut itself. About 80 percent of buildings to be salvaged and reconstructed per the initial post-1990 plan were instead demolished. Initial demolitions occurred in the central *souk* or market core during the early nineties, some by presidential decree and some more nebulous in origin.<sup>8</sup> This was followed by a more comprehensive phase of demolitions by Solidère in 1994. By the late nineties, the *bourj* or old town of Beirut had completely disappeared. Solidère claimed that the new project was to be a reconstruction of the city's old heart. What Beirutis were instead given was a "gleaming new city center rising like a mirage out of the dust clouds of history."<sup>9</sup> The downtown segment of the Green Line was filled with luxury residential high-rises, banks, and other institutional blocks. In its middle, an upscale outdoor shopping mall, sadly misnamed "Beirut Souks," excludes by design the vast majority of Beirutis for the benefit of wealthy international visitors and Lebanese expats. Commentators have emphasized that, through this process of rebuilding, the city's sense of history has been lost, "as though the historical experience and lessons of the war are not just to be forgotten, but to be unlearned." The prophesy that "far from weighing like a nightmare on the brains of the living [...], the past will be obliterated like the buildings of the city center" materialized soon thereafter.<sup>10</sup>

Murals and other large street art initiatives in Solidère's Beirut are few and located away from the Green Line in the redeveloped area. An exception is "The Rhino and the Oxpecker" (fig. 1), an example of mural colonialism that I believe aids the goals of the Solidère project. The mural was completed in 2017 by Cuban American artist Ernesto Maranje in collaboration with UNHCR Lebanon and the international NGO AptArt, an organization that, according to its founder, "engages vulnerable children in art."<sup>11</sup> Maranje painted "The Rhino and the Oxpecker" on the side of a five-story midcentury apartment building, a rare remnant of the old southwest edge of the Green Line's downtown core. It was part of a larger action titled "Paint Outside the Lines" that paired children with nine local and international artists to complete murals "in the streets of Beirut and in refugee camps." Maranje stated that "'The Rhino and the Oxpecker' serves as a reminder of how diversity can be a benefit rather than a burden."<sup>12</sup> The narrative of the symbiotic relationship between the two animals, and the colorful mural itself, may have functioned well as therapy for children affected by conflict. The mural's subject matter, however, coupled with its location at the edge of Solidère's Beirut





Figure 2-1 Ernesto Maranje. "The Rhino and the Oxpecker" (2017). Spears Street, Beirut.

Souks, did little to escape official policies of erasure. Rather, they became part of those policies. Aesthetics were used to *anaesthetize* the city, depriving it of its right to come to terms with its own traumatic past and present. This was street art *against* the right to the city. Local stories remained untold, and the painted wall became a detached, romantic, escapist fiction. As I will discuss later, other

examples of street art have engaged Beirut's Green Line in more contextual and critical approaches.

*Jerusalem: Settling the Seam, Negating the Line\_* In Jerusalem, between the mid-1990s and 2006 local collectives and grassroots organizations ensured that the urban and cultural fabric of the locally termed “Seam,” the space of and along the Green Line north and south of the Old City, was often populated by graffiti, street art, and other creative initiatives. These efforts proclaimed a desire for dialogue and argued for a possible future of tolerance and coexistence.<sup>13</sup> Since 2006, however, Israeli military and planning authorities have engaged in a renewed and systematic process of urban and cultural erasure. Through the insertion of new infrastructure in the form of highways, tram lines, and settlement projects along and within the Green Line, both its physical space and the heritage of its territory are being actively and purposefully altered. On the walls and in the streets, the fate of street art and urban creativity initiatives demonstrates how Jerusalem is forcibly being unified into a physical space claimed as the rightful heritage of only one of its sociocultural constituents.

Of particular interest is the case of Muslala, a nonprofit organization established in 2009 by Matan Israeli and Daphna Yalon with the goal of



Figure 2-2 Examples of buffed graffiti (undated) in Jerusalem. Images by author, 2019.

“creating public art within and between Jerusalem’s many borders.”<sup>14</sup> The two lovers had constructed a wooden stairway across a stone embankment separating two streets in the Musrara neighborhood just northwest of the Old City. It was this act of building to facilitate movement through urban space that led to the birth of their organization. As it cut through the heart of Musrara, Muslala’s 2012 “Watermelon Festival” recalled a tradition of temporary watermelon stands popping up inside the Green Line. That tradition of partaking in music, dancing, creating art, and sharing food had brought together Arabs and Jews inside the Green Line since 1967. Following the first Intifada and the Israeli response in the mid-1980s, however, the watermelon stands became a distant memory, and a large part of Musrara’s Green Line became a Jewish settlement. The 2012 Watermelon Festival, thus, created participatory art and recreated inclusive public space in a Green Line that was already experiencing advanced stages of erasure. It earned Muslala initial support and widespread recognition but also invited attacks by conservative voices and the new settlers in Musrara, who reversed their initial support and opposed anything that recalled their neighborhood’s past identities.<sup>15</sup> This led to the nonprofit’s eviction from the neighborhood and its relocation west of the Old City and away from the Green Line. The Watermelon Festival’s approach to the space of the Green Line has remained so impactful that both support for and opposition to it are still present in media and research.<sup>16</sup>

By 2014, activist graffiti and other public art projects were either banned or quickly buffed—overpainted with white paint. Discussions of art initiatives whose subject could be viewed as political or as countering official narratives were violently attacked by right wing organizations, rendering the heavy presence of police necessary.<sup>17</sup> Simultaneously, on the other side of the Seam, engaging with public space in creative ways in East Jerusalem also remained a political, controversial, and often dangerous affair. From language or symbolism used in sponsored and unsponsored street art, to narratives displayed on official or unofficial public signs telling the city’s story to visitors, to the design or location of micro parks and benches, Palestinians struggle to be creative and visible in Jerusalem’s public space.<sup>18</sup> I argue that mural colonialism in Jerusalem exists as the constant *removal* of sociopolitical creativity, commentary, and expression from its walls and urban spaces, both within and beyond its Green Line (fig. 2), manifested in the oppressive whitewashing and *erasure of identity* or of dissent. Mural colonialism here lies in the multiple layers of buffed, blank stone walls that colonize and further divide urban space.

*Nicosia: The City as Theater of the Absurd*—The Green Line in Nicosia lies uninhabited, as the conflict is unresolved. Turkish occupation troops have remained in offensive position north of the Green Line for half a century, and Greek and



Turkish Cypriots live segregated on either side of the line, whose wasteland is UN-administered territory. Starting with the 1987 UN-sponsored “Restoring the Heart of Nicosia,” one of the so-called bicommunal cooperation initiatives, renovations occurred throughout the 1990s in neighborhoods south and north of the Line. For the line itself, a survey of the state of ruined buildings was the sole planning project. Only two buildings inside the Green Line, just west of the Walled City, are used by UN personnel or as homes for the aforementioned initiatives. While the number and size of renovated areas in the Walled City grew, edging closer to the Green Line during the 1990s and 2000s, the idea and territory of the line remained a threatening physical and psychological scar experienced not only by citizens but also by visitors and developers. As I discuss further, a staged city and a mirage of its history would be repeatedly invented, painted, and pasted on Nicosia’s Green Line.

Following the 2003 opening of checkpoints along the Green Line, sponsored murals ushered in a process of erasure by so-called urban regeneration, masking anything that recalled past or ongoing conflict. A 2004–5 initiative by the British Council, an organization for cultural relations and educational opportunities that by design engages in foreign policy, is a characteristic example. The council invited Farrhad O’Neill, a Canadian artist of Irish and Indian descent who had lived and worked in Belfast since 1995,<sup>19</sup> to create works that would underscore what was seen by the UK as a moment of hope for “reunifying” Cyprus. O’Neill executed two murals on renovated buildings near the Green Line. He first completed “Constructing the Past” (fig. 3), unveiled on April 6, 2004, on a wall of the Scientific and Technical Chamber of Cyprus south of the Green Line, and then worked on “Ode to Aphrodite and Umm Haram,” unveiled on March 5, 2005, on Nicosia’s “Turkish Municipality” building north of the Green Line.<sup>20</sup> Both works exemplify mural colonialism as top-down actions by an international organization that romanticize and fictionalize the past, reconstructing and misrepresenting it for the sake of geopolitical agendas.<sup>21</sup> By stitching together distant, disparate, and unrelated figures, events, and epochs, the murals overwrite surrounding stories of conflict, grief, agony, and hope that are still untold and unheard. What instead remains painted on the walls is a false sense of appeasement and, at best, a poorly staged and understood cultural, urban, and historical identity.

Similarly to the way it would act in Beirut a few years later, the United Nations soon took over from the British in Nicosia, sponsoring bicommunal graffiti and street art actions adjacent or inside the Green Line as early as 2006 and at least until 2012, with the last one fittingly titled “Graffiti for Peace.”<sup>22</sup> Local institutions also learned their lesson: in April 2016, the Cyprus House of Representatives sponsored a public art action that saw five large murals go up at the southern ends of Nicosia’s Walled City, prominently featuring more



**Figure 2-3** Farrhad O'Neill. "Constructing the Past" (2004). Thisseos Street, Nicosia.

Aphrodites and plenty of peace-ushering doves.<sup>23</sup> State-sponsored actions that veil the ruins of war in Nicosia have not been limited to the production of murals. During the last decade, extensive pseudo-reconstructions have occurred along the Green Line, resulting in freshly painted walls of buildings and urban blocks that are otherwise disused or heavily damaged. Deliberately pristine moments of two-dimensional Neoclassicism, Art Deco, and Modernism mask the absolute desolation lying behind them. Via an expanded mural colonialism that also encompasses facade renovations, national and international institutions in Nicosia are attempting to veil its Green Line. They stage and fictionalize the line's outer edges and recast its facades, creating an absurd theatrical set that presents a world where an imagined historical Nicosia happily survives free of conflict.

### **03. COLORS OF REMEMBRANCE: WALLS OF RESISTANCE**

I have discussed how, in these contexts of persistent conflict, both mural-sized street art and urban creativity initiatives are invariably appropriated by the same systems of power they were born to oppose. Concurrently, while tagging and graffiti actions can be tactically successful in quickly communicating

sociopolitical messages, their short lifespan and the ease with which they can be erased or overwritten often prevent them from affecting change in the socio-urban fabric on which they emerge. In what follows, I present and interpret alternative examples of commissioned and noncommissioned street art from the last decade that engage the Green Lines in ways that subvert official messages and narratives. I argue that these examples demonstrate that it is still possible, by both engaging and avoiding authorities and institutions, to use urban space to aid citizens in remembering pre-conflict and conflict periods in their cities, in learning from and caring about each other, and in resisting the erasure of identities and the construction of fictional histories and urban narratives.

*Beirut: Rocket Holes and Calligraffiti*\_ Two years before Ernesto Maranje completed “The Rhino and the Oxpecker” near the southeastern edge of Beirut’s Green Line, the Beirut interior architect and artist Jad-El Khoury offered a different paradigm for engaging with the city’s civil war fabric. His “War Peace” project involved Khoury painting mural-scale red compositions of his signature “Potato Nose” figures, around bullet and rocket holes in buildings that have stood abandoned and semi-destroyed since the end of the war.<sup>24</sup> He started this project by painting the side wall of an eleven-story building located on the south side of the Ring Bridge, an elevated highway intersection in the middle of the Green Line leading into Martyrs’ Square and the redeveloped Solidère area. His stated intentions that the project “helps those who lived the barbarism of war to move on” and “does not aim to erase the memory of what happened” describe an alternative mode of street art’s engagement with the Green Line. Khoury would soon up the ante further, by obtaining permission from the Ministry of Defense and, in his own words, “attack” one of the most recognizable ruins of Beirut’s scarred fabric on the morning of November 15, 2015. Since that day, the twenty-six-story Holiday Inn Hotel (fig. 4), lying at the northeastern edge of the Green Line, bears Khoury’s blue “Potato Nose” compositions on its western side wall, leaving the hundreds of bullet and rocket holes exposed and emphasized.<sup>25</sup> Khoury’s work on the Holiday Inn triggered a backlash in local media, with accusations that this was a privileged example of street art, where authorities selectively allowed only one artist to have access to one of the war’s “sacred ruins.”<sup>26</sup>

Khoury continued to create “Potato Nose” murals beyond the “War Peace” project and away from the Green Line, on walls that did not always bear scars of war. His “War Peace” project, however, remains one of the most effective examples of street art engaging Beirut’s Green Line and history of conflict.

Like Khoury, Yazan Halwani is a Beirut artist born after the end of the civil war. He engages in mural portrayals of Lebanese cultural icons, widely accepted figures of the country’s heritage, in order to “overcome sectarianism



**Figure 2-4** Left: Jad-Ei Khoury. “Potato Nose” (2016). Hamra Street, Beirut (33.895378, 35.485444); Right: Jad-Ei Khoury. “Potato Nose [War Peace Project]” (2015). Holiday Inn Hotel, Foadad Shehab Avenue, Beirut (33.899375, 35.495579). Images by author, 2019.

in this fragmented city.”<sup>27</sup> Throughout the 2010s he created these mural portraits, some commissioned and others not, on the walls of ethno-religiously diverse neighborhoods across Beirut. Halwani maintains that he lives and walks the streets, listens carefully to local retellings of the war and prewar periods, and chooses sites carefully,<sup>28</sup> responding to neighborhood contexts and reminding Beirutis of their shared cultural heritage(s). He creates images of local cultural figures with calligraffiti, a form of art that combines calligraphy, typography, and graffiti.<sup>29</sup> While Halwani was not part of the UN’s 2017 “Paint Outside the Lines” action discussed earlier, in October of the same year he was one of three artists who participated in “White Wall: Meeting of Alphabets,” a calligraffiti action supported by the Institut Français du Liban, the Goethe Institute, and Fransabank Group. While a French artist worked in East Beirut and a Dutch artist worked in West Beirut, Halwani chose to work in the old Green Line corridor south of downtown. On Damascus Street near Sodeco Square, on the heavily war-damaged and later repaired Nouréini building, he depicted a powerful scene from the 1998 film *West Beirut*, an allegorical civil war-era story of Tarek and May, a Muslim boy and a Christian girl. Halwani described the mural as “a reminder of Lebanon’s post-war settlement: a political system built on sectarianism and business interest that blocks true national cohesion.”<sup>30</sup> The artist’s self-appraisal of the work stands in stark

contrast to media coverage that conversely delighted in a simplistic narrative of national cohesion.<sup>31</sup>

By creating works that directly and critically engage the experiences and effects of conflict on Beirut's diverse fabric and populace, Khoury and Halwani showed that even mural art promoted by national and international agents can subvert policies of erasure and instead address the local context in nuanced approaches. During the October 2019 uprising against corruption and nongovernability, Khoury returned to the Green Line in the Beirut Ring and painted a series of colorful drips on the curved side walls of "The Egg," a ruined modernist movie theater complex squatted by protesters still resisting the Solidère project. Artists who have endowed Beirut with large murals critically engaging its past have thus simultaneously partaken in activist street art urging Beirutis to rise against the erasure of their city's heritage and identity.<sup>32</sup>

*Jerusalem: The Factory that Speaks and the Village that Sees*—Khoury's "War Peace" project was still fresh in Beirut's Green Line when "The Walls," a murals action first held in Haifa in 2017, came to the Talpiot Industrial Zone of Jerusalem in the spring of 2018.<sup>33</sup> The organizers claimed to have "given a carte blanche" to local and international artists, but they also advised that "no politics, violence, or sex" would be accepted as subject matter.<sup>34</sup> The Japanese-American-Israeli Addam Yekutieli, already active in the street art scene of Tel Aviv as Know Hope, managed to negotiate access to the Green Line's "Seam" separating Talpiot from the Palestinian village of Beit Safafa. On HaGalgal Street, on the wall of a flour factory abandoned after the 1967 Six Day War, Yekutieli highlighted visible bullet holes by numbering them, circling them in white paint, and writing a corresponding numbered list of texts on the side of the wall. Aphorisms, metaphors, and poetry lines compose "246 Sides to a Story." Together with the painted bullet holes, the texts straddle the thin line of art that is sociopolitical commentary in a context that, as discussed earlier, invariably discredits or erases any such initiative. More than any other of his works, and perhaps any other mural in Jerusalem, "246 Sides" underlines Yekutieli's stated concern with "how to find unity in a fragmented world [while] living in a society where borders, lines and divisions are part of everyday existence."<sup>35</sup>

North of Talpiot, along the Green Line's east edge, lies Silwan (Siloan/Siloah/Siloam), a Palestinian village perched on hills just southeast of Jerusalem's Old City. Silwan's residents have been repeatedly threatened and evicted as settlers and settlements encroach the village, in a larger attempt to alter the ethnic/cultural makeup of the area surrounding the Old City. In Silwan's neighborhood of Batan al-Hawa, a street art action called "I witness Silwan" has been taking place since early 2019. The action is a collaboration between Jewish American artist and director of the US-based group "Art Forces"



Susan Greene, the Madaa Creative Center, and village residents. It uses murals depicting human eyes to protest Israeli occupation and settlement in a way similar to how Yekutieli uses words and bullet holes on Talpiot's old flour factory. Fragments of faces, aphorisms in the form of pairs of eyes belonging not only to everyday Palestinians but also to known activists and globally recognizable cultural figures, stare persistently back at the Ir David settlement, the Walled City, and across the Green Line to West Jerusalem. Greene observes that with this "radical and dangerous" project she wants "Silwan to look out in every direction," by turning the tables on a colonial gaze of surveillance in an "act of visual decolonization."<sup>36</sup> Her collaborator Jawad Siyam from the Madaa Creative Center adds, "The staring eyes say to people we see them, and they should see us too ... we want to say that we are here, we love our land and our home."<sup>37</sup>

"246 Sides to a Story" and "I Witness Silwan" are rare examples of Jerusalem street art that directly exposes nonmainstream sociopolitical points of view to the city, rendering nonsanctioned truths visible and public on the Green Line's urban fabric. They do not illustrate symbols of peace and appeasement, nor do they insist on mere existence or coexistence.<sup>38</sup> In a city where authorities persistently buff graffiti and street art and erase initiatives that comment on the realities of conflict, fragmentation, and oppression, these works, whose fate is at best uncertain, engage the Green Line by commenting on past and present conflict and actively opposing mural and cultural colonialism and erasure.

*Nicosia: Barricades of the Baffle Zone*\_ In Nicosia, both along the Green Line and elsewhere, mural art daring enough to engage the context of conflict remains practically nonexistent. In the Walled City, a series of barricades block access to the territory of Hermes Street that makes up most of the Green Line's length. By the early 2010s, as the previously discussed process of veiling the Green Line by facade renovation was under way, street art on or adjoining some of these barricades highlighted their presence and disruptive function. Works by artists like Athens-based Cacao Rocks or Larnaca-based Twenty Three transformed these dusty spaces of obstruction into meaningful places of possibility, acting as reminders of unresolved conflict and persistent identity. Cacao Rocks' 2013 painted works on the barricade of Eptanissou Street and an adjacent rooftop sidewall on Lidinis Street added color and brought attention to Nicosia's dead-ends.<sup>39</sup> Executed in the same year, Twenty Three's more discreet pasteup depiction of an old Cypriot mustached man reading a newspaper on a wood-framed wall surface adjoining the nearby Talou Street barricade animated the area by adding a face of continuity and identity, humanizing a hostile space without hiding its true nature—that of a barrier.

Twenty-Three, active since 2012, creates sociopolitical commentary that engages issues of Cypriot identity and conflict by "appropriations and



**Figure 2-5** Twenty Three. “Baffle Zone [South]” (2017). Thisseos Street, Nicosia (35.174416, 33.369319). Image by author, 2022.

juxtapositions of iconic images, symbols, and problematic representations.”<sup>40</sup> Though quickly recognized by local cultural and political powers and given significant commissions,<sup>41</sup> Twenty Three’s corpus has remained primarily in the streets. Both his own work and his collaborations have furthered a street art that resists official and imposed narratives more than any other street artist in Cyprus. In 2017, Twenty-Three collaborated with the local NGO Urban Gorillas, “a multi-disciplinary team of urban enthusiasts who envision healthy, creative and socially inclusive cities,” to create “Baffle Zone,” a piece of street art that straddles the divide, with its two stenciled halves and half wooden frames located one south and one north of the Green Line (fig. 5). With the project’s name a play on “Buffer Zone,” an alternate term used for the Green Line in Nicosia, the sites were carefully identified with their locations primed for quiet pausing and focused contemplation. The geometries of the walls were chosen so that the piece exists as a continuous composition once its mental location is reconstructed by the viewer following an urban journey from the south to the north through the nearby checkpoint, and then back again.<sup>42</sup>

While the commissioned murals and renovations discussed earlier veil Nicosia’s Green Line, artists such as Cacao Rocks and Twenty-Three have engaged the Green Line at a more humble scale and with oblique subject

matter. Their work speaks to issues of conflict and identity by locating and working in the *cracks*, emphasizing the form, materiality, and geometries of the line's architectural assemblage. By conceiving "Baffle Zone" as a work that is itself physically divided, but mentally and experientially recomposed by those who actively seek it out, Twenty-Three gave the divided city of Nicosia an art it deserves. It actively engages the Green Line and its territory and is completely understood only once a "complete" city has been experienced.

## 04. EPILOGUE

During the last two decades, street art and urban creativity initiatives in Beirut, Jerusalem, and Nicosia have engaged edge-conditions in and along the cities' Green Lines in similar ways and with similar agendas. Large commissioned murals, typically supported by national and international institutions, were created with specific content that actively erased diverse histories and identities and denied present realities of division and fragmentation. These top-down works established and amplified official and sometimes fictional narratives, aiming to deter citizens and visitors from understanding and engaging with the socio-urban fabric of conflict. In contrast, bottom-up initiatives created works of street art at varied scales that interjected in the social and political life of these cities by transforming the physical and mental borderlands of the Green Lines into spaces of meaningful encounters and expressions of diverse (hi)stories. These works, and the built fabric they respond to, resist policies of cultural and urban erasure. As manifestations of spatial practices of resistance, they create fissures in the bodies of the Green Lines, allowing for a view of and an engagement with the Other. They recolor the Green Lines by rendering them as border territories where sociopolitical conditions are intensified through the overlapping of different relations, and where the multiple truth(s) of the artists, of the urban fabric, and of the persistent connections that still bind the cities' diverse populations are highlighted, shared, and celebrated. Studying and interpreting these initiatives and acts of resistance enhances our understanding of the complexities of defining, and hopefully breaking, the multiple physical and cultural borders and walls that permeate the Levant.

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## NOTES

1. The origin of similar initiatives and actions long predates the modern era. Characteristic examples from the last century—such as the Big Character Posters in Kunming and elsewhere in China, the Muralist movement in Mexico City, or the slogans and portraits on the so-called Peace Walls of Belfast—serve as reminders that textual and visual narratives have often addressed urban space to both incite dissent and revolt against oppressive regimes, and, in turn, to guide or control historical and identity narratives by regimes resulting out of those very revolutionary movements. For recent sources see, among others, Eva Youkhana and Larissa Förster, eds., *Grafficity: Visual Practices and Contestations in Urban Space* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2015); Troy Lovata and Elizabeth Olton, eds., *Understanding Graffiti: Multidisciplinary Studies from Prehistory to the Present* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2015); Jeffrey Ian Ross, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art* (London: Routledge, 2016); Holly Eva Ryan, *Political Street Art: Communication, Culture and Resistance in Latin America* (London: Routledge 2017); and Konstantinos Avramidis and Myrto Tsilimpounidi, eds., *Graffiti and Street Art: Reading, Writing and Representing the City* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).
2. Pairing “mural” with the term “colonialism” for this contribution was carefully considered. The actions and results of the case studies presented herein describe processes that apply familiar colonial policies: national and/or international institutions—often from the same (once colonial) powers that shaped Cyprus, Israel, and Lebanon’s modern history of statehood, identity crisis, and subsequent conflict—appropriate urban space via seemingly reconciliatory or pacifist initiatives and offer fictional versions of stories or histories, often of their own imagining, with the intention of continuing to shape policies and identities in the cities and countries they once ruled and drained. We may be currently inhabiting a postcolonial world in theory, but colonial actions and policies are still present in postcolonial states.

3. Michael Davie, "A Post-War Urban Geography of Beirut," in *EURAMES Conference Proceedings* (Warwick: EURAMES/BRISMES, 1993), 2, mentions that the term "Green Line" was borrowed from "Israeli military mapping vocabulary."
4. Ibid.
5. Adrienne Fricke, "Forever Nearing the Finish Line: Heritage Policy and the Problem of Memory in Postwar Beirut," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 12, no. 2 (2005): 163, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0940739105050150>.
6. See, among others, Panos Leventis, "Walls of Crisis: Street Art and Urban Fabric in Central Athens, 2000–2012," *Architectural Histories* 1, no. 19 (2013): 1–10.
7. Fricke, "Forever Nearing," 164.
8. Davie, "A Post-War Urban Geography," 7; Saree Makdisi, "Laying Claim to Beirut: Urban Narrative and Spatial Identity in the Age of Solidere," *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 3 (1997): 672–74.
9. Saree Makdisi, "Reconstructing History in Central Beirut," *Middle East Report* 203 (1997): 23.
10. Ibid., 30.
11. AptArt commissioned Maranje for projects in Jordan in 2016, in Iraq in 2017, the Beirut site in the same year, and completed their collaboration with a mural at the Schisto refugee camp in Athens in 2018.
12. Donna 'Don' Haden, "Ernesto Maranje's The Rhino and the Oxpecker in Lebanon, 2017," Graffiti Street, accessed May 6, 2022, <https://www.graffitistreet.com/ernesto-maranjes-street-art-mural-the-rhino-and-the-oxpecker-in-lebanon-2017/>.
13. Ronan Eidelman (co-editor of online journal Erev Rav: Art, Culture, Society) interview by Dimitri Ioannides, Panos Leventis, Todd Lowery, and Evangelia Petriodou, Hansen House Cultural Center, West Jerusalem, December 17, 2019.
14. "The Muslala project is about creating public art within and between Jerusalem's many borders," Muslala, accessed May 6, 2022, <https://muslala.org/en/about-us/>.
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# FICTIONAL WALLS

## Dystopian Scenarios of Bordered Lives

*Angeliki Sioli*

### 01. WALL

“Wall” is one of the multiple names that have been used to describe a border. “The fence, the wall, [...] the frontier, the limit, the march, the boundary” are all “distinct phenomena in social history” that delineate a border in space, as Thomas Nail reminds us in the *Theory of the Border*.<sup>1</sup> While these words allude mostly to a dividing line, a static linear structure between two separate territories, today’s border studies argue for something different. Antony Cooper and Søren Tinning, referencing the work of numerous contemporary researchers, talk about “the conceptual shift from borders as territorial lines to bordering as socio-cultural processes, practices, and discourses.”<sup>2</sup> Border studies look at bordering not only in terms of territory but also “in the messy here-and-now micro-politics of everyday life practices and experiences.”<sup>3</sup> Based on this definition, this essay examines walls that create territorial separations while also playing a prominent role in everyday life practices and experiences.

The walls under examination are all fictional. They are imaginary structures of three dystopian worlds: the authoritarian regime of OneState, depicted in the novel *We* (1921) by Yevgeni Zamyatin; the totalitarian rule of Big Brother, captured in *1984* (1949) by George Orwell; and the tyrannical dominion of Heirs, described in *The Not Yet* (2014) by Moira Crone.<sup>4</sup> All three novels are deliberately literal in their depiction of walls as borders, showing in an explicit and straightforward way that borders are “a process of social division” in space.<sup>5</sup> Besides this strong common characteristic, two more reasons determined these novels’ selection and comparative analysis. They all depict a territory under omnipresent government surveillance, in which walls of different scales, materialities, and affordances regulate the everyday life practices and experiences of the respective citizens. The interaction of the characters with the layout and architecture of the fictional urban environments challenges walls and borders, allowing thus for moments of spatial and political resistance.

In this essay, I look into the different wall conditions captured by the three novels, unpacking the meanings they erect, the political and social power they imprint in space, and the kind of surveillance they impose. Quotes from the

novels related to walls and surveillance are used to communicate how the characters perceive and experience them.<sup>6</sup> Elements of the plot necessary for understanding the meaning and qualities of the examined walls are also introduced (I have attempted to restrict summaries to details pertinent to the analysis). I then examine the way these walls “leak”<sup>7</sup>—as all borders do—pointing out moments and acts of resistance. I conclude with a look at contemporary real-world wall conditions, discussing the importance of history and fiction in understanding and working with borders and walls from an architectural perspective.

## 02. WALL CONDITIONS

**Glass of a Beloved Panopticon.** “O, mighty, divinely delimited wisdom of walls” (91) exclaims the protagonist of *We*, who lives happily in the totalitarian city of OneState, a place where walls are perceived as the “most magnificent of all inventions” (91) and “the basis of everything human” (40). All walls in OneState are made of glass, creating physical yet transparent boundaries of different scales, forms, and affordances.

The biggest one is the Green Wall, which derives its name from the cloudy green glass it is made of. It both encircles and confines OneState. It carries no openings, passages, entrances, or exits, prohibiting any citizen from leaving OneState and any outsider from entering. The division between the society within and the world outside is “extensive,” introducing “an absolute break—producing two quantitatively separate and discontinuous entities.”<sup>8</sup> The Green Wall is meant to protect the rational, mechanized, and perfectly ordered OneState from Nature, the “irrational, ugly world of trees, birds, and animals” (91), as well as from the wild people of Mephi. Its very existence “differentiates, categorizes and hierarchizes” civilization.<sup>9</sup> As a boundary it is exactly what Caterina Resta describes in her article “Walled Borders”: “an ontological and political character, which concerns not only territory but also the discriminating definition of human and non-human.”<sup>10</sup> The protagonist of the story is assured that “man ceased to be a wild animal only when he built the first wall” (91).

The Green Wall is also a stark manifestation of how a society is “a product of the borders that define it” and how “certain dominant social formations” emerge because of the border, as Thomas Nail argues.<sup>11</sup> Life in OneState is as transparent as glass, frighteningly exposed to the public eye, and totally deprived of notions like privacy and isolation. The architecture of the city’s homogenous private apartments attests to this reality. Their walls, floors, and ceilings are made of clear glass. Every aspect of the citizens’ life takes place in open view. As Zamyatin’s protagonist puts it, “We live in broad daylight inside

these walls that seem to have been fashioned out of bright air, always on view. We have nothing to hide from one another" (19).

The glass city of OneState is an urban scale manifestation of Bentham's panopticon. It imposes "a certain self-discipline under the threat of external observation."<sup>12</sup> Control of the population in OneState is achieved "by a simple idea of Architecture," as Bentham would argue.<sup>13</sup> The society of OneState, totally visible, "is not one of spectacle but of surveillance," as Foucault might add.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the novel portrays a glass city in which life is perfectly controlled, scheduled, prearranged, and constantly surveilled. The "experienced eye of the Guardians" (15) is always there to "protect [...] from making the slightest mistake, the slightest misstep" (65). Zamyatin's cynical and satirical writing—a strong critique against the repressive regime of his native Soviet Russia<sup>15</sup>—presents creepy conditions of surveillance, borders, and control. The world he portrays is an ironic "beloved" panopticon, as the story's main protagonist professes to love living in it.

**Posters and Telescreens of a Dreaded Synopticon.** George Orwell's dystopian world, published almost thirty years after *We*, features no glass walls or external fortifications. The center of London, where the plot unfolds, is under the command of a Party led by Big Brother. Its citizens, the Party members, live "from birth to death" a totally controlled and surveilled life "under the eye of the Thought Police" (200). Unlike the impressive Green Wall of OneState, in Orwell's narrative there is no physical border between the city center and the dilapidated decaying suburbs that surround it, inhabited by the proles. The Party's rules, prohibiting interaction between Party members and the proles, seem to be more than enough to raise a figurative wall around the city center.

However, as Thomas Nail reminds us, "the border is not only in between the inside and outside of two territories, states, and so on, it is also in between the inside and the inside itself: it is a division within society."<sup>16</sup> Indeed in *1984*, walls divide the members of the Party itself. The members of the Inner Party live in luxurious apartments behind walls that the members of the Outer Party cannot cross without a special invitation. The members of the Outer Party live in dilapidated buildings the members of the Inner Party never visit. Most importantly though, everyone lives under the constant surveillance of everybody else; the Party's brainwashing is so harsh and effective that most children inform on their own parents. In short, the many obedient Party members observe the few disobedient ones, creating societal conditions similar to a synopticon.

Synopticon, introduced by Thomas Mathiesen in 1997 as a counternotion to Foucault's panopticon, is "used to represent the situation where a large number focuses on something in common which is condensed," basically "the opposite of the situation where the few see the many."<sup>17</sup> Mathiesen explains

that historically “panopticism and synopticism have developed in intimate interaction, even fusion, with each other.”<sup>18</sup> He even mentions *1984* in his article, arguing that “Orwell described panopticism and synopticism in their ultimate form as completely merged: through a screen in your living room you saw Big Brother, just as Big Brother saw you.”<sup>19</sup> Though this last observation is not actually accurate—the screens in the living rooms do not provide a live broadcast of Big Brother’s life—the fact that the many loyalists of the Party would observe the few disobedient ones is still a clear element of a synoptic spatial condition, one that is clearly dreaded by the protagonist of the story.

Party members caught disobeying the rules are imprisoned and excruciatingly tortured behind the frightening walls of the Ministry of Love. These humongous walls are completely opaque, carrying no windows at all. In the urban scale the walls of all the Ministries create the towering spatial division between the inside and the inside itself. They are made “of glittering white concrete, soaring up, terrace after terrace, three hundred meters into the air” (4). They are so enormous in scale that they are visible from anywhere in the city. As Gerald Bemstein in his article “The Architecture of Repression” observes, these walls create a “hermetically sealed interior, as repressive and degrading as any of the techniques of brainwashing” used by the Party.<sup>20</sup>

Within the city center the walls of all other buildings carry constant reminders of the Party’s totalitarian regime. They are flooded with enormous posters of Big Brother’s face with the caption: BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU. Posters abound within all interior spaces as well, but even worse, the walls of the private apartments carry telescreens, devices that simultaneously receive and transmit information (as Mathiesen also points out). This ubiquitous technology guarantees the most literal and frightening live, nonstop surveillance. Imagine a personal apparatus that can pick “any sound [...] above the level of a very low whisper” (3) and record any action within a wide field of vision. The Outer Party members cannot shut them down (unlike the Inner Party members) and while they can lower the volume, they cannot completely mute them. They are constantly exposed to the Party’s propaganda, even when they are asleep.

**Walled Urbs and Enclaves of a Cruel Banopticon.** While Zamyatin’s *We* and Orwell’s *1984* portray aspects of the panopticon and synopticon respectively, I argue that Moira Crone’s more contemporary dystopian novel, *The Not Yet*, borrows strongly from the principles of the banopticon. As Didier Bigo, who put forward the term, argues, the banopticon “excludes certain groups” of people “in the name of their future potential behavior.”<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the societal conditions “normalize the non-excluded through the production of normative imperatives, the most important of which is free movement.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the world portrayed in the *The Not Yet* thrives on exclusions of certain groups whose behavior

may threaten the societal status quo. It is also built on strict rules regarding the movement of the different societal groups. The walls, literal and figurative, that appear in the novel control the capacity of these groups to move freely or not.

Crone imagines a de-annexed and flooded New Orleans in the year 2112, populated by three strictly separated and harshly disconnected categories of people: the Heirs, the Not Yets, and the Nats. The Heirs—the wealthy, elite ruling class who lives “forever with mindless intensity”<sup>23</sup>—have access anywhere they wish. Heirs enclose themselves willingly in cities called Walled Urbs, surrounded by walls “fifteen stories high” (97). The most affluent Walled Urbs are even covered by balloon domes, on which a sky is projected, displaying a simulacra of climate and weather conditions. These domes allow for control of every single aspect of the environment of the city, even the air and the atmosphere, creating spheres of absolute exclusion. As Peter Sloterdijk would argue in his theory of spheres, these domes create a “fundamentally changed relation to the atmospheric envelope” that surrounds us all and makes us *humas*.<sup>24</sup> Air is the treasure that allows human beings to realize that they are always immersed in something that is imperceptible, impossible to control and yet very real.<sup>25</sup> Air is something we share with all other human beings, brings everything together, and makes everything possible.<sup>26</sup> The control over the air that the Heirs have achieved disconnects them even further from the other two social groups. Moreover, it extends from the urban scale to that of the human scale. The Heirs undergo regular medical procedures, adding ever so often new *prodermis* on their existing skin. This *prodermis*, which guarantees “longevity” (near immortality), is a kind of wall between them and the surrounding environment, sealing them even further from the air. Impervious to the air, the Heirs lack basic human qualities like the sense of time, of which they have none. They exist in a temporal limbo, having no sense of ethical urgency.<sup>27</sup>

The Not Yets and the Nats constitute the middle and lower rungs of the society respectively and must demonstrate complete subordination to those on the top.<sup>28</sup> The Not Yets, who are sponsored (owned) by the Heirs, live a life strictly defined by their benefactors and “cannot move freely in most districts” (92). They spend their early life working under excruciating conditions to accumulate a trust that will allow them to undergo the medical procedure to transform them into Heirs. The Nats consist of mixed races and have no access to a trust. They are considered third-class citizens who live a mortal life with no access whatsoever to the Heirs. Nats live in various Enclaves. The Enclaves are not separated by walls, since in the flooded New Orleans area, water acts as the physical borders. Moreover, Custom Controls between Enclaves authorize permissions of entrance and exit, and it is expected that their inhabitants carry enclave cards as their official identity documents. Nats also live in outlier camps surrounded “by high fences and guarded by dogs” (30). As

Robert Azzarello observes in *The Three Hundred Years of Decadence*, “the result is a world of haves and have-nots, those with access to medical science and technology that allow them to approach immortality and those without such access.”<sup>29</sup> Crone forewarns of these imposing walls built by society.

### 03. WALL LEAKS

The ability of walls to create conditions of absolute separation and exclusion has been effectively critiqued by many thinkers in the field of border studies. Thomas Nail is quick to remind us, through numerous examples of historic walls, that “borders, both internal and external, have never even succeeded in keeping everyone in or out.”<sup>30</sup> This incapacity “is not just a contemporary waning sovereignty of postnational states; borders have always leaked.”<sup>31</sup> Mezzadra and Neilson in *Border as Method* affirm that “many walls are far less rigid than they pretend to be.”<sup>32</sup> And Nick Vaughan-Williams in *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power* adds that borders are not “in any sense given but (re)produced through modes of affirmation and contestation” being “above all, lived.”<sup>33</sup> They are “dynamic phenomena that first and foremost involve people and their everyday lives.”<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the walls of the novels under examination leak.

**Dark Red Walls and Wall Blinds.** In Zamyatin’s *We*, some of OneState’s citizens and some of the wild people outside OneState cross the Green Wall. In both cases this is a forbidden act and, as many such acts, it shakes existing structures, enabling new ones to emerge. Indeed, the mechanized predetermined life inside OneState is overturned outside and new structures seem to be forming as the novel comes to an end. A small group of citizens crosses toward the wilderness and a small group of the Mephi crosses into OneState.

The crossing between the two worlds takes place through the portal of the Ancient House, which sits at the very edge of OneState, adjacent to the Green Wall. This is a remnant of the old ages, a historic house with “dark red walls” (91) and a garden, functioning more like a museum of how life and architecture used to be before the Two-Hundred-Years War. The Ancient House serves as a secret meeting place and as the gate to the world beyond the Green Wall. A hidden exit, through an old wardrobe, leads to a dark corridor that looks like “the tubes of the subways” (94) and exits outside of the Green Wall. Under conditions of panopticism, the only possible crossing is behind walls that are no longer glass but opaque; retrograde walls and corridors that block the eyes of the Guardians and sabotage the power of the panopticon’s surveillance.

Along with the dark walls of the Ancient House, there is one more architectural element “used in a disruptive manner towards the totalitarian system



of the One State, since the privacy that” it also affords “allows for insurgence” against the ever-visible everyday living, as Jana Culek suggests.<sup>35</sup> The glass walls of OneState’s apartments are equipped with blinds which the citizens “get to use [...] only on Sex Day” (10). Lowering the blinds allows them to create some privacy for the act of sexual intercourse, an act that takes place only with a predetermined partner for one hour on specific and prescheduled days of the week. Some citizens use the time and protected space behind the blinds to plot a revolution against OneState. These are also the citizens who venture outside the Green Wall. When the group of Mephi crosses into OneState, the glass walls of the city become yet again an architectural element of resistance. The Mephi use them to pin up posters announcing their presence in the city and threatening its citizens. Similar posters appear on the glass walls of the subway, on the benches, and on car mirrors.

**Wall Alcoves and the Antique Store.** *1984* begins with an act of resistance. The protagonist decides to start a diary recording thoughts and ideas, something not allowed by the Party. The architecture of his apartment seems to have pointed him toward this small rebellion, as the protagonist is convinced that it is partly “the unusual geography of the room that had suggested to him” (6) the idea to write a diary in hiding. In his living room, the telescreen is not placed in the “end wall, where it could command the whole room,” (5) but instead in the “longer wall, opposite the window” (5). Next to the telescreen there is “a shallow alcove” (5) probably to “hold bookshelves” (5) when the apartment was first built. By sitting there, he remains “outside the range of the telescreen, so far as sight” (6) goes.

