

Group themes and readings

Thursday, 24 September 2015

13:43

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 - a. Wendy Brown
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 - a. Politics of border
 - b. STÉPHANE ROSIÈRE and Jones
 - c. Parizot et al
3. MIGRATION AS EVENT / IMMIGRATION AS SURVIVAL
 - a. Held
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 - c. Silverstein
4. CONTROL AND SURVEILLANCE
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5. WAR, CONFLICT AND MIGRATION
 - Bennet (Thomas Demand)
 - Held



The Israeli Wall in the area of Qalandiya, North Jerusalem (Sebastian Bolesch).

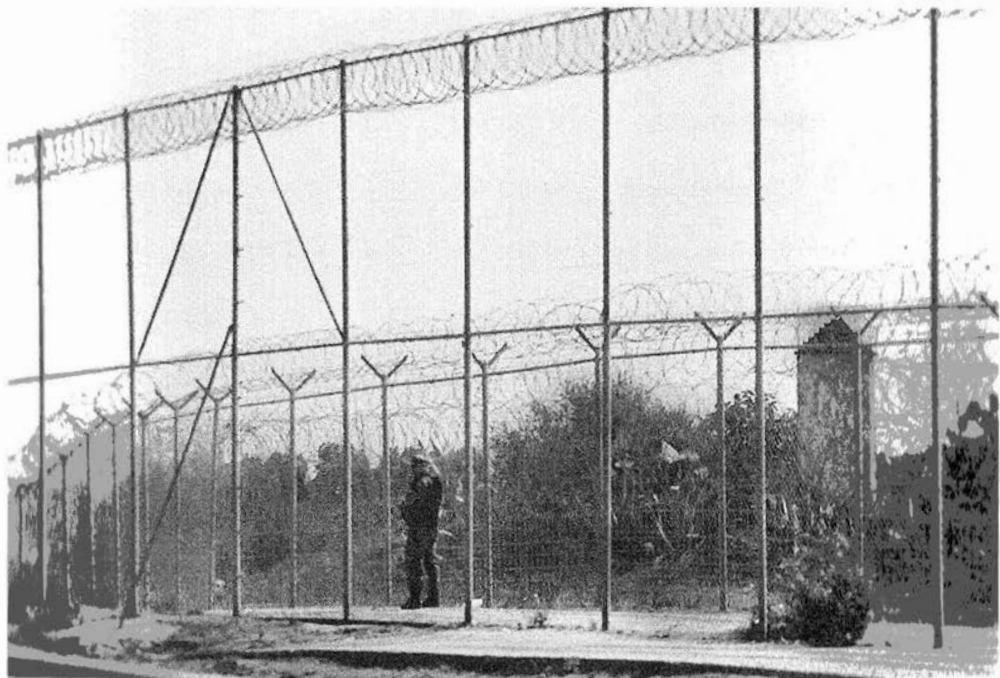
Walled States,
Waning Sovereignty

Wendy Brown

ZONE BOOKS · NEW YORK

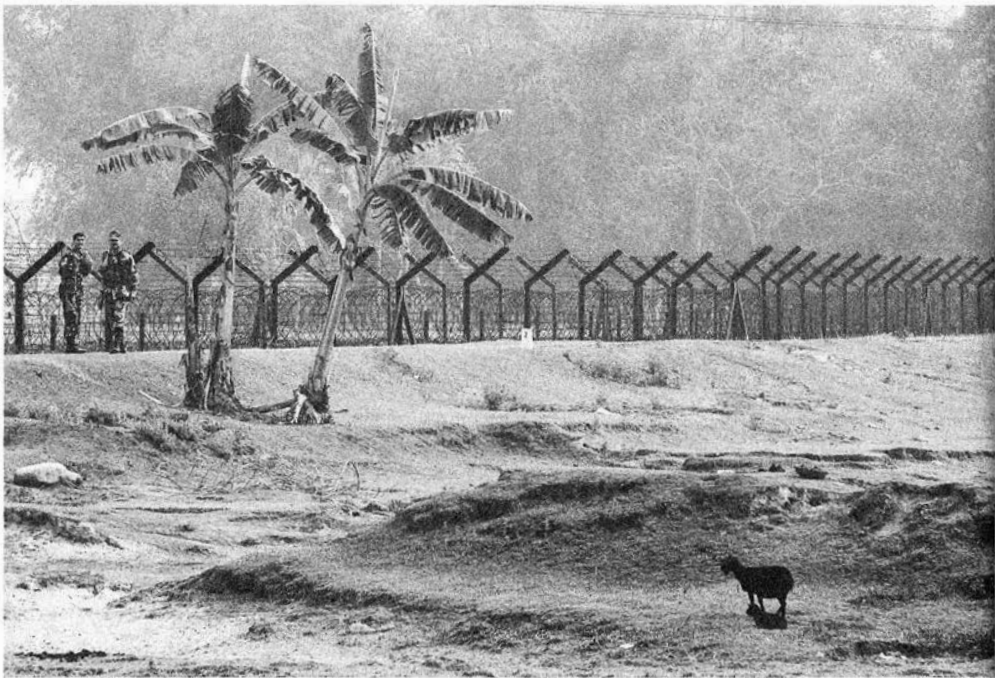
2010

Rochester, MN Public Library



Barrier around the Spanish enclave of Melilla in Morocco (Chiara Tamburini).

The striking popular desire for walling today, considered in light of recent pejorative historical associations with walling and with contemporary walling's general inefficacy vis-à-vis its putative aims, can be traced to an identification with and anxiety about this sovereign impotence. The popular desire for walling harbors a wish for the powers of protection, containment, and integration promised by sovereignty, a wish that recalls the theological dimensions of political sovereignty. If the fiction of state sovereignty is the secularization of the fiction of divine power, the deteriorating viability of this political fiction generates understandable popular anxiety, an anxiety addressed in part by the theological effect and affect of walling. The detachment of sovereign powers from nation-states also threatens an imaginary of individual and national identity dependent upon perceivable horizons and the containment they offer. Thus, walls generate what Heidegger termed a "reassuring world picture" in a time increasingly lacking the horizons, containment, and security that humans have historically required for social and psychic integration and for political membership.



India-Bangladesh border fence (Veronique de Viguerie/Getty Images).

However architecturally interesting or complex, walls are conventionally regarded as functional instruments for dividing, separating, retaining, protecting, shoring up, or supporting. Whether constructing a building, holding back land erosion, or lining neighborhoods, walls are ordinarily perceived as intended for a material task. Yet walls are also commonly said to convey moods or feelings by their design, placement, and relationship to built or natural environments. They may set or foreclose political and economic possibilities and be screens for a host of projected desires, needs, or anxieties. In this respect, walls can be crucial elements in the making of what Edward Said termed "imaginative geography," the mental organization of space producing identities



Barrier separating Shiite and Sunni neighborhoods of al-Shula and al-Ghazaliyeh in Baghdad (Ali Al-Saadi/AFP/Getty Images).

through boundaries: “A group of people living on a few acres of land will set up boundaries between their land and...the territory beyond, which they call ‘the land of the barbarians.’” This “imaginative geography of the ‘our land—barbarian land’ variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for ‘us’ to set these boundaries in our own minds; ‘they’ become ‘they’ accordingly.”¹