The other part of his decision has to do with the diary itself, which the protagonist buys in an antique shop in the suburbs. This is where the second opportunity for defying the rules and crossing borders appears. While the Party members are not supposed to visit the proles, the rule is relatively loose, allowing for some movement between the city center and the suburbs. As there are “various things such as shoelaces and razor blades [...] impossible to get hold of in any other way,” (6) the Party members venture from time to time into the dilapidated suburbs of London looking for them in “ordinary shops” (6). The protagonist finds in this excuse the opportunity to roam around the proles, in search of unobserved solitude and some kind of connection to the past that the Party has so carefully erased. As the reader finds out:

One could not learn history from architecture any more than one could learn it from books. Statues, inscriptions, memorial stones, the names of streets—anything that might throw light upon the past had been systematically altered. (98–99)

Marcin Tereszewski, in his article “The Confines of Subjectivity: Spaces of Resistance in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*,” points out that this is probably “why the protagonist is drawn to older inhabitants, asking them questions about pre-revolutionary England.”<sup>36</sup> The protagonist tries to reconnect with a past he no longer remembers as a way of rooting himself in his environment.<sup>37</sup>

It is in the proles that he will also secretly rent an apartment—just above the antique shop—to meet a lover in hiding. In the conditions of synopticon put forward by Orwell, it is when the characters are outside the strict confines of the Party, and among people that the Party separates itself from, that members can momentarily escape. Crossing the boundary between the city center and the suburbs, under the excuse of necessary purchases, allows for a limited and temporal freedom.

**Alteredds and the Wooden Palace.** The acts of resistance in *The Not Yet* are subtler and less heroic in comparison with the ones described in the other two novels; alternatively, these acts are actually encouraged by members of the ruling class. The main character of the story, a Not Yet, secretly crosses some of the strict borders of the Walled Urbs, per an Heir’s request. The only way for this crossing to take place is for him to transform into a fake Alteredd. Not Yets and Nats can be “resculptured by doctors” into Alteredds, creatures with animal elements, like “claws instead of hands,” or “wings coming out of their backs” (31). Alteredds are human pets owned by Heirs and for this reason they have some relative freedom of movement. As a fake Alteredd, the protagonist hides behind a metaphorical wall protecting him while visiting the wealthier Urbs of the West and the North. Unlike the Walled Urb of the New Orleans area, where the plot unfolds, the rules in these wards are very strict and the protagonist could never enter their high excluding walls as a Not Yet. In his trips, which are described very briefly in the novel, he needs to make sure nobody understands he is a fake Alteredd or he will be arrested.

The climatic resistance comes unexpectedly, and unlike *We* or *1984*, from an Heir. Dr. Greenmore decides to spend some time in her Wooden Palace, in the countryside outside the Walled Urb of Re-New Orleans where she normally resides. She wishes to study precedents related to an Heir’s disease. Her land is secluded “surrounded by oaks and even some field of cane” (110), which acts as a planted wall. In the privacy of her house, Dr. Greenmore discovers information about peoples’ old ways of living, their beliefs about religion, family, and love, all of which have been erased ever since eternal life was achieved. She, an Heir, slowly falls in love with the Not Yet protagonist and engages in sexual intercourse with him, something completely unthinkable in the world they both live in. The shedding of the most intimate wall, that of the *prodermis*

that covers all Heirs gifting them eternal life, is an act of border crossing. In the conditions of a banopticon, where certain groups of people are excluded and freedom of movement is limited, crossing the walls of the cities under disguise, searching for your human past, and quenching desires of the flesh with a member of another societal group are acts of resistance that question the existing borders and norms.

#### 04. BORDERED LIVES: A CONCLUSION

In his essay “Bindings against Boundaries: Entanglements of Life in an Open World,” Tim Ingold differentiates between an understanding of life as either occupying the world or a life as inhabiting it. When “life is lived into boundaries within which life is contained,” he argues it “is reduced to an internal property of things that occupy the world but do not properly inhabit it.”<sup>38</sup> Ingold develops the difference, arguing that an occupied world “is furnished with already-existing things, while one that is inhabited is woven from the strands of their continual coming-into-being.”<sup>39</sup> He prompts us to attempt “to recover the sense of what it means to inhabit the world,” and he reminds us that “the creeping entanglements of life will always and inevitably triumph over our attempts to box them in.”<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the life entanglements of the characters in the novels triumph, as Ingold puts it, over their worlds’ various walls.

The extreme and clear-cut nature of these novels’ walls makes it easy to understand the nature of the boundaries they create, the method of control and exclusion they impose, the surveillance they force. In our contemporary world, many gray zones make these conditions more difficult to detect, understand, and attempt to cross, a condition that people in power thrive off. We still have borders of all the above-described conditions: hermetically closed walls in social and physical terms, semi-penetrable boundaries, invisible or nonexistent physical borders segregating communities and cities. The Green Wall of OneState and Walled Urbs of the Heirs resemble in their function, the tall barbed wire fences installed on the geographical borders between countries like Mexico and the USA or Greece and its Balkan neighbors. The glass walls of OneState’s apartments and the telescreens resemble webcams and television shows in which people live in total exposure, or social media feeds through which people willingly reveal intimate and personal moments of their lives. The telescreens function similarly to cell phones and devices that can track our location at any given moment, with our own voluntary permission. The Walled Urbs resemble countries that one can only visit with a special permission or invitation, and of course, the countless gated communities around the globe where people—not necessarily the privileged few—willingly separate

themselves from their surroundings, avoiding (or controlling the degree of) contact with other social strata under the excuse of safety.<sup>41</sup> The Enclaves remind us of divisions of race and difference (especially in their limited access to healthcare). The Not Yets' indentured servitude speak volumes of the illegal labor (including child labor) in so many developing countries that sustain the production of goods consumed knowingly by the developed world. The people who produce these goods do not have the financial means to acquire them, which is yet another very harsh wall, albeit invisible. These novels help reveal society's walls and divisions of very different natures, from spatial and physical ones to political and societal ones. The acts of resistance the three novels describe are all subtle, small-scale, and probably incapable of causing a systemic change in the larger authoritarian regimes in which they occur. Nonetheless, they are still acts of resistance—and not necessarily revolution—that create fissures in walls.

It is worth noting that in all three novels the attempts of the protagonists to cross the borders, physical or metaphorical (and go against the inhumane laws of the totalitarian and authoritative regimes) take place, primarily, in spaces steeped in history and memories of the era before the radical social and political changes described in the stories. In *We*, the Ancient House is a reminder of the hectic and chaotic life before the order of mathematics and the transparency of glass walls. It is a place to meet a sexual partner in secrecy, to discover what passion really is, and to live a nonmechanized moment of existence. It is also the gateway to the other side of the Green Wall. In *1984* the antique shop and the apartment above it, once again steeped in the history of a life before the rule of the Party, become the context that allows the characters to think about what the Party really is and how they can work against it. "Being a place of memory and memorabilia," Tereszewski argues, the antique shop—and the room above it I would add—represent "an antithesis to the ahistorical social reality of" *1984*'s London.<sup>42</sup> In *The Not Yet*, it is behind the walls of the Wooden Palace that Dr. Greenmore decides to shed her *prodermis* and study the life of people before the scientific revolution that brought about near eternal life. The novels touch on the capacity of people to orient themselves through the preservation of memories, rituals, and meanings that history (personal and collective) carries with it. This is not an understanding of history for the sake of the past and a blind obedience to it, but an understanding of history as a force guiding us critically and creatively toward the future, as Nietzsche beautifully suggests in his essay "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life." We need history "for the sake of life and action, and not so as to turn comfortably away from life and action."<sup>43</sup> And we need literature, in the form of science fiction, and not only, to keep reminding us where ahistorical conditions can lead if taken to their extreme.

These dystopian novels remind architects, urban planners, and policy-makers who deal with boundaries in their multiple forms that any spatial decision has the potential to ignore or overrule people's history, culture, customs, rituals, and ways of living. Designers should also not overlook that history is a construct and that the histories of adjacent communities and people may be filled with conflict and disagreement. To negotiate such boundaries is difficult, challenging, but also paramount. As Anthony Cooper and Søren Tinning remind us, "in recent years we have witnessed an intensification of the debate surrounding such issues as 'freedom of movement,' 'open borders,' and even 'no borders,' [...] in the search for effective ways to tackle, negotiate, and possibly abolish the violence of borders"<sup>44</sup> What these three novel show us is that the answer is not a strict wall that deletes every historical trace of its territory. The novels remind us that any such harsh and ahistorical boundary will be crossed, will be challenged, and will ultimately topple, even if only by the accumulation of many small fissures over time. The "creeping entanglements of life" against its imposed borders, as Ingold puts it, will ultimately triumph.

## NOTES

1. Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2.
2. Anthony Cooper and Søren Tinning, eds., *Debating and Defining Border: Philosophical and Theoretical Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 28.
3. Ibid.
4. Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*, trans. Clarence Brown (New York: Penguin Books, 1993); George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Signet Classic, 1950); Moira Crone, *The Not Yet* (New Orleans: University of New Orleans Press, 2012). Please note that *We* was first published in 1924 by E. P. Dutton. in English translation by Gregory Zilboorg. Ever since there have been various other English translations. For this reason, slight differences in names (like OneState) and terms may appear from translation to translation.
5. Nail, *Theory of the Border*, 2.
6. I have employed in-text citation here in order to avoid an unnecessarily long list of endnotes. If a sentence contains multiple quotes from the same page, the page number is added only once at the end.
7. All borders leak precisely because all borders are constituted by and through a process of leakage, which is only temporarily stabilized into border regimes. Nail, *Theory of the Border*, 13.
8. Ibid, 12. Nail differentiates between an extensive and intensive division.
9. Christian Wille et al., eds., *Border Complexities and Logics of Dis/Order* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2023), 17.

10. Caterina Resta, "Walled Borders: Beyond the Barriers of Immunity of the Nation-States," in Cooper and Tinning, *Debating and Defining Borders*, 262.
11. Nail, *Theory of the Border*, 4.
12. As quoted in Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 34.
13. Ibid.
14. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 217.
15. Jana Culek, "Forms of Utopia: The Social and Spatial Forms of *We* and *Metropolisarchitecture*," in *Writingplace Journal 4: Choices and Strategies of Architectural Imagination*, ed. Klaske Havik, Rajesh Heynickx, and Angeliki Sioli (Rotterdam: nai010, 2020), 54.
16. Nail, *Theory of the Border*, 5.
17. Thomas Mathiesen, "The Viewer Society: Michel Foucault's 'Panopticon' Revisited," *Theoretical Criminology* 1, no. 2 (1997): 219.
18. Ibid., 223.
19. Ibid.
20. Gerald S. Bemstein, "The Architecture of Repression: The Built Environment of George Orwell's *1984*," *Journal of Architectural Education* 38, no. 2 (1985): 28.
21. As quoted in Browne, *Dark Matters*, 39.
22. Ibid.
23. "Bill Lavender Interviews Moira Crone about Her Book *The Not Yet*," Bill Lavender, *Southern Literary Review: A Magazine for Literature of the American South*, April 26, 2012, <https://southernlitreview.com/authors/bill-lavender-interviews-moira-crone-about-her-book-the-not-yet.htm>.
24. Peter Sloterdijk, "Foreword to the Theory of Spheres," in *Cosmograms*, ed. Melik Ohanian and Jean-Christophe Royoux (London: Lukas & Sternberg, 2005), 225.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Robert Azzarello, *Three Hundred Years of Decadence: New Orleans Literature and the Transatlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2019), 173.
28. Ibid., 174.
29. Ibid., 173.
30. Nail, *Theory of the Border*, 8.
31. Ibid.
32. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, Or The Multiplication of Labor* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2013), viii.
33. Nick Vaughan-Williams, *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 7.
34. Ibid.
35. Culek, "Forms of Utopia," 58.

36. Marcin Tereszewski, "The Confines of Subjectivity: Spaces of Resistance in George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four," *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 18, no. 1 (2019): 62.
37. Ibid.
38. Tim Ingold, "Bindings against Boundaries: Entanglements of Life in an Open World," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 40, no. 8 (2008): 1797.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., 1797, 1809.
41. For more see: Edward J. Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, "Fortress Communities: The Walling and Gating of American Suburbs," Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, accessed December 9, 2023, <https://www.lincolninst.edu/publications/articles/fortress-communities>.
42. Tereszewski, "Confines of Subjectivity," 62.
43. Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 59.
44. Cooper, *Debating and Defining Borders*, 18.

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# SEWING BORDERS

## Negotiating the Temporalities of Borders and Displacements

*Mohamad Hafeda*

A group of Beirut residents, with differing experiences of war displacement, encountered maps of the city and the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> Through their sewing skills, they studied and altered these maps. Consequently, they narrated and made evident notions of spatial, temporal, and historic borders that continued to shape their lives. The activities comprised participatory practice-led research and part of a film project entitled *Sewing Borders* that moved across maps, documents, and residents' stories.<sup>2</sup> It firstly examined the role of representational techniques such as map drawing and processes such as treaties and declarations in the construction of borders. Secondly, it exposed the temporal dimension inherent in these borders, which are often interpreted as spatial, geographic, and sovereign.

In this chapter I rearrange material from the film, including visuals and translated dialogue from Arabic, that weaves empirical, archival, and propositional components to construct a timeline of displacements across its pages. The chapter extends the discussion on the spatiality of borders, through the use of maps, into showing the temporalities embedded in these borders. It does so through participatory activities and by considering conditions and experiences such as being "on hold" and "recurring" as forms of temporal bordering practices that are characteristic of the displaced experiences in Lebanon and could be observed elsewhere. The research project was a response to the continuous wars and uncertainties engulfing the Middle East and the movements of millions of refugees to neighboring countries and to Europe. These displacements and the so-called refugee crisis in Europe are often discussed in politics and media as ahistorical events and an imposition on Europe and host countries, isolated from Europe's imperialist and colonialist past and its present geopolitical involvements. The work intends to draw attention to this discourse by providing a counternarrative that repositions the "refugee crisis" within a continuing historic timeline. It proposes and employs the temporal bordering practice of art and research as forms of critical and spatial practice that connect the rupture between the past and present, and works across seemingly divided geographies.<sup>3</sup>

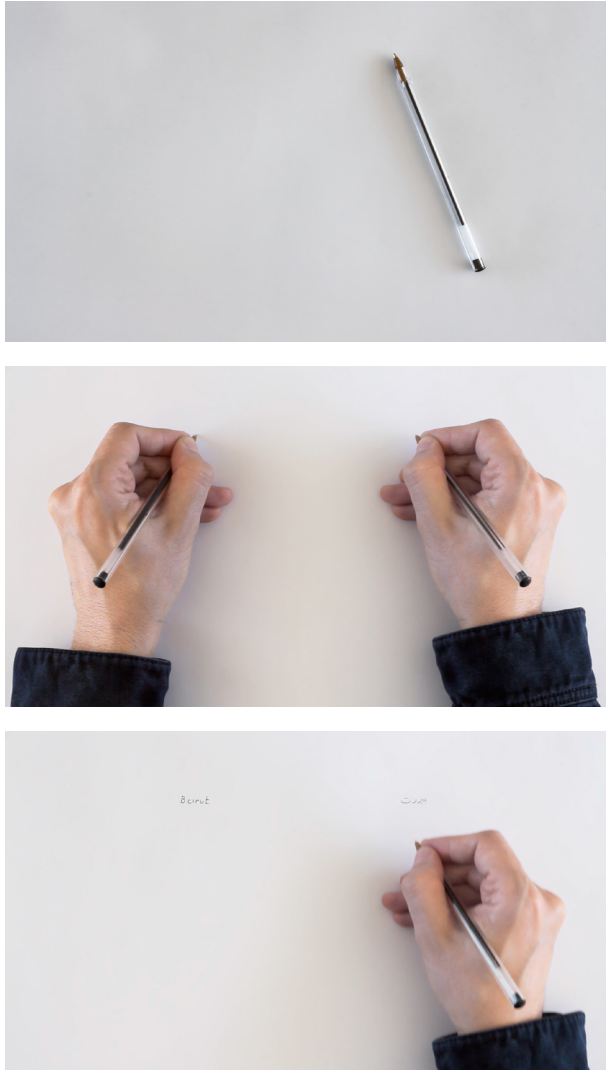


Figure 4-1 Hands writing and translating between Arabic and English.

## 01. SEWING: BORDERING METHOD

I start with a note on the methodology of sewing as a temporal bordering practice.<sup>4</sup>

The four participants the project worked with were selected for their sewing skills and their experiences of displacement. They were born in Lebanon or arrived there at different periods, depending on wars in their respective countries of origin. The participants included (M. S.) an Iraqi who arrived after the Iraq war in 2003; (I. M.) a Syrian of Kurdish ethnicity who was displaced in 2011 during the civil war in Syria; (J. S.) a Lebanese Palestinian whose family was exiled from Palestine in 1948 and who was born in Beirut; and (M. B.) a Lebanese Armenian whose grandparents were brought to Lebanon in the 1920s after the Armenian genocide. As such, the four participants, although not sole representatives, provided a microcosm of the makeup of the Lebanese society and diaspora.

The film worked with them intimately in their interior spaces, residence, or work place, as they were presented with a series of preselected printed maps. They were asked to sew personal experiences and borders they encountered onto the maps, as well as to imagine new realities. When I first met the participants to introduce the project, I explained to them that they would be sewing maps and responding to questions about their experiences in the city, borders, and displacement in general. The filming session with each participant took between sixty to eighty minutes. The questions and activities structured the film and changed in scale and time periods, moving from the local, personal, and present to the regional, communal, and past. They included:

*What are the borders/boundaries of the area where you live?*

*What are the borders you experience in your daily life?*

*Do you recognize the countries on this map?*

*How would you change the map?*

*What is the route you, your family, took to get to Beirut?*

The sewing activity was intended to provide the participants with a representational and propositional tool, through which they could intervene on the maps and change them. It was an alternative to cartographic techniques and related to the participants own skills and know-how. The sewing allowed them to express and represent boundaries and borders that were significant to each of their personal lives. It also gave them an opportunity to negotiate the existing maps and construct new geographical and political configurations using their cutting and stitching techniques. However, the sewing highlighted

that in every attempt to draw (sew) a line or connect (stitch) two sides, a new boundary with a possible division was created.

The sound of the sewing and the crumpling of papers, the silences and the time spent during the activities in a close proximity with the maps created a contrast between intimacy and the violence that the displaced regularly experienced and resonates in their relationship with the city. These characteristics of the sewing activities are not fully presented or translated on these pages. The sewing was also a method to practice research in an active manner that allowed for unexpected discoveries and the construction of new material evidence (representations) that wouldn't be necessarily possible through the conventional documentary style of question and answer.

In this context, sewing, coupled with dialogue, was a bordering practice, for it negotiated conditions of borders that were material in the form of maps (representational) and extended to the immateriality of the subjects' social life and spatial practice through what the subjects revealed about the impact these borders had on them. More than that, it was a temporal bordering practice that was critical (intended, propositional, and reflective),<sup>5</sup> for it was a time-based process that animated the maps' static lines through stitching and the unfolding of told narratives, experiences, and emotions—revealing how they were lived over time, highlighting their historic context while speculating on alternative arrangements.

This bordering method extended to the filming approach, as the camera shifted the gaze toward the maps and the participants' hands while excluding their body. This was a deliberate visual treatment to protect the identity of the protagonists but it also aimed to employ censorship to denote the extent of borders and restrictions the protagonists experienced and their misrepresentation in different aspects of life. At the same time, the scenes of the maps with the testimonies embodied the protagonists and politically charged the film while focusing on what they sewed and said.

In addition, the hands and voice of the filmmaker also appeared from the start as one of the actors/participants in constructing the film narrative. The work in general aimed to reveal how narratives of borders are formed; as such, highlining the artist's role, their subjectivity, and positionality in this process was important. It was through the negotiations of the participatory activities with the protagonists and their standpoints that the film performed and demonstrated how narratives and representations are constructed and borders are made.

The chapter continues with transcriptions (translated) and stills from the film.



Figure 4-2 Hand sewing boundaries.



Figure 4-3 Tourists' maps of Beirut with sewn boundaries\_ J. S. map.

*[The participants were presented with tourists' maps of Beirut and asked to locate and sew the boundaries of the area where they live]*

*J. S.*

*Here it is written Saint Elie church, right?*

*Saint Elie, in Mar Elias*

*-It says Bourj Abu Haidar*

*-Oh no... we should be*

*looking somewhere else*

*This is Mar Elias Street...*

*Here it is...*

*-Is this Mar Elias?*

*Is it this building block?*

*-Yes it looks like it*

*because this is Gabriel El*

*Murr street...*

*This is the drawing of the*

*camp.*

*M. S.*

*This is the street where I live*

*Maybe not... this is*

*Gemayzeh...*

*This is Pasteur...*

*Yes, this is the street where I*

*live.*

*-This block?*

*-Yes, with the street.*

*Some people call it Pasteur,*

*others call it Saifi.*

*I. M.*

*I live down El Saydeh church at the intersection.*

*It is considered at the edge of the Karm El Zeitoun area and the beginning of Achrafieh.*

*My shop is two streets up from where I live.*

*I lived six months in Bourj Hammoud, then I moved to Achrafieh.*

*It's been now seven years  
since I moved, I am very  
comfortable here.  
The borders [limits] of it are;  
Geitawi, maybe Karantina,  
then you turn to Bourj  
Hammoud, then you go down  
to Adliyah, then Hotel Dieu,  
Sodeco, then ABC. This is  
Achrafieh.  
As if we made Achrafieh  
bigger...  
-Achrafieh, it is big.*

*M. B.  
Here is the bridge ...  
The borders [limits] of Bourj  
Hammoud are: Daoura,  
Nabba, Sin El Fil, then  
Hankash. The Beirut River  
is between Bourj Hammoud  
and Khalil Badawi... then  
the Electricity Company and  
Mar Mikhael.*

*J. S.*  
*Here is the Foundation*  
*[where I work].*  
*The map doesn't seem to*  
*include the camp's streets.*  
*-No!*  
*But if we go down by the*  
*church we reach the camp's*  
*main entrance.*  
*The Foundation is near the*  
*second entrance.*  
*-Where is your house?*  
*-If I walk from my work ...*  
*here is my house.*



**Figure 4-4** Tourists' maps of Beirut with sewn boundaries\_ M. S. map.



**Figure 4-5** Tourists' maps of Beirut with sewn boundaries\_ I. M. map.



**Figure 4-6** Tourists' maps of Beirut with sewn boundaries\_ M. B. map.





Figure 4-7 Marking borders onto Beirut tourists' maps\_ M. S. map.

*[The participants were asked to sew the forms of borders they encounter on the tourists' maps of Beirut]*

M.S.

*[Using a pencil to mark borders on the map]*

*Bank of Lebanon,  
there is one at the end of  
Hamra before Al Sadat  
Street,  
then at the Corniche near the  
Riviera Hotel,  
then one at Ein El Mrayseh  
mosque,  
and one on the other side at  
Saint George near the Beirut  
Exhibition Center.*

*I know their locations, I  
know them by heart.*

*At night I avoid certain areas  
where the checkpoints are.  
Sometimes if you don't have  
your identification documents  
on you, you can get into big  
trouble.*

*-Do you avoid the whole  
area?*

*-No, I maneuver through the  
side roads.*

At night; avoiding checkpoints

بالليل: تجنب الحواجز

manoeuvring

زورية

*[Using a marker pen to  
highlight the map]*

*-What bothers you about the  
General Security building?*

*-You don't know when you  
enter it if you are going to get  
a yes or no.*

*It is the anxiety if you are  
going to stay or not.*

*Any minute you visit the  
General Security building,*

*your situation might turn  
upside down.  
They might say you have  
forty-eight hours to leave the  
country.  
I have been living here for  
almost ten years.  
I cannot possibly leave within  
forty-eight hours after being  
here for ten years.  
-Do you mean for visa  
renewal?  
-Yes.*

forty-eight hours; to leave the country  
ثمان وأربعون ساعة: لمغادرة البلد  
ten years; anxiety of leaving or staying  
عشر سنوات: العيش مع قلق البقاء أم المغادرة

*J.S.  
Here is the Saloumi area.  
The Dekwaneh should be  
here.  
I think it is outside the map.  
Because this is Saloumi and  
it is a street that follows on  
from it.  
-For how long you lived in  
the neighborhood there?  
-I was six years old when I  
left the Neighborhood.*

forty years; in the camp  
اربعون عاما: في المخيم

*[Using A4 paper to draw  
and stitch to the map]  
Let's consider that this is the  
Saloumi, there is a street that  
leads to Al Nafaa ...  
Here is the Rawda area,  
there is a street on a hill and  
our house was there ...  
In 1969.  
-Until which year?  
-Until the beginning of the  
Lebanese civil war, was it in  
1973?*



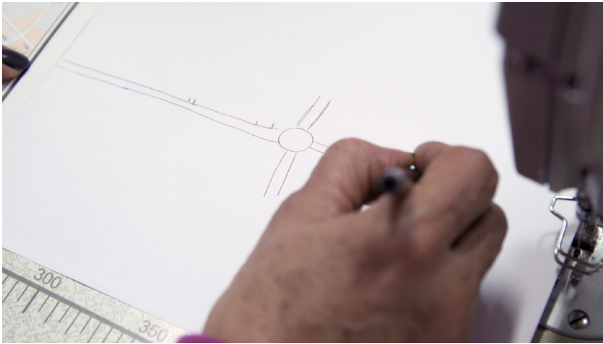
*-In 1975*

*-Yes*

*Our house was there in that area, then we moved to the camp.*

*Yes, we were displaced.*

Beginning of Lebanese Civil war; second displacement  
بداية الحرب الأهلية اللبنانية: اللجوء الثاني



**Figure 4-8** Drawing and stitching borders onto Beirut tourists' maps\_ J. S. map.

## 02. TEMPORAL BORDERING: SPATIAL PRACTICES AND HISTORIC TIMELINE

The activities and dialogue with the participants highlighted a number of temporalities that were relevant to the discussion of Lebanon's bordering practices today. The temporal bordering practices that the protagonists experienced on a daily basis constructed a daily timeline that was highlighted in the film, and here above, in the form of annotated durations such as "forty-eight hours," "ten years" "since birth," in addition to descriptive textual temporal content.

One participant, the Iraqi, marked on his map using a pencil the current locations of security checkpoints in Beirut that he memorized to enable him to navigate around the city. In addition, he mentioned his fear of entering the General Security building, which he highlighted using a marker pen. He lived in constant anxiety waiting to be arrested and deported at any time as he had no legal right to live and work in Lebanon, despite living in the country for more than ten years.

The Lebanese Palestinian talked about the recurrence of displacements that she and her family had experienced. Her family was expelled from Palestine in 1948 upon the Nakba (Palestinian Catastrophe). Later on in Lebanon they lived a second displacement during the Lebanese civil war in 1975, which coincided with the internal displacements that followed. She attached to the map a drawing of the route to her childhood residence in the suburb of Beirut, located outside the map limit, where she was displaced. She has lived ever since in the Mar Elias Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut.

The Syrian, who is of Kurdish ethnicity, talked about the historic denial of his people's rights, presently as refugees in Lebanon since 2011 and indefinitely as Kurds in Syria who were denied political representation and lived in fear of oppression. He drew, using a pen, the boundaries of what he believed is Kurdistan.

Despite not living it firsthand, the Armenian genocide remained a strong memory for the Lebanese Armenian protagonist, passed down from his grandparents. Following the genocide, his grandparents were displaced from Armenia in the 1920s. He marked on the map the location of the Karantina camp where his grandparents were first brought when they arrived in Beirut and the route to Bourj Hammoud where they lived after. He later on attached this map to another one of a larger scale showing the Middle East, on which he sewed his grandparent's route of displacement from Armenia to Lebanon. This was a moment in the film that didn't include a dialogue and where the stitching brought together distant locations and events of varying temporalities and with a time gap between them. Although the stitching here proposed a

new distorted map, it collapsed spatial and temporal distances and connected a rupture or a gap (geographic, temporal, and political), at least in the life of the protagonist and his family.

The participants' stories and alterations held in them the evidence of time. This was manifested in living in constant fear and anxiety, the state of waiting and being on hold for long periods, the recurrence of crisis and displacements, and intergenerational traumas passed down from grandparents to parents and children. These conditions not only indicate how time was lived and felt but should be also considered in terms of diachronicity and how time has been employed as an element of control and confinement in disjunction from space. This proposition was exacerbated by the "illegality" of refuge in Lebanon and the fact that the Lebanese state does not acknowledge the status of refugees and is not part of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention that protects their rights.

There was another lengthier and more communal timeline the participants expressed, which included a sequence of events and dates of wars and displacements; the Armenian Genocide of 1920s, the Palestinian Nakba in 1948, the 1975 Lebanese Civil war, Iraq war in 2003 and the Syrian war since 2011. This linear, though incomplete, timeline was a reminder of the series of crisis shaping the borders of Lebanon and the neighboring countries and that were still neither resolved nor settled. They went back in time to early last century and involved western colonial powers and regional authoritarian regimes. This timeline was not homogeneous for all but included a variety of temporalities and time experiences with moments of rupture, repetition, and suspension that could overlap and diverge.

As such it is time, not only space, that is used as a form of bordering and is mechanized to control the present movement of displaced communities as well as their future plans and imagination. The film, and this chapter, construct a map of temporal displacements and experiences, treating time as a border.<sup>6</sup>

*[The participants were presented with a series of Middle East maps, including printed Google maps, an outline map, a tourist map, and the 1916 Sykes-Picot map, and asked if they recognized the countries on the maps]*

*I. M.*

*I don't think that Syria is on this map.*

*M. S.*

*The thing that I can recognize here is the source of Euphrates and Tigris. Because I know where they start and the path they lead. This is the only familiar thing to me here.*

*-The rivers and water, the sea.*

*-Yes, rivers and water.*

*-Do you recognize these countries?*

*-Yes.*

*-Where is Lebanon?*

*-Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Turkey, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran.*

*M. B.*

*Syria, Turkey, here is the Antep area. This is an important area.*

*-There is this map*

*-Gaziantep ...*

*-Is it Antep or Gaziantep?*

*-We call it Antep but here it is written Gaziantep.*

*-What is written here?*

*... Antep*

*Urfa, Marash, these are all Armenian areas.*

*This is Armenia*

*But Armenia continues further down.*

*-This map is from 1916*



Figure 4-9 A variety of Middle East maps; printed Google map.



Figure 4-10 A variety of Middle East maps; outline map.



Figure 4-11 A variety of Middle East maps; 1916 Sykes-Picot map.



Figure 4-12 A variety of Middle East maps; tourist map.

... but it is wrong  
These areas used to belong to  
Armenia.  
Lake Van, this used to be  
ours. And there is Mount  
Ararat.  
All these areas used to be  
Armenian before the  
Ottomans came.  
Armenia was bigger.

[Marking boundaries on the  
tourists' map of the Middle  
East using a pen]

I. M.

Our dream as Kurds is to  
establish Kurdistan.

-What is the area you are  
including?

-A part is in Syria, the biggest  
is in Turkey, a smaller part is  
in Iraq, and in Iran. There is  
a part in Russia that is very  
small. This is how I would  
like to change the map.

Human beings who create  
borders between countries.  
There shouldn't be such a  
thing.

When I said I would like to  
have a Kurdistan, it was not  
to create a border between me  
and the other countries, like  
this is your homeland, this is  
my homeland.

Since we were born we never  
felt we had a homeland.

We lived in Syria without  
any rights,  
and in other countries we are  
also living with no rights.

From birth; living with no rights

منذ الولادة: العيش بلا حقوق

J. S.

*[Sewing new boundaries on  
the Middle East outline  
map]*

*-At this point we reached the  
sea.*

*What would you like to  
include?*

*-The sea is ours.*

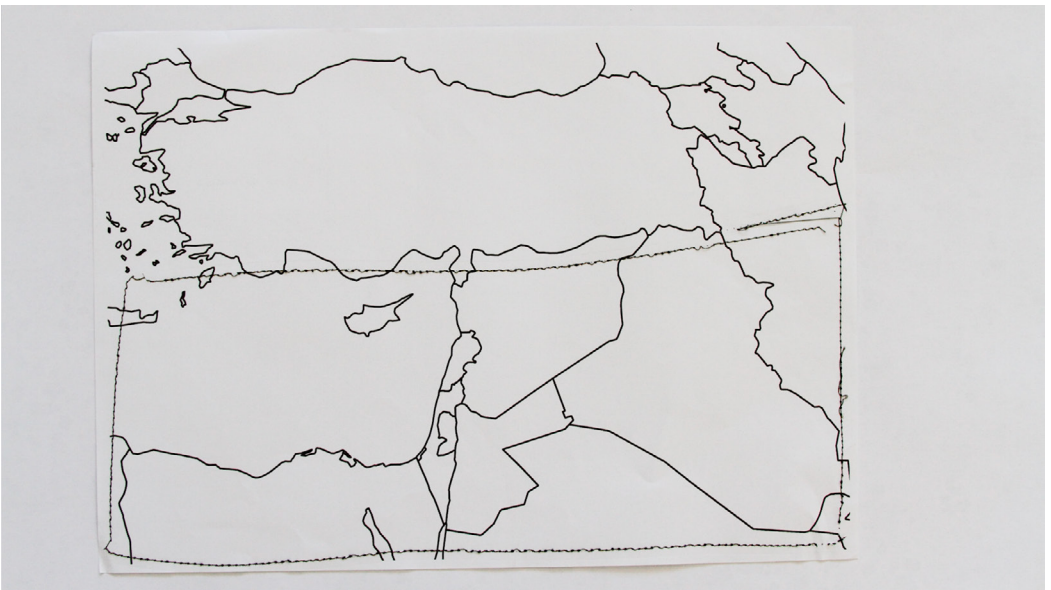
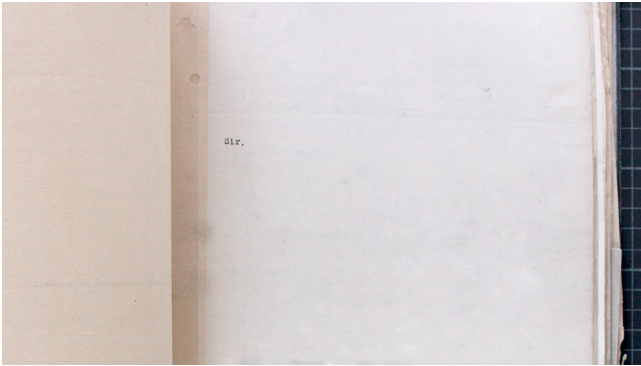


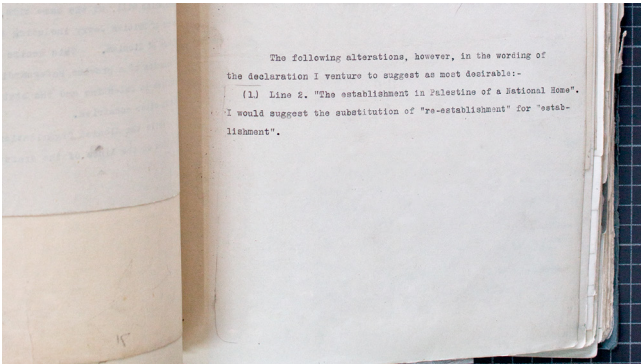
Figure 4-13 New sewn boundary on an outline map \_ J. S. map.



## SEWING BORDERS



**Figure 4-14** Details from the correspondence that preceded the Balfour Declaration.



**Figure 4-15** Details from the correspondence that preceded the Balfour Declaration.



**Figure 4-16** Detail from 1916 Sykes-Picot map.

### 03. REPRESENTATION AND TRANSLATION

Whereas the series of maps used offered representations of borders in the form of political lines on paper, the participants' narratives and activities revealed certain borders while constructing new ones. These borders were in the form of oral descriptions as well as drawings, sewn lines, and stitched papers. The participants expressed and made visible their marginalization and misrepresentation in political and urban life, as well as their exclusion from the systems of (political) representation that the maps denoted. This was the case of the Syrian Kurdish participant who expressed the Kurd's lack of rights and the Iraqi who had no legal status despite being in Lebanon for more than ten years.

The sewing activities offered a range of representations and propositions on the screen. These were in the form of sewn boundaries where a participant lived; marking personal border sites; stitching a drawing of a childhood residence to the map; sewing routes of displacement; drawing a boundary of Kurdistan and sewing a boundary to connect part of the Arab countries; and the stitching of two maps that connected the place of birth and route of displacement to the place of refuge and current residence. These interventions on the maps were not mere representations of lived experiences through lines: they were also propositional constructions that imagined alternative landscapes. Collectively, they destabilized the maps' original configuration and materiality.

The maps gradually alternated throughout the film scenes in type and scale following the structure of the activities and the development of the discussion with the participants. They included tourists' maps of Beirut, a variety of printed outline maps and Google maps framing parts of the Middle East and the Arab world, and either included or excluded names and boundaries. In addition, the project used historic political archival material, namely the Sykes-Picot agreement map and the Balfour Declaration—two colonial documents that were pivotal in the making of the borders of the Middle East in the early twentieth century. The multiple use of maps with different graphics and information (sources, names, dates, lines and colors) and the use of documents (treaties and declarations) allowed a comparison among these artifacts that showed the discrepancies, gaps, inaccuracies, and fiction involved in the processes of representation involved in their production and their detachment from what they stand for or represent.<sup>7</sup> As such, they aimed to draw attention to the fiction inherent in the making of borders in general.



In addition to the sewing of the maps, the film employed linguistic translation at the outset to indicate that working across languages and the borders of cultures shared similarities with the processes of displacement and the movement of subjects, and by extension the processes of representation. Translation (similar to representation) included processes of transformation, delineation, discrepancies, gaps (untranslatability), and the construction of new content.<sup>8</sup> The film's opening scene showed two hands, which belong to the artist, writing simultaneously in Arabic (from right to left) and English (from left to right) the word Beirut. The scene presented the artist oscillating between two languages and implicated their role in translating and mediating with the protagonists and between the different media and documents used in the film.

The film transcribed key content (relating to time and borders) in Arabic from the participants' testimonies, as well as translating it from Arabic to English. This process intended to visualize and materialize this bordering content in the form of text (in Arabic) to a local viewer, and by translating it (to English) to formalize it for a wider audience. There was also a voice (of the artist) reading Arabic translations of selected text from the correspondence that contained alterations on the drafts that preceded the Balfour Declaration. The declaration was issued by the British government in 1917 toward the end of the First World War and promised the establishment of a homeland to the Jewish people in Palestine. The use of the Balfour correspondence intended to offer an example of how nationalistic ethnic narratives and nation-states borders were plotted and executed, another mode of border representation: first, as a textual and linguistic exercise, then later on translated and implemented in a colonization project of mass migration and land claims. Another variation on the plotting of borders used by the project was the Sykes-Picot agreement map, which partitioned the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East between the French and English spheres in 1916. The film showed close ups of the colored pens dividing the geography on paper, highlighting the abstraction of such processes.

The inclusion, selection, translation, and reading of the correspondences in Arabic aimed to make the document public for those people who were disconnected (unaware of) from it and yet who lived through the consequences. It also emphasized the colonial heritage in contrast to the lived experience. The translating and voicing were a form of claiming control and a position of power over the document in a local language, emphasizing the extent of alterations and corrections (similar to sewing) made to the text and inserting them back into everyday discourse and public consciousness.

*[Sewing routes of  
displacement journey]*

*J. S.*

*-To Mar Elias Camp?*

*-Yes to Mar Elias Camp.*

*-Is this your grandmother's  
route?*

*-My mother's family, my  
mother was born by then.*

*-Which year?*

*-In 1948.*

*They left Jaffa to the West  
Bank,*

*from the West Bank to  
Amman,*

*from Amman to Syria,  
then Lebanon.*

*I. M.*

*We are here in Qamishli,*

*you reach Al Hasakah,*

*then Deir El Zore,*

*then you reach Tadmor,*

*after Tadmor you reach the  
road to Damascus*

*and it is on the road to*

*Damascus that I come and go.*

*Sometimes through Aleppo,  
depending on means of  
transport.*

*But, in general through  
Damascus I come and go.*

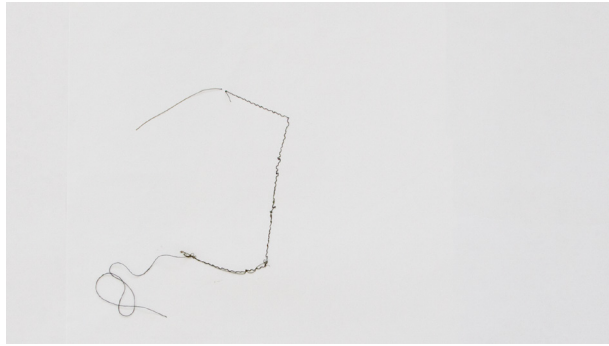
*I used to.*

*The last time I visited Syria  
was two and a half years ago,  
because I'm unable to go and  
come back.*

*Mainly because of the  
conflict, also due to decisions  
and regulations  
made by the Lebanese  
government;*

*if I go I might never be able  
to return,*

*and currently I cannot risk  
leaving and not coming back.*



**Figure 4-17** Sewn displacement route on white paper\_ J. S. map.



**Figure 4-18** Sewn displacement route on white paper\_ I. M. map.

two and a half years; unable to come and go

عامين ونصف؛ عالق بالبلد

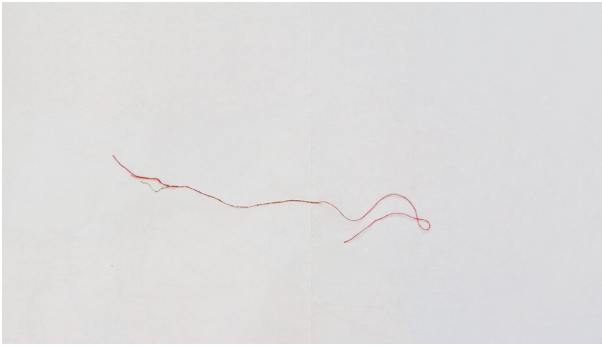


Figure 4-19 Sewn displacement route on white paper\_ M. S. map.



Figure 4-20 Sewn displacement route on white paper\_ M. B. map.

M. S.

*In 2006 I left Baghdad for Damascus.*

*-By plane?*

*-Yes, by plane.*

*Toward the end of 2009 I moved to Beirut, from Damascus to Beirut.*

*-Why did you leave Baghdad?*

*-My brother was kidnapped. We wanted to leave anyway because of the situation, and then "the incident" took place so we left.*

M. B.

*My grandfather was born in Antep. Originally we are from Antep. After the "holocaust" [Armenian genocide] he came from Antep to Aleppo, then they brought him from Aleppo to Lebanon. First they brought him to Karm El Zeitoun, then they took him to Karantina, and later on to Bourj Hammoud.*

*-What about your grandmother?*

*-Same story, same area. But they met here.*

After the genocide; first ... then ... later on ...  
بعد الإبادة الجماعية: أولاً... ثم... بعد

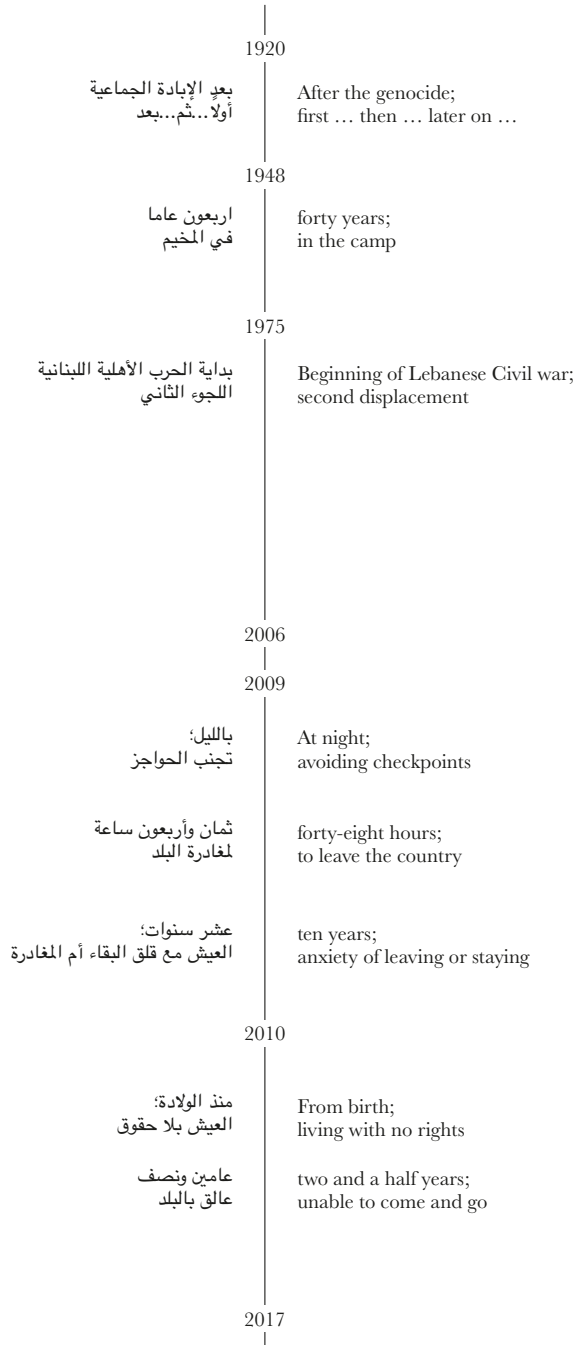
## 04. TEMPORALITY OF PARTICIPATION

The participants went back in time and sewed the routes of their journey to Lebanon, or that of their families, from Jafa (Palestine), Antep (Armenia), Baghdad (Iraq), and Qamishli (Syria). At this stage in the film the original maps have disappeared and have been replaced by the stitches of these routes on the back of the maps. These were the routes of reversal in both time and space that put forward the reality of the individuals, their families' histories, and the personal significance of their displacement. The reversal was a temporal bordering practice of resistance that undid the maps' lines. The film then presented a timeline (of text and dates) that included all the annotated durations and temporal content that had appeared on the screen (and here above) as a summary of the protagonists' dialogue. This visual was a map of time that inserted personal dates and experiences of bordering such as "at night; avoiding checkpoints" with common and historic tragic events that caused a series of displacements. The timeline offered a relational reading across these separate events and a record of individual voices (and histories) that were often omitted from the testimony of formal historic records that tend to document mega events from the perspective of the powerful.<sup>9</sup>

The processes of sewing, altering, translating, reading, and writing constructed various new lines on the screen challenging the maps hegemony and their credibility, while showing their temporal aspects and their historic extension. By doing so, these bordering activities exposed the processes involved in the construction of borders and showed them as narratives, as representations and as abstractions, yet extremely powerful and violent.

Engaging the displaced in such participatory art and research activities produced self-representations that contested dominant depictions of migrants in the media and politics. Even though the direct impact on the participants themselves might be limited to their experience during the film activities,<sup>10</sup> the use of participatory research practice aimed to unsettle the current cartographies of displacement that were restricted by the emphasis on geographical and nation-state boundaries. At the same time the research contributed first-hand accounts of displacement and the conditions experienced. The temporal bordering practice of art and research as forms of critical and spatial practice displaced and transformed borders in time and space and can shuffle relationships and construct associations between past, present, and future times that have been restricted, possibly deliberately, in the current political time.

## SEWING BORDERS



**Figure 4-21** Positioning the “refugee crisis” within a continuing historic timeline that includes the protagonists’ events and experiences.

## NOTES

1. The project does not define or refer to a clear geographic boundary of the Middle East or Arab world but uses existing maps that include the region or takes a variety of shots from online sources and Google Maps.
2. Mohamad Hafeda, *Sewing Borders* (2017). Twenty-five minutes film, commissioned by Ashkal Alwan for Video Works 2017.
3. I expand upon the definition of bordering practice by considering the bordering practice of artistic research as a critical spatial practice that allows self-reflection as well as the transformation of border positions. See Mohamad Hafeda, *Negotiating Conflict in Lebanon: Bordering Practices in a Divided Beirut* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019).
4. The “bordering method” and “temporal bordering” of art and research practices were developed and discussed in Hafeda, *Negotiating Conflict in Lebanon*. Also see Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).
5. For the discussion on “critical spatial practice” see Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006).
6. For further discussion on the “temporality of borders” and “waiting” see Shahram Khosravi, *Precarious Lives: Waiting and Hope in Iran* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017). Also see Ghassan Hage, *Waiting* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2009).
7. I refer to W.J.T. Mitchell’s definition of representation that “exacts some cost” in the form of discrepancy or gap in its operation. See his “Representation,” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 11–22.
8. I refer to Walter Benjamin’s concepts of the untranslatability and foreignness between languages and the possibilities that generate out of difference. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1970).
9. For the discussion on the limitations and problematic of the linear representation of the timeline and its history see Daniel Rosenberg and Anthony Grafton, *Cartographies of Time: A History of the Timeline* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010).
10. A participant talked about the intensity of the working session, comparing it to drama therapy, not expecting where it would lead, leaving her emotional and reflective.

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PART 2

# THROUGH THE BORDERS



# MAPPING ARCHITECTURES OF DISPLACEMENT

*Nishat Naz Awan*

The relationship between architecture and displacement is fraught. In many ways, architecture should be the discipline most invested in thinking about displacement and its effects, since at its core architecture is concerned with the question of settlement and the making of a home. Yet, it was only in the aftermath of the so-called refugee crisis of 2015 that this topic became more than a niche preoccupation within both the academic discipline and the profession in Europe.<sup>1</sup> Since then migration and the lives of refugees have become important topics, but these seem to be overwhelmingly interrogated in the idiom of crisis, presumably a consequence of the interest in Europe, at least, emerging within the specific context of large numbers of Syrians fleeing the conflict in their homeland. Whereas the topic of migration and displacement has many different aspects and temporalities, architectural responses to these questions tend to take one of two forms: either an interest in refugee camps and temporary shelter, or questions related to the integration of newcomers into existing communities.<sup>2</sup> Both these themes—while being concerned with questions of space, in the sense of settlement and of making a new home—also rely on an underlying conception of borders that remains unacknowledged, and on an accelerated temporality of crisis. There is an unquestioned faith in the integrity of geopolitical borders and their attendant value system based on European ideals of the nation-state as the most important vehicle for governing lives. These ideals were the product of the Peace of Westphalia, when the fragmented factions in Europe were brought together in 1648 through a series of peace treaties that ended decades of war. This event is regarded as the birth of the modern (European) nation-state and the concept of sovereignty that it rests upon.<sup>3</sup> The fate of refugees, who are supposed to be able to cross these nation-state borders with or without papers, is based on humanitarian values enshrined in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, itself a consequence of Europe's failures in protecting its Jewish population. The question of who counts as human within such humanitarian principles, and the racialized way in which these principles have been applied, can be seen in contemporary times in the differing reactions toward Afghan refugees as opposed to those fleeing the war in Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> It seems that the “differential inclusion” of borders

not only determines who is allowed into the fortified spaces of northern privilege but also who is considered to be human at all.<sup>5</sup>

Turning to the accelerated temporality of crisis that seems to govern many, admittedly well intentioned responses to displacement, it may be useful to consider at what point a life becomes visible and legible to those formulating the responses—that is, at what point might we begin to feel empathy toward the displaced. For many of us, refugees become visible when they arrive at the shores of Europe (or another territory in the global North), in northern urban centers, or within the spaces of international NGOs. These often *are* moments of crisis and disaster, but importantly people's stories begin well before they gain this visibility and the attendant potential for an empathetic response from those in positions of privilege. At this point, they will often have traveled long distances, endured many hardships for months, if not years. If we were to apprehend displacement through these longer temporalities, many other concerns might emerge beyond the immediate need for shelter.<sup>6</sup> In keeping our responses limited to the aftermath of disaster, traditionally architects have not questioned the reasons why the disaster or emergency occurred in the first place. In the context of refugee camps, our responses have also failed to ask basic questions, such as why people are confined to a camp and not allowed to live in already established cities, or to question the carceral logic that underpins and governs life in refugee camps.<sup>7</sup> These are ethical questions that some might consider beyond the scope of the professional architect or of the academic discipline, but the need for an expanded understanding of architecture beyond the built object, and toward the consequences of architectural knowledge, practice, and production is now well established.<sup>8</sup> In terms of architectural responses to refugee camps, some notable exceptions have emerged in the last few years, including Irit Katz's discussion on the role of camps in Israel/Palestine as complex spaces of power and resistance, Aya Musmar's discussion of how Syrians resist forms of humanitarian governance in Za'atri refugee camp in Jordan through everyday practices, and Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi's exploration of the spatial politics of Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya.<sup>9</sup> A commonality here is that all these camps have existed long enough, with the first being built seventy-five years ago and the last eleven years ago, to no longer be considered through the lens of emergency. But they are also all spaces governed by international agencies (UNHCR in the case of Za'atri and Dadaab and UNRWA in the case of Palestinian camps), which bestows a form of visibility upon these spaces and their inhabitants. The increasing numbers of those who are undocumented and unsettled outside such spaces have somehow escaped notice within most architectural consideration. These are people living in what Shahram Khosravi terms "circulation [...] a controlled

movement of people sent back and forth between undocumentedness and deportability: between countries, between laws, between institutions.”<sup>10</sup> It is precisely this unsettled state that people have been forced into, that means they cannot easily make a new home, let alone integrate into new contexts. This is especially true when there is a sense that people are entering already established communities that they have to fit into, rather than a negotiation where both newcomers and those already living in a particular place rethink their relationships in response to each other.

While in the example of refugee camps, borders emerge as physical and bureaucratic technologies for controlling groups, in the context of cities and established urban centers, borders emerge also as social constructions around what is considered acceptable behavior, including whose values are given precedence and how this governs entry into social, cultural, and political life. If we were to rethink the relationship between architecture and displacement through the act of crossing borders, but with this expanded and more complex definition of borders, we might find a very different set of concerns for architectural engagements with this topic than the ones outlined above. We may have to include not only those who fit the rather narrow description of a refugee as defined by the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, but also include, for example, those moving due to the climate crisis or structural injustices.<sup>11</sup> Those who are referred to in mainstream media and popular discourse with the often derogatorily used term “economic migrants,” rather than refugees, are usually people from countries of the global South. Overwhelmingly, these are nation-states dealing with the historic consequences and economic aftermath of the looting of lands by colonial powers. The benefits of this stolen wealth are still being reaped by countries of the global North, while previously colonized countries are saddled with historic debt.<sup>12</sup> Using the term displacement rather than migration brings some of this complexity to the fore, and it also means thinking of those who are internally displaced, through conflict, land grabs, or the climate crisis, to name only a few factors that compel people to move. These are all situations that are either much more prevalent in the global South than in the North or whose consequences are felt more severely there, as is the case with the climate crisis. In many places, then, displacement is all of these things happening at once, and therefore this term brings a complexity to the question of migration and movement, and with that to our conceptualizations of borders, that is often missing from mainstream discourse. What would be the consequence of shifting our perspective and looking at migration and borders from the south rather than the north?

## 01. DISPLACEMENT AS TEMPORAL DISLOCATION

Recently I visited a series of villages situated near the town of Muridke in Pakistan, which itself is situated on the outskirts of the city of Lahore. I have been researching and conducting interviews in this agricultural area over the past four years. The region is well known for two reasons: as the place in the country where some of the best quality and highly priced basmati rice is produced, and as the home to the majority of men who are attempting to make their way to Europe. The incongruous nature of these two facts is explained somewhat when driving to the area from Lahore, the second largest city in the country. The area is being engulfed by the urbanization and industrialization that has been creeping northward from the city over the last decade. As villages lose their land to industrial workshops and highly polluting factories, and as climate change makes crop yields unpredictable, young men are being lured to make difficult journeys, to go *bahar*, a word that means “outside” and usually denotes for them somewhere, anywhere, in what they consider to be the prosperous West.<sup>13</sup> The villages are nestled between small towns, half-built motorways, and the debris of a fast and unregulated industrial expansion. Yet, despite this urbanization, there is severe unemployment and what work there may be is highly precarious. Working conditions are cited as the main reason for migration by everyone I spoke to, including the young man in his midtwenties quoted below, who at the time had recently returned back to Pakistan from Turkey:

I decided to go because here we suffer so much, all of our labor is for other's benefit. I thought if I went I could at least work for myself and sort my life out. That's why I wanted to go ... I wanted to go to Greece as I have some friends there.<sup>14</sup>

In other conversations people spoke about the way the area had changed, the breaking down of community life as villages are urbanized, the toxicity of the water and the soil as factories pollute the rivers and the fields, the hazy and unbreathable air due to pollution. In writing about environmental degradation and its effects on the poor in the global South, Rob Nixon calls for a more radical understanding of displacement. He argues that in such contexts, temporal dislocation should also be considered a form of displacement that might encompass “the loss of the land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable.”<sup>15</sup> If we are to take Nixon's definition of displacement seriously, then what does this do to our understanding of borders? It would highlight the often unacknowledged relationship between this kind of displacement and the one we are more familiar with, where people travel vast distances. For architecture, it might mean paying attention to spatial situations that result from



**Figure 5-1** A factory in the agricultural area near Muridke spilling toxic waste into the irrigation canal. Syed Kamran Ali Rizvi (2021).

these different understandings of displacement, as well as the forms of representation used to depict and analyze such situations.

Certainly it would transform the familiar brutality of the migration maps printed in news articles and policy documents telling us about flows and influxes with carefully chosen arrows all pointing only toward Europe or North America, and ignoring, for example, the complex and larger scale displacements that occur across regions of Africa, Asia, South America ...<sup>16</sup>

But the story of Muridke and its surroundings also tells us something about the temporality of a crisis that is always already unfolding. Elizabeth Povinelli's term "quasi-event" speaks to those conditions, which never quite reach the moment of crisis but instead always remain below the level of the spectacular. It urges a rethinking of events through their mundane and everyday aspects, an approach that is sorely missing in the spectacle-like context of migration and displacement as it is understood in mainstream discourse. Povinelli writes that "quasi-events" are "a form of occurring that never punctures the horizon of the here and now and there and then and yet forms the basis of forms of existence to stay in place or alter their place."<sup>17</sup> That is to say that in the context of a place like Muridke and its surroundings, displacement is the altering of a place and of ways of living, slowly and debilitatingly over time. Additionally, in thinking with the temporalities of undocumented migration as they reveal themselves in people's lives and in the landscape, a conception of time as means of control is helpful. The seasonal rhythm and slower pace of village life is being replaced by another time tied to the demands of

capitalist production, as well as to the circulatory rhythms of migration. These operations of a dominant time also emerge in language as the Punjabi lunar calendar and its associations to particular seasons and to farming lose out to the Gregorian calendar. As agricultural practices become increasingly dependent on fertilizer and pesticides for regulating crop yields, the intimate knowledge of seasons, environments, and ecologies that is embedded in the Punjabi calendar, and was traditionally used to facilitate farming, has come to be seen as redundant. At the same time, the journeys of undocumented migration follow their own temporal and seasonal logic that emerges in relation to the restrictions and filtrations of borders, resulting in the smallest of distances sometimes taking days or weeks to cross, while at other times large distances can be traveled easily and quickly. In such moments of speed, those without documents are able to inhabit the contiguity of normative time and space that those of us with documents take for granted.

## 02. MAPPING BORDERS AS SPATIOTEMPORAL RELATIONS

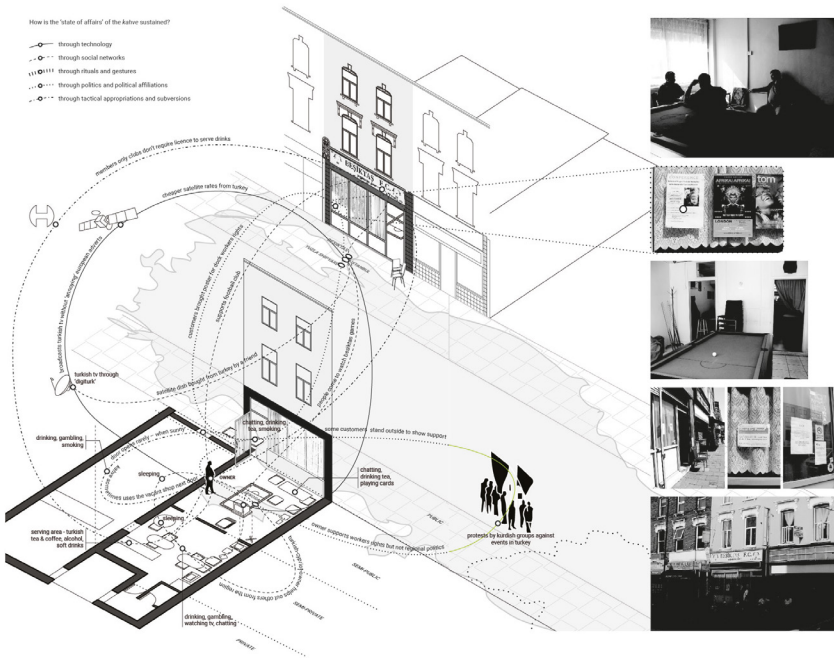
The refrain that borders are no longer lines in the sand is a familiar one, but as can be seen from the discussion above borders are also entities that modulate time.<sup>18</sup> In the group Multiplicity's 2003 film, *Solid Sea 03: Road Map*, a two-channel video displays side by side two journeys of equal length through the West Bank in Palestine. One is an Israeli citizen's journey between settlements on newly built bypass roads that takes just one hour, and the other is a circuitous five-hour journey of a Palestinian trying to get from Hebron to Nablus.<sup>19</sup> The proliferating internal borders across the West Bank have been designed to slow down and frustrate some journeys and lives while facilitating others. Stories of racialized persons being stopped in the middle of a busy European city, or at a train station, and challenged to prove their identity, also tell us that borders are complicit in valuing some people's time more highly than others. In this case borders are also displaced and dispersed from their physical location, appearing in policing and bureaucratic practices. Furthermore, this observation holds true for the traditional idea of a border as geopolitical entity, for example the external border of the EU now exists in Morocco, Algeria, and even as far south as Niger on the African continent, as the EU outsources its border management further and further away from its actual, that is to say, physical location.

Attending to these spatiotemporal complexities of borders requires modes of representation that can facilitate an interdisciplinary, multiscalar and de-centered approach to the world. Certain types of digital mapping techniques have this potential and they are already transforming our understanding of



space and the relationships between the virtual and material worlds. While there are some exceptions, the overwhelming majority of both contemporary digital and historical maps have been topographical. A topographic map works with the standard three dimensions, where scale and distance remain static; examples include the Mercator projection considered the norm for representing the Earth, the practices associated with GIS, and the projections used in Google Earth. In contrast, a topological map privileges relations. It places emphasis on common properties over proximity based in distance, or to put it another way, it envisages proximate relations beyond the organizing logic of distance. Perhaps the best-known recent example of a topological map is the Worldmapper project, where the shape and size of countries are distorted according to statistical data such as population size, water use, literacy, etc.<sup>20</sup> Another example is the Border Bumping project by Julian Oliver, which shows how as people cross the dense borders of Europe, they may be in one territory but their mobile phone picks up a signal from another.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps a more poignant example of this can be seen in the many conflict border situations where you might be able to pick up the signal from the other side of the border but cannot physically cross. Another example is the use of Italian SIM cards by refugees crossing the Mediterranean from Libya. As their phone picks up the signal from Italy, they know they are close to their destination. Whereas in the Worldmapper project topological relations were found in statistical data, here they are found in and through GPS technology.

A final illustrative example are my own maps of Turkish *kahve* (cafés) in London based on a series of conversations with owners and customers, in which I wanted to discover how these places functioned in the lives of their migrant users, many of whom had arrived in London as refugees. I had been observing the cafés for a while and was aware that many of the businesses were short-lived, easily opened and closed, among the first casualties of the encroaching gentrification that was moving northwards from the City of London. The maps I drew attempted to show both the spatial configuration of the cafés and their organizational structure. I paid particular attention to the networks within which these spaces operated, the ways in which they maintained connections to Turkey, and how they involved themselves (if at all) in regional politics. The maps revealed that while the networks crossed long distances and had an air of ephemerality about them, they were actually embedded in very particular physical locations, in certain objects, and in certain practices. The combination of these highly material and located practices with the deterritorialized condition of migration constituted the cafés as important places for their migrant users. In the maps, I represented the networks as loops that visualized the many connections a physically enclosed space makes with localities in other parts of the world. The mapping of these networks was approached



**Figure 5-2** A mapping of the networks that make the space of the Turkish kahve (café) in London. Author (2008).

through the question: How is the “state of affairs” of the *kahve* sustained?<sup>22</sup> These loops or networks were then categorized according to the ways in which they were mediated, for example through satellite TV or through political organizations, meaning that topological relations were found in technology, as well as in social and spatial interactions.<sup>23</sup>

### 03. TOPOLOGICAL MAPS AS ENTANGLEMENTS

An entwined and intense relationship between technological, social, and spatial relations seems to be a key quality of displaced lives. For those of us who are no longer located within the territory of our birth, technology allows us to maintain connections that would otherwise be difficult to sustain. Yet, technology is also used to curtail movement, to produce the very borders that people have crossed in search of better lives. In producing topological maps of migration and of borders, I am interested in how we might mobilize digital technologies to understand these very particular spatial relations, while also being aware of the way the digital space produces its own exclusions, and is

mobilized by states and other actors interested in exclusion through the hardening of borders. How, then, might we use the affordances of forms of digital mapmaking to resist the carceral and exclusionary logic of borders, and instead use these techniques to reveal the workings of power in relation to borders and displacement? These questions have been central to the long-term collective project, Topological Atlas, that I have been involved in for the last few years. Within this project techniques of mapping and spatial analysis are combined with ethnographic methods to produce a digital atlas of unsettlement.<sup>24</sup> Based on intensive fieldwork in border areas at various locations across the Pakistan-Iran and Iran-Turkey borders, as well as in the megacities of Karachi, Pakistan, and Istanbul, Turkey, our work investigates the relationship between technologies of border security, systems of documentation, border landscapes and the experience of crossing borders without papers. We approach migration as a system of circulation where deportation regimes, precarious lives, and militarized borders work together to keep people moving, that is, to keep them unsettled. If architecture, as I stated earlier in this chapter, is a discipline and a practice that at its most fundamental considers questions of settlement, then how might we approach this growing global community of the unsettled, forced to move due to racialized systems of privilege and exclusion? For us, this has meant considering the production of borders as spatialized power relations, attending to how they are produced through the entanglements of terrain, technology, and subjectivity. The question of the terrain includes physical spaces, landscapes, and border infrastructures and brings with it a territorial element. Technology refers to the way borders are produced through certain processes, including the bureaucracies deployed in border control and the technologies of border securitization. Finally, subjectivity refers to how these techniques and technologies for the production of borders also produce certain subjectivities—the unwanted or undocumented migrant, the racialized refugee or asylum seeker, the people smuggler and the border official. An architecture of unsettlement would need to consider all of these aspects together.

The research at the Pakistan-Iran border consisted of interviews, conversations, and field trips, intended to understand the nature of the territorial formations being produced and reproduced through the movement of people and goods, seasonal and climatic changes, and the knotted entanglements of these flows and exchanges. We have explored these at key locations along the border, such as the Taftan border crossing, which is the only formal border post between Pakistan and Iran. But our main focus has been on the smaller crossings where inhabitants of the area can pass with a *rahdaari*<sup>25</sup>—a word used for tolls or transit duties but also for the piece of paper required to pass the border at these smaller local crossings. It can only be used by those who can

prove residence in close proximity to the border and allows for short stays of up to fifteen days within sixty kilometers of the physical border. These small outposts are where informal border trade occurs, for example in the roughly forty thousand liters of cheap Iranian diesel that flows into Pakistan in small barrels on the back of pickup trucks and motorcycles every day, or the more illicit narcotics trade that connects Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran.<sup>26</sup> These are also the places where undocumented migrants can cross the border on their way to Iran, Turkey, or further into Europe. In using mapping, visualization, and spatial analysis to consider these phenomena, the aim is not to reveal the routes and strategies of those who are evading border security in order to make their way to what they consider to be more prosperous lives in Europe, nor is it to reveal the partially hidden practices of low-level smugglers who are often trying to make ends meet in an area that has long been neglected by both the Pakistani and Iranian states. Instead, the aim is to make sense of the entanglements of power not through the language of sovereignty, as Povinelli has cautioned,<sup>27</sup> and which is the usual modality in which exchanges at the geopolitical border are understood, but through the tension between terrain, technology, and subjectivity. In concrete terms this means, for example, understanding how ethnicity effects experiences of crossing the border—Pashtun, Punjabi, or Baloch people will all have completely different experiences of the technologies of border management, including how they are treated at the frequent check posts along the highways. The system of *lines* (bribes) and favors that allow some to pass through and others not are often brokered through low-level agents who are also drivers or conductors of buses or are in the guise of passengers. Their ethnicity as well as the informal networks they have managed to cultivate will ensure their survival in this dangerous business—it is an example of what AbdouMaliq Simone calls “people as infrastructure.”<sup>28</sup> The infrastructural relations in these border areas are less to do with the road, fence, and wall building that we would normally associate with hardened borders (although these are also present); instead, the state modulates flows across the border that it anyway never intended to stop, and it relies on this infrastructural capacity of people to find a way through the various obstacles it places in the way, some intended others not.<sup>29</sup> Of course, the system of *lines* ensures monetary value not only for those whose ingenuity allows them “to derive maximal outcomes from a minimal set of elements” but also for the state at large, which derives economic benefit from the cheap oil and other goods that move across the border.<sup>30</sup>

The informal nature of how oil is transported means there is spillage everywhere, the pristine coastline along the Arabian Sea is often polluted by the small boats that carry and use the diesel. To trace the lines of toxins that seep into the land and the sea from the small-scale industry that this diesel



**Figure 5-3** The patchy globe is a collage of photos and other visual and audio material from areas the research team have conducted field work layered on top of an image of the planet. *Topological Atlas* (2021).

supports and that is crucial to so many livelihoods is to map out the ways in which our lives are interconnected across geopolitical borders. “As we stretch the local across these seeping transits we need not scale up to the Human or the global, but we cannot remain in the local. We can only remain *hereish*.”<sup>31</sup> This concept of the “hereish” is what drives the types of maps we are producing, which visualize not only from the perspective of human relations or through the dichotomy between local or global. Instead, they are glimpses into complex entanglements that can only ever make sense from a situated perspective rather than the god’s eye view of traditional maps. Some principles for producing “hereish” maps for a topological atlas would be: to make patchy models that allow for moments of uncertainty and unknowing rather than producing totalising worlds; to privilege intensities of experience and relationalities over an attempt to produce a unifying vision; to use narrative as a device to navigate through such complex representations; and perhaps most importantly, to follow Katherine McKittrick’s argument relating to “a black sense of place,”<sup>32</sup> where she warns against analyzing spatial violence in a way that perpetuates such narratives. She instead asks us to produce analyses that reveal not only spatial violence but also the forms of life that resist and to contribute toward supporting those.

#### 04. DISLOCATING ARCHITECTURE

This gives a clue as to what an architecture of unsettlement might be. It would be an architecture that displaces the notion of location as a point on a map, or a set of coordinates. Doreen Massey’s seminal definition of a place as a net of

relations over space and time is useful here, but place in this conceptualization is related to a locality, that is, place is understood through being in it, and of it, over a long period of time.<sup>33</sup> Those who live unsettled lives do not have this luxury, and so the net of relations gets stretched, distorted, and becomes patchy. This patchiness is accompanied by a sense of time that is beyond one's own control, being accelerated or slowed down by outside forces, such as the many bureaucratic processes related to the maintenance of hardened borders. In such a context, place is "hereish" in the sense that Povinelli defines it, and I would add that it is also *nowish*. Being dislocated brings with it an appreciation of the topological relations that constitute reality, such as an inherent understanding of your own place within the technological and bureaucratic apparatus of border policing. This was the case with one of the people I met during field research for Topological Atlas, a young Punjabi man who had been to Greece and back many times when I spoke with him in one of the villages near Muridke. He knew all about the official European databases that held biometric and other information on him and almost all the other people he had met on his journey to Europe.<sup>34</sup> He was also very aware of their function in creating the complexity of the world that he would have to navigate should he decide to return, because the question of return is always open in his unsettled life.

Finding ways to account for and to support the network of practices that displaced people rely on is perhaps crucial. For those who are always compelled to move due to a lack of citizenship documents, a life on the move is made in the interstices of the bourgeois, sedentary life that the rest of us lead with our fixed addresses and employments. How to support and facilitate the networks built by those on the move could be one way of thinking about an architecture of displacement. The practices of relational or topological mapping described above are an attempt to do this. They straddle the line between producing representations of the workings of power, and accounting for those that resist through small scale everyday acts and modes of endurance. Both have a place in apprehending the workings of contemporary borders and the displacements they enact. To map the changing seasons, shifting monsoons, and threatened ecologies of a place like Muridke, next to the movement of people across geopolitical borders, is to resist the dominant European narrative on who is allowed to travel across borders and why. To map the movement and flow of oil, goods, or toxins across the Pakistan-Iran border is to show how a landscape considered empty is teeming with different forms of life and diverse economies, and to resist the labeling of informal trade as smuggling. To insist that temporalities are rhythms and relations that cannot be shown in a linear manner in perfectly formed timelines is to understand how events can unfold at multiple speeds, and that the deployment of technology for the production of borders can modulate time. An approach to architecture that has

been dislocated from its allegiance to static ideas of time and space can offer forms of representation and apprehension of lives and spaces that may not otherwise be legible to those whose own lives are so very different. In addressing those people and situations that architects have ignored for so long, we need to start with the basics—we need to account for the spaces and times of displacement, which in itself is a propositional activity that can generate new knowledge. Any remit of architecture beyond this, such as the designing of spaces and of relations, must come after, and often does so organically since architecture is much more than the built object.<sup>35</sup> In this sense, an architecture of unsettlement is an architecture that builds empathy toward those who are displaced, something so sorely needed in the context of borders and the movements they seek to curtail.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## NOTES

1. The Syrian conflict that began as an uprising in 2011 caused the large-scale displacement of people in the country and across the region. According to UNHCR, over 7 million people had fled their country by the end of 2014, and by the end of 2015 more than 900,000 had arrived at the shores of the Mediterranean. This led to the mainstream media in Europe coining the term “refugee crisis,” a characterization that has been challenged by a number of activists and scholars.  
Xavier Alcalde, “Why the Refugee Crisis Is Not a Refugee Crisis,” *Peace in Progress Magazine*, November 2016, <https://www.icip.cat/perlapau/en/article/why-the-refugee-crisis-is-not-a-refugee-crisis/>.
2. Alice Finney, “Ten Designs for the Global Refugee Crisis Including Shelters and Female Hygiene Inventions,” *Dezeen*, June 12, 2022, <https://www.dezeen.com/2022/06/21/refugee-crisis-designs-roundups/>; Kaja Kühl and Julie Behrens, “Spaces of Migration: Architecture for Refugees,” *Architectural Design* 88, no. 4 (2018): 86–93, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ad.2325>; Doug Saunders, *Arrival City: How the Largest Migration in History Is Reshaping Our World*, repr. ed. (New York: Vintage, 2012).



3. The concept of “sovereignty” is described in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as: “Sovereignty, though its meanings have varied across history, also has a core meaning, supreme authority within a territory. It is a modern notion of political authority. Historical variants can be understood along three dimensions—the holder of sovereignty, the absoluteness of sovereignty, and the internal and external dimensions of sovereignty. The state is the political institution in which sovereignty is embodied. An assemblage of states forms a sovereign states system.” Dan Philpott, “Sovereignty,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, summer 2014 ed., <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/sovereignty/>.  
For an example of a very different system of organizing territory and sovereignty, see: Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1994).
4. “A Tale of Two Protection Systems: Afghan Refugees Turn to Small Boats While Ukrainians Use ‘Safe and Legal Routes’ to Reach UK,” *Migration Observatory*, August 25, 2022, <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/press/a-tale-of-two-protection-systems-afghan-refugees-turn-to-small-boats-while-ukrainians-use-safe-and-legal-routes-to-reach-uk/>.
5. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, “Borderscapes of Differential Inclusion: Subjectivity and Struggles on the Threshold of Justice’s Excess,” in *The Borders of Justice*, ed. Etienne Balibar, Sandro Mezzadra, and Ranabir Samaddar (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 181–203.
6. Following a disaster or an emergency the need for immediate shelter is clear, and there is a long and dedicated history of architects being involved in the designing of temporary homes in collaboration with various international agencies, particularly UN Habitat.
7. Kelly Oliver, *Carceral Humanitarianism: Logics of Refugee Detention* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
8. Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider, and Jeremy Till, *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2011); Jane Rendell and David Roberts, “Project,” *Practising Ethics*, 2022, <https://www.practisingethics.org/project>; Jeremy Till, *Architecture Depends* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).
9. Irit Katz, *The Common Camp: Architecture of Power and Resistance in Israel-Palestine* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022); Aya Musmar, “Environmentalizing Humanitarian Governance in Za’atri Refugee Camp through ‘Interactive Spaces’: A Posthuman Approach,” in *Architecture and Feminisms: Ecologies, Economies, Technologies*, ed. Hélène Frichot, Catharina Gabrielsson, and Helen Runtig (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 181–91; Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, “On Humanitarian Architecture: A Story of a Border,” *Humanity Journal* 8, no. 3 (2017), <http://humanityjournal.org/issue8-3/on-humanitarian-architecture-a-story-of-a-border/>.



10. Shahram Khosravi, "Stolen Time," in *Radical Philosophy* 203, (2018): 38–41, <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/stolen-time>.
11. The full definition of who constitutes a refugee under the UN Convention can be found here: <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/1951-refugee-convention.html>.
12. According to economist Utsa Patnaik, 45 trillion dollars' worth of wealth was stolen from the Indian Subcontinent by the British, and currently Pakistan is nearly 250 billion dollars in debt. Ajai Sreevatsan, "British Raj Siphoned Out \$45 Trillion from India: Utsa Patnaik," *mint*, November 19, 2018, <https://www.livemint.com/Companies/HNZA71LNVNVXQJ1eaIKu6M/British-Raj-siphoned-out-45-trillion-from-India-Utsa-Patna.html>.
13. One man in his late twenties described his reasons as: "I was interested in a better life and a better income in Europe. I thought there would be a hundred new opportunities there and I could make something of myself." From an interview conducted by the author (Punjab, 2020).
14. Extract from an interview conducted by the author with a man in his midtwenties who had recently returned (Punjab, 2020). He did not make it to Europe but was arrested in Turkey and taken to a camp to be deported. He was not given an opportunity to apply for asylum or a visa but was transported back to Iran by road and handed over to the Iranian authorities, who then sent him back to Pakistan by road.
15. Rox Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 19.
16. For a detailed overview of these kinds of migration maps see: Henk van Houtum and Rodrigo Bueno Lacy, "The Migration Map Trap: On the Invasion Arrows in the Cartography of Migration," *Mobilities* 15, no. 2 (2020): 196–219, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2019.1676031>. An example of migration maps in news articles: Charlotte Hauswedell, "Surge in Migrant Arrivals in Spain – DW –," *Deutsche Welle*, August 18, 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/surge-in-migrant-arrivals-in-spain/a-40148818>.
17. Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2016), 40.
18. Henk van Houtum and Ton Van Naerssen, "Bordering, Ordering and Othering," *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 93, no. 2 (2002): 125–36, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9663.00189>; Olivier Thomas Kramsch, "The Rabelaisian Border," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28, no. 6 (2010): 1000–1014, <https://doi.org/10.1068/d14508>.
19. T. J. Demos, "Experiments with Truth," *ArtForum*, February 2005, <https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/200502/experiments-with-truth-8266>.
20. Danny Dorling et al., "Worldmapper: The World as You've Never Seen It Before," accessed October 28, 2015, <http://www.worldmapper.org/>.

21. Julian Oliver, "Border Bumping," March 1, 2012, <https://julianoliver.com/projects/border-bumping/>.
22. Here I am referring to Actor-Network Theory. See John Law and John Hassard, *Actor-Network Theory and After* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
23. Nishat Awan, "Mapping Otherwise: Imagining Other Possibilities and Other Futures," in *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice: Materialism, Activism, Dialogues, Pedagogies, Projections*, ed. Ramia Mazé, Meike Schalk, and Thérèse Kristiansson (Baunach: AADR, 2017), 33–41.
24. Topological Atlas is a multiyear research project, funded by the European Research Council, that investigates infrastructures of border management through their material, affective and social dimensions alongside a concern with the experience of undocumented migrants and border communities as they come into contact with these infrastructures. For more on Topological Atlas see: [www.topologicalatlas.net](http://www.topologicalatlas.net)
25. The word *rah* means path or way and *daar* means responsibility for, or possessing.
26. Nausheen H. Anwar, "Asian Mobilities and State Governance at the Geographic Margins: Geopolitics and Oil Tales from Karachi to Taftan," *Environment and Planning A* 48, no. 6 (2016): 1047–63, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X15594804>.
27. Povinelli, *Geontologies*.
28. A. M. Simone, "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg," *Public Culture* 16, no. 3 (2004): 407–29.
29. This is what Nausheen Anwar terms "the Janus face" of the state. Anwar, "Asian Mobilities and State Governance at the Geographic Margins."
30. Simone, "People as Infrastructure," 411.
31. Povinelli, *Geontologies*, 13.
32. Katherine McKittrick, "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place," *Social & Cultural Geography* 12, no. 8 (December 2011): 947–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2011.624280>.
33. Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1994), 120.
34. One such database is EuroDAC (**E**uropean Asylum **D**actyloscopy Database), which categorizes people according to their asylum status and how they entered the EU. The records in the database include age, sex, and the place where the biographical data was taken. For more on the workings of EURODAC see: Vassilis S. Tsianos and Brigitta Kuster, "Eurodac in Times of Bigness: The Power of Big Data within the Emerging European IT Agency," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 31, no. 2 (2016): 235–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2016.1174606>.
35. For a discussion of the role of architecture beyond the built object see: Awan, Schneider, and Till, *Spatial Agency*.