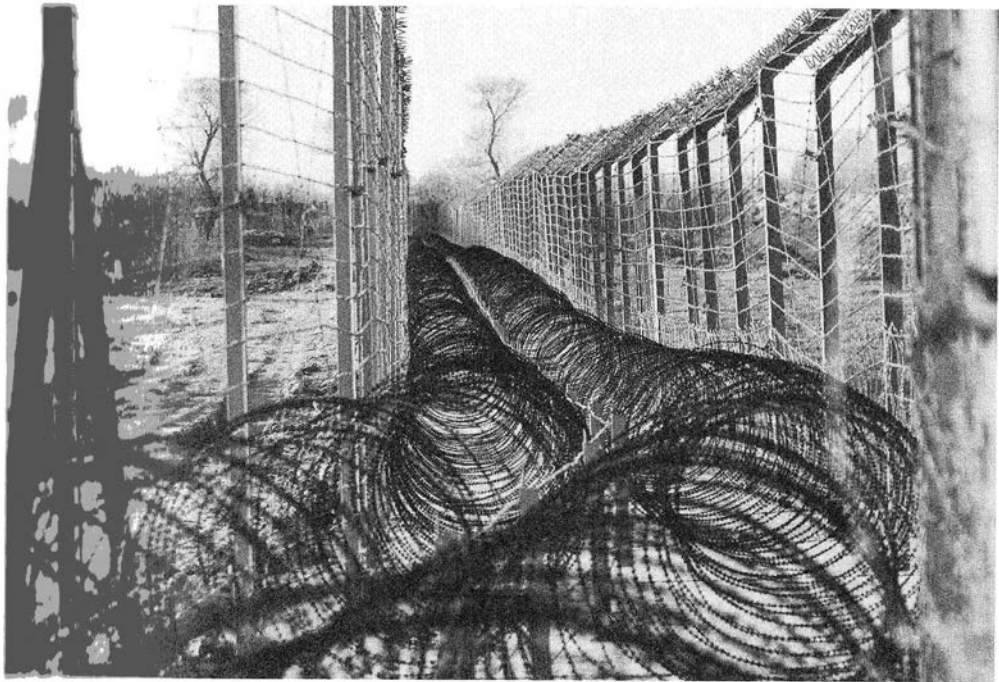
Saudi barrier at the border with Yemen (Khaled Fazaa/AFP/Getty Images).

The new walls target the movements of peoples and goods often drawn by the pull within destination nations for immigrant labor, drugs, weapons, and other contraband, and not only from the press without.¹² Ideologically, the dangers that walls are figured as intercepting are not merely the would-be suicide bomber, but immigrant hordes; not merely violence to the nation, but imagined dilution of national identity through transformed ethnicized or racial demographics; not merely illegal entrance, but unsustainable pressure on national economies that have ceased to be national or on welfare states that have largely abandoned substantive welfare functions. As such, the new walls defend an inside against an outside where these terms “inside” and “outside” do not necessarily correspond to nation-state identity or fealty, that is, where otherness and difference are detached from jurisdiction and membership, even as the walls themselves would seem to denote and demarcate precisely these things. ~~Walls today~~



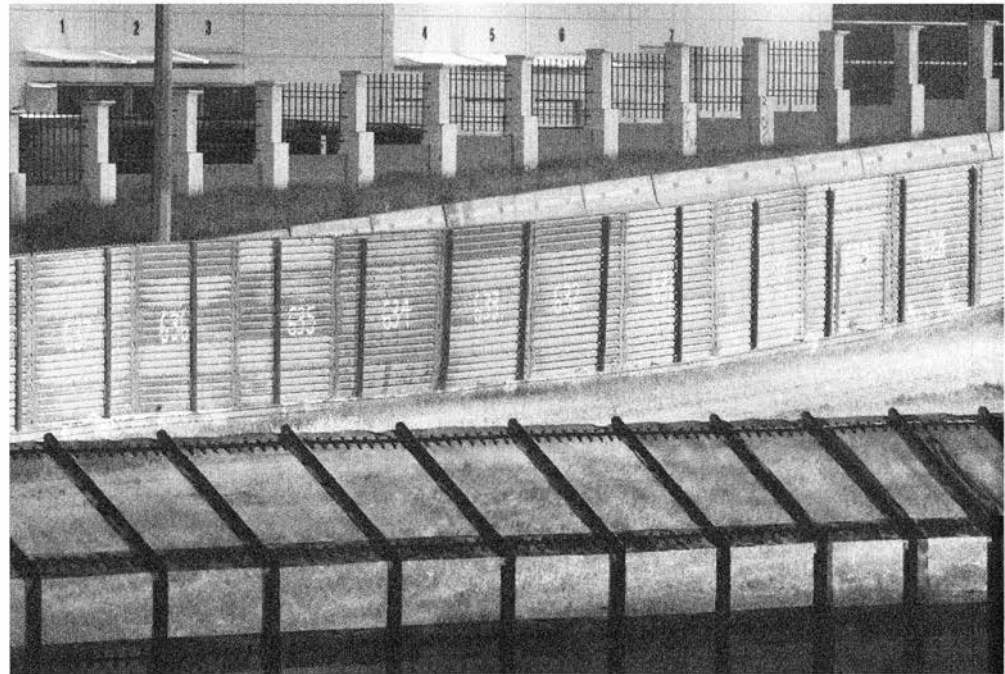
U.S.-Mexico border (Marc Silver).

Even if they could be distinguished, walls cannot be placed easily on the security side of a “security versus economy” matrix of contrary pulls toward bordering and unbordering. Such matrices continue to presume sovereign nation-states and the autonomy of the political and the economic. They also lack a place for the symbolic and theatrical dimensions of border fortifications. At best, staying strictly within an economy-security framing, walls could be characterized as (feeble) technologies in the “war of all” generated by neoliberalism itself, security measures responding to economically generated forces that themselves break down the legal spaces conventionally organized by political sovereignty and represented by nation-states. Walls represent the emergence of policing and barricading in the face of this breakdown and of the ungovernability by law and politics of forces produced by globalization and, in some cases, late modern colonialization.



India Pakistan border fence (Ami Vitale/Getty Images).

Ancient temples housed gods within an unhorized and overwhelming landscape. Nation-state walls are modern-day temples housing the ghost of political sovereignty. They organize deflection from crises of national cultural identity, from colonial domination in a postcolonial age, and from the discomfort of privilege obtained through superexploitation in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent global political economy. They confer magical protection against powers incomprehensibly large, corrosive, and humanly uncontrolled, against reckoning with the effects of a nation's own exploits and aggressions, and against dilution of the nation by globalization. These theological and psychological features of the clamor for walls help explain why their often enormous costs and limited efficacy are irrelevant to the desire for them. They produce not the future of an illusion, but the illusion of a future aligned with an idealized past. Sigmund Freud will have the last words here: "We call a belief an illusion when a wish-fulfillment is prominent in its motivation, and in doing so we disregard its relations to reality, just as the illusion itself sets no store by verification. . . . Having recognized religious doctrines as illusions, we are at once faced by a further question. . . . Must not the assumptions that determine our political regulations be called illusions as well?"⁵³



U.S.-Mexico border (David McNew/Getty Images).

Migrants' Art and Writings

Figures of Precarious Hospitality

Nadia Setti

UNIVERSITÉ PARIS 8

ABSTRACT Time, precarious lives and memories and multiple narrations related to crossing borders constitute the key meanings of a series of contemporary pieces of works produced by migrant artists and writers (Tarek Al-Ghoussein, Marwan Rechmaoui, Jumana Emil Abboud and Hoda Barakat). Through an analysis of some of their works, this article focuses on some spatio-temporal images, actions and metaphors related to movement (crossing, walking through, passing borders). Then it questions the exploration of narratives in visual arts, especially the relationship between imaginary fiction and reality stories. Theatre may become the very place where contemporary tales of migrant people are translated, (re)told, performed. The very meaningful notion of hospitality becomes a theatrical practice in one of the most relevant spectacles of the Théâtre du Soleil, *Le Dernier Caravansérail (Odyssees)* (2003). Another aspect of this creative hospitality – Leïla Sebbar's *Mes Algéries en France* – concerns the interweaving of memories belonging to opposite sides of divided countries, after the colonial wars. This work of collection, transcription, translation from one to another gives an example of writing (as fiction and narrative) as a repairing work but also of revelation of unknown connections.

KEY WORDS contemporary fiction ♦ hospitality ♦ migrant writers ♦ postcolonial memories ♦ temporality ♦ theatre ♦ visual arts

Nowadays, we have a view of our world as a planetary map crossed all over by many trajectories: those of products of the world market, those of migrant streams from South to North, from East to West (itineraries and directions change from region to region, in different periods). This kind of map varies quite often so that the representation of the world space is related to a changing time. It is a time of displacement, migrations, travels and transfers of merchandise or individuals, images, words. Postcolonial or neocolonial wars bring about the migration of entire populations, native and sedentary people become nomadic, citizens of one country become strangers, exiled, refugees, *sans papiers*, in other countries,

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European Journal of Women's Studies, 1350-5068; Vol. 16(4): 325–335; 342621; DOI: 10.1177/1350506809342621
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where they are obliged to hold identity papers to be able to show the police and authorities. The decolonization process is followed by the globalization era where new forms of colonization emerge.