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# WAY STATION AND ASYLUM

## Border Conditions in Architectural Education

*Ursula Emery McClure, Marisa Gomez Nordyke, and Paul Holmquist*

The question of borders looms large in the architectural imagination. The architectural figure of the wall manifests borders as the primary lines of defense against the flows of people, capital, and goods—real and imagined—that threaten national sovereignty and internal power structures.<sup>1</sup> The wall also embodies the militarization and securitization of border spaces, as well as the unjust violence enacted on the migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers who traverse them. Borders are defined and implemented by political forces beyond architecture’s purview, which most often reduce it to implementing the “bordering” practices of exclusion, separation, and detention by state power.<sup>2</sup> Yet as architectural historian and theorist David Leatherbarrow has written, architecture as a discipline comprehends its own subjects, types of knowledge, competencies, and responsibilities not only within the technical domain of construction but also within the ethical sphere of human life in the broadest sense of ethos, or way of life.<sup>3</sup> Architecture has an “ethical function,” following philosopher Karsten Harries, not only to shelter human life but also to accommodate the potential fullness of human life in its social, cultural, and political dimensions.<sup>4</sup> Architecture’s complicity in the unjust violence of borders then compels crucial questions: Can architecture be separated from the operation of state power at borders? What responsibility do architects have to address political questions of civil and human rights, and the conditions of people’s lives, along the border? If bordering is an essentially spatial practice, how can architecture draw upon its own disciplinary capacities to reimagine the role it might play in alternative bordering practices—in bordering “otherwise”—and to inscribe these practices within humanitarian values?

### 01. BORDER - ARCHITECTURE - PEDAGOGY

Architectural design studios at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) and Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge (LSU) took up these questions in response to the imperilment of human life along the US-Mexico border by

state power in two distinct but interrelated senses: natural and biological life, and social and political life. The philosophical and political significance of these senses of life at the border can be understood through Giorgio Agamben's concept of "bare" or "naked life," as an exclusively biological life separated out from the fullness of human life in itself by the operative legal and political structures of state power.<sup>5</sup> Within the criminalized immigration process at the border, migrants and asylum seekers undergo a violent reduction to merely living bodies bearing minimal rights.<sup>6</sup> They are wholly exposed to the exclusionary violence of state power that, explicitly or implicitly, imperils their naked lives on the one hand and inscribes their human potentiality exclusively within its biopolitical regime on the other.<sup>7</sup> The studios sought to envision how architecture could act to protect, restore, and sustain the viability and potentiality of migrants' human lives in the fullest sense, both natural and sociopolitical, and by virtue of its core disciplinary capacities, transcend, illuminate, and render inoperative the unjust logics of separation and reduction.

The design studio as a speculative and generative pedagogical form particular to architectural education allowed students to engage the questions of human life at the border in theoretical, creative, and practical terms, in relation to actual conditions and practices at specific border sites. At UTA, Ursula Emery McClure and Marisa Gomez Nordyke led students in developing way stations providing shelter and essentials crucial for migrants' survival as they crossed the remote border region of the Chihuahuan Desert in West Texas. Life safety became the basis for architectural approaches that sustained migrants' natural, bodily lives through adaptive strategies drawn from the region's flora and fauna. In a studio led by Paul Holmquist at LSU, students reimaged the concept of asylum as a singular space for nurturing the social, economic, cultural, and political lives of asylum seekers and refugees and for recognizing their inherent rights to develop full human lives outside of the framework of nation states.<sup>8</sup> Students explored how restorative activities and programmatic functions accommodated by architecture could form the basis of strategies for creating places of social interaction, opening toward new possibilities for public life and modes of "denationalized" citizenship within the space of the Rio Grande, in between, as it were, the US and Mexico, and joining the cities of Matamoros, Tamaulipas, and Brownsville, Texas.<sup>9</sup> Considered together, the thematic and pedagogical approaches taken by these studios illuminate how speculative architectural imagination can both comprehend and respond to the spaces, conditions, and practices of borders from within architecture's own disciplinary capacities.



## 02. THE UTA STUDIO: WAY STATION

The US-Mexico border presents a particularly challenging and nuanced opportunity for design exploration. Eighty international crossings are interspersed along the border, which stretches for 1,954 miles.<sup>10</sup> Twenty-eight of those crossings are in the state of Texas, where the border follows the course of the Rio Grande.<sup>11</sup> Although border patrol stations play an important role in the collection of revenues and prevention of injurious plants, animal pests, and human and animal diseases from entering the country, their primary purpose is to oversee visitors' entry and exit and to enforce immigration law. Every day, trucks bring commercial goods into the country and people cross to make their living, returning home to Mexico each night. Many others seek to cross informally, evading surveillance. All of these types of crossing define and activate the border, but the perception of the border has been dominated by the concept of the "border wall." This is particularly evident in Texas, where the border and its oversight are at the forefront of political and cultural debates about immigration and US responsibilities under international law to refugees and asylum seekers.

In 2021, life safety issues at the US-Mexico border in Texas were especially pressing. Record numbers of immigrants gathered and were detained at the border in substandard, makeshift facilities adjacent to official ports of entry. Meanwhile, hundreds of others died from lack of shelter and water as they attempted to cross farther west in remote, less patrolled, and unwallled desert regions.<sup>12</sup> These events, which correlate directly to shelter (architecture) and the protection from harm shelter provides, were presented to the UTA students as the inquiry for the "La Linda Crossing: Dynamic Systems Border/Way Station" Fall 2021 Integrative Design Studio. The UTA Way Station studio was composed to reenvision one of these border crossings, both functionally and architecturally, in order to remedy the imperilment migrants face in the harsh desert conditions. As current border enforcement actions push migrants to cross in more remote regions and risk their lives, the assigned architectural program augmented the traditional border patrol functions with the hospitality services of a way station, "an intermediate stopping place."<sup>13</sup> Providing the students with an architectural program for a border station that performs monitoring duties, acts as the gateway to a country, and also offers respite to travelers assigned a position of inclusivity and welcome to the project. This program is counter to the current functions of border stations at the US-Mexico border, which intentionally restrict and exclude access rather than facilitate it.

To support this reprogramming, the studio organized users into two categories: "watchers" and "crossers." "Watchers" referred to those who occupy the station to patrol and protect the border. This terminology invests the actor with a responsibility to watch over and care for those who are crossing, rather



**Figure 6-1** La Linda International Bridge, photo by Ursula Emery McClure, September 11, 2021.

than emphasizing policing. Those who utilized the services of the station while traversing the border on foot, boat, or auto, were termed “crossers.” Reframing occupancy use in this way eliminated the distinction between those who traveled officially or unofficially, attempted to dislocate the studio from the highly charged political context, and supported the more unbiased program of the way station. Reenvisioning the program and renaming the users from the onset of the studio was critical not only to challenging the design of current border thresholds but also to negotiating the site of the project. Lying at the heart of the vast Chihuahuan Desert and immediately adjacent to Big Bend National Park and the Rio Grande, the La Linda Bridge is located in one of the most remote and inhospitable areas for crossing the border—there are no major towns nearby, few roads, little infrastructure, and miles of ground to cover. The previous station has been demolished and the bridge is currently closed. Here, the Rio Grande—not a wall—performs the work of “bordering.”

To cross the Rio Grande in West Texas is very different from crossing a wall or fence. The river border at this location is horizontal and constantly changing in size, depth, and speed. This physical character is the opposite of the vertical planes that construct much of the border elsewhere. The studio encouraged students to see the formation of the river over the millennia, and that of the surrounding environment, as a precedent for the design of the way station in which structure results from the interplay of dynamic elements. For, as author and historian Paul Horgan has written,

It has taken ocean and sky; the bearing of winds and the vagary of temperature; altitude and tilt of the earth's crust; underground waters and the spill of the valleys and the impermeable texture of the deserts; the cover of plants and the uses of animals; the power of gravity and the perishability of rock; the thirst of things that grow; and the need of the sea to create the Rio Grande.<sup>14</sup>

This characterization of the river is especially evident at the La Linda Bridge, where the river emerges from Boquillas Canyon (the deepest and longest river canyon in Big Bend National Park), makes a sharp turn north creating a flood plain, and then disappears back into the Chisos Mountains at Heath Canyon. Alongside the bridge, which spans the river in the narrow desert valley between these two canyons, is a flood gauge measuring 40 feet (12.2 meters). This marker, in conjunction with the adjacent canyons and flood plain, illustrates the volatile occupancy of the Rio Grande in the Chihuahuan Desert. Therefore, the studio proposed that just as the shape and character of the river is the result of fluctuating natural forces, architectural design might result from the confluence of complex political and ecological elements.

The complexity and fluidity of the social, political, and environmental context posed one challenge to the Way Station studio; the diverse backgrounds of the students posed another. Immigrants made up 70 percent of the class. Some had gained or were on the path to citizenship, while others were “undocumented”—meaning they were residing in the United States illegally.<sup>15</sup> In response to the students’ diverse life experience and the necessity for discretion, the studio foregrounded “life safety” at the border as one of the primary responsibilities of the architecture profession. The American Institute of Architects defines life safety responsibilities as “those aspects of professional practice that protect occupants, users, and any others affected by buildings or sites from harm” and asserts that architects have a “duty to protect the public’s health, safety, and welfare.”<sup>16</sup> By focusing the goals of the project on professional requirements of life safety and the welfare of the public that all of the students must achieve (versus citizenship status or immigration policy consensus), the studio took a political position opposed to the status quo. In Texas, extending consideration to the life safety of migrants is, sadly, a contentious issue.

In addition to reformulating the language and program associated with border stations, pedagogy in the Way Station studio endeavored to mitigate political noise and students’ biases by requiring biomimicry to inform design decisions. Biomimicry or biomimetics as defined by *Merriam-Webster* is “the imitation of natural biological designs or processes in engineering or invention.”<sup>17</sup> For living things, desert environments are challenging, as they have limited resources (food and water) and are excessively hot. Completing biomimetic investigations of nonhuman species that thrive in the desert requires

students to frame their ideas for occupancy around the biological needs for life, not political or cultural biases. Animals and plants do not participate in government or border policies; they do not acknowledge lines drawn on a map. They possess strategies for surviving in the environment and move about as needed for resources. Incorporating biomimicry into the project encouraged students to see biological design practices as the means by which to create safe, adaptable, and harmonious constructions and protect life in a desert environment.

The biomimetic investigation began with research and analysis of desert flora and fauna. On the first day of the course, students made their selections, preferably native (or autochthonous) to the Chihuahuan Desert. The architectural program, typically distributed on the first day of integrative design studios, however, was not assigned. Thus, for the first four weeks of the semester, the students' investigations focused on the site, its environment, and the flora and fauna that occupy the context. Each student selected a unique animal and plant to guarantee a wide range of species in the studio and, in turn, a diverse and expansive list of processes that support survival in the desert. Next, the students cataloged all the physical and behavioral attributes of their species. Then, through a series of analyses and graphic studies, they selected and transformed attributes into architectural shelter studies within their desert worlds. By focusing on basic survival and shelter strategies of other species in the inhospitable context of the West Texas desert, the students approached life safety as the minimum and necessary responsibility of architecture for the border.

Concurrent with the biomimicry portion of the studio, those who could do so traveled to the La Linda International Bridge and Big Bend National Park. Ideally, all students would have made a site visit. However, financial strain and fear of apprehension by border agents patrolling the region prevented some from attending. To get to the site, the students drove nine hours west from the Dallas-Fort Worth megalopolis to the remote and sparsely populated environment of the Chihuahuan Desert. The drive constituted an important component of the studio, as it provided the students with a visceral experience of the transition from populated to not, temperate to dry, green to brown, covered to exposed, built to unbuilt, and polished to raw. The trip also provided the students with the opportunity to feel the extremes of the environment and to experience what it means to cross the border by passing through patrol stations. None of the students had been to West Texas, much less traveled a road that passed through a US Border Station. Nor did they have any idea of how "patrol" occurs in the nation's largest expanse of open border, or the bordering role played by the desert and river landscape. The hope was that these experiences would attune their design responses to the experiences of both "watchers" and "crossers."

The excursion took the studio to the Rio Grande (the border) multiple times. The first stop was the project site at the La Linda International Bridge. Currently a closed border crossing, the single-lane bridge crosses the river deep in the desert. It is more than eighty miles (approximately 130 kilometers) from the closest inhabited town and twenty miles (approximately 30 kilometers) from any services. The studio spent an entire day on site measuring, material mapping, sketching, filming, and photographing. This documentation was critical not only for the students' individual projects but for their peers who could not come to the border. The isolation in nature was palpable, and the heat oppressive. It was 115°F in the sun (46°C), cooling only to 95°F (35°C) at the river's edge and 80°F (26°C) under the bridge. The next day was spent in Big Bend National Park. The studio traveled to every site in the park that touches the river to experience the variety of desert and riverine environments that form the border. From visiting delta lands level with the river, to traversing the towering mesas—isolated flat-topped hills with steep sides, found in landscapes with horizontal strata—that overlook it, to standing midstream in awe of a canyon, the students touched the border at each location.<sup>18</sup>

While at the site, students embodied the multivalent role of “watcher.” As the site is located within the boundaries of the Big Bend National Park, the “watchers” include not only border patrol but visitors to the park who bear witness to the government's treatment of “crossers,” discouraging violence. As they were perched upon a mesa, the daily rhythms of life on the border played out before them. The students observed “crossers” from Mexico freely traversing shallow portions of the Rio Grande to sell their wares. A father and his young son waded through the muddy waters, laid down a blanket, and set out delicate figurines crafted from copper wire for tourists to purchase. At the last stop, the Santa Elena Canyon, the students undertook their own border crossing. They hiked across the riverbed to circumnavigate the canyon and cross the border, feeling it mucky and rocky under their feet. Performing the role of both “watcher” and “crosser,” coupled with their immersion in and documentation of the desert environment, was important to the architectural investigations that would take place back on campus. Moreover, gaining insight into life on the border through experience, rather than through abstract political debate, enhanced the students' capacity for empathy and bolstered their commitment to life safety.

Following the biomimetic investigations, field excursion, and more site analysis (the gathering of existing site conditions such as geography, geomorphology, climate, materiality, geology, etc. and investigations into how the existing conditions coexist and interact), the students began work on design proposals for the way station. It was at this point in the semester, the sixth week, that the specific requirements of the architecture program were distributed.

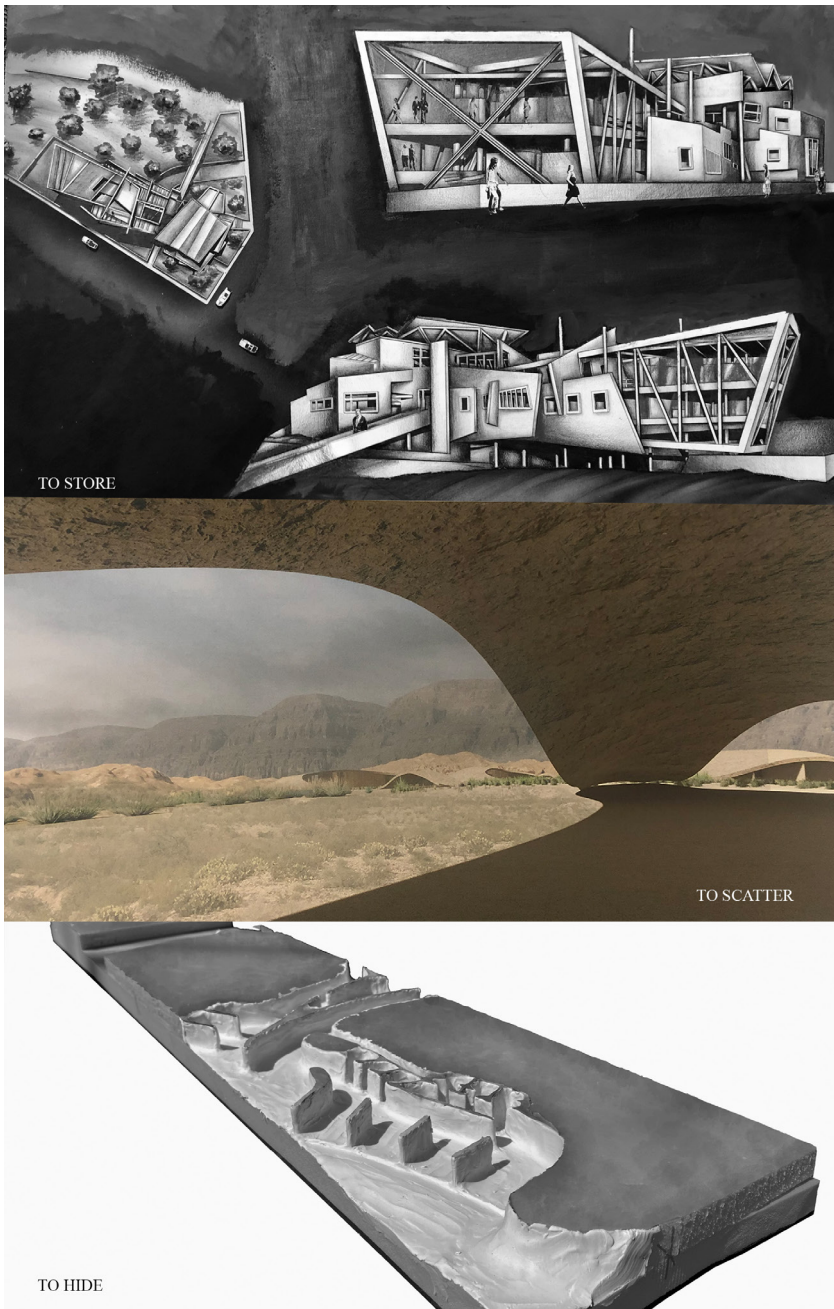


**Figure 6-2** UTA students crossing the US-Mexico border at Santa Elena Canyon, photo by Ursula Emery McClure, September 12, 2021.

The intent of introducing the program specifics almost halfway through the semester instead of the first day was to avoid hampering the students' creativity with the technicalities of architecture (problem solving) and foreground their survival analyses and biomimetic investigations. The way station was to be a facility serving migrants crossing both officially and unofficially, in which the realities of immigration law and its enforcement were suspended. Thus, when assigned the specific technical requirements for the way station, the students would investigate this fictional premise through the desert survival strategies they had already defined and begun to study materially and experientially. For the rest of the semester the students developed their projects, focusing on the station's technical, material, and resilient details. Their final responses were as varied as their flora and fauna selections, but all could be categorized under one of three architectural themes: to store/serve, to scatter, or to hide. It seems that when investigating the life safety responsibilities for border architecture in a desert environment, the students' conclusions conceptualized and materialized the instinctual survival attributes of its nonhuman occupants.



## WAY STATION AND ASYLUM



**Figure 6-3** UTA student projects: Emanuel Paclibon (top), Youssef Elmergawy (middle), Calvin Ridenour (bottom). University of Texas Arlington, Fall 2021.

**To Store/Serve: The Cactus\_** Student projects that determined this theme were the most similar to a conventional border facility. They tended to lie immediately adjacent to the bridge. Almost all the way station activities fell under one roof and all occupants moved in and around the way station. For the students whose designs supported this theme, their position toward life safety was that the architecture must be prominent on the horizon, so that one could see it from afar and know where safety and shelter could be found. Thus, the way station was distinct from the landscape, making itself known both in scale and materials. These projects not only made themselves highly visible, but they also positioned their storage components (water, energy, and operations) internally, leaving their perimeter to provide services to the users. This is similar to the desert cactus, one of the largest flora found in the desert. It too stores everything it needs to survive internally while offering its appendages—its fruit, flowers, and succulent leaves—to other desert inhabitants for survival.

**To Scatter: Desert Flora\_** Several students pursued an opposing approach to the way station. They found a centralized facility too similar to how the official US border currently presents itself and determined that the disparate services the way station offered could allow for a more dispersed (scattered) facility. As the site at the river was large, the terrain diverse, and the users varied (“watchers,” official “crossers,” unofficial “crossers”), the projects that scattered the architecture presented a humbler station. These projects paid particular attention to the many unique conditions of the site—the road, the bridge, the riverbed, the rocky outcropping, and the valley of trees—assigning program spaces to certain conditions. Assignments varied according to each project, but all followed the survival strategy of desert flora such as the ocotillo, the living rock cactus, and the welwitschia. These plants spread out across the landscape, both above and below ground. The root systems of plants that lie adjacent to one another occupy the ground at different levels, either just below the surface with small, weblike roots or, in contrast, a single, deep tap root. This allows them to capture as much water as possible without fighting one another for the resource. The harmonious relationship among desert flora served as a model for students who believed scattering was both safer and more equitable to all the site’s users.

**To Hide: Desert Fauna\_** To hide was the third theme projects presented. For the students working in this mode, the severe climate of the desert border greatly influenced their designs. Their projects utilized the steep terrain to bury the way stations or exploited the lush vegetation at the river’s edge to camouflage the presence of the architecture. Either response led to dark and shaded spaces, material palettes that drew from the site, and multiple, discreet



points of entry for different categories of users. These characteristics responded to the behaviors of desert fauna and perhaps even those of the human crosser. Desert fauna shield themselves from the day's heat and harsh sunlight by seeking out shade or burrowing underground. This is not only to avoid the extreme temperatures but also to avoid detection by predators. Many desert animals also camouflage themselves, furthering their ability to hide in the flora and rocks of the desert ground. Finally, desert fauna who establish their own shelter primarily do so underground, creating burrows and elaborate tunnel systems where they hide during the day. These underground shelters are accessed by multiple entrances and exits that allow the fauna to evade predators. The projects that hid best exemplified biomimetics and were the most contrary to existing border facilities, both in practice and design.

The emergence of design themes directly reflecting the novel characteristics of desert flora and fauna was expected, as they provide valuable insight into life safety strategies. The students' translations of these strategies for human occupancy, however, was surprising. Biomimicry forced students to reconceive the notion of "bordering." Maintaining focus on the survival needs of humans traveling across the border and those who must watch them mitigated personal bias and political noise, ultimately resulting in designs more humble, approachable, and environmentally responsible than conventional border stations. In this way, the Way Station studio reimagined border architecture as hospitable and empathetic, countering spatial archetypes and serving basic biological necessities while demonstrating reciprocity with the environment. The clarity of this hospitality is an "otherwise" or alternative architectural experience for those who cross and watch this remote border.

### 03. THE LSU STUDIO: ASYLUM

In the summer of 2018, the exclusionary violence enacted by the US-Mexico border became powerfully evident in the carceral architecture of the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" policy, in which all migrants and asylum seekers apprehended while crossing the border illegally were subject to criminal prosecution. In facilities along the Rio Grande Valley, hastily erected chain-link fence enclosures for adults and children separated from their parents were immediately likened to animal cages.<sup>19</sup> They comprised an architecture of sheer restraint and exclusion that revealed the essential reduction of human beings in a criminalized immigration process to living bodies possessing minimal rights.<sup>20</sup> Asylum seekers fleeing violent persecution in their home countries experience the precarity of this reduction acutely. They appear at the border not as citizens with inviolable rights but, in the words of

philosopher Hannah Arendt, as “nothing but human beings,” and thus politically unrecognizable.<sup>21</sup> The operation of state power on those most vulnerable at the US-Mexico border was exposed as expressly “architectural” through apparatuses of control and surveillance implementing exclusionary practices to produce an alien other, variously to be absorbed within or expelled from the state.<sup>22</sup> Reduced to sheer instrumentality, the architecture of these bordering processes only recognizes and acts upon the human reduced to the condition Agamben describes as “bare” or “naked life.”<sup>23</sup> Separated out from the fullness of human life in itself, this bare life of migrants and asylum seekers can be wholly delivered over to the power of the nation-state to define, thus inscribing the human exclusively within its political regime.<sup>24</sup> Given the inherently “architectural” nature of border spaces and practices, and the deep complicity of architecture in the exclusionary state violence enacted through them, how could an architecture of asylum in the fullest sense—of recognition, refuge, and protection of the human, as such—possibly be envisioned, let alone created, at the US-Mexico border?

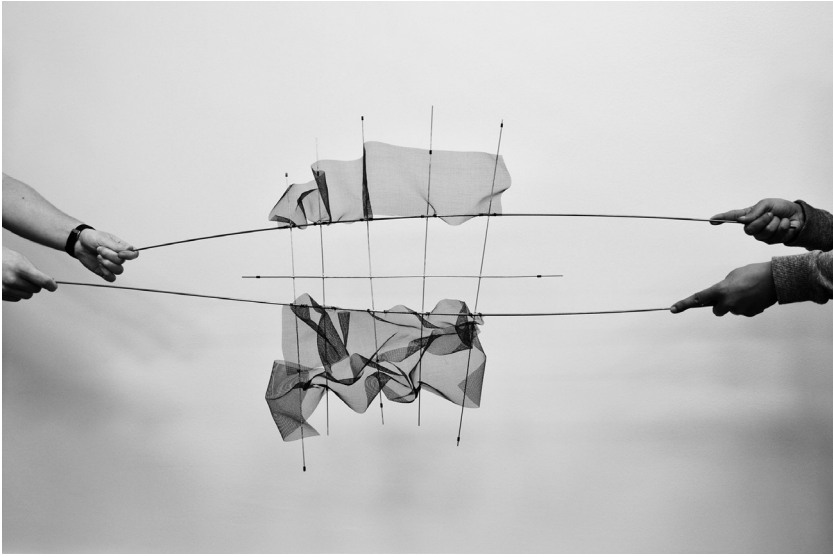
This question was taken as the premise for an advanced architectural design studio at Louisiana State University in the fall of 2018 titled “Asylum: Bordering Otherwise on the Rio Grande/Bravo del Norte.” Set along the US-Mexico border between Brownsville, Texas, and Matamoros, Tamaulipas, the studio work adopted the concept of asylum as a model for reconceiving how architecture could “border otherwise” not only for those seeking legal asylum but also for all traversing the border including migrants and residents from both sides. The studio drew upon the historical concept of asylum as the inviolability of persons and places within sacred precincts subject exclusively to divine law.<sup>25</sup> An architecture of asylum would conceive the possibility of a space outside of, and set apart from, that of the border structured by the operative, instrumental logics of power. As in the original sense of asylum, this space would be subject to a different, if not “higher” law, in which the nature of human being could not be separated or reduced unjustly but would rather be acknowledged in its irreducible fullness and potentiality. By predicating itself on such a view of the human, this architecture of asylum could furthermore envision enacting it by accommodating practices of healing, restoration, and recognition in the form of various social, cultural, economic, and political programs for architectural spaces. These practices would address not only urgent physical and psychological needs of migrants and asylum seekers but also social needs and desires for participation, exchange, and intercourse with others in new modes of public life.

The architectural question for the studio then became how to accommodate and foster these practices in a range of private and public spaces within a distinct space of asylum itself, conceived as a thickened area between, as it

were, the two sides of the border. This intermediary zone was physically located between the line of enforcement generally running along the levees encasing the American side of the Rio Grande, and the nonenforced levees on the Mexican side of the river. However, the space of asylum was conceptually identified with the river itself, as an essentially natural entity lying ambiguously between the United States and Mexico, Brownsville and Matamoros, yet belonging to both nations and cities. Within the quasi-natural space of the river, including wide areas of embankments and wetlands, the studio speculatively imagined that exclusive claims of national sovereignty over this territory would be suspended. According to this fictional premise, the asylum zone would be permeable to pedestrian access from both sides; however, it could not be crossed to officially enter either country. Rather, it would allow asylum seekers, migrants, the residents of Brownsville-Matamoros, and even tourists to provisionally dwell together for a limited time through mutual encounter, exchange, and support, and collective practices of restoration and recognition.

Following from the notion of asylum as both practice and place, the studio undertook to develop particular bordering practices as architectural programs that could be accommodated in various private and public spaces within the urban-riverine context of the border. Taken together, the interconnected sites of these program-practices would constitute the asylum zone as a complex social, cultural, economic, and ultimately political space. The design task then became to situate these programmatic practices and spaces not only in relation to their sustaining natural and urban contexts but also to each other, in order to stimulate new modes of social practice and interaction. To this end, the primary work of the studio comprised two phases: a collaborative master plan by groups of four students who each conceived, sited, and developed programs that acted together to constitute an overall zone between them; and the subsequent, individual development of particular program-sites as architectural proposals within it.

The master plan and individual projects envisioned the asylum zone as a shared space where asylum seekers and migrants could obtain services and mutual support, as well as providing them with opportunities for personal, professional, and creative development, social interaction, commerce, and recreation together with residents of Matamoros and Brownsville. The zone would furthermore aim to restore the continuity of urban life between the two cities, and the historical, social, cultural, and economic connections that have been ruptured by the securitization of the border. Natural restoration of the river would parallel and support the broader recuperation of human capacities and relationships. Finally, the zone would provide those within it the opportunity to experience a “denationalized” public realm constituted solely by their own presence and participation as whole persons, regardless of citizenship,



**Figure 6-4** LSU student project, “Bordering Apparatus.” Peggy Faucheux, Lydia Hagel, and Gurkirat Kaur. Louisiana State University, 2018.

nationality, or other status.<sup>26</sup> The public spaces of asylum, opening up between various program-practice sites, would provide arenas for advocacy, discussion, and debate around the shared concerns and aspirations of migrants and inhabitants alike. These spaces would be understood as political in an Arendtian sense, unformalized by any state regime, in which people come forward as equal “citizens” to disclose their identities as fully human in acting and speaking together for the sake of their common concern for wholeness and recognition.<sup>27</sup>

In light of the public, political dimension of this view of asylum, collaboration in the design process played a key pedagogical role. If the notion of asylum entailed supplanting the exclusively instrumental “law” of the border’s operative sense of reality, it likewise asserted the priority of a sense of reality in which the fullest potentiality of the human as “form-of-life,” following Agamben, could possibly transcend being separated from or reduced to mere bodily life.<sup>28</sup> In conceiving the public spaces of the asylum zone, the studio implicitly took up the distinctly political sense of reality in Arendt’s theory, which is co-constituted out of the simultaneous, plural, embodied perspectives on a world shared in common.<sup>29</sup> This sense of reality is contingent upon the co-presence of equal actors who prevent the world from being subject to a singular perspective or authority.<sup>30</sup> Design collaboration in the studio was understood analogously as a mode of co-constituting the possibilities of the

project out of the equal participation of group members, in ways that could anticipate the properly political sense of reality in the zone.

An initial studio exercise explored this mode of co-constitutive design in developing a conceptual “bordering apparatus.” Students individually examined water as a phenomenal bordering condition locally in Baton Rouge that spatially, materially, socially, and perceptually manifested in ambiguous and ambivalent ways. They then translated interpretive texts, images, and diagrams of this condition into small constructions exemplifying perceptual and material qualities they had identified. Working in teams, students synthesized these constructions into a single, dynamic apparatus that qualitatively demonstrated their interpretation of water as a bordering phenomenon in social, interactive terms. The apparatus was furthermore required to preserve the primary quality or characteristic of each individual construction in equal proportion. This exercise set the model for design collaboration in the studio work overall, including site research, master planning, and the collective invention of public spaces with respect to the various sites and practices they encompassed. The challenge became how to respond to plural and diverse constituencies within the project in ways that were responsible, in turn, to the dimensions of human plurality, equality, and diversity at stake in the studio’s conception of asylum.

*Mending the Divide through Healing and Exchange* exemplifies how students collaboratively engaged the notion of asylum as “bordering otherwise” in a master plan and individual architectural proposals.<sup>31</sup> The students developed original architectural programs informed by their research into the border context and conditions around Matamoros and Brownsville, and their investigations and experience on site during our studio visit to the area.<sup>32</sup> These programs expanded upon practices that students had found were already occurring to some extent within the border context and were developed in particular sites to promote interactions between asylum seekers, migrants, and residents. The master plan of *Mending the Divide* envisioned the asylum zone taking form between two thematic poles, *exchange* and *healing*, each encompassing two complementary sets of programmatic practices at key locations within the urban-riverine geography of the border: the Gateway International Bridge over the Rio Grande linking the downtown areas of Matamoros and Brownsville and the grounds of the former U.S. Army Fort Brown approximately one mile (1.6 kilometers) to the south, a natural reclamation area and site of an abandoned golf course located between the river and the border fence.

On the bridge, the project “Memorializing Histories” imagined a documentation and interpretation center for oral history and storytelling, suspended in the gap between the bridge’s two directional lanes directly above the legal line of the border in the middle of the river. Those crossing the border from

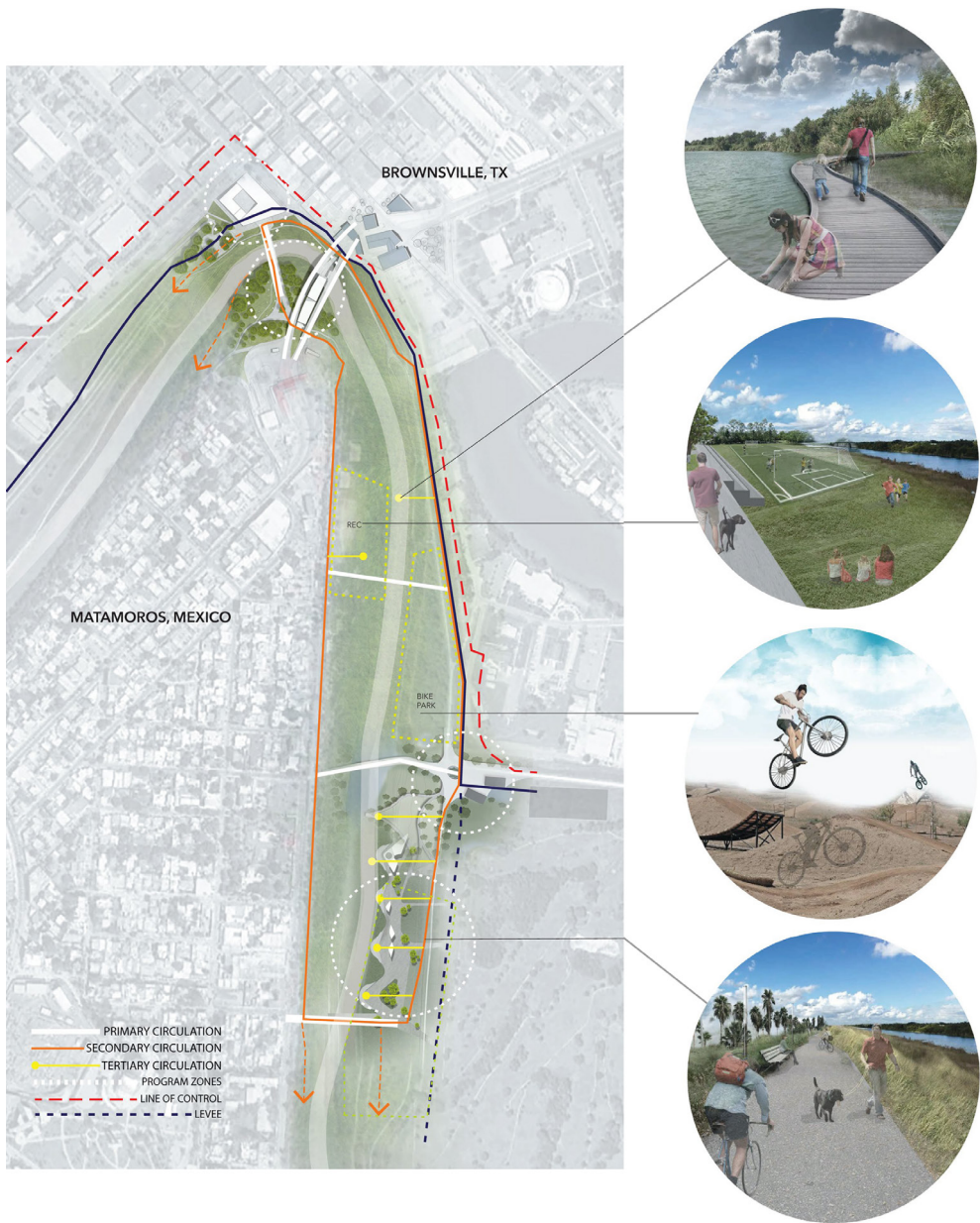


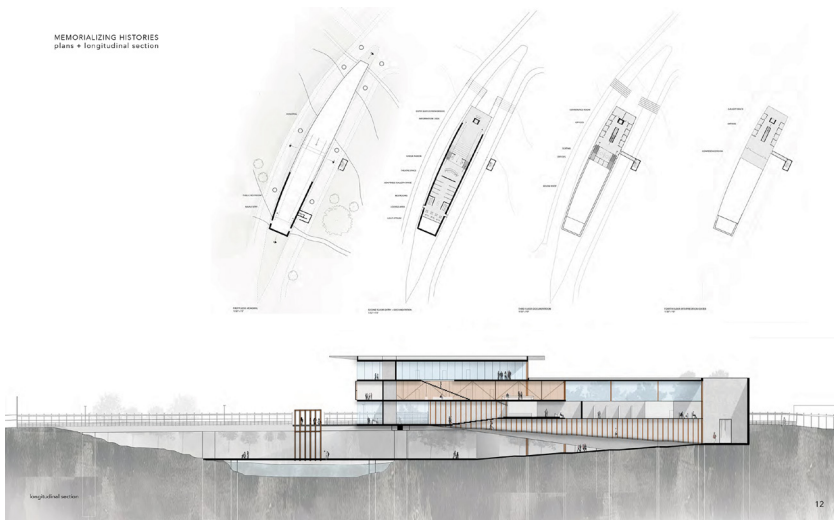
Figure 6-5 LSU student project, master plan, *Mending the Divide through Healing & Exchange*. Saul Belloso, Grayson Bullion, Gurkirat Kaur, and Madeline Luke. Louisiana State University, 2018.



both sides would be able to recount their stories, share memories and information, search databases of missing persons, leave messages for friends and family members, and memorialize those who had lost their lives within the borderlands.

A public park traversing the riverbed would join the center to a second project, “Crafting Exchange,” a marketplace and reskilling center. Encompassing maker spaces, peer-training workshops, a resource library, and display areas for selling crafted goods, the complex would recognize the diverse creative capacities of all people as a source of worth, dignity, and respect within a public space of exchange. Set at the edge of the Brownsville business district, the center would furthermore act as an economic and social stimulant to a struggling downtown and integrate migrants and asylum seekers into the fabric of everyday urban life.

At the reclaimed natural area of the former Fort Brown, a second pair of program-practices interwove the restoration of natural riverbanks and wetlands with that of human physical, psychological, and social well-being. “Unifying Cultures” proposed connecting restored public green spaces on both sides of the river to the Olympic Park cultural district of Matamoros. A new bridge would act as a public plaza for reconvening civic festivals and parades that had historically brought the two communities together. A secluded group of pavilions within the reclaimed green areas would accommodate an



**Figure 6-6** LSU student project, plans and longitudinal section, “Memorializing Histories.” Madeline Luke. Louisiana State University, 2018.

arts therapy center for migrants and asylum seekers, connecting the restorative role of the creative arts with the essential creativity of nature. In addition, the students proposed opening the levee in order to recover an adjacent wetland area during seasonal flooding. Set atop the levee, the project “Spectra” proposed an urban rehabilitation and humanitarian response center for asylum seekers and others who were victims of gender-based violence, either in their home country or as they traversed the border. The project sought to allow residents to move within and between spaces of varying degrees of privacy and publicness, as needed or desired, alternating between the seclusion of the wetlands and openness of the river, and ultimately the urban spaces beyond.

In *Mending the Divide*, recovered natural areas provided the connection between individual projects and their respective public spaces, making the asylum zone equally a natural and political refuge. From the *healing* area of the asylum zone, a series of trails and bike paths would extend north linking recreational and natural areas along both banks of the river to connect to the *exchange* area centered on the Gateway International Bridge and the downtown centers of both cities. Each of the studio master plans took similar approaches, utilizing a range of sites that acted as inflection points between intersecting private and public, natural and urban, and social and political realms. While each master plan comprised only four proposals for practicality’s sake, all student projects were understood to contribute to a larger comprehensive, if wholly speculative, vision for the asylum zone, which included a diverse array of program-practices such as women’s and children’s health, legal outreach and advocacy, multimedia production and global communication, urban farming and foodways preservation, interfaith activism, and sports. Collectively these represented the extent to which the potential for “bordering otherwise” could be envisioned from within architecture’s core capacity to accommodate the practices, both exceptional and of the everyday, that habitually sustain the dignity and fullness of human life.