So the experience of being a stranger, an outsider, is much more common, is even an essential part of our human experience in these times. Border-crossing can be an ordinary act without consequences (study, business, tourist journeys) or an act of survival for those who leave their homes to escape disease, war and poverty. These migrants become neighbours, work colleagues, schoolmates of those who never had to leave. In our daily life we may cross in public or private space, as well as on web logs, people whose language and culture are completely or quite different from ours. These experiences lead to a rethinking of hospitality beyond the private space, into an enlarged, public and globalized one.

My first question is: how do artists and writers inscribe within their work this moving space and time, its instability and actuality? How do the visual arts, texts and theatre performances speak to us of these migrant itineraries and of the language of hospitality?

Since our world is a variable one, most contemporary artists choose materials and artistic forms typical of performance art (photos, videos, movies, electrical engines, mobiles). Since space keeps changing, images as texts cannot be fixed, but they transform themselves in time: for example, they circulate online, in a space whose limits are incalculable and then potentially without limits. If the idea of border implies a spatial representation, these works produce temporal representations on a world scale. Many texts stem from a strong feeling of fading origins and memories, of the fragility of ephemeral houses, from the consciousness of a loss of memory, of one's mother tongue and of one's collective and personal history. Politically engaged artists in the global and local context cross-examine the limits/borders between the fictional and the real world, especially when reality is characterized by war or economic disasters.

(IN)VISIBLE BORDERS

The image chosen for the exhibition *Scènes du Sud II Méditerranée orientale*¹ is a tent in a desert, its blue covering suspended in the air, so that you cannot say if the tent is being put up or taken down. The photo catches a moment between two periods, before/after. It is an unfixed habitation, of

being in-between an arrival, a stay and a departure. The Palestinian artist Tarek Al-Ghoussein exhibits a series of photos printed on silk: they hang down from the ceiling so that visitors can walk among them, and see each one from either side. Visitors can invent various possible itineraries but they are never in a frontal and static position of voyeur/spectator; they can move around, between, up and down, looking at each photo from multiple angles. We find the idea of crossing in another piece of work, by the Lebanese artist Marwan Rechmaoui: his *Beirut Caoutchouc* (Rubber Beirut) is a large-scale reproduction of the map of Beirut, but there are no topographical indications, no names appear on the black map. The map is on the ground and visitors to the exhibition can walk on it. Visitors are there incognito, without name or identity: they are only characters in an imaginary space, in a temporary space and time (the exhibition). These crossings through the map leave almost imperceptible marks. So borders, frontiers, are entirely fictional: nothing allows us to distinguish this plan from that of any other town in the world. It is made of the same material as rubber-soled shoes: striding along and pacing over it, visitors use it, ruin it, mark it with their footsteps. Cuts become visible: frontiers are like cuts/breaks/fault lines that can end in the disintegration of the plan/town/work. This is especially meaningful precisely because it concerns Beirut, a town divided into many sectors, each self-contained and clearly delimited, so that to pass from one to the other passports must be shown at checkpoints, visible marks of internal frontiers that are not inscribed on the rubber map. Moreover visitors come to realize that their going through Beirut is a symbolic crossing, a fiction; where one moves between this piece of artwork in the exhibition and the real town, with its historical and cultural context. The transformation of a visitor into an active agent is the political element of this aesthetic proposition.