#### 04. PEDAGOGY - ARCHITECTURE - BORDER

Through the speculative explorations of Way Station and Asylum, architectural pedagogy sought to comprehend the conditions of the border in the specific terms that fall within architecture’s disciplinary purview—the protection and nurturing of human life, both natural and biological, as well as social and political. Yet recognizing that bordering processes are executed by forces beyond architecture, both studios took it as a fundamental pedagogical stance not to directly contest, subvert, or circumvent current border practices through architectural intervention. These approaches tacitly accept the operative reality



through which state power acts and effectively reinscribe architecture within wholly instrumental modalities that can only confirm the unjust, reductive claim of state power over life. Rather, the studios sought to establish an alternative ground for bordering as a practice by shifting the engagement with life at the border to expressly architectural terms, as if architecture's recognition and accommodation of life in the fullest sense could supplant current practices that reduce and imperil life. To make this shift, the studios adopted the key pedagogical strategy of positing the fictional suspension of current border practices and proceeding as if their exclusionary logics enacted upon life were rendered inoperative. By so doing, the potential role of architecture to illuminate and critique the spatiopolitical condition of borders and practices of bordering could come forward through envisioning wholly alternative modes of accommodating life in architectural terms.<sup>33</sup>

Predicated on a fiction, the studios were then able to explore complementary approaches to the fullness of life as a real political stake at the US-Mexico border that drew respectively upon life safety and program accommodation as key areas of architectural responsibility. UTA's Way Station responded to the imperilment of migrants' natural, biological lives by border enforcement practices that effectively lead to people attempting to cross the border in dangerously remote and inhospitable areas. The studio addressed the migrants' life safety needs through biomimetic strategies that deactivated this imperilment for the sake of migrants' potential to pursue their lives in the fullest sense possible after crossing the border. LSU's Asylum responded to the imperilment of human potentiality in migrants' reduction to living bodies with minimal rights. The studio addressed the possibility of human development in new occasions for social, economic, cultural, and political interaction through proposing new activity-programs for architecture and the spaces they entail. In so doing, Asylum activities and spaces also sought to cultivate opportunities for migrants to recognize themselves and act politically as "citizens" outside of nation-state regimes. By virtue of architecture's disciplinary capacities to shelter and accommodate life within complex natural and urban environments, students in both studios were able to ground the specifically architectural imagination of alternative practices of bordering directed against the all-too-real imperilment of human life at the US-Mexico border.

## 05. CONCLUSION

As much as the figure of the border wall predominates in the political imagination of state power, Way Station and Asylum reveal alternative ways that architecture could potentially comprehend and inform our conception of the border and bordering as a spatiopolitical condition and practice. In turn, they suggest

how, in reclaiming disciplinary priorities independent of state authority, architecture might come to grasp its complicity in exclusionary state violence at borders and seek out alternative modes of practice that restore and sustain life in spite of the operations of state power. Border studio pedagogy not only enables students to engage the conditions of borders and bordering practices as expressly architectural ones but also brings into stark relief how architecture's disciplinary capacities are, in fact, ethical imperatives. The studios at UTA and LSU furthermore show how architectural pedagogy can equip students to act architecturally within the context of global change—social, political, economic, and environmental—at scales ranging from the personal to the planetary. In this way, architectural education prepares students to engage dynamic social and political conditions such as migration and asylum while foregrounding architecture's core responsibility to sustain human life in its fullest sense.

## NOTES

1. Wendy Brown, *Walled States: Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 7–26.
2. Henk van Houtum and Ton van Naerssen, "Bordering, Ordering and Othering," *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 93, no. 2 (2002): 125, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9663.00189>.
3. David Leatherbarrow, "Architecture Is Its Own Discipline," in *The Discipline of Architecture*, ed. Andrzej Piotrowski and Julia Williams Robinson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 83–87.
4. Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 4, 13; see especially pt. 4, "Architecture and Community."
5. Giorgio Agamben, "Form-of-Life," in *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 3–12. See also Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 1–12.
6. Agamben, "Beyond Human Rights," in *Means without End*, 18–23.
7. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 126–35. See also Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), esp. chap. 1 and 2.
8. Agamben, "Beyond Human Rights," 18–23.
9. For a conception of citizenship open to claims from nonstate, extranational actors see Saskia Sassen, "Incompleteness and the Possibility of Making: Towards Denationalized Citizenship?" in *Political Power and Social Theory*, vol. 20, ed. D. E. Davis and J. Go (Leeds: Emerald Group Publishing, 2009), 229–58, [https://doi.org/10.1108/S0198-8719\(2009\)0000020013](https://doi.org/10.1108/S0198-8719(2009)0000020013).

10. "Sectors and Stations," Border Patrol Sectors, US Customs and Border Protection, accessed August 29, 2022, <https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/along-us-borders/border-patrol-sectors>.
11. "Texas-Mexico Border Crossings," Texas Department of Transportation, accessed August 29, 2022, <https://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/projects/studies/statewide/border-crossing.html>.
12. See Priscilla Alvarez, "At Least 650 Migrants Died Crossing the US-Mexico Border, the Most Since 2014, International Agency Says," *CNN* online, December 9, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/09/politics/migrants-dying-crossing-us-mexico-border/index.html>; and "Record High Migrant Detentions at US-Mexico Border," *BBC News*, October 22, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-59019791>.
13. *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "way station, (n)," accessed August 28, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/way%20station>.
14. Paul Horgan, *Great River: The Rio Grande in North American History* (New York: Rinehart, 1954), 7.
15. Students residing in the United States illegally are permitted to attend the university and can even apply for scholarships from the State of Texas. The university keeps student immigration status confidential. See, "DACA FAQ," University of Texas at Arlington, accessed August 29, 2022, <https://www.uta.edu/student-affairs/daca/faq>.
16. "Health, Safety and Welfare Units," American Institute of Architects, accessed August 29, 2022, <https://www.aia.org/pages/3281-health-safety-and-welfare-credits>.
17. *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "biomimicry, (n)," accessed August 29, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/biomimicry>.
18. A mesa is an expansive, flat-topped ridge with steep sides rising over a plain. Mesas are prominent geomorphic features of the southwestern United States. See Piotr Migon, "Mesa," in *Encyclopedia of Geomorphology*, ed. Andrew S. Goudie, Taylor and Francis (London: Routledge, 2006), 668, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uta.edu/10.4324/9780203381137>.
19. Miriam Jordan, "U.S. Shuttles Warehouse Where Migrants Were Kept in 'Cages,'" *New York Times*, November 25, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/25/us/border-migrant-children-cages-ursula-warehouse.html>.
20. Agamben, "Form-of-Life," 12.
21. Hannah Arendt, "We Refugees," in *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*, ed. Marc Robinson (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 118; Agamben, "Beyond Human Rights," 19–20.
22. Van Houtum and Van Naerssen, "Bordering, Ordering and Othering," 125.
23. Agamben, "Form-of-Life," 3–12. See also Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–12.
24. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 126–35.

25. See Linda Rabben, *Sanctuary and Asylum: A Social and Political History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press: 2016), chap. 1, “Sanctuary’s Beginnings”; Ulrich Sinn, “Greek Sanctuaries as Places of Refuge,” in *Greek Sanctuaries: New Approaches*, ed. Robin Hägg and Nanno Marinatos (London, Routledge: 1993), 88–109; and Angelos Chaniotis, “Conflicting Authorities. Asyilia between Secular and Divine Law in the Classical and Hellenistic Poleis,” *Kernos* 9 (1996): 65–86, <https://doi.org/10.4000/kernos.1157>.
26. Here we draw broadly on Saskia Sassen’s concept of “denationalized” practices of citizenship in Sassen, “Incompleteness and the Possibility of Making.”
27. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 175–81. See also Agamben, “Beyond Human Rights,” 18–23.
28. Agamben, “Form-of-Life,” 3–4, 8–9.
29. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 50–53, 57–58.
30. *Ibid.*, 58.
31. Saul Beloso, Grayson Bullion, Gurkirat Kaur, and Madeline Luke, *Mending the Divide through Healing and Exchange*, architectural design project, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, 2018.
32. Due to US State Department advisories on travel to the Mexican state of Tamaulipas at the time, the students were not permitted by the university to cross into Matamoros and so were unable to experience crossing the border and to witness the treatment of migrants as they attempted to do so.
33. See David Leatherbarrow’s discussion of the architectural capacity to “know the world” through making projective images of it in design, in Leatherbarrow, “Architecture Is Its Own Discipline,” 87–91.

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# POLITICS AND ARCHITECTURE OF BORDER CROSSINGS

## The Case Study of Gevgelija in North Macedonia

*Aleksandar Staničić*

Globetrotters around the world—at least the ones who decide to do their globe-trotting on land—know that they can get a pretty accurate first impression of the country they are about to enter by examining the spatial organization, architecture, and appearance of a border crossing. Willingly or not, the architecture of those places depicts in crude, bare essence the cultural and political climate of the state they belong to, its global geopolitical position, and bilateral relations with the neighboring states with which they share a border. For example, the border between Belgium, where I live, and the Netherlands, where I work, is in some places marked by a white line on floor tiles that runs through coffee shops, houses and, I assume, bedrooms (fig. 1). Two different types of light bulbs (shining in different colors) used in Berlin during the Cold War division reveal where the border-wall between East and West Germany used to be. Border lines that separate Brazil and Bolivia demonstrate cultural discrepancies, such as opposite stances toward deforestation and the preservation of nature. If architecture of a border zone can be described as “*frontières plastiques*: an equilibrium between social forces,” as suggested by Jacques Ancel,<sup>1</sup> then this is best visible in the formal and spatial appearance of a border crossing.

By the same token, observing the temporal transformation of borders over a longer period of time can reveal significant changes to a country's sociopolitical structure and policies. The peace-time (re)bordering of Europe after the Second World War, first due to the creation of the European Economic Union and then as a response to the migrant crisis, are just two telling examples. On the one hand, spatial regimes imposed on border crossings are there to serve their primary purpose, control over movement of people and goods; on the other, the aestheticization of those places, through intricate architectural designs, speaks to the intrinsic connection between art, architecture, and power (understood here as both political power and the power of projecting certain image), such as the one we see, for example, in the design of capital cities.<sup>2</sup> In many instances, this status is also confirmed by the (symbolic) dismantling of border walls through acts of artistic creation, performance, civil disobedience, and destruction.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 7-1 Border between Belgium and the Netherlands, Baarle-Nassau, 2021. Photo: author.

This chapter examines one case in particular, the Gevgelija border crossing on the Greek-North Macedonian border, as its architectural and spatial transformation over the years can be considered a true indicator of one particular society's cultural and economic transformation in the wake of the collapse of former Yugoslavia. The crossing lived its golden age during the 1960s, when it marked the place of entry into the socialist Yugoslav federation from then-friendly Greece. When the country started sliding gradually into neoliberalism in 1980s, a shopping mall became the spatial dominant of choice. Demolition of the modern and culturally symbolic architecture in early 1990s announced the break-up of the federal state and set the stage for the notorious Skopje 2014 project, with a souvenir shop selling motives from ancient Macedonia and a mastodont casino dominating the local landscape. Finally, today it has become a place of conflict, where thousands of refugees are struggling to overcome its insurmountable wire fence on their way to western Europe.

At the same time, by virtue of its being on the Eastern Mediterranean Route, Gevgelija can also be perceived as part of this new international legal entity that exceeds the borders of the EU.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, I support that argument by showing how, ironically and perhaps tragically, it is the architecture of separation that “helped” Gevgelija become part of this new oppressive and global apparatus, elevating it—probably for the first time in its history—above strictly national(istic) representations. Finally, I end this chapter with a brief



discussion of the implications of studying the spatiality and aesthetic appearance of border crossings for architectural research and practice.

But before I offer the historical overview of the spatial transformation of the Gevgelija border crossing, I will try to place this discussion in a broader theoretical and disciplinary context.

## **01. ON BORDERS ZONES, BORDER LINES, BORDER WALLS, BORDER CROSSINGS, BORDER ARCHITECTURE, AND—AESTHETICS.**

As much of the current literature on borders has pointed out, reducing borders to a single line on a map—or in a 3D space, to a boarder wall—would be a gross oversimplification. A “lines in the sand” agenda, as argued by Noel Parker and Nick Vaughan-Williams,<sup>5</sup> cannot capture all the complexity of the formation of border lands and border zones. What may well be the result of the “modern cartographical representation and institutional arrangement of the border as a line—first in Europe and then globalized through the whirlwind of colonialism, imperialism, and anticolonial struggles—has somehow obscured this complexity and led us to consider the border as literally marginal.”<sup>6</sup> Instead, we should be focusing on the *process of bordering* (or more recently, *borderscaping*)—a “messy here-and-now micro-politics of everyday life” that is “interpreting borders as socio-cultural practices, experiences and discourses.”<sup>7</sup> This approach, in turn, acknowledges “the multiplication of different types of borders but also [...] the reemergence of the deep heterogeneity of the semantic field of the border. Symbolic, linguistic, cultural, and urban boundaries are no longer articulated in fixed ways by the geopolitical border. Rather, they overlap, connect, and disconnect in often unpredictable ways.”<sup>8</sup>

But if the materiality of the border line is indeed a fiction,<sup>9</sup> what is the political and semantic significance of border walls, and perhaps more related to this chapter, border crossings? In this chapter I suggest it is about defining and ordering the society within, through the act of differentiation from the illusive “other” but also through aesthetical representation and, as we will see, cultural appropriation.<sup>10</sup> This echoes the recent writings of Wille et al., who argue that “every demarcation is an act of differentiation, which implies the constitution of meaning, just as every definition is based on the principle of bordering. The border differentiates, categorizes and hierarchizes and puts the differentiated units into relation with each other.”<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Thomas Nail writes that

the border is both constitutive of and constituted by society. [...] Accordingly, society is first and foremost a product of the borders that define it and the material conditions under which it is dividable. [...] The border has become the social

condition necessary for the emergence of certain dominant social formations, not the other way around.<sup>12</sup>

The implication is that borders, more than representing simple divisions between states, have the potential to create separations and categorizations between people on a global level. This is especially the case if, following the argumentation of Étienne Balibar, we understand borders as “polysemic, meaning that they represent different things to different people; [...] borders are becoming more diffuse in the sense that they no longer constitute the site in which politics, culture and socioeconomics coincide—that is, the border is no longer at the border.”<sup>13</sup>

Border crossings then—and not just as the administrative procedures required to cross a border but also as the physical and aesthetic appearance of such places—rather than disrupting and negating the hegemony of a border line, represent a place where bordering, understood as the act of polysemic human differentiation, is repeatedly confirmed and practiced.<sup>14</sup> As Sandro Mezzadra and Neilson Brett remind us, “sorting and filtering flows, commodities, labor, and information that happens at borders are crucial for the operation of these actors,” migrants but also global political actors.<sup>15</sup> The act of crossing a border is fundamental for experiencing all its underlaying intricacies, that is, “only in crossing it, can the border become tangible and understandable.”<sup>16</sup> But this act also carries an enormous transformative potential that goes hand in hand with the in-between state of an unknown limbo, “a phase of anti-structure, of ambiguity, of a blurring and a levelling of differences.”<sup>17</sup> Crossing a border is always a step into an unknown, but in passing that threshold, “specific socially valid structures liquify, enabling new structures to form.”<sup>18</sup>

With such high symbolic and performative importance, it comes as a surprise that the architecture of border crossings is rarely studied. Especially from the aesthetic and artistic perspective, authors tend to focus much more on border walls. For instance, Ronald Rael’s *Borderwall as Architecture: A Manifesto for the US-Mexico Boundary* proposes a series of new, speculative architectural designs to consider the nature of the wall between the United States and Mexico.<sup>19</sup> In the same vein, in *Border Wall Aesthetics: Artworks in Border Spaces* Elisa Ganivet revisits the history of border wall aesthetics and compares more recent border-related works by multiple artists.<sup>20</sup> Even more prolific is the work regarding the architectural design in border regions.<sup>21</sup> In her book *Two Sides of the Border: Reimagining the Region*, Tatiana Bilbao proposes a series of architectural and landscape interventions for the wall between Mexico and the United States, exploring the potential it contains to be reconsidered and recalibrated.<sup>22</sup> Another significant contribution to “thinking futures” that brings together the emergent theory of “border thinking” with innovative thinking on design,

decoloniality, and globalism is the volume *Design in the Borderlands*, edited by Eleni Katalantidou and Tony Fry.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the volume *Architecture of the Borderlands*, edited by Teddy Cruz and Anne Boddington, provides design and theory-based meditations on the nature of borders from a range of architectural commentators.<sup>24</sup> Even Anoma Pieris's edited volume *Architecture on the Borderline: Boundary Politics and Built Space* does not discuss specifically the architecture border crossings, with all its societal, cultural, and political implications.<sup>25</sup> This chapter on the Gevgelija border crossing in North Macedonia, its shifting politics and architecture that has followed sociopolitical transformations in recent decades, is a small contribution to the above discourse.

## 02. THE "GOLDEN AGE": BUILDING A SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA

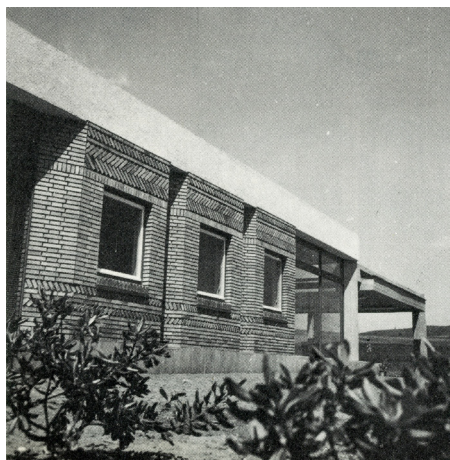
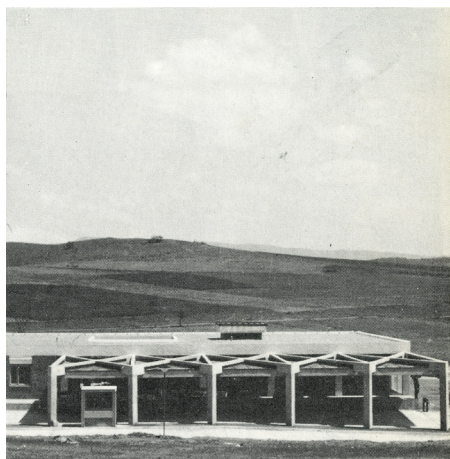
The Gevgelija border was established only after the end of the First World War. Right from the beginning it represented the point of delineation between two friendly and allied countries—Greece and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.<sup>26</sup> The rise in significance of the Gevgelija border crossing coincides with the considerable efforts put forward by socialist Yugoslavia during the 1960s and 1970s to build its international reputation as a bridge in a deeply polarized world. Two events marked this era. First, in 1961, the First Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement was held in Belgrade. Yugoslavia was the founder and unofficial leader of the “third block” that, during the Cold War, functioned as a counterbalance and appealing alternative to two major blocks—Eastern and Western. This allowed Yugoslavia to extend its influence over third-world countries, portraying itself as a friendly and open society and gaining access to an untapped market that spread from South America, through Africa, to Eastern Asia.<sup>27</sup> Despite being a socialist dictatorship at its core—the Communist Party of Yugoslavia monopolized the entire political system for decades—the country in this process of globalization appropriated many characteristics and cultural values of the capitalist West, while maintaining close political and cultural ties with other nonaligned countries, many of which survive to this day.<sup>28</sup> This allowed Yugoslavia not only to carve out a privileged position in a world divided by the Cold War but also to build a platform for rich cultural and economic exchange in which architecture played an important role.<sup>29</sup>

The second event was the 1963 earthquake that devastated the city of Skopje, today the capital of North Macedonia. The earthquake killed more than one thousand people and destroyed nearly 80 percent of the city, most of which featured traditional houses from the Ottoman era. In an unprecedented act of solidarity for that time, more than thirty-five countries across the iron curtain divide volunteered to participate in rescue missions and later

reconstruction efforts, sending both personnel and building material.<sup>30</sup> In local folklore it is often said that this was the first time after 1945 that Soviet and American soldiers met on the ground. Sizeable donations coming from the United Nations solidarity fund allowed for a thorough urban renewal.<sup>31</sup> The most notable result was the master plan for Skopje city center proposed by famed Japanese Metabolist architect Kenzo Tange.<sup>32</sup> The plan put Yugoslavia on the world architectural map, while the broad international effort put into this reconstruction strengthened the country's position as a global mediator.

It was amid such a political climate that a competition for the new customhouse in Gevgelija was held in 1965. The reasons why Yugoslavia decided to dedicate such attention to this border crossing remain unclear, but we can speculate that its construction was part of Skopje's urban renewal, in an effort to modernize the south of the country and connect it to the Mediterranean. Aleksa Korolija and Cristina Pallini argue that it was also part of the construction of the Highway of Brotherhood and Unity, which cut through the entire country, connecting Slovenia with Macedonia.<sup>33</sup> Youth Work Actions (in Serbian, *Omladinske Radne Akcije*) that made such huge infrastructural endeavors possible became embedded into the Yugoslavian myth, while joint participation helped build long-lasting social connections and tolerance across the country. During that time Yugoslavia also constructed other buildings with the purpose of elevating its international reputation, such as refugee centers for asylum seekers, also sponsored by the UN.<sup>34</sup> The similarities in the architectural language of those buildings and the Gevgelija customhouse, as we will see, are notable.

Detailed information about the competition, such as the brief, the composition of the jury, or the list of participants, were not preserved. The winning design was the work of Mihajlo Mitrović (1922–2018), a renowned Serbian architect, who for most of his life worked independently and left a substantial legacy both as a builder and architectural critic.<sup>35</sup> Mitrović's style is widely recognizable as a successful intertwinement of traditional and sculptural elements with modernistic architectural expression, most notably present in his asylum for refugees in Banja Koviljača.<sup>36</sup> He employed the same principles in designing the Gevgelija customhouse (figs. 2–6). The building combines modern forms and a characteristic open plan with traditional materials such as small format terracotta, reminiscent of the traditional wall brick patterns of old Macedonian monasteries.<sup>37</sup> On the northern facade, facing the road that would ultimately take us deeper in Macedonian and, further still, Serbian countryside, the architect placed plaster cast motives—replicas of famous medieval sculptures that could be found in ancient Serbian monasteries down the road. Mitrović understood the border customhouse as an outstanding tourist information desk, a facility that “will awake tourist's desire to explore further the country they are about to enter.”<sup>38</sup> The lightness of the concrete structure



**Figure 7-2—Figure 7-6** Gevgelija customhouse, Mihajlo Mitrović, 1965, details. Source: Mihajlo Mitrović, "Zapis o tri moja dela," 1970.



reflected the casual style of the Gevgelija border crossing, stripped almost entirely of the strictness and formality usually associated with its primary function. Instead, the cast of a white lion from the Studenica monastery greeted guests and welcomed their visit, inviting them to explore its natural habitat, hidden deep in the wilderness of the Balkan Mountains.<sup>39</sup>

This deviation from the strict postulates of modernism is not at all unusual for the endemic architectural style that flourished in Socialist Yugoslavia. The political rift between Josip Broz Tito and Joseph Stalin led to Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Soviet Bloc in 1948. In an effort to distance itself from cultural influence of Socialist Realism advocated by the Soviet Union, and also in an effort to develop an architectural style that would suit the new progressive image it was trying to establish, the Yugoslav Communist Party allowed a great amount of freedom and individualism to Yugoslav architects. In addition, trying to play "the third block" card meant opening society, and consequently its borders, to foreigners and foreign influences. Consequently, the country slowly shifted toward a more liberal society, developing a soft kind of socialism characterized by the self-management (in Serbian, *samoupravljanje*) of all public resources. The proclaimed maxim of "brotherhood and unity" encouraged the exchange of workers, ideas, and cultural influences across the country. Some historians even argue that the Yugoslav leadership of that time managed to successfully mask the authoritarian grip over the country with the glamour of capitalist West, to the point that the image it was broadcasting to the world was more bourgeois than socialist.<sup>40</sup> On this wave of international and transcultural exchange, and in combination with the strong socialist component that put the needs of people first, architecture took a leading role in economic progress and the cultural emancipation of society. These tendencies were evident in the development of a unique "Yugoslav" architectural style that marked the entire postwar period, to which Mitrović contributed significantly with his work.<sup>41</sup>

### 03. DISINTEGRATION OF YUGOSLAVIA AND SLOW SLIDE INTO NEOLIBERALISM

After the death of Tito in 1980, the clamps of socialism started to loosen up, and the country slowly drifted toward neoliberalism. A proliferation of private capital, a phenomenon absolutely unimaginable only a couple of decades earlier, started to take over the Yugoslav economy.<sup>42</sup> A new class of nouveau riches appeared that gained its wealth at the expense of state-owned industry, driving many of those public firms to bankruptcy. Foreign capital was allowed to enter the market while privatization was seen as the best, if not the easiest, way to save jobs and manage failing industry. This was also the period when the first



Figure 7-7 The shopping mall that was built adjacent to Mitrović's customs house, which was later removed.

signs of society's political and economic stratification started to appear. The planning sector and institutional management of public spaces began to yield under those influences, allowing private interest to dominate the public ones.<sup>43</sup> Many public spaces were seen as valuable resources up for grabs. Planning institutions legalized such behavior by changing urban plans at all levels, leading to the emergence of "investors' urbanism" (in Serbian, *investitorski urbanizam*).

This shift became immediately visible in the morphology and spatial organization of border crossings. In the case of Gevgelija, it manifested through the construction of a shopping mall right next to Mitrović's customhouse (fig. 7). Unfortunately, pictures from that period are very difficult to find, but according to Mitrović's testimony, the shopping mall was situated only a couple of meters away from his building, rendering it completely invisible from the point of entry into the country. That way, in his view, the message of cultural exchange he was trying to send was not only rendered insignificant—it was completely erased, while priority was given to more mundane functions. At the same time the ominous voices of nationalist awakenings became louder and louder, announcing Yugoslavia's final disintegration in a series of conflicts throughout the 1990s.

In the prelude to the Macedonian declaration of independence in 1991, Mitrović's building was demolished, unavoidably causing some controversies. In an interview I conducted with the architect in 2014, he vigorously defended his stance that the Gevgelija customhouse was demolished because of the

“unconcealed animosity toward the historicistic tinge in his opus.” He also added that this was only a small instance of a systematic suppression of architecture that contained Serbian nationalistic imagery, citing as other examples buildings by Momir Korunović in Ohrid and Bitola. According to Mitrović, the goal of this calculated action was to purify the country, which was now seen as tainted by Serbian cultural influence (which had been significant since the Macedonian liberation from the Ottoman Empire in the Balkan wars at the beginning of the twentieth century) and to set the ground for the creation of a completely new Macedonian national style in architecture. In that same interview I asked Mitrović about the optics of imposing Serbian cultural symbols on the Gevgelija customhouse and why did he not use, for example, motives characteristic of other parts of the country. He denounced the implication, stating that the road from Gevgelija leads straightforwardly through Macedonia to Serbia, therefore it was only logical to present sculptural motives from Macedonian and Serbian monasteries.<sup>44</sup>

There are no records in Macedonian archives that would clarify the motives for the building’s demolition, but interviews I conducted with a few people involved shed some light on the story.<sup>45</sup> The first person I interviewed was Mr. Todor Jugov, who at the time was the director of the so-called Self-Managing Interest Community for Housing of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia. Mr. Jugov was in charge, among other things, of all customhouses in Macedonia. He told me he remembered the customhouse in Gevgelija, which was in use only from 1965 to 1980. He remembered it as an “architecturally very beautiful and proportionate building”; and he also remembered the white lion on the facade but was tellingly unaware of its provenance or symbolic meaning. According to him, the building was unfortunately inadequate for its primary function since its capacity was not calculated to deal with Gevgelija’s heavy traffic flow. He testified that it was a federal decision to demolish Mitrović’s customhouse and to build in its place the new one, with four times the capacity. Since the new customhouse was also designed by an architectural firm from Belgrade, he rejected the notion that there were nationalist or political motives for the demolition of the original building.

Even more revealing is the testimony of Prof. Mihailo Tokarev from the Faculty of Architecture in Skopje. He and his brother Andrej, at that time young architectural students, worked with Mitrović on final design solutions for the Gevgelija customhouse. Professor Tokarev’s view on this matter is also different from Mitrović’s. He thinks that the customhouse was, above all, a conceptual and miniscule building, with an insufficient capacity to bear the demanding flow of people and vehicles. Soon after the building opened its doors, all those small impracticalities came to the surface. Partly because of its dysfunctionality and partly because of negligence, Mitrović’s customhouse



was first abandoned, and then completely demolished. Professor Tokarev denies even the slightest possibility that nationalist motives had anything to do with its destruction. In his words, “If there’s someone or something to blame, it’s the general lack of acknowledgement of modern Yugoslav architecture and its formidable standard-bearers among the people in state planning apparatus who make purely practical decisions.”<sup>46</sup>

#### 04. NATIONALISM, POSTMODERNISM, AND RESURGENCE OF BORDER WALLS

It could also be argued that the lack of appreciation for Yugoslav socialist modernism, as well as the lack of proper protection mechanisms, is the key issue here. Regardless of the technical motives for the destruction of the Gevgelija customhouse, the failure to acknowledge its architectural qualities and endemic (Yugoslav) modernist heritage later paved the path for the much-criticized reinvention of the Macedonian national style, notoriously embodied in the infamous *Skopje 2014* project.<sup>47</sup> The identity void that appeared after gaining independence—in the case of North Macedonia, for the first time in its modern history—is something that all ex-Yugoslav republics have in common.



Figure 7-8 The souvenir shop at the Gevgelija border crossing.



**Figure 7-9** The “Flamingo” casino-hotel in Gevgelija.

Architecture played a big role in this intense nation-building, not only by reinvigorating national symbols of the past but also by negating (and in many instances, openly destroying) shared Yugoslav heritage.<sup>48</sup> In North Macedonia, the government of the then-ruling nationalist party VMRO-DPMNE decided to claim continuity with the ancient Hellenistic heritage, although 70 percent of modern-day Macedonians have Slavic origin. It can also be argued that the complex political situation in a country where largely Muslim Albanians constitute almost 25 percent of the population certainly played a significant role in this decision; claiming a solely Orthodox Christian medieval heritage would be unacceptable to nearly a quarter of the population, so compromise was found in “neutral” Hellenism, to the great dismay of neighbouring Greece.

As part of this project, a small souvenir shop selling statuettes of Philip II of Macedon and Alexander the Great was opened in 2013 on the Gevgelija border crossing by the then-Macedonian minister of culture (fig. 8). The role of border buildings as touristic billboards of sorts was yet again reaffirmed, but this time the content of the message was significantly different from the one Mitrović was trying to send with his customhouse (this is not to mention the fact that the new building was much smaller in scale and lacking proper architectural language). This act of cultural appropriation provoked an outrage in neighbouring Greece, which already—because of the dispute over the new country’s name—had been blocking Macedonian integration into European institutions for decades.<sup>49</sup> In the latest act of spatial postmodern transformation at the Gevgelija border, a gigantic casino (because of its form, one would assume, appropriately named “Flamingo”) was constructed in its background, dwarfing the border crossing itself (fig. 9). Ominously hovering above the border, it could be read both as the ultimate symbol of the triumph of the neoliberal turn embodied in “investors’ urbanism” and a tombstone to Mitrović’s idea of Gevgelija being a place of transcultural emancipation and exchange.



Figure 7-10 Migrants gathered at the Gevgelija train station.



Figure 7-11 Barb-wired wall on the Greece-North Macedonian border.

This spatial transformation was accompanied by a change in the administration of movement of people and goods through the border. The admission of Greece to the EU in 1981 hardened the border line with Yugoslavia—a non-EU state. The Macedonian declaration of independence and the dispute



over the new country's name made the border with Greece even harder. The Schengen agreement, which officially became part of EU law in 1999, cancelled hard borders between EU member states, but it relied on the strict control of the EU's outer border, Gevgelija included. Thus, supranational political entities directly impacted the regimes of control on a local level and the spatial forms that facilitated them.

The fluidity and changeability of borders was demonstrated yet again in the final act of spatial and symbolic transformation of the Gevgelija crossing in 2014, when thousands of refugees were precluded from crossing to Macedonian territory from the Greek town of Indomeni (figs. 10–11). Not formally recognizing the Macedonian state name, Greece refused to issue travel documents to migrants, who then remained stuck in the buffer zone between the two countries. The barbed wire that was installed on this border, just like the ones between Serbia and Hungary or Serbia and Croatia, reminds us that Europe is in constant peril of the “Balkanization” of its territory. Physical and legal mechanisms are being put in place here to repair fissures in (border) walls and protect the power systems of wealthy countries, at the expense of the poor and underprivileged. In order to be able to control the movement of migrants through the Eastern Mediterranean Route, the EU introduced a system of check points and legal procedures, in which Gevgelija was a very important point.<sup>50</sup> Ironically, the fact that it became part of this new oppressive apparatus brought new global attention to the border crossing, so that its one-sided nationalist representation, embodied in its distinct and symbolic architectural forms, was put aside and replaced with a much less nuanced and globally recognized symbol—an insurmountable border wall.

## 05. CONCLUSION

Formal border crossings give expression to a very particular kind of sociopolitical relation, because they always reflect official state politics, whether as posters for national identity or spatial manifestations of various political systems established to maintain control over the movement of people. In the case of the Gevgelija border crossing, formalized sociopolitical forces were historically emphasized and always brought to the surface, to the point that it is possible to study North Macedonia's political and cultural transformation by analyzing the architecture of that place alone. In 1960s, during the pinnacle of Yugoslavia's diplomatic activity, this border crossing was given premium treatment, with one of the most prominent Yugoslav architects at the time—Mihajlo Mitrović—given the opportunity to design a customhouse. The architect's

modernist high-design was a showcase of the country's progress, hospitality, and openness to the world, and also a display of the country's cultural riches to be explored. As Yugoslavia's political significance started to weaken both internationally and domestically, the progressive modernism of Gevgelija border crossing was replaced with a more utilitarian approach, wherein the customhouse disappeared completely. Following the country's independence, a search for national identity became the dominant political imperative, embodied in the appropriation of ancient Greek classicism and "investors' urbanism," which was showcased in the spatial dominance of privately-owned casinos. Finally, supranational political entities enforced the erection of barb-wired fences to stop refugees from entering the Eurozone, showing quite literally how architectural objects, forms, and symbols are used as a tool by various sociopolitical forces to define a particular territory. This chapter is a reminder that

Europe's borders arise and move, surveil and intervene, perish and continue in other guises. Borders are not only avatars of politics or instruments that carry the burdens of history and the Westphalian past that can be used at will; they also translate and mediate politics by creating moments where the conditions of territory are reproduced.<sup>51</sup>

It is also a stark reminder that the price of the perceived freedom of movement of people and goods in the Eurozone is the ruthless hardening of border infrastructures, and border architectures, at its peripheral territories.

There are several possible implications of this correlation for the ways we study and produce architecture. First, we could argue that the power of architectural theory and history in this context resides in providing more nuanced readings of the politics of representation and the broader impact of spatial conflicts by studying the architecture of borders and border crossings themselves. Secondly, borders are conditioned territories constantly in the making, places where histories of the past and realities of the present blend and project cultural values into the desired future. Since the task of the architect is inevitably to interpret and translate those values into form, the architect's (ethical) responsibility is to understand the broader implications of their designs and then to actively participate in the formation of these conditioned territories, both as designers of space and participants in public debate. All aspects of architecture, from *what* we design, *how* we design it, to how we *communicate* our ideas can be put to use to reveal spatial conflicts, tackle social injustices, and propose alternative realities.<sup>52</sup> If borders are indeed places of political plasticity, where sociopolitical forces are taking form, architects should be the ones creating moulds.

## NOTES

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28. For the Yugoslav focus see Vladimir Kulić, *Land of the In-between: Modern Architecture and the State in Socialist Yugoslavia, 1945–1965* (PhD diss., Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Texas at Austin, 2009), <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/items/9bd7ff79-f279-4c77-9b4c-925839d6adea>; Vladimir Kulić, “‘East? West? Or Both?’ Foreign Perceptions of Architecture in Socialist Yugoslavia,” *The Journal of Architecture* 14, no. 1 (2009): 129–147; Vladimir Kulić, “An Avant-Garde Architecture for an Avant-Garde Socialism: Yugoslavia at EXPO ’58,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 47, no. 1 (2012): 161–84; Vladimir Kulić, Timothy Parker, and Monica Penick, eds., *Sanctioning Modernism: Architecture and the Making of Postwar Identities* (Austin: University of

- Texas Press, 2014); Danica Milan Stojiljković and Aleksandar Ignjatović, "Towards an Authentic Path: Structuralism and architecture in socialist Yugoslavia," *The Journal of Architecture* 24, no. 6 (2019): 853–76.
29. Many people in the former Yugoslavia idealize this period as the "Golden Age" of the republic. Even today, it is popularly believed in most former Yugoslav republics that this unique brand of "soft socialism" has been adopted by many European countries, and that its model is being used by the European Union itself. The politics of nonalignment is still so prevalent in Serbia that, arguably, Serbian political leadership still tries to mimic it. I explain this in detail in Aleksandar Staničić, "Media Propaganda vs. Public Dialogue: The Spatial Memorialisation of Conflict in Belgrade after the 1999 NATO Bombing," *The Journal of Architecture* 26, no. 3 (2021): 371–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2021.1897645>.
30. For more on this see: Goran Janev and Blaž Križnik, "From Open City towards Grand National Capital: Mapping the Symbolic Reconstruction of Skopje," presentation at the workshop "Remapping Skopje," October 2008, <https://www.scribd.com/document/14056508/Mapping-the-symbolic-reconstruction-of-Skopje>; Divna Pencik, *Skopje City Centre on 1965*, <https://www.scribd.com/presentation/62475437/Skopje-City-Centre-on-1965>.
31. United Nations Development Program, *Skopje Resurgent: The Story of a United Nations Special Fund Town Planning Project* (New York: United Nations, 1970).
32. Kenzo Tange, "Skopje Urban Plan," *The Japan Architect*, no. 130 (1967): 30–69. <https://www.scribd.com/document/37608929/Kenzo-Tange-JA-n130-May-1967pdf>; Mihail Tokarev, *Edicija 100 godini moderna arhitektura, kniga 3. Pridonesot na Makedonija i Jugoslavija (1918–1990)* (Nezavisno izdanje. Istorisko-kristicki pregled, 2006).
33. Aleksa Korolija and Cristina Pallini, "The Highway of Brotherhood and Unity as a Cross-Cut into the Yugoslavian Epic," *Histories of Postwar Architecture* 3, no. 6 (2020): 93–120, <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2611-0075/10116>.
34. I discuss this in detail in Aleksandar Staničić, "Refugee Shelters done Differently: Humanist Architecture of Socialist Yugoslavia," in *Making Home(s) in Displacement: Critical Reflections on a Spatial Practice*, eds. Luce Beeckmans, Alessandra Gola, Ashika Singh and Hilde Heynen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2022), 173–96.
35. Aleksandar Kadjević, *Mihajlo Mitrović: Projekti, graditeljski život, ideje* (Beograd: S. Mašić: Muzej nauke i tehnike: Muzej arhitekture, 1999); Mihajlo Mitrović, *At the Turn of the Century: the Architecture of Energoprojekt between 1951–1995* (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1995).
36. Staničić, "Refugee Shelters done Differently." In Banja Koviljača Mitrović used those motives to "bring local traditional architecture closer to foreigners, to perhaps inspire them to learn more about local culture."



37. Mihajlo Mitrović, *Mihajlo Mitrović: Izložba arhitekture, Muzej primenjene umetnosti Beograd, 13–25. april 1971*, exhibition catalogue (Zagreb: Sitotisa studentski centar Zagreb, 1971).
38. Mihajlo Mitrović, “Zapis o tri moja dela,” *Arhitektura Urbanizam* 66 (1970): 6–11.
39. However, when I asked Mitrović in 2014, who then was ninety-two years old, why he didn’t put on the facade motives from Catholic cathedrals or Muslim mosques, both of which were abundant in Yugoslavia, he dismissed my implication immediately. Mitrović was no stranger to nationalistic motives in his later work, such as the sculpture of an eagle on a residential building on Takovska Street in Belgrade that “looks” toward the ruins of Radio-Television of Serbia, bombed by NATO in 1999. Interview with the author held in Belgrade on 17 July 2014. See also Staničić, “Refugee Shelters done Differently.”
40. Vladimir Kulić, Maroje Mrduljaš, and Wolfgang Thaler, *Modernism In-Between: The Mediatory Architectures of Socialist Yugoslavia* (Berlin: Jovis, 2012).
41. Ivan Štraus, *Arhitektura Jugoslavije: 1945–1990* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1991).
42. P. H. Liotta, “Paradigm Lost: Yugoslav Self-Management and the Economics of Disaster,” *Balkanologie* 5, no. 1–2 (2001), <https://journals.openedition.org/balkanologie/681>.
43. Miodrag Vujošević, *Planning in the Post-Socialist Political and Economic Transition* (Belgrade: Institute for Architecture and Spatial and Urban Planning of Serbia, 2003); Slavka Zeković, Miodrag Vujošević, and Tamara Maričić, “Spatial Regularization, Planning Instruments and Urban Land Market in a Post-Socialist Society: The Case of Belgrade,” *Habitat International* 48 (2015): 65–78.
44. Rael, *Borderwall as Architecture*.
45. Here I want to use the opportunity to express gratitude to my dear friend and colleague Milena Shundovska from Bitola for all her help and support in conducting this investigation.
46. Interviews with Todor Jugov and Mihailo Tokarev were conducted in early 2016. Perhaps an important lesson here is to be extremely critical and wary when you are interviewing living architects about their work. A well-known architectural critic in Serbia, Bojan Kovačević, once said—in jest of course—that he can’t wait for some famous architects to perish so he could evaluate their work properly!
47. Janev and Križnik, “From Open City towards Grand National Capital”; Jasna Stefanovska and Janez Koželj, “Urban Planning and Transitional Development Issues: The case of Skopje, Macedonia,” *Urbani Izziv* 23, no. 1 (2012): 9–100.
48. Aleksandar Staničić, “Transition Urbicide: Post-war Reconstruction in Post-socialist Yugoslavia,” in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Cultural Heritage and Conflict*, ed. Ihab Saloul (London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).
49. In 2018 two parties reached an agreement by which FYR of Macedonia would change its name to North Macedonia and renounce its pretensions to Hellenistic cultural heritage, so it could finally continue its integration into the European Union and NATO.