THEATRE AND THE ART OF HOSPITALITY

The Persian *caravanserai* is a type of hostel built to accommodate entire caravans, with a yard and warehouses for animals and merchandise, and rooms for people. Do caravans still exist in our times? The play performed between 2003 and 2006 by the troupe of the Théâtre du Soleil, *Le Dernier Caravansérail (Odyssées)*, certainly deserves this name. The title and the realization of this spectacle perfectly signify the company's deep aesthetic, political and ethic vocation from its foundation in the 1970s. This is why it is such an essential reference in the itinerary I propose, in two fundamental

ways: being an example of modern hospitality, a space of collective and individual creation where everyone creates (oneself) in relation to the other(s); and since the way each actor/actress works is always open, always receptive to the other (character /performer/text), hospitality is mutual. As Hélène Cixous remarks in the programme of the spectacle:

Who are those refugees that our actors receive into their soul and their bodies? Who rest for a short ephemeral time in one or another caravanserai, who are those who receive our actors in their memory and destiny? . . . Ulysses is nowadays without name and without return. (Théâtre du Soleil, 2003)

The play is based on the transcription, assemblage and rewriting of several tales heard by the actors during the company's many travels around the world. Tales of true stories: some of them are those of the actors of the troupe, many others were refugees and *sans papiers*, *clandestins*, illegal immigrants living in the so-called *centre d'accueil* of Sangatte, others came from far away countries of the Middle East (Iran, Afghanistan) or the Southern hemisphere (Australia) or Eastern Europe (Russia, Chechnya). As one can easily imagine, the very history of our globalized world can be retraced in these tales. Instead of a printed play script (as is the case for other performances by the company), there is a kind of notebook where are registered the dates and encounters, the remarks of those who have told their stories, to those who have listened to them. Maps of their journeys are reproduced, often the same of contemporary migrations. Essential words in the vocabulary of a globalized world – refugee, hospitality, exile – are explained, documents reproduced, sentences written on the walls of Sangatte, recorded, translated and transcribed. One realizes the political impact of each of these gestures; and these clandestine and passing lives, persons and stories are given a time and space of existence, during the ephemeral space–time of the theatre. There, all of them can feel at home, they are *chez soi*. Even if they are considered *sans papiers*, without an identity card, they each have their names, origins, languages, dates, memories, places. At the very beginning of the play there is a scene that is emblematic of the theme of this issue of *EJWS*: a group of men, women and children try desperately to cross a river in turmoil, at the risk of drowning in its turbulent waters. Crossing borders is not without danger, these people jeopardize their lives in order to get to the other side. Unfortunately, this side is often a place like Sangatte, where people are imprisoned in an enclosed territory just because they have no identity cards (most of them have deliberately destroyed or thrown away their passports when passing the frontiers).

Of course, Sangatte is the example and the metaphor of conditional hospitality of a state deciding through its laws who will be admitted and who will not. This could eventually avoid the collision between the traditional law of hospitality and power that Derrida analyses:

This collision, it's also power in its finitude, that is the necessity, for the host, of choosing, electing, filtering, selecting guests and visitors, those who will be granted asylum, who will be given the right of visiting and getting hospitality. There is no hospitality, in its classical sense, without the sovereignty of the self in one's own home, but since there is no hospitality without finitude, this sovereignty can be exercised only by filtering and choosing, that is to say by the violence of exclusion. (Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 1997: 53)

But what does it mean being at home in a theatre during a performance? For the actors? In a modern *caravanserai*? One has to imagine an extra-territorial space where each one is at the same time an insider and an outsider, known and unknown, all differently a stranger at home. This play by the Théâtre du Soleil enriches the meaning of habitation, hospitality, outsider, stranger: one can be (wel)come to the performance without having to give one's name at the entrance, without stating one's identity. The power of the nation-state's laws to control entries and departures can be suspended in the theatrical space. In no way can this space become a territory with defined and exclusive – meaning controlled – borders. Moreover, even the stage is mobile, and this is another very effective metaphor of these tragic migrant stories: actors but also houses, rooms, tents, hospitals, shift across the stage (arrivals, departures). Habitations are temporary structures as persons can't stay in the same space for long, they cannot put down roots or build foundations. *Clandestins*, migrants cannot even touch the ground (the stage): each 'ground' is only a temporary one; only very few succeed in settling somewhere for any length of time. But on the stage there is a visible border, just in front of the spectators: a high wire netting and just in the middle a large rip through which migrants try continuously to pass. Almost all the scenes of *Sangatte* are attempts to cross the frontier and get to England. The word 'contemporary' is never more meaningful than on this stage, with its alternating scenes of what happens 'at the same time' in Iran, Afghanistan, France, Australia, Russia, England; through the stage, on the stage, all these migrant voices, languages and cultures communicate, and the public is both spectator and witness. Present time is necessarily a presence together, that allows one to be near, listening to their life tales, which happened elsewhere but are played here and now because of the hospitality of theatre. This community of presence (co-presence) make us conscious of the modern frontiers (wire fences, gates and walls); crossing them is an act of survival, not only an exchange or a simple getting through.