50. Philippou, "Spatial Extensions of the Right to Seek Asylum."
51. Huub Dijstelbloem, *Borders as Infrastructures: The Technopolitics of Border Control* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021), 173.
52. Armina Pilav et al., "How to Spatially Mediate Conflicts?" *Footprint* 14, no. 2 (2020): 1–10.

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# BORDERS AND IMAGINARY PASSAGES

*Sofia Dona*

In 2017 I was working on my art project “La Puerta de las Californias” on the US-Mexico Border, filming a gigantic wooden door crossing the border on a truck from Tijuana to San Diego. I had to cross the border several times, sometimes during the same day, acknowledging every time the privilege of having a European passport. During one of these crossings—and on my way to the University of California San Diego to give a presentation titled “Tunnel Below / Skyjacking Above: Deconstructing the Border”—I was stopped by the border guard on duty and was asked to turn on my laptop and show the presentation to him. One by one the images showed various ways to “illegally” cross the border. That day, the border crossing became a site-specific presentation, performed at the border for border control. Some days after the incident and during my research on the project, I met Mael Vizcarra, an anthropologist and filmmaker from Tijuana—who later became a dear friend—with a tattoo of the US-Mexico border on her arm, running from her shoulder to her wrist. She recalled that as a kid she had to cross the border from Tijuana to San Diego every day to go to school, and after September 11 she had to wait more than four hours every morning at border control. Her story reminded me that the border is engraved on our bodies every time we manage to cross or to not cross it.<sup>1</sup> In the following text I present a series of art projects that deal with borders and imaginary passages. Through various artistic practices, I am interested in distorting established notions of everyday life, while generating a defamiliarizing effect that manifests both in a revealing and a poetic way. The reconstruction of a border mountain range out of sand becomes the action for reconstructing memory, filming in slow motion thousands of pigeons exiting a truck amplifies the moment of a forced liberation, putting together videos of motorcyclists’ alternative rides through the Alps multiplies the absurdity of the concept of legal crossings, archiving the plants of a wall made for segregation analyses the design of a racist barrier in the city, constructing a gigantic door on a wrong scale becomes the way to document the US-Mexico border through a mistranslated metric system. While moving through various works, the text focuses on the project “Mountains Come First,” questioning how the memory of one body crossing can create a collective memory.



## 01. LA PUERTA DE LAS CALIFORNIAS (2017)

Tijuana has been given different names in connection with its geographical position, such as “La Esquina de México” (the corner of Mexico), “La Puerta de México” (the door to Mexico), and “La Esquina de América Latina” (the corner of Latin America). One of the most popular names, the “Door of Mexico,” refers to the entire city as the door, the entrance from Mexico to the United States and vice-versa. Peter Andreas, as quoted by Mike Davis in the book *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, observes that “the paradox of US-Mexico integration is that a barricaded border and a borderless economy are being constructed simultaneously.”<sup>2</sup> One example of this borderless economy can be noted in the way that both the Mexican metric system and the imperial US system are used and combined in the work of architectural and construction companies in the border area. This coexistence of “architectural languages” often leads to misunderstandings and the production of designed objects at the wrong scale. For the project “La Puerta de las Californias” (2017) I constructed a huge wooden door and transported it on a truck across the border from Tijuana to San Diego.

The door was a mistranslated object: constructed using the Mexican metric system, it resulted in a door that was 6.8m high, instead of the standard 6 feet 8 inches of the American imperial system. The gigantic door produced by this misinterpretation was brought across the Mexico-US border and went through official customs policies and processes. The entire process of the



**Figure 8-1** “La Puerta de las Californias” (2017). A wooden door, transported by truck across the border from Tijuana to San Diego.

crossing of the gigantic door was filmed and used in this project as an element to read the border. The documentation formed a three-channel video installation, where the perception of scale changes as the door moves in front of the border, next to huge trucks, or inside residential areas. At the same time, the action of the crossing itself revealed stories about the specific border. Constructing the door, obtaining permission for filming in both Mexican and US inspection centers, negotiating with the cargo drivers, all those elements defined the border in ways that, as Peter Andreas argues, comprise both an open economy and a method of separation and control.<sup>3</sup>

## 02. HERBARIUM OF THE WALL OF NEUPERLACH (2018)

In autumn 2016 a four-meter-high wall was built in the neighborhood of Neuperlach in Munich between a refugee accommodation center and the residential area. The technique used to build the wall was “gabion construction” (from the Italian *gabbione*, which means “big cage”), made of stacked stone-filled metal nests. On both sides of the wall a series of plants and trees were carefully selected and planted by the city in order to hide the wall. For the work “Herbarium” (2018), I collected leaves from plants on both sides of the wall and created a herbarium book including all the plants that camouflage



**Figure 8-2** “Herbarium” (2018). A herbarium including plants from both sides of the gabion wall in Neuperlach, Munich.

the gabion wall, creating in their way a second wall on it. Like a border botanist, I added labels that marked the potential height each plant can reach, their origin, and their pollination method. The herbarium book included plants that were officially selected by the landscape department for this planting purpose, but also included those that were self-grown. In the context of Munich, a city where plantation has been used to hide buildings associated with the Third Reich, the project questions the responsibility of designers, architects, and urban planners in dealing with a problematic history and architecture. The wall of Neuperlach was controversial, with urban activists and citizens comparing it to the Berlin wall due to its height and function of separation. Paradoxically, even if the gabion wall is removed, the roots of the trees and plants will spread under the wall and the double-sided plantation will remain as an in-between void or a trace of the wall. Therefore, the herbarium book can be considered an encyclopedia of plants for urban segregation.

### 03. ALTERNATIVE BRENNERO (2019)

When mountains themselves become the natural border, there is no need to create a wall. “Alternative Brennero” (2019) refers to the impenetrable border of the Brenner pass between Italy and Austria in the Alps. Many people have been risking their lives in that area attempting to cross these mountains to reach the north of Europe. The video installation takes its title from an article



**Figure 8-3** “Alternative Brennero” (2019). Nine YouTube videos document the routes of motorcyclists through various mountain passes in the Alps.

in a magazine that presents beautiful alternative routes a tourist can take through the mountains, while avoiding crossing Brenner. Nine YouTube videos document the routes of motorcyclists enjoying passes through the Alps, such as Passo dello Stelvio, Reschenpass, Timmelsjoch, Simplonpass, Großglockner, San Bernardino Pass, Gotthard Pass, Furka Pass, and Splügenpass. The videos, filmed with GoPro cameras, are presented with their sound in a composition of nine monitors. Alternative Brennero is reminiscent of a video game capturing the moment of passing through, from the real to the imaginary. The project comments upon different realities, worlds, and conditions.

#### 04. VOYAGEURS (2019)

In contrast to the curved roads through the Alps followed by motorcyclists, “Voyageurs” (2019) focuses on the ability of pigeons to fly in one straight line following the Earth’s magnetic field. The video installation captures the moment of release of thousands of pigeons during a pigeon race. Pigeon racing is the sport of releasing specially trained homing pigeons that can return to their homes over a carefully measured distance. It is popular in various countries



**Figure 8-4** “Voyageurs” (2019) A video installation captures the moment of release of thousands of pigeons and their ability to follow the earth’s magnetic field.

around the world, either as a hobby or in competitive form. A specific type of pigeon called the “Voyageur,” bred for its “homing instinct,” can fly for hours, navigating in response to the Earth’s magnetic field, and find its way home from great distances. Racing pigeons are transported to other countries in specially modified trucks and are released all together to start their voyage back home. Shot at the border between Germany and Poland, “Voyageurs” captures in slow motion the liberation of four thousand racing pigeons from a truck. The video work reflects on crossing borders, seeking alternative routes, arrival, deportation, and forced journeys.

## 05. MOUNTAINS COME FIRST (2021)

In the video “Mountains Come First” (2021), Juxhin Kapaj (a.k.a. Jorgo Prihti) uses a spade to dig. Shoveling sand, he arduously forms the shape of the mountain range that he crossed in 1990 as he migrated from Albania to Greece. The rhythm of the spade digging alongside the sound of the waves on the beach create a soft background noise covered only by Juxhin’s voice as he narrates his story: from Avlona (Albania), to the Ceraunian Mountains, on to Corfu and Athens. The deeper he digs, the more the ditch becomes a negative of the mountain topography, subsuming him slowly. The mountain formed by the dug-up sand looms over him, surpassing even the horizon line. Meanwhile a lone rower passes by balancing on a surfboard. Toward the end of the narrative, an audio extract from the film *Afti i nyhta menei* (*Edge of Night*)<sup>4</sup> intercepts the film, where Kapaj lends his voice to an Albanian migrant crossing the border. The narration becomes more fragmented as Kapaj tries to recall his journey through the mountains, mentioning cities, rivers, and the geological topography of the landscape he crosses. Sculpting the mountain range, its peaks, crevices, and gorges, he effectively reconstructs both the landscape and the history of his crossing. The title of the work is borrowed from the chapter “Mountains Come First” from Braudel’s *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II: Volume I*,<sup>5</sup> where the author claims that less research has been carried out on mountains due to their lack of an agricultural economy. While mountains may not have been considered important to a sedentary way of life, those that circumscribe the Mediterranean are the embodiment of passages and crossings over time.

Frances Yates in *The Art of Memory* writes about how ancient Greeks and Romans connected mnemonic systems to architecture and space, referring to the work of Quintilian.

In order to form a series of places in memory, he [Quintilian] says, a building is to be remembered, as spacious and varied a one as possible, the forecourt, the living room, bedrooms, and parlours, not omitting statues and other ornaments with which the rooms are decorated. [...] We have to think of the ancient orator as moving in imagination through his memory building whilst he is making his speech, drawing from the memorised places the images he has placed on them. The method ensures that the points are remembered in the right order, since the order is fixed by the sequence of places in the building.<sup>6</sup>

Kapaj's "memory palace" is not an architecture but a landscape, or, in other words, it is the architecture of the landscape. It is both the mountain he constructs and the hole that he digs.

The following text presents a part of Juxhin Kapaj's narration as the exact transcription of the recording. In Kapaj's narration, *present* and *past tense* are mixed in his sentences, intertwining his (past) crossing and his (present) memory and deconstructing linear time. In Greek, the word for *past tense*, *ἀόριστος*, means *indefinite, indeterminate*. The Greek word for present tense, *ἐνεστώτας*, has its etymology in the word *ἐνίσταμαι*, which means *to oppose, to object to, to be averse to, to demur at*.<sup>7</sup> In Kapaj's narration, what is indefinite comes together with an objection (to time). In his extended analyses of the modes of narration in films, George M. Wilson demonstrates how such modes always entail at once the story being told (the narrative), the act of storytelling (the narration), and its text (the medium through which storytelling is embodied).<sup>8</sup> While the narrative connects to the past tense (the story told), the narration connects to the present tense (the telling of the story), and the transcription of the text becomes the medium in which the telling is embodied. The body of the text following in this essay alludes to the body of Kapaj as he digs to recast the mountains he once crossed, now a mound of sand standing behind him. Juxhin Kapaj's narration forms a testimony of his efforts to recount his crossing of the border through mere memory. Reconstructing what is remembered in the form of storytelling in the present, objecting to time, he is submerged in the hole of an indefinite past. This transcription of Kapaj's testimony into a written text performs an attempt to create a collective memory.



Juxhin Kapaj (a.k.a. Jorgo Prifti) narrates:

*One group set off on foot. We arrive there, maybe eight hours later, on foot. We arrive in the evening, we wanted to go to the borders. We were told that there were police, in plain clothes. "They'll mug you and take you back." We stayed the whole night, there were some women with children there with us. Around one o'clock at night, a woman goes to check. "There is nobody there, we can go." We go into the village and ask, "Do you want money to show us the borders?" A local guy said, "It's far away, help me to collect grass for my livestock and I'll help you." We went on to do that, we filled the sacks. Then he took us to his house, offered us water. Then he says, "The border is there," it was right next to us. But that was not the real border, there was army there, but the border was three hours away from the village, maybe four. No, it was three hours because I remember we set off at one o'clock and we arrived at four in the morning. I pleaded with God; the moon was bright. It was the fifth of January in 1991. The local showed us the border, we knew there were soldiers there that were going to ask for money. I had a watch; I also had my mother's wedding ring and took it off so they wouldn't take it. The soldiers said, "Be careful, it's a really dry area, but as soon as you get over there, the Greek soldiers will help you." So, we started slowly, and we arrive at the river. We could only pass over the bridges, but the army was there, you could not cross. There was a wire rope to help you get across. Due to rain the water had risen so high that you could hardly... If you walked only the head was out of the water. I said wasn't going to do it, we should move further down. Out of fear, we would sleep on these rocks the whole day and we would walk at night. We did this for three days; we were moving toward the sea. Then, we saw some other groups. The locals who guided us were paid, so other groups were there, as well. They said, "We'll check what time the soldiers change guard." That was because they were leaving a bit earlier. If they changed guard at six in the morning, they were leaving at ten to six, before the next guard arrived. So, we had to take advantage of this. After three days we arrive straight at Sagiada. We set off on foot once again. Meanwhile, the police would mug you if they saw you in the streets. And they had centers... detention centers. We avoided them, as we were afraid of being sent back. The police pass the first time. We jumped over and fell on something; berries, the ones we eat. Deep in the berries, it was hard to get out of there. We got up again, I didn't have any food with me. All of them had brought food, I had nothing. I saw a football player I used to know; he gave me some tins. It was oysters with sauce, then I was terribly thirsty. No water. In the meantime, the police appear again the next day. There were seven of us, but when the police came, we were splitting. There were many groups, on the way but they would split, because they shared the money to give to the locals who would guide you. The locals said, "I can take you to the border." They took the money and then we were splitting depending on our destination. One man wanted to go to Thessaloniki. I was left with the guy who said that he would help me. We sneaked inside some huge water pipes. We dragged ourselves inside there, it was one hundred meters under a bridge. Then we went back into the forest, we managed to get away from there too. We arrived to Igoumenitsa, near the port, but from the mountainside. Three more days there. It was*

*humid. I tell my friend, "Let's go across and get it over with." He gets down to ask, the fare was 550 drachmas. I only had Albanian money, he had 10,000 and said, "It's enough. We'll buy tickets and get on the ship." We bought the tickets on the third day. The whole thing lasted seven days. Six and one day that we spent at Saranda. Seven days...*

[...]

*Aoos River ends up somewhere here, so there's no way... Aoos must end up here... No, it can't be Aoos. Here is Argyrokastro. And here on the mountains in Greece. That's a beautiful river. Perhaps, this is not the one... It's in Ioannina, there was an old road by the Italians, look, a beautiful river... It goes down to the town... Because, after we crossed the dry patch, we moved on, until we found the real river... And the wire rope was there, but because there was a lot of water, we came down toward the sea to find a bigger opening, and we found a wider opening, however, we saw the bridges. We kept an eye on the soldiers... Maybe we went down like that. There were rocky plates all along. We went on foot, but sideways. We didn't go down like that from the seaside. Maybe the other river was here, the real one. What can I say... They told us that we would find it and we should move through there. We walked even at night. I believe that it goes this way. That we went down like that and it went toward there. It seems like we moved along sideways. Here is Sagiada, no. I think that it might be on the upper side. Because then I found myself in a forest. Then, after I arrived... And where is Igoumenitsa? Is it so far away? And how did I get here? Did I come all this distance on foot? So, this must be the forest we ended up in...*

**Figure 8-5** "Mountains Come First" (2021). 10 video stills capturing Juxhin Kapaj shoveling sand to form the shape of the mountain range that he crossed in 1990.





"We arrive there, maybe eight hours later, on foot. We arrive in the evening, we wanted to go to the borders."



"The locals showed us the border, we knew there were soldiers there that were going to ask for money."



"Out of fear, we would sleep on these rocks the whole day and we would walk at night. We did this for three days."



"We jumped over and fell on something: berries, the ones we eat. Deep in the berries, it was hard to get out of there."





"They took the money and then we were splitting depending on our destination."



"Then we went back into the forest, we managed to get away from there too."

SOFIA DONA



"We kept an eye on the soldiers ..."





"We walked even at night."



*"Maybe we went down like that. There were rocky plates all along. We went on foot, but sideways."*



## NOTES

1. In *Borderlands / La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa employs a powerful metaphor to describe the particular “border culture” of the US-Mexico borderland as “una herida abierta,” where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 3.
2. Richard H. Friman and Peter Andreas, eds., *The Illicit Global Economy and State Power* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 12.
3. Ibid.
4. *Afti i nyhta menei*, dir. Nikos Panayotopoulos (Σκούρας Α.Ε, Lumiere Productions, Marianna Film, E.P.T., Ελληνικό Κέντρο Κινηματογράφου, 1999), 1:95:00.
5. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II: Volume I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 25.
6. Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 3.
7. Γεώργιος Μπαμπινιώτης, *Λεξικό Νέας Ελληνικής Γλώσσας, Ε' Έκδοση* (Αθήνα: Κέντρο Λεξικολογίας, 2019).
8. George M. Wilson, *Seeing Fictions in Film: The Epistemology of Movies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

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**PART 3**

# **BEYOND THE BORDERS**



# THE BORDER COMPLEX

## Mapping Spaces of Simultaneity

Marc Schoonderbeek

### 01. THE WALL CONCEPTUALIZED

*Vagueness is a form of tolerance that produces a diversity of architectural languages, each inscribed in the particularities of a border condition.*

—S. Umberto Barbieri, *Border Conditions*<sup>1</sup>

Probably one of the better historical examples illustrating Barbieri's claimed possibility that a particular "border condition" can produce "an architectural language" is *Exodus, or The Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture*, also known as Rem Koolhaas's graduation project at the Architectural Association in London in 1972.<sup>2</sup> It constitutes an intriguing example of an architectural project in which the characteristics of an architectural element (in this case "the wall") are conceptualized as a spatial condition, thus influencing, if not determining, the basic idea of an architectural project. Influenced by his 1971 visit to the Berlin Wall, Koolhaas projected a large wall-system, Superstudio style, onto contemporary (yet exaggerated) London, in order to play a dialectic game of good and bad, of inclusion and exclusion, imprisonment and freedom, and so on.<sup>3</sup> As a result the benefits, blessings, and heroisms of architecture are on full display in an experiential retreat of spatial incarceration.<sup>4</sup>

Much scholarship has been conducted, over the last few years, about the general tendency in architectural discourse of the time (end of 1960s, early 1970s) to conceptualize the overall characteristics of the American city as the foundational basis for architectural theory (think Chicago, Los Angeles, Las Vegas and Manhattan).<sup>5</sup> In contrast, the *Exodus* project stands out as the conceptualization of a specific border condition that constituted the foundational basis for an architectural vision, in this case, a vision that propels architecture as "the hedonistic science of designing collective facilities that fully accommodate individual desires."<sup>6</sup>

Though it was Koolhaas who presented *Exodus* as his thesis project at the AA School of Architecture, the project is overall credited as a collaboration between Koolhaas, the Greek architect (and Koolhaas's architecture mentor at the AA) Elia Zenghelis, the Dutch artist Madelon Vriesendorp, and the Greek



painter Zoe Zenghelis, and the group entry to Casabella's 1972 competition "The City as Meaningful Environment." As is generally known by now, all four protagonists consequently formed their collective architectural practice, the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) in 1975, and both Vriesendorp and Zoe Zenghelis later also contributed to Koolhaas's *Delirious New York* (1978).<sup>7</sup> The *Exodus* project and its underlying cause(s), or better, raison(s) d'être, are presented in OMA's overview publication *S,M,X,XL* as the two different enterprises they actually were, but then chronologically reversed: one as "foreplay" (i.e., the *Exodus* project of 1972), the other (i.e., the "theoretical project" *The Berlin Wall as Architecture*<sup>8</sup>) placed as the opening segment of "Medium" and as a "first and last..." reflective text memoir about the 1971 "AA Field Trip" to Berlin.<sup>9</sup>

In this reflective text, which bridged a two-decade time period, Koolhaas's tone is still very much manifesto-like, seemingly in a retroactive attempt to squeeze out fundamental insights about architecture through the prolonged exaggeration of the Berlin Wall's features. Two fundamental conclusions from this reflective text immediately stand out, even at this point in time (i.e., about fifty years later): the fact that the Berlin Wall was experienced as being "heart-breakingly beautiful," and that architectural form was actually deemed incapable of bearing any meaning. This absence, which was strengthened by an absence of program, had resulted in a structure more stable than any other architecture present in Berlin at that time. The architectural consideration of the Berlin Wall thus resulted, or even culminated, with the *Exodus* project in an all-encompassing consideration of architecture's promise and potential, which was supposedly standing in extreme contrast, one should add, to the more general considerations of architecture's agency in society at that time.

Yet despite its suggested heroism, and even with half a century in the rear-view mirror, the *Exodus* project still remains close to a historical anomaly. Not only does the specific condition of the Berlin Wall seem like a remnant of days long past, the proposed translatory act clearly constitutes an oversimplification of the Wall's bordered condition, and in fact seems blatantly incorrect. The Wall as individualized object can be considered an architectural masterpiece only rhetorically: both in Berlin and in London, it would need the context of the city to be able to perform its majestic architectural agency. Furthermore, the depiction of the "voluntary prisoners" continues to remain too closely tied to injustices executed on the human body to be given a prominent presence in such a frenzied celebration of architecture's potential.<sup>10</sup> The discussion of biopolitics and (other) forms of exclusion, combined with the onslaught of images of conflicts and wars, have, by now, accumulated in a highly sensitive mentality that determines more carefully (and more justifiably) the receiving end of image production.

In many discussions about the project, *Exodus* is framed in light of the 1968 student revolts and understood as an emblem of the rebellious hippie era of the late 1960s.<sup>11</sup> One could argue, however, that the project anticipates much more the punk mentality emerging around the early-to-mid-1970s, as this project is essentially antiestablishment and not really geared toward overturning the conservative mentalities (of the 1950s and beyond). Rather, it is a more radical, sinister, and nihilistic attempt at revaluing all values, at provoking by use of the compositional technique of juxtaposing the hedonistic with both anarchy and totalitarianism and casually playing with severe political incorrectness. In other words, the project is a dialectic play geared toward a synthetic whole, based on combining love AND war, Danteum AND Continuous Monument, emancipation and discipline,<sup>12</sup> Futurism and communism (or fascism and Situationism, if one prefers), architecture's celebration AND destruction (i.e., an eternal confrontation without resolve, yet with sinister celebration), presented with a cynicism that seems to not have subsided in Koolhaas's architectural position ever since.

More importantly, the border condition of the Berlin Wall, in hindsight, produced an architectural position that still intrigues through its ambiguity and, if one might state, schizophrenia. The nihilistic, punk-like, antiestablishment attitude produced an architectural expression that bounded extremes, while simultaneously refusing to disclose its exact position(s). *Exodus* thus indicates the agency of architecture and its profoundly contradictory nature: aimed at a betterment of life, the tools of the architect would also and simultaneously cause its countereffect: exclusion, encampment, imprisonment, colonial tendencies, occupation, banishment. In fact, one could conclude via this line of reasoning that utopia, as an envisioned architectural desire for a future state-of-being on earth, is actually intrinsically linked to the diasporic.

## 02. WHAT IS A BORDER?

*It has become widely accepted that "borders are a complicated social phenomenon related to the fundamental basis of the organization of society and human psychology."*

—Vladimir Kolossov, *Theoretical Limology*<sup>13</sup>

In his 2020 book *A Research Agenda for Border Studies*, James Scott refers to Kolossov's quote in order to exemplify the nature of contemporary borders.<sup>14</sup> In the book's introduction, Scott lists several disciplines thoroughly involved in the multidisciplinary debate on borders: political science, sociology, anthropology, history, international law, economy, technology, psychology, "as well as the humanities," notably art, media studies and philosophy. Scott, however,

never discusses, nor even mentions architecture: literature and art might “tell us as much about borders, borderlands and border-crossings as do ethnographic or historical investigations,” but he makes no mention whatsoever of either the role of architecture in border studies or of the architectural nature of borders. This absence is puzzling. Are borders not by default and foremost spatial? Is division, partition, and spatial ordering not part of the core activities of architects? What are architects actually doing wrong to be so overlooked and NOT invited to the disciplinary table to discuss the border? The spatial aspect of the border, the material practices of bordering, the border itself as an architectural element or object, the facilities developed by border regimes: these most certainly give borders an architectural dimension. And what about the envisioning, planning, and designing of borders and border crossings? These aspects related to borders are by default also architectural questions. What else do architects do BUT “bordering, ordering and othering,” to use a rather popular dictum in border studies of the last decades?<sup>15</sup>

Even more striking in Scott’s formulation of an agenda is the seeming tendency to suggest a common and straightforward understanding of the border as the dividing line between nation-states, perhaps between two geographical areas, but certainly nothing more. One would guess that, especially from the perspective of the spatial disciplines, a much more sophisticated approach to the border has emerged in the last decades. This more sophisticated understanding has partially been influenced by the proliferation of a wide variety of border regimes globally, partially by the continuous technological enhancement of the border’s obstructive agencies, and partially by the profound understandings of space that have, consequently or not, been conceptualized theoretically. Despite the reference to the social, as substantiated by the use of Kolossov’s quote, and though he does mention border making as a practice, Scott remains deeply committed to the border as a geographically located dividing line between mostly political entities. From an architectural perspective, much more can and has been said about the nature of the border as a definer or delimitator of space. Architecture is a discipline that involves the fabrication of spatial (non-)limits (walls, doors, windows, etc.), but it is also a discipline that orders space (programmatically, functionally, experientially, etc.).

The context of this collection of border-related architecture essays, in which attempts are made to detect some fundamental “architectures of resistance,” is obviously, and perhaps unfortunately, not the place for extensive reflections on the relevance of architecture for border studies. Yet one would assume this is self-evident. This particular chapter will try to expand, or break open, the discussion on the nature of the architectural dimension of borders more generally. Namely, it proposes a shift toward emphasizing the conceptual-territorial aspects of the border, as opposed to the spatial-material.

First though, a few notes are needed to clarify the notion “the border” more specifically. To this end, J. M. Coetzee’s book *Waiting for the Barbarians* has proven to be an insightful and extremely intriguing source for understanding as well as delineating the complexity of the (contemporary) border.<sup>16</sup> From the very first sentence, a suffocating tension is present in the book. Coetzee delicately offers us the ingredients of the tensions that seem to be intrinsically linked to the border: the here and there of its spatial extent, “the others” on the other side, the presence of unbalanced power relations, sudden implementations of mysterious (or at least not transparent) rules and regulations, imprisonment, cloaked or unseen eyes and gazes, torture, the projected understanding that “pain is truth,” and furthermore the unquestioned loyalty to the state (or Empire), the unlimited and undefined “permission to act,” the cultivated fear resulting in aggression, the cruelties as a direct resultant of these aggressions and the way a certain consciousness starts to respond to this, the unavoidable projection of one’s cultural condition onto the disembodied remnant findings of another culture, this time distant not only in frames of references but most significantly distant in time. A series of important questions is implied by this initial, sophisticated narrative: Is the border really nothing other than a spatial device of humiliation? An element capable of the fiercest of torture practices, which the above list of border characteristics might attest to? Both separator and container, outlook and introspection, promise and doom, impotence of power, devoid of shadow... And, bearing the offered insights of *Exodus* in mind, is the border thus the architectural element par excellence?

Coetzee manages to deepen the issue further, though. He offers an awkward, but no less intriguing take on “the others” (i.e., the unknown barbarians), where at one point the role of the one that tortures and the one that loves is questioned, and conclusively considered to be basically similar. Both torturer and lover are keeping another person captive and contained, both claim the body, invade it, explore it, and colonize it. Both acts, of torturing and nurturing, are to be considered a transgression toward the other that is dubious at best. As the protagonist describes at one point, not being able to explore the inner life of the body, one is forever doomed to explore the surface in search of an entrance. Rather than getting to the core of matters, the feeling of the encounter with the other remains purely superficial, endlessly navigating the surface of the unknown subject, never being able to move beyond that threshold, to transgress, let alone overcome the difference(s). But this potentially highly problematic insight is reversed at the very end, when the position of the other in the unfolding constellation is suddenly brought forward. The other remains without voice, but here that silence becomes an absence that is suddenly brought into existence, not solved or transgressed, but simply brought forward

as a possibility and as a presence. As a consequence, once the mystery of otherness, with all its exquisitenesses, has become present and subsequently vanishes, the ordinary will set in, even settle in, opening the possibility of a world consisting of nothing but ordinarinesses.

Generally speaking, the border is of course a very robust spatial element, with a far-reaching territorial stretch (and agency), and with extremely sophisticated mechanisms to adjust and adapt to any violation, occurring mostly (but not always) through literal transgressions. Yet the border's other side endlessly continues to have its appeal, drawing one into the unknown territories, causing the other side of the border to not remain *terra incognita*. The unknown *has* to be investigated, if only to satisfy the wish or promise that, apart from the similarities, some exquisite otherness might be discovered or revealed. The opening toward the others, which the enclosing border instigates as much as enforces, begs for confirmation, needs the encounter, demands proof of the existence of otherness. The border is the physical and spatial expression of the desire for the other shore, the other self, the possibilities yet to be imagined and therefore not yet accounted for. The border cannot but be transgressed: *that* is ultimately the entire point of its fabrication, willingly and knowingly producing its own obsolescence, but not exactly, at the moment of its transgression.

Once the other is acknowledged, recognized, investigated, and perhaps interrogated at that other side, the other becomes inherently part of one's system, one's doing, and one's thinking. In this set of circumstances, the other does not necessarily invade but starts to become almost automatically internalized. Once absorbed by this side, the other is no longer an undefined possibility but a literal and very localizable and clearly discernable presence. A growing awareness of distinctions then becomes part of the *modus operandi*. Differentiation and exclusion emerge as dangerous mixtures, ultimately and potentially (or unavoidably) resulting in a society of distinction, exclusion, and other controlling practices (as Foucault has so painfully shown).<sup>17</sup>

This insight then brings forward the critical question of what, in the end, do differentiation and transgression produce? It would seem inevitable that differentiation, as a technique to understand, open, and allow for different realities to be acknowledged, has the agential potential of exclusion and/or expulsion as its inherent side effect. Since the rules for involvement and terms of engagement are unclear, the inclusion/exclusion mechanism(s) remain unclear. These unclarities and uncertainties start to produce anxieties, curiosities, cynicisms, mysteries, numbness, paralysis, and doubt. The internalization of the border as a device of differentiation and distinction thus means the emergence of a sense of paranoia that becomes omnipresent and nonevasive. The distinction between perpetrator and victim will become unclear, mixed, and thus remain confused from hereon in. In other words, the bordering process

further and deepens, with the border becoming a space of simultaneity.<sup>18</sup> This is the Foucauldian parallel universe where Kafka (i.e., the Court)<sup>19</sup> meets Agamben (i.e., the Camp).<sup>20</sup> Janus's Head has been internalized, the double-sidedness of the border has turned inward, both physically and mentally.

Can it thus be concluded that any border seems to inevitably become such a space, where the clear distinction between this side and the other side has slowly started to be blurred because of elements of the inside being placed outside and vice versa? Is, therefore, each border subject to these sketched bordering and othering mechanisms and processes? This would subsequently mean that the implementation of any border means the other is introduced and thus always present as possibility, and that otherness is introduced and thus always present as agency. The double-sidedness of the border not only enables one to navigate and investigate the other shores but also to interrogate the self and the same, both aggressively and fiercely, as well as caringly and affectively/appreciatively. Once the Janus-system has folded back, the overall condition will have been further blurred into a mesh in which every detail, every characteristic has been distributed almost evenly, across both sides of the—now former—divide. But not quite of course, as a certain measure of differentiation will persist and can never be truly dissolved.

### 03. THE BORDER CONCEPTUALIZED

*Walls today articulate an inside/outside distinction in which what is on the inside and being defended and what is on the outside and being repelled are not particular states or citizens, indeed, in which subjects, political power, political identity, and violence may be territorially detached from states and sovereignty on both sides.*

—Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*<sup>21</sup>

The question posed at the start of the previous segment, namely “what is a border?”, is an intended and direct reference as well as titular reiteration of Étienne Balibar's 1993 paper, in which he deliberately chose a dialectical approach to investigate the political agency of borders. In order to describe the changing nature of borders and bordering practices, Balibar identified three main characteristics of borders as they existed at the time, namely “overdetermination,” “polysemic character,” and “heterogeneity.” In terms of the border being overdeterministic, he claimed that any political border is never “just” the dividing line between two states only but is always also reconfirmed by other divisions. No border, therefore, operates by (and in) itself, but always in relation with other borders. The polysemic character of borders, then, refers to the differences in meanings attributed to the border, with

Balibar claiming that borders exist differently for individuals (“belonging to different social groups”<sup>22</sup>), while the heterogeneity of borders, in his understanding, refers to the dissolution, or disentanglement, of political, cultural, and socioeconomic borders. In other words, he identifies the tendency of then-contemporary borders to no longer be concentrated as (and in) one border entity but to be diversified into several, and above all separate borders, thus introducing a wider variety of spatial orderings, superimposed onto a given territory.<sup>23</sup>

As Balibar’s paper was written in the post–Cold War period of the early 1990s, one important thing stands out with respect to his claim from a contemporary point of view. The reterritorialization of borders that occurred after the Cold War did happen on several scales, where the consequential geographic redistribution of power was combined with different economic and political interests, a tendency continued today and enhanced through flexible alliances that are subject to constant revision. Something fundamental seems to have changed in recent geopolitical conflicts, as a hybridization has occurred that has allowed a fragmented landscape of interests and conflicts to emerge, in which clarity has not only been lost but is deliberately avoided. Superficially speaking, globalization has been twisted back into a nation-first mentality, all while installing a new global configuration of power relations. But analyzing the current state of affairs more closely, these developments do not constitute a return to the Cold War, as has recently been argued, far from it. As the recent Turkish-Russian “relationships” in Syria, Libya and elsewhere can attest to, the current “mixed alliances” have been fundamentally blurring the field of partnerships, coalitions, and conflicting interests. In the contemporary “post-truth” world, a “coalition of the willing” such as the one formed after Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait would still be possible, but it would simultaneously and continuously be undermined by other coalitions, other battlefields, and by dispersed national interests globally. In the very end, even the post–Cold War reterritorialization of power relations and global alliances has “melted into air.”<sup>24</sup>

This has some implications for the conceptual-territorial understanding of the border. Of course, it had already been argued that the conflicts of the decades of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s saw a far-reaching change of diminishing spatial sceneries, namely from the geopolitical division of the world in roughly two entities in conflict (i.e., the Cold War), to interstate wars (i.e., the Balkan Wars), to a direct attack on the city with the (9/11 and other) terrorist attacks. Related to the geopolitical scale, it would seem that most of the theoretical conceptualizations that were formulated following the end of the Cold War have by now become rather obsolete, almost to the point of irrelevancy. The “end of history,” the “clash of civilizations,” “failed states,” or the “non-integrated gap (composed of anarchy)”<sup>25</sup>—these notions have perhaps surfaced at



times, but nothing permanent has persisted in the current, politically oriented, spatial debates.

In full contrast, the prevailing conceptualizations of the border that were formulated either post-Cold War or post-9/11 have remained relevant and have maintained their capacity to describe contemporary border conditions. The border as line, limit, edge, (political) space of in/exclusion, as zone, state of exception, as scape, as method, as territorial extent, as gathering place, or as locus for encounter, and also “border thinking”<sup>26</sup>—each of these notions has remained relevant. In fact, these “border realities” exist and are all present simultaneously. The point, also substantiated by Coetzee, is that the border actually becomes a superposition of coexisting spatial complexities. Considering these terms conjointly is then more in line with the agency of borders and how to understand them. The instrumentalization and operationalization of the border within a given territory have produced an interwoven, complex web of networks, connections, and links onto the territory, thus producing what Balibar has termed “*Cross-Over*, ‘overlapping folds,’ or *nappes superposées*.”<sup>27</sup> As a result, not only has the border gained a certain complexity—in part because of its saturation with technological innovations—the border itself has by now literally become a “complex,” as its driving force(s) have a vested interest in the consolidation, and definitely not the dissolving, of the border. This “Border Complex” has started to not only solidify existing bordering entities but also to introduce the need for new(er) and ever more sophisticated ones.

Recent discussions of these contemporary operations of power, and the role of biopower in them, have evinced an increased attention to forms of resistance or to strategies of withstanding or obstructing power. Alexander Galloway, for instance, has used Deleuze’s extension of Foucault’s Disciplinary Society (i.e., the Society of Control) to shift attention from the relationship between political power, vertical (time-based) bureaucracies, and thermo-dynamic technologies to the relationships between control mechanisms and digital technologies. While this periodization could indicate the transition from the modern to the postmodern age, it can equally be attributed to the distinction between the most influential technological devices of an era and the particular way a given society was operated, which Galloway terms the transition from decentralization to the protocological nature of distributed networks.<sup>28</sup> With respect to the emergence of the focus on security and biopower, Foucault had already indicated that “security [is] being exercised over a whole population.”<sup>29</sup> But Galloway uses Deleuze’s reading of Foucault to indicate that the very site of biopower is also “a site of resistance,” as life is turned against power when power takes life as its “aim or object.”<sup>30</sup> Yet if one wants to extrapolate these readings, and thus formulate a critique, does this mean that “mere” existence (“the power of life,” in Deleuze’s terms) is already considered to be a

form of resistance? That would seem to deny the harsh reality that being in close proximity to the border, to these spatial mechanisms of exclusion, can in fact have its origin in the reflexive, intuitive, or simply instinctive response to utter despair.

Is it not rather cynical to term this resistance? Or would the whole point be to confront the border with some kind of bodily presence? The process of mirroring, blurring, and differentiation in relation to the presence of the border, as we could also sense in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, produces a condition in which all bodies are being brought into relational movement. Paul Virilio has termed this emerging condition the "ultracity" and argued that the "megapolis of the excluded of all stripes, who pour in from all sides, has now come to rival the all-too-real megapolis of the included."<sup>31</sup> Virilio thus foresees an uprootedness that will transform the sedentary city of the past into this nomadic "ultracity" of the nearby future, in which the various forms of dislocations and displacements will be the result of an overall avalanche of exoduses, creating "deportees of a new kind."<sup>32</sup>

With respect to the Berlin Wall, that classical, historical example of border production, it has been argued that each transgression of the Wall automatically instigated a change of its control mechanisms, the system adjusting to the revealed flaws. And since no border ever operates completely successfully, as there will always be ways "around" it, transgressions are considered to be an intrinsic part of the border's functioning. Consequently, resistance is also considered to be already embedded in the very fabric of the border. This is a tactical game that both strengthens the agency of the border but also invites its very overcoming. This is the moment where the transition from the initial, though never actually existing, state of clear border dichotomies (i.e., inclusion vs. exclusion, belonging vs. nonbelonging, native vs. non-native, us vs. them), transforms into the differentiated state of the simultaneous. Increasingly, in this bordered space, the emergence of simultaneities on either side means a transfer of dichotomies, an ongoing process of endless differentiation (as well as nomadism). Where Virilio talks about a constant state of outsourcing, this externalization of the internal produces precisely this space of simultaneity. "Elsewhere" is indeed and already "here."<sup>33</sup>

## 04. THE TERRITORY MAPPED

*Architecture is the source, the origin, a boundary in time and space and the transcendence and transgression of that boundary. And all of this in a very concrete, bodily, non-metaphysical way. In order to understand architecture, we need to return to the boundary, [...] to the moment that men joined together with nature, in other words, brought order into the chaos, set up a cohesive arrangement, gave the rambling, anonymous world a name, created, as Bataille put it, "human order."*

—Geert Bekaert, *Architecture Devoid of Shadow*<sup>34</sup>

The consequence for the previously mentioned changes with respect to the geopolitical territories has been that both issues of movement and technologies will have to be incorporated in the conceptualization of the border. Space and time have become intrinsically related through these issues (of movement and technology). The territory that is constructed out of a set of overdeterministic borders can be regarded as a thick surface that is simultaneously becoming a thinned substrate through the saturation of (digitized) border technologies. The border thus undergoes a gradual transformation of form and a continuous alteration of meaning through the accumulation of other significations.