PERFORMING BORDER-CROSSING

This dramatization of crossing borders returns in a performing artistic project by the Palestinian artist Jumana Emil Abboud. The stage is a 'real' one:

the land between Jerusalem and Ramallah. In a short text on the website *LiminalSpaces*, Abboud proposed her project *Smuggling Lemons*: the initial idea is to transport a lemon tree to the other side of the frontier, but this being almost impossible, because of the checkpoints, she imagines other ways of transportation and crossing. At every stage of the project there is a trespassing of territorial and property laws: to get the lemons she has to steal them in a garden enclosed by a gate, then she has to conceal them in a bag or a belt, finally she will transform them into lemonade in order to destroy the evidence of smuggling. Many aspects of this performance story are interesting for our theme: the development of the metaphor of putting down roots and of uprooting (of a lemon tree, of people living in-between), but even if we know that the uprooting of a tree and its transportation are possible, in her story Abboud chooses the transportation of fruits, the tree is not eradicated but parts of it can cross the frontier many times. The artist, a woman, carries them: her body has a very important function of container for the clandestine fruits to pass through the checkpoint. She is a migrant, a stranger, a smuggler but at the same time she is the site of hospitality. So the shift from carrying lemons to carrying her own daughter is not astonishing: she carries both in her arms, inside and outside her clothed body (lemons are concealed to pass the border). This artist, not only writes her piece, but, as the actors and actresses on a stage, performs it in different ways and engages her own body in it, as a woman and a mother, that means that in this case, gender is an essential element in the border crossing:

I want to smuggle lemons from Jerusalem to Ramallah. That's all. An entire lemon tree actually, but since I cannot technically carry an entire tree in my bag, I will make do with the lemons themselves. *Smuggling Lemons* is a project that has several components: a video work, an installation of the smuggled lemons, and a performance involving a lemonade stand that will take place at the completion of the project in order to eliminate all evidence of the smuggling operation. One can visualize a scenario in which an individual is awarded back the lemon tree from the very garden where the house he lost once stood. He may naively imagine that his loss of the house was due simply to geographical disorientation, or to a mistake made in the process of drawing a map. Imagine that you awaken one day to find yourself separated from both your house and garden, or to discover that your house has been cut off from your garden. You really want to quench your thirst with a cold glass of fresh lemonade. It occurs to you that the only way to do this is for you to steal the lemons from the tree (on the other side of the divide) in a precarious smuggling operation. This project will include the design of a special belt in which the lemons will be carried in order to facilitate their transportation. There will surely be times, however, when I will not be able to use the belt (during security checks, for instance, when the belt might look to some like a suspicious explosive belt); in such instances, the lemons will be carried by hand, placed in a purse, put under my armpits, placed inside my mouth or in a pocket, etc. I will make the journey from Jerusalem to Ramallah several times, carrying another batch of lemons each time. One can never foresee the route one will have to take, the situation at the border, or the possibility of

passing through checkpoints; hence the visual documentation of the journey. I will travel through the landscape, carrying the lemons in my hand or around my waist as if I am carrying my first born child, directing her attention to the landscape in all its glory, pointing towards my favourite spots, and upon arrival rocking her gently to say: Look, we are home. Once enough lemons have been smuggled, I will host a sort of celebration during which I will attempt to dispose of all the lemons by making lemonade out of them and selling all the juice. The lemonade will be very cheap, in order to encourage consumption of all the lemons and thus to eradicate, or at least question, the very idea of the lemon tree's existence. Lemons are like jewels. They represent the wealth and glory of the earth, a historical and personal encyclopaedia of cultural attachments and baggage. They symbolize heritage, memory and longing, national identity and individual acts of 'heroism' (or the illusion thereof), destruction and loss, betrayal and abandon; at the same time, the lemons could simply negotiate a ritual procedure involving the making of a fresh glass of lemonade. (Emil Abboud, 2007)