The heterogeneity Balibar pointed to has inevitably been furthered by the differentiation brought forward in relation to contemporary border conditions. The agency of borders is their capability to differentiate (also preparing the ground for selection, exclusion, and externalization), but their encounter also produces experiential differentiation. On another occasion, however, Balibar argued for a different type of heterogeneity, one that is also relevant for the current border debates and which requires a full quote here, in order to properly appreciate its range of argumentation:

It is impossible to represent Europe's history as a story of *pure identities*, running the danger of becoming progressively *alienated*, but only in terms of *constructed identities*, dependent on a series of successive *encounters* between "civilizations" (if one wants to keep the word), which keep taking place *within* the European space, enclosing populations and cultural patterns from the whole world. Just as it is necessary to acknowledge that in each of its "regions" Europe always remains heterogeneous and *differs from itself* as much as it *differs from others* (including the "New Europes" elsewhere in the world). This *differance*, to put it in Derridian terminology, both internal and external, is irreducible. Which leads to the political conclusion that Europe's heterogeneity can be politically *mediated*, but cannot be *eliminated*. In this sense, only a "federal" vision of Europe, preserving its cultural differences and solidarities, can provide a viable historical project for the "supra-national" public sphere.<sup>35</sup>

Excluding the European contextual framing of his argument for the moment, Balibar's more general plea for a "federal entity" is intriguing. As a consequence of realizing that any identity is by default a constructed one and any formulated collective thus inherently heterogeneous, the "mediating" of this heterogeneity becomes the central focus of attention. Any sense of belonging is thus a fabricated belonging, a process of in- and exclusion that can be mediated, i.e., guided, manipulated, and censored. But it can also be redirected. If, as indicated, life itself cannot constitute a form of resistance in and by itself, a form of "mediation" needs to be propounded in which commentary, reflection, agitation, protest, political positioning, and criticality find their mediated presence and expression. Resistance mapping is such a mediating tool, as it potentially offers another way of dealing with the problematics of borders sketched thus far, namely through the potential that is situated in the mediated projection of forms of opposition, obstruction, actions and activism and, not to be underestimated, at least the idea of some kind of say (and thus control) in these matters.

As stated, borders produce territories, but so do maps. If the border is the moment in which the territory is framed and thus brought into existence, the territory is simultaneously differentiated and thickened (or thinned) by the border as well. The relationship between the map and the territory is complex, as the map is not a reduced version of the territory but constitutes an independent and autonomous discourse in itself. Originally, the map is a depiction, representation, model, or simulation of the territory, but since cartography has developed its own distinct set of discursive rules, it can henceforth only be partly related to its source, namely the "original territory." That "original" understanding of the territory is reinterpreted, transformed, and distorted over time, with each new map that is produced. The map's difficult relationship with the "real" is increasingly the result of the map setting out (spatial) relationships outside of the map. This is not "agency" just yet, meaning these relationships do not necessarily have an effect on reality, but at least invisible realities are produced, revealed, framed, and clarified by these maps.

Similar to architecture, cartography is a discipline in which various forms of spatial representation are produced through acts of drawing. In the production of maps, reality is decoded and recoded through notation. The coding that constitutes the core of the representational act constitutes a form of displacement through its "projection," namely its indicating of what will (have to) be. To "project" is to describe, to anticipate a future, a possible but envisioned, and therefore necessary future. But architecture is a casting present of the "here" and "now," of place and time, of Being, of being present. It does not foreclose future, it merely introduces this infinite becoming present of presence. To project is to insist on a certain control, but, as stated, such utopic desire is never without its diasporic effects.

Mapping the bordered territory means depicting a topological geography of simultaneity, a gravitational constellation of relations, that would reflect the sketched character of contemporary borders. Indeed, as is now commonplace in map thinking, maps produce territories as well. In a mapping, one is projected in an array of different localities, causing one to be im-placed with multiple frames and multiple groundings. The map orders the differentiated plurality the border produces. As it is the spatial object where things arrive at and depart from, the border thus reorders, an operation that involves the re-implication of objects within a territorial field. This reordering is also a redifferentiation, a making possible of the latent (forces, people, objects, social groups, what NOT), and allowing these to laterally reemerge. Borders are the unheralded heroes of architecture, the circumscribers of space, the means of making present. A border is every location, an incorporation of the inside and the outside, as a complexifying ever-becoming-different.

## NOTES

1. Umberto Barbieri, "Preface," in *Border Conditions*, ed. Marc Schoonderbeek (Amsterdam: Architecture et Natura Press, 2010), 19.
2. O.M.A., Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, *S,M,L,XL*, ed. Jennifer Sigler (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1995), 2–21.
3. As is probably lesser known, *Exodus* and its reference to the Berlin Wall predate the wonderful cinematic reversal elaborated in Tarkovski's movie *Stalker*, in which the forbidden zone plays an equally appealing role. See: Andrei Tarkovski, *Stalker* (Mosfilm, 1979).
4. Lara Schrijver, "OMA as Tribute to OMA: Exploring Resonances in the Work of Koolhaas and Ungers," *Journal of Architecture* 13, no. 3 (2008): 235–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602360802214927>.
5. Respectively: Alvin Boyarsky, "Chicago à la carte: The City as Energy System," *Architectural Design Magazine*, 40 (1970): 595–640. The text also appeared as Alvin Boyarsky, "Chicago à la Carte," in *Architectural Association: The Idea of the City*, ed. Robin Middleton (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996); Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972); and Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1978).
6. Jeffrey Kipnis, *Perfect Acts of Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2001), 14–33. Also published in: Martin van Schaik and Otakar Máčel, eds., *Exit Utopia: Architectural Provocations 1956–76* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2005), 236–53.

7. Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*.
8. Alejandro Zaera Polo, "Finding Freedoms: Conversations with Rem Koolhaas," *El Croquis* 53, (1992): 6–31.
9. O.M.A., Koolhaas and Mau, *S, M, L, XL*, 2–21 and 212–33 respectively.
10. Lieven de Cauter and Hilde Heynen, "The Exodus Machine," in Van Schaik and Mácel, *Exit Utopia*, 263–76.
11. Apart from the authors cited (i.e., Schrijver, Kipnis, De Cauter, and Heynen), we could also mention Charles Jencks terming the work "ad hoc urbanist" in *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1977), as well as Rafael Moneo, *Theoretical Anxiety and Design Strategies: In the Work of Eight Contemporary Architects* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004). Intriguing counterpositions can be found in Felicity D. Scott, "Involuntary Prisoners of Architecture," *October* 106 (2003): 75–101; Tahl Kaminer, *Architecture, Crisis and Resuscitation: The Reproduction of Post-Fordism in Late-Twentieth-Century Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2011), 140–48.
12. Foucault's disciplinary reference to Bentham's panopticon, see: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).
13. Vladimir Kolossov, "Theoretical Limology: Postmodern Analytical Approaches," in *Diogenes* 53, no. 2 (2006): 11–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192106065968>.
14. James W. Scott, "Introduction," in *A Research Agenda for Border Studies*, ed. James W. Scott (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020), 3–24.
15. Henk van Houtum and Ton van Naerssen, "Bordering, Ordering and Othering," *Journal of Economic and Human Geography* 93, no. 2 (2002): 125–36.
16. J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980).
17. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.
18. Though this goes outside the framework of this discussion, I would like to suggest that this understanding of the border as a space of simultaneity provides reasons for a certain critical distancing vis-à-vis the understanding of the territory as a palimpsest.
19. Franz Kafka, *Der Prozess* (Berlin: Verlag Die Schmiede, 1925), translated in English as *The Trial*.
20. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
21. Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 82.
22. Étienne Balibar, "What Is a Border," in *Politics and the Other Scene* (New York: Verso, 2002), 79.
23. Note that there is no territory without a defined "space" and that this space needs to be indicated, if not demarcated, i.e., bordered.
24. Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Penguin Books, 1982).

25. Respectively: Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1997); and the terms used in the context of the “Bush doctrine” as well as by the CIA (with the nonintegrated gap as the extension of the “Axis of Evil,” which basically comes down to the global South).
26. Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).
27. Étienne Balibar, “Europe as Borderland,” Alexander von Humboldt Lecture in Human Geography, University of Nijmegen, November 10, 2004, <https://eclass.uoa.gr/modules/document/file.php/PHS498/4.1%20Europe%20as%20Borderland%20Balibar.pdf>.
28. Alexander R. Galloway, *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).
29. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population; Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 12.
30. Galloway, *Protocol*, 16.
31. Raymond Depardon and Paul Virilio, *Native Land: Stop Eject* (Paris: Fondation Cartier pour l’Art Contemporain, 2008), 185.
32. Ibid., 192.
33. Ibid., 12.
34. Geert Beekaert, *Architecture Devoid of Shadow* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1988), 21.
35. Balibar, “Europe as Borderland,” 13.

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# TRUTH-SPOTS AND BOUNDARY-WORK

## Encountering, Transcending, and Rethinking Boundaries in Cities and in Urban Studies

*Eugene McCann*

“What distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is ... that the architect raises his [*sic*] structure in imagination before he erects it in reality.”<sup>1</sup> This statement, with its tinge of anthropocentrism born out of limited nineteenth-century knowledge of animals, comes from a discussion of the labor process. How, we might ask, do those of us in the contemporary interdisciplinary field of urban studies work to understand, imagine, and shape the world? How, moreover, do people with whom we engage outside of the academy conceive of and rework their cities? How, specifically, do boundaries, broadly defined, factor into our approach to cities?

The theme of this volume is how urbanists of all kinds, as well as architects and artists, encounter and transcend often apparently impenetrable boundaries to movement and to thinking. I will address this topic through two cases of how people work, practically/intellectually, to reshape and rethink cities. The first of these examples is the movement in many cities to establish Supervised Consumption Sites (SCS). These are legal health facilities where people who use illicit drugs can consume them in supervised conditions, with clean equipment, and with reduced fear of arrest, of contracting a blood-borne infection, or of dying from an overdose. SCSs are also contact points between people who use drugs and other health and social service providers. As I will discuss, SCSs are the product of knowledge sharing across borders, among a global network of “harm reduction” experts. Some of these sites have become important reference and relay points in the development of a general model of SCSs.

My second example is the ongoing discussion in the academic field of urban studies about how and from where knowledge regarding cities is created. The traditional reference points in the field, largely global North cities, have been questioned by a “Southern urban critique.”<sup>2</sup> Critics argue that conceptualizing global urbanism largely through references to cities like Chicago, New York, or London impoverishes the field. Moreover, they argue that a reconstructed urban studies must not merely add more examples from the majority world but must encourage and valorize conceptualization based on a wider set of reference points.<sup>3</sup>

In both examples, the established boundaries of practice and knowledge are encountered, transcended, and redrawn through deliberate actions intended to reframe specific problems. They involve both practical and intellectual labor. I argue that “spatial interexchange” offers opportunities to develop architectures of resistance in the city (such as SCSs) and in the academic study of cities (such as new theoretical reference points and citational frameworks) that open our perspectives to a more progressive and global sense of cities.

This reference to a global, progressive sense of cities refers to Doreen Massey’s notion of a global sense of place,<sup>4</sup> which I will use to ground a conceptual framework for my argument. I will combine my discussion of Massey with an outline of the policy mobilities approach, which geographers and others have used in recent years to investigate how ideas, models, and expertise have circulated globally through cities to shape them and their global contexts. I will then elaborate on the two examples; the final section of the chapter will reiterate the connections between them in the context of this volume’s focus on boundaries and architectures of resistance.

## 01. A GLOBAL SENSE OF PLACE AND IDEAS ACROSS BOUNDARIES

Massey was a geographer who wrote profoundly about how we can think of cities as places shaped by social relations stretching across space, far beyond local boundaries. Her classic article, “A Global Sense of Place,”<sup>5</sup> argues that it should be “impossible even to begin thinking about Kilburn High Road [her local shopping street in London] without bringing into play half the world and a considerable amount of British imperialist history.”<sup>6</sup> This is in opposition to a reactionary stance that “require[s] the drawing of boundaries.”<sup>7</sup>

That kind of boundary around an area precisely distinguishes between an inside and an outside. It can so easily be yet another way of constructing a counterposition between “us” and “them.”<sup>8</sup>

Massey certainly did not want to define Kilburn, or any place, in terms of “enclosing boundaries.” Instead, she pursued a progressive, extrospective sense of place. For her, each place is “a *meeting* place,” and it is “extroverted.” “Boundaries,” she continues, “are not necessary for the conceptualisation of a place.” Rather, “each place is the focus of a distinct *mixture* of wider and more local social relations.”

Massey’s perspective suggests that all cities are global. They are assembled out of parts gathered from nearby and from far away. They are bounded in some ways, for example in their formal political jurisdictions. But it is useful to

think through the productive tensions between this local-territorial condition, on the one hand, and the global-relational character of all places, on the other.<sup>9</sup> This can be done by focusing on migration, environmental, or economic processes. Similarly, geographers and others have recently studied urban policymaking from a perspective that works through the tension between the territorial/topographical and the relational/topological.

This “policy mobilities” approach<sup>10</sup> seeks to encapsulate how cities act globally in terms of policy-making; how they learn about “best practices”; and how urban actors circulate models beyond their own municipal boundaries and across the borders of the nation-states in which they are located. The policy mobilities literature asks how and in whose interests certain policy models, “best practices,” knowledge, and ideas are mobilized and operationalized in new contexts. Thus, it conceives local policymaking as extrospective—looking outward for lessons and “fixes” to local problems, such as new ways to develop sustainably, create better transportation infrastructure and services, or promote business activity.<sup>11</sup> The policy mobilities approach identifies actors involved in the circulation of contemporary policies, plans, and designs for cities. These include a wide range of agents, from politicians and planners, to architects and academics, to experts and consultants of various types. Moreover, as I will discuss below, members of social movements and other political actors can also be agents of policy mobilization, as they all create and work through inter-local networks to promote certain ideas on how to govern and design cities in new, different, or better ways.

The mobilities concept connotes fluidity, mobilization, and deterritorialization but is, crucially, also about “moorings,” stabilities, and territorializations. Policy models and other potentially mobile entities need footholds from which to “push off,” and they often create and require bounded channels to direct their circulation. So, an account of policy mobilities must overcome reification and “methodological nationalism” (the assumption that the nation-state provides the appropriate parameters within which to study sociospatial processes).<sup>12</sup> Instead, policy mobilities scholars emphasize that urban governance involves various forms of citation and referencing that connect locations together into a geography of knowledge through which ideas about “best practices” and exemplary models circulate. Thus, the global circulation of policies and expertise is a sociospatial process. It is shaped by and shapes connections made by various policy actors across space. These connections, relationships, and bonds are sometimes made through face-to-face encounters, such as meetings, conferences, site visits, etc. Yet, more often, they are made at a distance, through emails, electronic or printed copies of gray literature, etc. These are teaching and learning activities that may seem mundane, but they are crucial to how urban spaces are produced.

When a policy or a design appears in a new place, it is often a reference to, or citation of, something somewhere else. Yet, like a reference, it is not a direct copy. Rather, it evokes connection and inspiration while conferring credibility through association. Similarly, as suggested above, references and citations emerge in and flow from specific locations of policy innovation to places where good governance and inventive problem-solving are argued to be located. The inter-referencing and mobilization of policy models involves interpretation, reinterpretation, and translation by various actors along the way. Policy consultants, for example, make a business out of abstracting elements, or “lessons,” from specific contexts, molding them into a persuasive story, then remolding that story to fit the needs and aspirations of their clients elsewhere. These circulations and material references flow through what the policy mobilities literature calls “informational infrastructures.”<sup>13</sup> These are institutions, organizations, and technologies that frame and package knowledge about best practices, successful cities, and cutting-edge ideas for specific audiences. There are at least three subsets of these infrastructures. First, there are states, from the local to the national, and related international organizations like UN Habitat. Second, educators and trainers who formally instruct new generations of policy actors are also a form of infrastructure. Third, professional and activist organizations serve a similar function by identifying and promoting particular “best practices” via their publications, information clearinghouse websites, email lists, awards, conferences, workshops, and field trips.

Nonetheless, despite the ability of experts and other actors to inter-reference various policy models in cities around the world, creating networks of knowledge and trust among them, this is no unbounded “space of flows.”<sup>14</sup> Borders, territories, legal systems, and state structures cannot be ignored or dreamed away. While some policy mobilities scholars have emphasized the role of the national state in shaping and constraining the circulation of models,<sup>15</sup> much of the literature leaves the national state and its borders in the background of analyses.

How might we build on this conceptualization of mobilities and moorings, inter-referencing, and boundaries to think through the work of urban policy-making and urban studies? In the next sections, I draw on the policy mobilities approach and introduce two concepts that have not yet been employed in it but nonetheless resonate with it, since they speak to the practical, intellectual, and spatial aspects of knowledge production. I will discuss the first concept, truth-spots, in the next section, before turning to the question of boundary-work.<sup>16</sup>



## 02. TRUTH-SPOTS: THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE AND SUPERVISED CONSUMPTION SITES

The first SCS opened in Bern, Switzerland, in 1986 and the model has spread since then. There are now at least 190 legal SCSs in 16 countries, including Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland.<sup>17</sup> From the outside, they may look like storefronts, or they may be less visible, embedded within other health facilities, in social housing buildings, or social service locations. Inside they bear a family resemblance to each other. They tend to have a reception area where participants in their programs register and wait for admittance. When a space in the consumption room opens, people enter, collect the sterile equipment they need, sit at a table or booth with good lighting and sometimes with a mirror. They consume their drugs, while being witnessed by staff. They then move into a third area, where they are encouraged to sit for a while so they can be monitored for signs of overdose and where they can have something to eat or drink and chat with staff about their days, their general health, and their social service needs. Extensive published evidence shows the success of the sites in preventing overdose deaths, reducing blood-borne infection, and connecting participants to housing or other health and social services.<sup>18</sup>

Yet, SCSs are often controversial and the model is still prohibited in most countries—remaining literally and figuratively out of bounds. To be operated legally, SCSs must comply with national drug laws. These laws often prohibit owners or operators of premises from knowingly permitting the use of illegal drugs in their buildings. There may also be other regulations barring staff from assisting people who are consuming. Often, beyond national laws, which are themselves dictated by international drug control conventions, local authorities can prevent SCS operation through planning codes and other restrictions. In all these ways, laws and regulations create boundaries to the mobile SCS model. A great deal of political labor is necessary to overcome these boundaries. It is work that imagines a less harmful future for people who use drugs, that develops and communicates knowledge about how to operate SCSs, and that engages in political advocacy to change regulations to allow SCS to operate.

The ideal of a less harmful future for people who use drugs is central to the “harm reduction” movement, of which SCSs are one manifestation. Harm reduction is “a principle, concept, ideology, policy, strategy, set of interventions, target and movement” that is increasingly global in its extent.<sup>19</sup> The basis of harm reduction is a pragmatic, nonjudgmental attitude toward drug use that is focused on stabilizing people’s lives rather than enforcing abstinence, either as a condition for entry into supportive programs or as a definitive goal. The philosophy is manifested in initiatives including needle and

syringe distribution, naloxone provision, and campaigns for decriminalization. SCSs are some of the most visible manifestations of harm reduction ideas, since many are located in places that Tempalski and McQuie call urban “drugscape,”<sup>20</sup> or in what Rhodes calls “risk environments”: “places ... produced by social isolation and underdevelopment, where certain patterns of drug use are more likely to occur.”<sup>21</sup>

Harm reduction comprises numerous related “moving ideas.”<sup>22</sup> They are persuasive and thus *move* or prompt people to action for change in how the harms associated with the prohibition of certain psychoactive substances are governed. They are also *moving* in the sense that they travel among places, shared by advocates through various forms of communication and circulated through networks of like-minded people who use drugs, public health practitioners, researchers, and activists.

Harm reductionists cite evidence of SCSs’ successes and ongoing challenges through references to the large number of research studies that have been published in a variety of health and social science journals.<sup>23</sup> Thus, we can understand the SCS as both a moving model that strives to cross jurisdictional boundaries and as a site and stake in a politics of expertise and knowledge production intended to persuade those in power to change hegemonic (criminalization, prohibitory) approaches to drug-related harms. This politics of knowledge proposes alternative public health and social movement-led approaches that emphasize meeting people who use illicit drugs “where they are at” in their relationship with those substances even if that means facilitating safer use, rather than demanding abstinence. Reference to evidence in published academic studies is corroborated and amplified through less formal discussions that happen in and around regular conferences of harm reduction organizations, like the Harm Reduction Coalition and the Drug Policy Alliance. These “informational infrastructures” are key architectures within harm reduction’s geographies of knowledge.

SCSs in two cities—Sydney, Australia, and Vancouver, Canada—are crucial reference points in the global SCS discussion. Sydney’s Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) in the city’s Kings Cross neighborhood was established in 2001 and Vancouver’s Insite opened in 2003. Largely because of the strict terms under which they were established—as research trials with funding attached for studies and evaluations to be conducted on various aspects of their operations and effects—these two places have become the key reference points for advocates to learn how to argue for SCSs. They allow advocates to show skeptics how SCSs improve the lives of people who use drugs and how the surrounding neighborhoods can benefit from their establishment.

Indeed, a powerful aspect of these and other established SCSs, even ones with less academic research conducted on them, has been how they have become destinations for what the policy mobilities literature calls “policy tourism.”<sup>24</sup> In this regard, SCSs can be thought of as what sociologist of science Thomas Gieryn calls “truth-spots”: places that help people believe.<sup>25</sup> They are delimited geographical locations that are the focus of practical and intellectual engagement and that lend credibility to claims that are made about and from them.<sup>26</sup>

SCSs frequently host organized delegations from elsewhere, or individual visitors, including journalists, from other places or even from their own cities. In this context, the sites become places of education and persuasion—places where the codified knowledge of the research literature is complemented by the visceral experience of visiting, touching, being in the site and its neighborhood and speaking informally to the various people who are in the SCS as participants in its programs or as workers. In this sense, truth-spots are meeting places—of people, of minds—within wider and longer pathways of ideas. They are places in which, from which, and about which persuasive stories of successful public health practices are told. They are also reference points and the repeated referencing, or citation, of them by experts lends to their credibility. Credibility or truth is not only inherent to the “spots,” in other words; it is also relationally produced across distance. This is where the literature on truth-spots and the one on policy mobilities can engage in constructive conversation.

These SCSs are important elements of the movement’s collective topological “mental map” of similar cities that, while topographically distant and enclosed within the borders of dissimilar states, are socially, psychologically, perceptually, and meaningfully close in the collective map of harm reductionists.<sup>27</sup> To put it another way, this map is not only a route planner for policy tourists, but a reference list. It directs people and attention, moving ideas and policy knowledge.<sup>28</sup>

Nonetheless, as I have suggested earlier, practitioners’ ability to inter-reference various SCSs, creating networks of knowledge and trust among them, does not happen in, or produce, an unbounded space of flows. The brute reality of borders, legal systems, and other regulatory regimes must be acknowledged and addressed. Ignoring this reality is particularly problematic in the context of harm reduction and drug policy since national states adhere to the treaties and conventions of the international drug control regime. As the SCS model circulates, it encounters and seeks to transcend borders and the bounds imposed on its core practices. Thus, legal boundaries (and relief from them) become physically manifest in SCSs, which sometimes operate as exceptions by gaining temporary exemptions to extant laws that would normally prohibit their operation. They are spaces carved out within established borders through which globally mobile models can transcend those boundaries.

### 03. BOUNDARY-WORK: THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE IN URBAN STUDIES

One of the key points of my discussion of SCSs is that communities of like-minded actors gather around particular framings of problems and solutions, often in, or in reference to specific truth-spots in urban built environments.<sup>29</sup> They engage in intellectual and practical work to envision and enact a new approach that draws upon and is strengthened by their collective social interactions, both in person and at a distance. Similarly, academics continually engage in learning, referencing, and citational practices as they study urbanism. How, then, are places utilized and how are boundaries encountered and transcended in the process of knowledge production in critical urban studies?

While not an urban studies scholar, it is perhaps telling that Gieryn elaborates on his argument about truth-spots through the case of Chicago, a classic truth-spot in the history of urban studies that has shaped the wider geographies of knowledge and practice about cities (“Zones in Transition,” etc.).<sup>30</sup> For Gieryn,<sup>31</sup> “urban studies becomes a propitious case for exploring the emplacement of scientific claims, and (in particular) the relationships between the place where knowledge comes from and its bid for credibility.” He continues,

authors of the Chicago School oscillate between making Chicago (the city) into a laboratory and a field-site. On some occasions, the city assumes the qualities of a lab: a restricting and controlling environment, whose placelessness enables generalizations to “anywhere,” and which demands from analysts an unfeeling detachment. On other occasions, the same city becomes a field-site, and assumes different qualities: a pre-existing reality discovered by intrepid ethnographers who develop keen personal sensitivities to the uniquely revealing features of this particular place. As Chicago-the-city is textually shuttled back and forth between laboratory and field-site, the claims about metropolitan life by Chicago School authors take on credibility by being situated in the complementary legitimating languages of both truth-spots—lab and field.

This is similar to the lab/field character of SCSs as truth-spots that I have described above. SCSs also shape the truth and mobility of harm reduction because they function as sources of somewhat generalizable knowledge (labs) and as complex sites embedded in their own histories, politics, policies, legalities, and contexts of drug use, which confer credibility on those who speak from them.

One can argue that critical (urban) scholarship involves the constant effort to question and transcend the bounds of established intellectual approaches, structures, and ideologies, such as the received wisdoms of the Chicago School. And, indeed, Gieryn points to the field’s emergence beyond Chicagoan

orthodoxies by referring to the work of the Los Angeles School. But the Chicago/LA debate was itself a parochial discussion in the wider context of a world of cities and a world of difference.<sup>32</sup> More recent discussions in urban studies have questioned the theoretical centrality of North American and European cities to our understanding of the urban world.

Kong and Qian's (2019) study of the hierarchical geographies of knowledge production in urban studies, what they call the field's "centre-periphery hierarchy," highlights the boundaries that exist between different forms of knowledge in the field.<sup>33</sup> This is where Gieryn's other concept, "boundary-work" is useful. For him, boundary-work is "a rhetorical style" in which scientists attribute "selected characteristics to the institution of science ... for purposes of constructing a social boundary that distinguishes some intellectual activities as 'non-science'."<sup>34</sup> Since Gieryn's original discussion, which provided historical accounts of attempts to draw and negotiate a boundary between science and non-science involving specialists, policymakers, and the public, the notion of boundary-work has been employed more extensively to refer to how boundaries between fields and subfields of knowledge production are constructed, enforced, challenged, and dissolved through debate and action. The concept has also been used to analyze how social and spatial divisions are produced, policed, and contested in the world. For example, the urban studies literature features a number of contributions that employ "boundary-work" as a lens through which to analyze class, race, and other divisions that are reflected in and facilitated by the variegated character of neighborhoods in cities, with the purpose of highlighting the power and politics involved in the production of uneven urban landscapes.<sup>35</sup>

My purpose in this section, however, is to focus on boundary-work in academic citation practices. As I discussed above, SCS activists developed their knowledge of that particular harm reduction approach by referring to academic research on, and informal stories told about, cities where SCSs had been established successfully. This process of referencing opens up new ways of thinking about solutions to drug related harm outside of the boundaries imposed by individual nation states' responsibilities as signatories of international drug control treaties. Similarly, an attention to what, who, and where one cites as a scholar allows one to encounter and transcend established thought-boundaries and theory-spots.

Citation is, according to Ahmed,<sup>36</sup> a "reproductive technology, a way of reproducing the world around certain bodies." "Citational structures can form what we call disciplines," she continues. These "*techniques of selection* ... [are] ways of making certain bodies and thematics core to the discipline, and others not even part." There is a politics of citation in academia (and beyond), she argues, involving "*screening techniques*: how certain bodies take up spaces by

screening out the existence of others.” Bodies, worlds, cores, spaces: citation produces intellectual fields and boundaries.

Not surprisingly, then, the practice, objects, and consequences of citation cultures have long been a concern in many disciplines. In geography, for example, numerous interventions and analyses have critically discussed the character of academic publication and citation. These studies have focused on the hegemony of global North academics, institutions, and journals in shaping knowledge production and on the dominance of the English language in the production of knowledge, suggesting that even the category “global North” should be narrowed to the UK and USA and, to a lesser extent, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Other interventions have also highlighted problematics of difference, identity, and positionality in academic citation practices.<sup>37</sup> They critique the roles narrowness, habit, and uncritical “box checking” in citational practice play in centering authority in the discipline. Instead, Mott and Cockayne, for example, argue for “careful and conscientious citation ... because the choices we make about whom to cite—and who is then left out of the conversation—directly impact the cultivation of a rich and diverse discipline, and the reproduction of geographical knowledge itself.”<sup>38</sup>

There has been a similar attention to citation in urban studies. Kong and Qian’s detailed analysis of urban studies journals provides an assessment of the field that is enlightening in its details, even if not surprising in its conclusions, given the discussion above. They show urban studies to be dominated by Anglo-Americans, in terms of its most prominent agenda-setting authors, their home institutions, the cities they study, the analyses they produce, and even their “conceptions of the ‘city.’”<sup>39</sup> Kong and Qian also note that their dataset, which extends from 1990 to 2010, suggests that “the majority of those who have made it to the lists of most productive and influential authors are less proactive in addressing the ‘peripheries’ of urban knowledge.”<sup>40</sup> Yet, they do also point to life beyond the boundaries of the Anglo-American core: the rise of postcolonial approaches that build on notions of ordinariness, relational comparison, and the decentering of Northern theory; indications of some changes in the norms of international publishing regarding accepted styles of theorizing, analysis, citation, and language; and the emergence of “diverse academic communities”<sup>41</sup> who research a wide range of contexts but also publish in international journals. Kong and Qian illustrate this argument by highlighting the growth of research on urban China “under the larger rubric of urban studies ... [but with] scholarly conventions resistant to uncritical borrowing from Anglophone literatures.”<sup>42</sup>

A particularly profound insight of Kong and Qian’s analysis is their identification of a group of scholars who they describe as “inbetween intellectuals” or “scholars native to developing countries but employed by Anglo-American

institutions” who “work across boundaries between different intellectual traditions” to render “the binary of centre–periphery less applicable than a discourse of hybridity.”<sup>43</sup> They highlight Chinese inbetween urban scholars as mediators, translators, network-builders, and mentors who “are presumably more sensitive to local specificities, but [can] also ... negotiate the conventions and norms of international publishing.”<sup>44</sup> Fittingly, Kong and Qian point out that these inbetween intellectuals can be viewed in two ways: while they actively diversify Anglophone and Chinese-language scholarship, they also can be seen to “reproduce the inherent inequality in the global landscapes of knowledge production, for closeness to the Anglophone publishing industry, in one way or another, shapes their academic prestige and reputation.”<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, the mobilities of these inbetween scholars—less-traveled pathways that transcend established boundaries—offer concrete evidence of other viable interactions, citation practices, and perhaps even “school formations” in an extended urban studies field. Addressing this finding, Kong and Qian invite urbanists to “further reflect on the habitus of urban knowledge production and circulation, which is circumscribed in some ways and being opened in others.”<sup>46</sup>

It is in their call for reflection that Kong and Qian’s argument resonates with those of Ahmed, Mott and Cockayne, and others on the politics of citation. Given Mott and Cockayne’s concern with “issues of power, marginalization, and authority in the production and reproduction of geographical thought,”<sup>47</sup> they argue that

citation is a form of shorthand, a reference to an earlier work, which, if deemed “appropriate” to reviewers and readers, confers the writer’s capacity to speak adequately on a given topic. A citation unknown, out of place, from the “wrong” source, or absent altogether might imply that an author does not have the right credentials and has not passed an implicit test of adequate scholarship. Hence the iterative and repetitive compulsion to cite already widely cited scholars of assumed authority and prestige that will confer on the reader with the greatest alacrity the author’s legitimacy.<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, they argue that the issue of whose work is cited is directly related to questions of voice and authority, which ideas and bodies are worthy of attention, dialogue, and remembrance, and “who is able to set the terms of debate in geographical scholarship.”<sup>49</sup>

These arguments lead Mott and Cockayne to advocate for replacing the sort of compulsory citation they identify in the literature with a series of strategies for individuals and collectives: analyzing the citations in one’s own papers, paying attention to if and how they provide space and attention to early-career or marginalized scholars; questioning self-citation, especially among



established scholars; valorizing collaboration and co-authorship; as editors or reviewers, paying attention to and developing policies around the character and politics of citation; and, as institutional actors, valorizing a wide range of academic activities. For them, these citational practices can turn citation from an activity that often uncritically reinforces established practices, centers, and “disciplinary mythologies” into a practice that generates new ideas and progressive change—a practice that might transcend and redraw established boundaries.

## 04. CONCLUSION

This chapter began by asking how urban studies scholars and urban actors, more broadly, conceive of and rework cities. It explored how both practical and intellectual labor are involved in encountering, transcending, and rethinking the boundaries that define how we shape and theorize urbanism. Through the concepts of truth-spots and boundary-work, I suggest that what we know about cities and how we know cities are connected. This revolves around encounters with and attempts to transcend and/or redraw boundaries in knowledge and practice. The sorts of architectures of resistance considered by this volume can, then, be thought of in physical and localized terms (the SCS, for example) but also in the sense of intellectual structures that constitute global-relational political geographies of knowledge. Like the proverbial architect, urbanists of all types can imagine and build new futures for cities.

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# GREENWAY AS BORDER

*Nicholas Serrano*

On the morning of December 11, 1973, two middle-aged men rode a tandem bike precariously along a gravel path, breaking through a yellow ribbon in a ceremonial gesture opening the first segment of the Capital City Greenway in Raleigh, North Carolina. The gentleman in front wearing plaid pants and a striped tie was outgoing mayor Tom Bradshaw; behind him was mayor-elect Clarence Lightner. The entire event was somewhat ridiculous. The location had no formal entrance. It was at the edge of town, in a marginal valley of the House Creek floodplain that was nearly impossible to access, set behind a street of expansive suburban houses and a new interstate highway. City officials in suits, loafers, dress shoes, and high heels followed local reporters juggling cameras down the steep banks, slipping and sliding on a thick layer of recently fallen foliage. The greenway trail itself was little more than a three-quarter mile long line of granite screenings on a litter layer of the forest floor; Bradshaw and Lightner only managed to ride a few feet before toppling over, just enough time to snap a quick couple of photos. Civic leaders congratulated one another, jacked up their trousers, and hiked back up out of the glorified ditch.<sup>1</sup> Forty years later, in 2013, the city finally paved that short path and officially connected it to the now expansive, hundred-mile network of greenways.

Later that evening in 1973, Clarence Lightner was sworn in as mayor of Raleigh. Maynard Jackson was also elected mayor of Atlanta that year, and together they were among the first Black men elected to lead major cities in the post-Jim Crow South.<sup>2</sup> Lightner and Bradshaw choosing this greenway dedication for their first and last official public appearances was significant. A ballot referendum earlier that year changed the Raleigh City Council to district representation, leading many incoming members to run on a populist platform, including open space preservation and, as circumstances would have it, a Black mayor. Greenways occupied that rare realm of populist and racial political consensus. Lightner was defeated by a building contractor two years later, and the capital city of the “progressive southern state” has never again had a Black mayor. Greenways, however, became central to Raleigh’s identity.

Commenting on Robert Frost’s famous line “Good fences make good neighbors,” landscape theorist J. B. Jackson said, “boundaries stabilize social relationships ... They give a permanent human quality to what would otherwise be an amorphous stretch of land ... a way of rebuking the disorder and

shapelessness of the natural environment.”<sup>3</sup> This chapter is about greenways as borders in post–World War II urban development in the southeastern United States. Although greenways gained widespread popularity with the rise of an ecological consciousness among the public in the late 1960s and ’70s, the phenomenon is not wholly of this movement. They are also derivative of a spatial distance integral to the suburban landscape. Greenways are an aestheticization of ecological ethics in the urban landscape, as much a visual amenity as environmental infrastructure.

This chapter examines the early history of the Capital City Greenway program in Raleigh, North Carolina, a midsize city largely developed in the twentieth century, to explore the premises and practices of what was ultimately a new approach to planning. It begins with a brief overview of greenways and open space preservation that provides the context for twentieth-century urban development centered around community planning and suburbanization. It then turns to the history of planning in Raleigh, where ideas for the Capital City Greenway emerged in the 1960s. Through a close reading of these early greenway proposals, we find strong connections between greenways as environmental infrastructure and defined borders between neighborhoods and differing urban communities. The notion of greenways as open-space preservation is then complicated by the history of urban segregation. The chapter ends with a recent experience on a nearby greenway to exemplify the persistent racial tensions encountered through greenways as borders in modern urban form.

One of the difficulties in studying greenways is in how the greenway program itself blurs administrative boundaries between planning policy, infrastructure, and economic development. Greenways were a new way of looking at the urban environment, responding to twenty years of postwar suburban development, but it is precisely this boundary blurring that allowed landscape to assume a new role in urban form, with important ideological and material consequences for the city. Greenways are broadly defined as a system of open space preservation, usually through a series of linear corridors that follow natural features of the landscape. Greenways are not original to Raleigh, and although the Capitol City Greenway prides itself as the first comprehensive greenway system in the United States, there were others that were similar, if not slightly distinct by design and intent.

The Capital City Greenway was like other early municipal greenway plans. It proposed implementing zoning ordinances to restrict development in floodplains and provided incentives to developers donating these corridors for utility easements and public recreation. The central problem concerned how to acquire land for passive public use in a society that holds private property rights in regard second only to “economic development,” which in practice

meant real estate development, thus further complicating the issue. To understand these complications requires delving into the history of open space preservation and postwar urban development.

## 01. OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION AND COMMUNITY PLANNING

The history of modern greenways dates to the nineteenth-century work of H.W.S. Cleveland in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Frederick Law Olmsted's Emerald Necklace in Boston, the Olmsted Brothers in Baltimore, and Charles Elliot and Sylvester Baxter's plan for the Boston Metropolitan Parks Report.<sup>4</sup> These early examples were almost exclusively concerned with preserving the aesthetics of landscape, the ameliorating effect of nature, and similar ideas stemming from the historical association between Enlightenment transcendentalism and the United States' national identity.<sup>5</sup>

Elliot and Baxter's 1894 plan for Boston Metropolitan Parks is the most pertinent to this story. Their plan was different from the typical nineteenth-century conception of public parks popularized by Olmsted, mainly by confronting regional trends in land development and introducing metropolitan governance as a means of reform.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the passive enjoyment and spiritual replenishment of nature espoused by Olmsted, Baxter and Elliot advocated for the active enjoyment of nature through landscape preservation. They extended park and open space planning to regional land use planning by identifying marginal sites, usually floodplains or derelict landscapes, that could serve a public purpose and define the shape of future development. Whereas Olmsted was mainly concerned with a park system's effect on public health, Baxter and Elliot extended this concern to the ecological health of a region.

The populist appeal for open space preservation in the twentieth century was a direct reaction to the increasing monotony of post-World War II suburban development. Builders bulldozed thousands of acres of land and built colonies of seemingly identical houses to meet an insatiable demand for single-family housing that became the ideal of twentieth-century suburban life. Open-space activists made three main arguments for preservation around amenity, outdoor recreation, and ecosystem services. Whereas Olmsted's nineteenth-century parks were based in transcendentalist notions of the rejuvenating psychological benefits of nature against the backdrop of an overcrowded industrial metropolis, mid-twentieth-century suburban sprawl produced a rampantly banal urban landscape that heightened the need for visual respite. Suburban development also consumed vast extents of land that left fewer opportunities for larger parks accommodating traditional programmed recreation. However, it was the ecosystem services that provided the most

potent political motive. Vast extents of unregulated suburban development blanketed the landscape in impervious surfaces and filled floodplains, thus increasing the severity of flood events. Open space corridors along urban streambeds instead preserved floodplains, providing the opportunity for landscape to absorb and drain stormwater runoff.<sup>7</sup>

Aesthetics was always central to the overall program. Open space provided much needed visual relief to the monotony of suburban sprawl. It helped to define communities, identify one place from another, and therefore impart a sense of place rooted in US identity with the landscape. One scientist at the time wrote, "The average person wants more and more to conserve nature simply because it is there; because it is good to look at and be in."<sup>8</sup> President Johnson's *White House Conference on Natural Beauty* of 1965 and subsequent proceedings *Beauty for America* were the crescendo of this movement.<sup>9</sup>

The link between postwar suburban sprawl and the subsequent open space preservation movement is well documented; however, this was not exclusively a one-way relationship. Open space was a key identifying feature of post-war suburban communities. The contemporary model of suburban development traces back to English progressive reformer Ebenezer Howard's Garden City concept of regional towns circumscribed by greenbelts.<sup>10</sup> Each town followed a ward-and-center model with different land uses separated by communal green spaces such as a town garden, central park, and grand avenue. Garden City architect Raymond Unwin connects the importance of communities and green open spaces in a 1920 essay:

It will be found that the proposed distribution will largely depend on the proper apportionment of open space around each area, and that this open space will serve two main purposes. It will provide all the opportunities for recreation, gardening, and so forth, and it will give a degree of definition to the area and separation from other areas which will emphasize [*sic*] the locality as a defined unit. Referring to the importance of defining areas, I may perhaps quote what I wrote in 1919 that "these belts might well define our parishes or our wards and by doing so might help to foster the feeling of local unity in the area."<sup>11</sup>

Early Garden City experiments in the United States included developments by the Regional Planning Association of America and the Greenbelt towns developed by the United States Resettlement Administration. Architect Clarence Stein designed several of these communities, one of the more famous being Radburn in Fair Lawn, New Jersey, designed in collaboration with Kenneth Weinberger. Radburn incorporated fingers of landscaped walkways projecting between clusters of homes that branched off a singular loop road. These early greenways were organized as a nested hierarchy of greenspaces that joined

together at a green spine, providing an internal pedestrian circulation throughout the community. Stein wrote that the primary function of green spaces “is visual ... or perhaps I should say spiritual ... [they] give the feeling of spreading spaciousness.”<sup>12</sup>

Professional developers in the United States soon adopted a modified version of the garden city model for mainstream suburban developments. One of the main differences was their connection to the surrounding urban fabric. Although both garden cities and mainstream suburbs were ideally bordered by arterial roads, professional developers designed more inward-focused neighborhoods with buffers at their edges. Access was usually limited to a few entrances on arterial roads, and internal roads discouraged through traffic. Neighborhoods extended back from the arterial roads on high ground down to the edge of a creek at the far end. This allowed for a network of green spaces along streambeds that extended up between neighboring developments.

Where Radburn and similar progressive developments in the United States utilized landscaped pedestrian corridors to provide circulation internal to neighborhoods, developers utilized greenways as buffers for their neighborhoods and adjacent land uses. Development manuals noted it is important to take stock of the surrounding environment and guard against land uses that could potentially detract from the community. One manual notes, “Undesirable surroundings ... must be guarded against. Physical buffers such as parks, golf courses, river valleys and certain types of institutional properties may minimize such bad effects ... Rough land, such as stream valleys not adaptable to building development, will often lend itself to park use.”<sup>13</sup>

## 02. PLANNING HISTORY OF RALEIGH

Raleigh was founded as a planned city in the late eighteenth century, with few natural features to ground its existence aside from a locational advantage roughly in the geographic center of North Carolina. Topography was central to its design from the start. The capitol building was sited at the highest point in Union Square in order to be well drained. Four main streets ninety-nine feet wide extended out from Union Square through seventy-two blocks comprising the square mile extents of developed land. Nine springs at the corners of town feed into the city’s waterworks and were evidently the reason for choosing this site over others.<sup>14</sup>

The Raleigh Women’s Club invited Charles Mulford Robinson to conduct the first modern city planning effort in Raleigh, published in 1912. The overriding theme of his proposal was aesthetic, taking note of the city’s appearance and seeking to instill visual order through future growth. Robinson

provided the first suggestion for a corridor of parkways connecting public lands, taking stock of existing parks and open spaces and connecting them by a “circuit drive.” This was a more traditional corridor concept connecting major parks like Olmsted’s proposal for Buffalo, with most of its length comprising existing streets to be beautified as parkways.<sup>15</sup>

Raleigh established a City Planning Department in 1949 and published an informational pamphlet entitled *Planning Principles of Raleigh* the next year. Written toward a public audience, the pamphlet outlined four main principles to drive the city’s future growth: dignified architecture, a balanced economy, nature preservation, and avoiding congestion. Aesthetics were important and included stately trees, “dignified setting[s]” for public buildings, and “handsome” residential areas. The pamphlet expanded on Robinson’s proposal for a corridor of connected parks with a more expansive network of corridors situated largely on undeveloped lots or land along streambanks. The pamphlet promoted these streams as a unique feature of Raleigh’s landscape, proposing that “every stream should be a potential park,” and argued for quick efforts to save the streams or else Raleigh would be “just like any other ordinary city, characterized by an unbroken urban sprawl from one end to the other.”<sup>16</sup>

The *General Land Use Plan for Raleigh* followed six months later and expanded on the *Planning Principles* pamphlet with “open space” central to its theme. It envisioned Raleigh as a “spacious and attractive” city where streams were preserved as “public corridors” and “spread out” being fundamental to guarding against congestion. The plan included “park strips along the streams acting as boundaries for the communities” serving multiple uses for recreation, sewer and water lines, and as a “buffer” against industry. The entire city would be circumnavigated by a green belt connecting the three main waterways surrounding the city: House Creek to the west, Crabtree Creek to the northeast, and Walnut Creek to the southeast. These were not “idle open spaces,” but instead imagined as “public corridors” of the city. This green belt was to include a parkway, larger parks for recreation, bicycle paths, and bridle trails.<sup>17</sup>

The first plan to focus specifically on a greenway as a connected system of open spaces was *Raleigh: The Park with a City in It* published in 1969. It led with the importance of open green spaces as contributing to the “character” of the city’s architecture and creating an “image of Raleigh as a vital, growing, pleasant place to live.” Imbedded within this was a belief in the psychological effects of landscape, where streets are important open spaces for experiencing architecture, parks relieve the monotony of urban blocks, and these are all “important open spaces that ‘tell’ us what our environment is like.” The report was devised partly in reaction to the Army Corps of Engineers plan to straighten and channelize major creeks in and around Raleigh. Noting that marginal lands are usually last to be developed, it saw potential in the string of riparian

lands along streams to be developed as the Capital City Greenway and sought to combine the infrastructure savings through natural drainage with the aesthetic ideal of open space. Rather than channelizing the streams, landscaped earthen embankments could instead provide similar protection with the added benefit of connecting existing Raleigh parks, many of which were already located along existing streams.<sup>18</sup>

Whereas previous land use development plans mainly focused on streams as open space preservation and a singular circumferential green belt, the Capital City Greenway would be a vast network of connected open spaces penetrating throughout the city. This had important implications for urban form with the greenways forming a framework that could “give coherence to future growth.” The report noted the potential for greenways to function like the landscaped pedestrian corridors at Radburn, as a network of trails that would allow residents to safely walk or ride from home to schools and parks. Although this seems to promote connectivity, the plan also highlights the importance of these greenways being sufficiently wide to function as an “ideal separator of neighborhoods and a buffer between residential, industrial, and commercial developments.” In addition to streambanks, the plan called for combining the greenways with parkways where they would act as “buffer strips [that] can turn an unsightly, noisy, enervating thoroughfare into a pleasant, enjoyable access-way to homes and shopping centers.”<sup>19</sup>

From its beginning in the late eighteenth-century, urban planning in Raleigh was concerned with creating a pleasing environment. The first modern planning initiatives by the Raleigh Women’s Club were born out of concern for one hundred years of piecemeal development, but it’s also significant that this concern coincided with the height of biracial migration to urban centers in the post-reconstruction era. Subsequent planning efforts by the Raleigh City Planning department sought to impose visual order on urban form by reclaiming marginal open spaces as greenways, and proposed methods to institutionalize them through municipal policy that aligned with modern community building strategies. The next section explores the meaning of these marginal spaces and their wider role in Southern history.

### 03. THE RACIAL HISTORY OF BORDERLAND SITES

The Capitol City Greenway, like Baxter and Elliot’s plan for the Boston Park system, did not start with a blank slate. Many of the sites identified for open space preservation were marginal lands, but these lands had a history of habitation by users on the margins of society. Floodplains, waterfronts, and shorelines have a long record as sites of inexpensive housing or aesthetically noxious



industrial uses such as slaughterhouses, factories, or lumber yards. Baxter and Elliot were particularly alarmed by the increasing use of lowlands for new residential development, which had an association with disease and malignancy. The Capitol City Greenway, like the Boston Park system, was partly an effort at reclaiming spaces in the city and preventing the “wrong” kind of development, simultaneously layering moral order on urban form.<sup>20</sup> These sites were chosen because they were available and unlikely to elicit political controversy by current inhabitants.

African Americans are often on the margins of society in the southeastern United States. Many of their neighborhoods, such as Southside and Smokey Hollow in Raleigh, were located on the least desirable real estate, in lowlands and floodplains.<sup>21</sup> Greenways can be considered as part of the broader postwar urban renewal effort to disentangle the traditional pattern of racially intermixed urban living into distinctly segregated sectors of the city. One Raleigh resident observed of the northeast parts of town in the direction of white flight, “The trees are everywhere. They hide the poverty.” By contrast, the southeastern parts of town where African Americans lived “tend to be flatter, dustier, and more swampy. West and North Raleigh have more rolling hills ... the environment of Northwest Raleigh is more conducive to healthy psychologies than the one in Southeast.”<sup>22</sup>

This is a larger issue underlying the ethics of greenways in urban planning. The rise of a popular ecological consciousness through postwar environmentalism provided firm grounding for White citizens to cultivate an aesthetics of wilderness through greenways, but it was a very racially specific aesthetic focused on the White spatial imagination. By contrast, many African Americans have a conflicted relationship with wilderness throughout southeastern United States history. Wilderness provided a refuge for enslaved persons escaping to freedom, places of communal gathering away from white surveillance, and a supply of natural resources when they were unequally exploited in the urban market. Slaves escaping plantations often only found temporary refuge in the gruelingly inhospitable southern swamps, as Solomon Northrup chronicled in *12 Years a Slave*.<sup>23</sup> In rare instances slaves were able to forge sustainable communities in the wilderness, such as historical archaeologist Dan Sayers has uncovered with maroon settlements in the Great Dismal Swamp.<sup>24</sup> More often, the woods outside of plantations afforded a gathering space for enslaved persons beyond the overseer’s eyes. Post-Civil War, freepersons’ communities were often located on the periphery of towns where residents foraged from the surrounding forests rather than be exploited in the urban marketplace. Commenting on these settlements in Raleigh, local historian Karl Larson noted, “because of the poverty in which many of the freed men lived, those who could afford to buy property often purchased less expensive tracts, many of them in creek

bottoms or other undesirable locations. Blacks who could not afford to buy frequently rented quarters in the same vicinities. This early trend pointed the direction of much of Raleigh's future Black residential development."<sup>25</sup>

The cloak of darkness that afforded sanctuary in the wilderness was also a source of constant fear. These marginal spaces beyond public view were used to enact renegade justice that was beyond the law. This was exemplified by the story of Lunsford Lane, who was born a slave in Raleigh, purchased his freedom, and worked in Boston raising funds to purchase his family's freedom. Upon returning to Raleigh for his family, a mob of "rabble" abducted him, "dreadfully enraged," they "seemed to lap for blood":

They conducted me ... in the direction of the gallows ... I now expected to pass speedily into the world of spirits ... but then as they were taking me to the woods, I thought they intended to murder me there, in a place where they would be less likely to be interrupted than in so public a spot as where the gallows stood.<sup>26</sup>

Throughout southeastern United States history, marginal spaces played a central role in the everyday life and psyche of those at the margins of society. To reclaim "open space" as an important environmental amenity is to erase a history that has rarely been recorded. But this history of urban racial segregation proves difficult to eradicate through the piecemeal approach of municipal policy in a conservative southern state, as evident in the following section of this essay.

#### **04. EMBODIED RACIAL TENSIONS**

The anthropologist Anthony Cohen distinguished between borders as spatial facts and boundaries as permeable and imprecise.<sup>27</sup> Greenways operate in a contradictory space of the latter, as boundary corridors between bordering communities or land uses that both buffer and connect. The recreational and circulatory benefit of greenways as corridors contradicts their simultaneous function as buffers and raises questions of what exactly are the "undesirable" versus "compatible" land uses. Greenways can both connect White spaces along corridors adjacent to Black spaces while simultaneously buffering those Black spaces they are traversing. Natural landforms and transportation infrastructure have a long history of separating White/Black spaces in southern cities, and contemporary greenways play to this advantage.

Often greenways are both borders and boundaries. The American Tobacco Trail in Durham, North Carolina (just down the road from Raleigh), is a good example. It is an exceptionally potent landscape artifact of southern history and the post-reconstruction Jim Crow industrial order that organized

daily life. The space now occupied by the American Tobacco Trail was previously a nineteenth-century railroad corridor connecting tobacco factories downtown with agricultural lands to the south. Its circulatory function also doubled as a border between the wealthiest and poorest neighborhoods in Durham separating the White Forest Hills development to the west from the Black Hayti neighborhood to the east. The railway was abandoned in the 1970s and sat vacant for twenty years before being converted to a greenway that conveniently connected the new American Tobacco District redevelopment project to White suburban neighborhoods south of town. Now functioning primarily as a recreational corridor, the greenway still backs up to the wealthiest and the poorest neighborhoods in Durham for its first mile leading out of downtown, buffering mansions built by wealthy nineteenth-century industrialists from the remnants of Hayti that was destroyed by twentieth-century urban renewal projects.

Greenways as boundaries can function as interfaces where different city residents confront one another and as sites of heightened racial tension. One local journalist detailed her encounter with a presumably Black thirty-year-old man as she walked her child in a stroller on the American Tobacco Trail in 2014. He asked her, “Hey, is that a boy or a girl?”

She was alarmed by the presence of a Black man confronting her in this part of town. Without giving him much attention, she mumbled to herself,

“If you have to ask, you don’t need to know.”

He followed up, “Goddam bitch? Why didn’t you answer me?”

She thought to herself, “My name’s not bitch.”

“Why are you getting all white on me?” he prodded once more.

“We’re right downtown. Anyone could see this,” she thought to herself.

This is an explicit conflation of race and space where the presence of a Black man in a historically disadvantaged part of town led the White person to make assumptions about their intent. At the same time, she hinted at a presumed sense of safety where public visibility supposedly deterred deviant behavior.

“Just leave me alone,” she scowled, “I haven’t done anything to you.”

He replied, “I didn’t mean anything ... Go on, go ahead of me.”

She doubted his sincerity and thought to herself, “You’re not following me,” and dialed 911.<sup>28</sup>

Conflations of race and space permeate the public imagination and inform generalized perceptions of place. One Yelp user left an instructive review of the American Tobacco Trail highlighting a popular misconception of urban spatial order: “I don’t know which one attracts the other, but railroad tracks and seedy neighborhoods seem to go hand in hand.” Describing their experience on the American Tobacco Trail, the user noted that a few moments after entering the greenway from a “quiet suburban park,” they were shortly

in a part of town where I normally wouldn't go without a squad of Marines. I saw an interesting variety of emotions on the faces I passed. Some were sizing me up like prey. Some were filled with class or racial resentment.

Assuming that this Yelp user (who goes by the handle "Bubbatron") is a middle-class White male, then the "class or racial resentment" he read presumably came from disadvantaged Black faces. His review underscores our human tendency to associate the constructed environment with social values, here a postindustrial landscape with "seedy" neighborhoods, and by extension seedy people. Although perhaps intending to subjugate the racial animosity he supposedly experienced by calling out the resentment of others on the trail, he in fact reinforces the resentment of the Black other when inferring an animalistic tendency of those "sizing me up like prey."

## 05. CONCLUSION

In his work *The Consciousness of the Eye*, the sociologist Richard Sennet wrote:

Faced with the fact of social hostility in the city, the planner's impulse in the real world is to seal off conflicting or dissonant sides, to build internal walls rather than permeable borders ... These techniques, which originated in the garden city planning movement to create a peaceful, orderly suburb, are now increasingly used in the city center to remove the threat of classes or races touching, to create a city of secure inner walls.<sup>29</sup>

Greenways helped redefine the behavior of boundaries in urban planning from the rectilinearity of real estate to the ecology of greater urban regions. In so doing, city planners exploited the underlying social ecology that had relegated the disadvantaged to marginal sites and aestheticized their landscapes for middle-class leisure. Instead of increased tax assessments to mitigate storm water or more compact urban growth (which would ultimately be more sensitive to the larger landscape), planners reclaimed marginal landscapes as "natural infrastructure" to sustain increased suburban sprawl. This in effect extended the White spatial imagination to the control of urban form, buttressed by the logic of environmental responsibility in a profession that increasingly incorporated scientific reasoning. Clarence Lightner was elected in a brief wave of populist backlash against that other focus of modern planning, urban highways. The destructive effects of highways were more evenly felt across older downtown neighborhoods, both White and Black. The cultural significance of marginal lands resonated with a narrower audience, and the isolating

effects of suburban planning would not emerge for another thirty years. Greenways appealed to a broad base of populist support among the middle class, both Black and White. Lighter had no choice but to go along for the ride.

## NOTES

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# THE SACRED INSIDE

## Shameful Camera Encounters in the Refugee Camp

*Aya Musmar*

To shoot a photograph of a scene means to act with a certain superiority to apprehend, capture, and freeze people, space, and time constituent of that scene. In her seminal work, *On Photography*, Sontag writes, “there is an aggression implicit in each use of the camera.”<sup>1</sup> Drawing on the linguistic analogy that the word “shooting” brings to our mind, the aggression of photography could be thought of as performative, too. But what if that scene is one of the refugee camp? What types of aggression does “shooting” a photograph imply there?

Hannah Arendt argues that refugees are stripped of the juridical rights typical of citizens.<sup>2</sup> For the displaced, the citizenship trinity (territory—nation—state) is dismantled, meaning that their access to their citizenry rights is disabled.<sup>3</sup> This displacement is spatial too. For Michel Agier, refugee camps are but waiting rooms located at the margins of the world. Refugees, as the undesirable of the world,<sup>4</sup> live in what Giorgio Agamben describes as the “state of exception.”<sup>5</sup> They are not allowed to enrol in the world’s normative order.<sup>6</sup> Refugee camps are located within recognized territories; however, they are still extraterritorial to the legal, political, and spatial order of the states within which they sit. In Za’atri refugee camp, the borders of the camp and what they mean for the two main agencies responsible for managing it bear testimony to its extraterritoriality. For the Jordanian government, the borders of the refugee camp relate to security: *securing* the outside from the inside. For the UNHCR, the borders of the refugee camp are for protection: *protecting* the inside of the refugee camp from the outside. Although these two ends may seem to be bipolar, they are substantially similar, both subjugating the refugee’s body/territory either to their scrutiny or their patronage, respectively. This highlights a hierarchy gesturing to the refugees’ lack of official political representation.

A refugee camp may, thus, be described as a naked scene. The legal and political precariousness to which refugees’ lives are conditioned necessitate an ethnographic distance that accounts for this precariousness. My question in this photo-essay, however, exceeds its methodological underpinnings, extending to epistemic questions that ask: In what ways do refugees recreate the thresholds across which they attempt to cover the nakedness of their territories? How do we document refugees’ spatial practices as we document the

ways in which refugees negotiate their thresholds? And how does an understanding of the affective proximities that we experience as researchers in the refugee camp allow for this documentation?

Through this photo-essay, I will show what holding a camera while doing fieldwork in the refugee camp may mean, and the affective proximities the camera can negotiate. In her book, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed coins the term “affective economies,” suggesting that emotions have their own economies: they circulate and accumulate.<sup>7</sup> As they move between bodies and objects, they stick to their surfaces, giving them their shape. I suggest that the camera is an object of shame, depending on the distances and proximities.

In the following photo-essay, I configure the relationship between my shame and the act of trespassing multiple thresholds. Through my time as a humanitarian volunteer, emotions of shame lingered as long as I wandered in the districts of the refugee camp. Based on the encounters I had during my daily journey, my shame would be experienced in different intensities. I argue that these different intensities are telling of different relationalities forged in-between the inside and the outside. My description of the relationship between my shame and the photos shared within each section remains absent, in hopes that the absence of description mediates the ambiguity that standing at these thresholds, or within them, invokes. The photo-essay reads along three main sections, each of which describes an encounter in which I was ashamed for the use of my camera: with a police officer; a Jordanian humanitarian worker; and a woman from Za’atri refugee camp. Each of the photos below snaps *Howsh* in different places within one of the districts in Za’atri refugee camp, speaking of the possible spatial translations of these relationalities.

## 01. THRESHOLD: FROM HOWSH TO FENA

In the refugee camp, inside-outside relationalities do not mirror those presumed in a private-public dichotomy; they are situated within nonsecular sociocultural settings that are complex and ambiguous. There is a whole different set of vocabularies used to describe the multiple thresholds that displace the hyphen in the private-public. Only an attempt to translate the vocabularies that designate the use of each space can show the impossibility of finding one English terminology capable of these descriptions.

*Howsh* is one of these thresholds, where the relationship between the inside and the outside may be investigated. It is an Arabic noun that designates a semi-courtyard in the house. It could be derived from the verb (Hawash- حوش), which translates as “collected” and “accumulated.” To understand the use of the *Howsh*, it needs to be situated within a taxonomy of other terminologies

that are used to designate similar areas in the Arabic house; such as (Fena'-فناء), which translates as "courtyard" and (Kharabeh-خرابة), which translates as "dump."<sup>8</sup> According to interviews I conducted with Syrian refugees in the camp, their understanding of the *Howsh* has always been related to two main aspects: the dress code of women of kin in these spaces, and the material aesthetics of the place. In contrast, Fena' is a place where women could drop their head covering and enjoy the freedoms of being at home; in the *Howsh*, they would not. *Howsh* is a place where they would plant bushes and trees, store food, do the laundry, and keep carpentry tools and other oversized instruments, however, it would not be considered as a dump because people's interaction with it is lively.

## 02. "WHOSE CAMERA IS THIS?": A NAKED SCENE

As we leave the refugee camp, the police officer attending the check point of the inner gate would normally wave back to us. But this was not the case this time. He seemed cynical; he spotted something suspicious inside our car and asked us to stop, preventing us from passing the borders of the camp. "Your IDs," he ordered. We realize later that he had glimpsed the camera through the window of the car. "Whose camera is this?" he asked. "Mine," I said. He asked me to step out of the car with the camera and placed the camera on the belt of the inspection machine. The camera looked so small on the moving strip. In a refugee camp, where Syrians struggle to deserve a caravan, there was this room, hosting none but the inspection machine. "Why would someone designate a room to host such an oversized machine?!" I thought to myself. The inspection machine said that my camera was clean. I was relieved, even though I did not understand what the officer meant by "clean." So, he asked me to get out of the room, and so I did, moving in his direction. "Turn on the camera for me. Why did you carry the camera?" he asked me as he started investigating the content of my camera, going through all the photos, including my personal photos that had been stored on the same memory card. He seemed slightly disappointed by the fact that the photos on my camera were harmless. This meant that the trouble for which he might have been fishing did not exist. He eventually released the camera and lifted the ban he had initially enforced on our movement. We thanked him, promising that this would not happen again and moved back to the car. We left the camp feeling disturbed. My colleagues suggested that I should hide the camera in my bag next time.<sup>9</sup>

This is one of the many camera-encounters I had while doing my ethnographic research in Za'atri refugee camp between 2016 and 2017. During this time, whenever I carried my professional camera on my fieldwork as a

humanitarian volunteer, it would become the subject of conversation. For example, who I am and why I am carrying the camera, how I take photos, and what scenes I am interested in capturing, and if I am taking photos of objects or subjects, would center the informal and formal conversations that I had throughout my journey.



**Figure 12-1** A close-up view of the landscape behind the wired border-line while driving on Baghdad highway that cuts through the North Eastern Desert of Jordan.

*Photographing bordered areas is prohibited. In the permission that I was given to access the camp, a line excepts bordered areas from my access. 2015.*



**Figure 12-2** A view of Za'atri refugee camp from the ring road. Photo was taken while on one of the NGO tours around the camp.

*The purposes of these tours were either to drop off (and collect) the NGO workers assigned to work in districts that are not within a walkable distance from the basecamp, or to show donors and prospective collaborators the camp infrastructure and the NGO main facilities. 2014.*



**Figure 12-3** A view of the refugee camp that is enabled by a topographical rise near District 11.

*In District 4, a higher topographical rise referred to as Al-Talleh, which means “the hill,” would get crowded in the early phases of the refugee camp. This was an important spot for Syrian refugees because their cell phones could identify a signal from their Syrian cellular network here. 2014.*



**Figure 12-4** A view of the camp while distributing gas cylinders to community kitchens (pink-painted brick buildings).

*Photo was captured by a colleague when he was sitting on the top of the truck that carried the gas cylinders. Later in the year, community kitchens were declared defunct and demolished. Except for one or two community kitchen buildings that were turned into community centers, all community kitchens were leveled.*



### 03. "THIS IS NOT A TOURISTIC SITE!": A CHRONICLE OF SHAME

*In Za'atri refugee camp, my earliest shameful encounter was my first. It dates to the summer of 2014. Two years post its establishment, I visited the camp for the first time as an aid worker in one of the International NGOs partnering with the UNHCR. I had encountered Palestinian refugee camps before as a child; my mom used to be the principal of an elementary school there and I had accompanied her to the school every single Saturday. However, my presumed familiarity with the refugee camp had failed at the sight of Za'atri refugee camp. Sitting on a massive plot in the middle of the desert, the white caravans superimposed the horizon, creating a shallow skyline that gestured toward a (distant) semi-urban life. A screen of dusty air masked the image of the skyline intensifying at the bottom, speaking of movement. I wanted to capture the scene. I took a photo of each single detail; of the road, of the gate, of the road-signs, and was ready to take many more. My endeavors were interrupted when a colleague asked me to stop taking photos because—quoting what she said—“This is not a touristic site.”*

“Tourists” was how my colleagues in the NGO had often described researchers excited to be in the refugee camp. For Jordanian humanitarian workers, unless researchers visiting the refugee camp prove the opposite, they are “tourists” whose interest in capturing its life is a fleeting one. The temporality of the researcher’s stay, combined with their reliance on Jordanian humanitarian workers as mediators of their stay and very often guides of their tours in the refugee camp, situate researchers as mere outsiders who seek to be entertained.

The tourist metaphor is a tricky one. The contrast (or analogy) between the gaze of the tourist and the gaze of the researcher carries an alarming undertone, one that seems exploitative. It portrays researchers’ bad conduct during fieldwork at times, yet still masks the practical and hypothetical nuances that doing research in places like the refugee camp implies. The institutional procedures that regulate fieldwork and the academic culture obsessed with knowledge production shape the terrain upon which fieldwork practices sit. Some fieldwork ethical frameworks complement the need to address the regulatory procedures administered by the refugee camp gatekeepers (institutions). For instance, the ethics of “do no harm” prevail in the discourse of doing fieldwork in the refugee camp. However, it is still up to how the researcher chooses to situate herself in the fieldwork to account for the complexities of doing research in the refugee camp. Therefore, it is necessary to unpack these nuances and think of the ethical commitments to which researchers may attend before assuming that their gaze holds racializing undertones.

“This is not a touristic site. And I am not a tourist!,” I had responded to my colleague. In the spring of 2016, I had to defend myself and my fieldwork

again in the office of the programs' director of the same NGO. I had applied to access the camp for my fieldwork through the same NGO where I had worked as a humanitarian worker in 2014; my application was being stalled, and my PhD was being delayed. When she told me that I should/could not be in the refugee camp, I questioned the racialized bias behind the selection of researchers who shall/can access the refugee camp. "I have provided you with all the required documents: my research proposal, my governmental permission, my Arabic and English copies of my research information sheet. I tried to contact you several times, maybe I am not blonde enough."<sup>10</sup> The same agencies responsible for the camp's extraterritoriality control the access of researchers to the camp. At the end, I was granted access. However, the grounds upon which I was granted this access did not have to do with research. The NGO had subcontracted me through a "service contract," a form of affiliation that would facilitate my experience to accomplish some tasks but changing the type of access through which I had initially intended to collect data.

Although the refugee camp is situated within the national borders of Jordan, as a Jordanian citizen, I had often felt inferior to it. The extraterritoriality of the refugee camp reinforces the grounds of this inferiority; as an Arab and Muslim woman, I often felt that my racialized qualities did not meet those required of a "researcher." Despite my affiliation with a North-based university, I was admitted access to the camp eventually as a volunteer who could speak English and do office work; I was not expected to ask for more.

This inferiority was embodied even more by my Jordanian colleagues in the humanitarian space. Despite their long experience in humanitarian work in the refugee camp, "English" was the reason behind the termination of many of their contracts. In *Manging the Undesirables*,<sup>11</sup> Michel Agier points out how the international regime treated local managements in the humanitarian space as potentially corrupt governments. This affected the ways in which Jordanian humanitarian workers often saw themselves. In my PhD thesis,<sup>12</sup> I document some of these ways. For instance, one of my colleagues once praised the condescending language used by a manager because Arabs are allegedly inherently corrupt and only understand the authoritarian language of fear.



**Figure 12-5** Inside the Howsh of a family in District 1.

*The man was showing me the Howsh after I had told him I was an architect, explaining to me how he had divided that small piece of earth, and how planting cucumbers and other vegetables helps him be self-sufficient. He is married to two women, who share the responsibility of caring for the house.*



**Figure 12-6** Inside the Howsh of a family in District 3.

*The Howsh served the extended family living here, with storage space to pickle food. Children came out to the Howsh from the inside. The door pane, against which the child is hiding, opens a long corridor that leads to other rooms.*



**Figure 12-7** Taken from within a Howsh in District 12.

*This Howsh is placed near the entry point of the house and is partially covered. Four shelves are fixed at the right corner of the photo. Guests and house dwellers take off their shoes and place them on these shelves before getting in.*



**Figure 12-8** A view of a large Howsh that has been utilized for farming purposes, as well as for keeping live stock.

*The black blankets and plastic sheets are stitched together to delineate the boundaries between this Howsh and those of the neighbors.*



#### 04. "SHAME ON YOU!": PROLIFERATED HOWSH!

*I started as her angry voice came from the inside, shouting at me, "Hey, you there, do not take pictures of people's insides. Do not you have any shame? ... go away!" I thought it was OK to take pictures of things: objects, places, and spaces as long as I was not taking pictures of people's faces. I only wanted to capture how the blurry sheer curtain articulated the facade! Charged by memories from my childhood where I would simply flee a public scene after being shouted at, I wished I could flee the humiliation of being scolded by her angry voice; I wished I could go away, walk faster or maybe just disappear! I could not! I stood still where I was. I wanted to apologize for the misunderstanding and to explain to her my point of view: that the lens of my professional camera was not meant to be pointed toward the inside of her place, but only to the outside. That I wished only to capture the beautiful proportions of the facade of her household.<sup>13</sup>*

Shame is an emotion that brings the qualities of the self into question.<sup>14</sup> For Ahmed, emotions enforce larger power structures: economies of affect circulate, and what causes their movement is a variation in how they intensify at different locations in these structures. Shame in the refugee camp is a complex emotion; it cites the different intensities that are experienced within what Alexander Betts refers to as "the refugee regime complex."<sup>15</sup> Besides the humanitarian regime, other regimes, such as the Jordanian government, and other informal networks of power among refugees themselves utilize an array of emotions in order to mobilize the ends to which those with power aspire. Shame does not come on its own, but with other emotions, such as fear, hate, and disgust.

Shame in this incident is used to guard the sacredness of the inside; or what is referred to in Arabic and Muslim culture as *Hormet Al-Boyout*, t "the sacredness of the domestic space." *Hormet Al-Boyout* is a cultural code and the statement "shame on you!" is supposed to awaken the addressee to a shared moral sensibility. For this woman, the absence of this sensibility jeopardized not only her private space but also her everyday practice of religion. *Hormet Al-Boyout* is a gendered term. The curtain was spatially important to delineate the boundary between the accessible and inaccessible. The mere presence of the curtain (sheer in this case) is supposed to mediate the common understanding of the inaccessibility of the inside; those who trespass the threshold are unfaithful to the culture and should be ashamed of this infidelity.

Joining the camp as a humanitarian volunteer rather than a researcher meant that I had to subscribe to the code of conduct of the NGO with which I was affiliated. These codes are meant to set a standardized just "response" replacing the cultural codes usually exchanged by people (including those that I exchange with refugees). This subscription and adherence to the codes of

conduct set up by the NGO marginalize other forms of sensibility that may be necessary when we engage in fieldwork in the refugee camp.<sup>16</sup> *Hormet Al-Boyout* is a moral code that I am very familiar with; however, it was disabled when I was carrying out my fieldwork in this case.

I did not go away, as her angry voice from the inside asked me to. “Assalamualikum!” I shouted in return, before taking a few steps toward the sheer curtain that drew a vertical boundary between us. Across the sheer curtains, she could see me, but I could not see her. I began apologizing from behind the curtain, requesting to step inside to explain to her what happened, and to show her the photo that I had captured of her place. She calls me inside, to the middle of her Howsh, where she and her daughter are sitting in the path of the sunlight to receive some natural warmth. I walk a few steps to where the woman sits with her legs crossed on the floor. I sit down on my knees and apologize again. I show her the photos that I had just captured, she asks me to delete them; I delete them, and then I move on as if nothing had happened at all.<sup>17</sup>





**Figure 12-9** A view of the entrance with a folded curtain gesturing an invitation to the inside.

*It is likely that the corridor leads to the Howsh that utilizes a plot of space to manage privacy, often protecting the inside of the inside.*



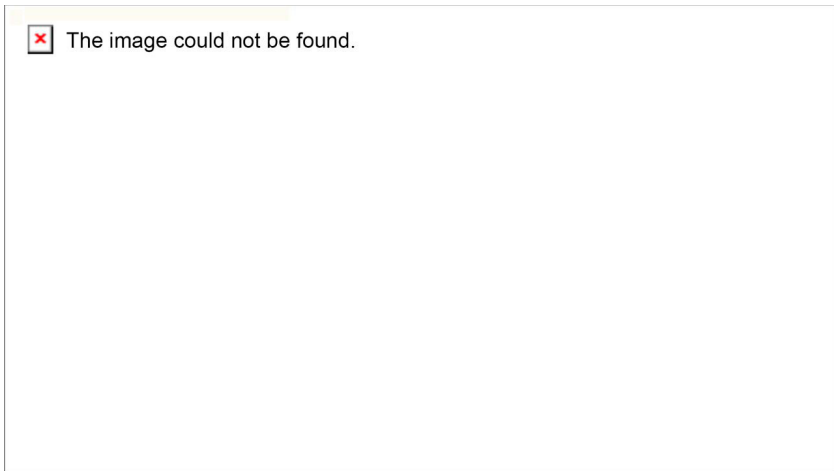
**Figure 12-10** View of the expanding territory of a household.

*Black plastic sheets were stitched and installed around the plot that surrounds the caravan, expanding the territory of the household.*



**Figure 12-11** A view of one household on a windy day.

*The animated sheets disclose the layers of clothes that have been used to cover their shelters, uncovering multiple fluctuating thresholds that define their territories within the camp.*



**Figure 12-12** A photo of a transparent curtain disclosing a private view of the Howsh where a woman and her daughter sat against the rays of the sun.

*This photo was deleted shortly after it was taken.*

## 05. CONCLUSIONS

These encounters were experienced with varied intensities; how my camera is being questioned is determined by the interests, emotions, and concerns of the individuals running these conversations. For example, the police officer at the gates of the camp had perceived my professional camera as a security threat to the borders of the camp, while Jordanian humanitarian workers and residents of the refugee camp perceived it very differently.

With each camera-encounter, my own qualities were brought into question, scrutiny, and doubt. Between the impressions that my colleagues had of me as a tourist/interloper and the illicit exclusion to which I was subjected as a researcher in relation to my White counterparts, understanding the power structures of the humanitarian space was crucial for me to navigate and negotiate my positionality.

## NOTES

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8. Through an informal interview with Mohammad Aldairy, a friend and colleague from the Syrian refugee community, he shared that "the kharabeh as a space is both; abandoned, and dirty." These are the reasons, as well as the results, of it being "unattended." It is derived from the Arabic stem verb "kharab," which means "vandalized." However, the term itself, "kharabeh," does not necessarily imply any intentional vandalization that is aimed at ruining the space; rather, the implication is more of abandonment. Aya Musmar, "Field Notes 2," 2017.
9. Ibid.

10. Aya Musmar, "Witnessing as a Feminist Spatial Practice: Encountering the Refugee Camp Beyond Recognition" (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 2020), 55. <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/25927/>.
11. Agier, *Managing the Undesirables*.
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15. Alexander Betts, "The Refugee Regime Complex," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2010): 12–37, <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdq009>.
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# NEGOTIATING BORDERS THROUGH SPATIAL PRACTICES: A CONCLUSION

*Angeliki Sioli, Nishat Awan, and Kristopher Palagi*

*Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack, a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in  
—Leonard Cohen, “Anthem”*

The book you hold in your hands did not try to describe what borders are. As discussed in the introduction, our focus from the beginning was on the ways we can resist borders through spatial practices. We approached borders firstly from their political and social perspective—and the types of spatial relations they produced—and only then, if necessary, from their physical dimensionality. For us this is an epistemic position that emerged from our own interest in the topic but also from the personal involvement of many of this book's contributors with the borders they describe. The majority of scholars in this book have lived the borders they study. They have experienced them at an intimate scale and they have felt their impact in their everyday lives, even before acquiring the skills to study them. For many, this engagement with borders is both *situated* and personal. We believe that such an approach, when it manages to overcome biases and political propagandas, can create new ways to negotiate borders: as places of meaningful adjacencies, where fruitful osmosis can overturn their dividing role.

When students of architecture, who personally experience segregation and division in their everyday life, study critically the *where, why, what, who*, and *when* of border conditions, they understand the multiple perspectives that are involved in any conflict negotiation. They resist long existing racial biases in space. When citizens, researchers, and historians look closely at aesthetic expressions of political agendas, as in the form of graffiti, they bring to the foreground what might hinder a deep understanding between the communities involved. They resist superficial architectural readings of space. When architects study fictional lives of people caught in situations of harsh spatial exclusions, they can feel in their skin, even if they have never experienced them



themselves, the unfair conditions their defensive or protective walls may create. They resist thinking of borders from a theoretical and detached perspective. When refugees and immigrants are asked to look at official representations of borders and question them by prioritizing their personal understanding of them, architects can see that walls and borders have a much wider spatial impact than that depicted by drawings and maps. They resist believing in maps and official spatial representations of division. When architects and spatial practitioners consider borders and the displacement of people not only through their immediate effects but within longer temporalities, they begin to find new moments of intervention. They resist understanding architecture's role as merely humanitarian. When architectural educators connect their courses to the political and spatial realities of real-life borders, bringing the students in direct contact with them and teaching them to look thoroughly at both (or at all) sides, they teach an approach to design that attempts to implement equal opportunities and create spaces of acceptance instead of exclusion. They resist an apolitical approach to architectural education. When historians look at the details of how different borders came into being and how they have transformed over time, they remind us loudly that borders are just a human construct that can embody diverse and contradicting political agendas. They resist the propagandistic readings of official historiography. When artists use their humorous, sensitive, and unconventional gaze to shed light on border conditions, they give voice to the real protagonists of these conditions and let their stories be heard. They resist conforming to the realities of real-life border situations. When academics provoke with their theoretical writing on borders, territories, and mapping, they expose borders as places of simultaneity that cannot be read only in black-and-white. They resist the conventional discourse on borders and become intentionally polemical. When policymakers care that the "right to the city," as Lefebvre advocated for, is offered to groups of people that are usually in the margins, they shape cities and public spaces to include the needs of all citizens, offering them the space for a shared future. They resist creating urban spaces for the privileged few. When landscape architects look into the history of design policies and go beyond their aesthetic characteristics, they reveal agendas of division hidden in zones of greenery and nature. They resist looking at spatial situations through the dominant logic of power. Lastly, when researchers share their own ethical concerns or even shame, for working with those most affected by borders, they awaken us to the fact that beyond theories, books, articles, and chapters borders displace, hurt, and kill people on a daily basis. They resist being naive or inconsiderate about the actual realities of borders.

These are the many ways in which the chapters in this book have shown us how spatial practices of resistance at borders can help mitigate divisions. Yet this book is also about the ways in which resistance and negotiation work together in and through spatial relations, and here the contemporary context within which this text has emerged is of consequence. This book began with a conference at the School of Architecture at Louisiana State University in 2019, and we are wrapping up this manuscript at the end of 2023. In the intervening years, the world has changed in so many different ways; we already mentioned the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the introduction. As we write these final words, the war on Gaza continues. These events have called into question our own humanity and so nothing can ever be the same, including the role of spatial practices in questioning borders. And so we end here with a formulation that we have been thinking about for quite some time but had discarded along the way: the notion of a fissure, or a crack in the wall, as a way of imagining how borders can be transcended. The moments of resistance expressed above can also be understood as forms of spatial practice able to create cracks and fissures in the many visible or invisible walls that only seem to be multiplying across our planet.

At a geological scale, fissures are the product of the movement of the earth's plates over the ever-churning magma below. Here fissures are a kind of insurance and reassurance; they allow the plates to move and to withstand pressure from below, accommodating small-scale resistances without breaking apart. In this reading, fissures are not only too small: crucially, they are fundamental to the survival of edifices, allowing them to weather the bigger storms brewing below. But what is particular about a fissure in a wall is that there is often something external or alien that creates the opening—it could be moss settling into mortar or it could be moisture entering into the brickwork. Slowly and surely through processes that are neither obvious nor accounted for, something changes, and what felt like an indestructible edifice begins to crumble. That these processes start at a molecular scale, invisible to many of us, is important. That they occur only when relations move beyond binary understandings is also crucial. The sense of erosion working on a temporal scale much longer than we are used to also seems important. Which reading of fissures is more useful in our world of proliferating borders? Leonard Cohen's lyrics in the epigraph to this conclusion are helpful in realizing that as with all things, fissures too are what we make of them. Some will only help the workings of power, but others will let light in, and the more fissures there are, the higher the chances of producing a different kind of change.



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