MEMORIES AND IMAGES INTERWEAVING

The female performance artist in *Smuggling Lemons* not only crosses a border carrying her fruits (lemons/daughter), she weaves a connection between one side and the other, passing many times through the frontier (checkpoint). I would like to expand this idea of relation work through another example. Leïla Sebbar has created a series of books – *Mes Algéries en France* (2004), *Journal de mes Algéries en France* (2005) and *Voyage en Algéries autour de ma chambre* (2008) – with various content and material: fictional stories, autobiographical stories, interviews, photos and drawings. The covers of the books are a series of images like pieces of a mosaic, each one points to a story, to a fragmented memory. They do not suggest a linear narration or succession, they belong to distant periods and situations, their order is that of the personal recollections of the narrators and of the author assembling them. The assemblage is moved by the desire 'd'abolir ce qui sépare' (Sebbar, 2005: 11). The first gap is between two countries, her parents' homelands, France and Algeria (she was born in French Algeria). Reading allows us to pass from the author's memories, to her friends' or parents' memories, or to those of unknown persons, witnesses of the tragic period of colonization and of the independence wars. The terms connection and collection are especially relevant for this careful, meticulous work, similar in some ways to that of a historian (the Preface was by Michelle Perrot); nonetheless, Sebbar is above all a writer, borrowing often the voices and memories of others. Here she arranges her own archives and offers them to the reader: objects, cards, photos of coffee-shops, schools, graveyards of the colonial period in Algeria, family portraits, portraits of famous or unknown persons in Algerian history. Her parents' photos represent the image of a crossed journey: her father's from

Algeria to France, her mother's from France to Algeria. In the colonial period in *Algérie française*, European/French clothes coexist with traditional costumes from different regions of Algeria. With these books Sebbar is not only a *diseuse de mémoire*, a witness and narrator of this memory, she is also the collector of a mixed genealogy, she has to cross colonial borders, in the act of writing her own story, to go further than this familial space; she also collects images and documents of Algerian migrants living in France. Thus she moves from the colonial past to the postcolonial present: she creates a map where one can retrace the journeys, from place to place, from one story to another, as she multiplies viewpoints, voices, narrators, sources of memory. She transforms the colonial map into a postcolonial one through a double inversion of marks: being born from the meeting of her mother's and father's two trajectories through the colonial map of French Algeria, images suggest the crossing of foot prints: France's colonial foot prints over Algerian soil (schools, language, urban space), and those of Algerian migrants in the French landscape (coffee shops, soldiers' tombs). There are the marks of the journeys of French people who migrated to Algeria or who were born there, some of whom participated in the fight for the independence of Algeria. There are many women in this narration of passionate and singular destinies, some of them little known: the nurse and obstetrician Juliette Grandgury; the great ethnographer and resistance fighter Germaine Tillion; Josette Audin, Maurice Audin's wife, dying probably after being tortured by the French army, and others. Sebbar also recalls many Algerian women who became her friends in other contexts (such as the publication of the feminist revue *Histoire d'elles*). In these pages the function of the author is exactly that of a collector of witnesses' stories, memories and prints; she performs the literary inscription of hospitality; she receives, translates from one language to another, from images to words, from memories and countries.

* * *

For some borders become invisible but for others they are still there, standing strong like great brick walls, an obstacle to their desire to get to the other side, looking for freedom or for a better life. Trying to cross may end in death. So it is clear that contemporary border-crossing is very far from an ideal cosmopolitanism, which is much more an intellectual conception. Migrants are fragile, vulnerable beings: their status is precarious; as women they are often kept in or pushed back to the other side (victims of fundamentalist laws separating sexes, abolishing desires and sexual liberty). The artistic choice to perform this space of migration exposes this vulnerability of the migrant subject, making the visitor/spectator/reader the agent of an aesthetic space of dangerous crossings and precarious lives, performing for a short time a dream of hospitality without conditions.