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The Significance of the Insignificant: Borders, Urban Space, Everyday Life

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Abstract: This paper can be read as a film sequence, as each scene is based on the narration of a different everyday encounter in the city. The aim of the paper is to start a discussion on the multiple ways borders proliferate in the urban: not only through laws, institutions or policing practices, but also through deeds, words, and feelings. Rather than analyse migration and borders by focusing only on the borderzones, this paper captures the multiple relations that connect the camp to the city square, the deportation regime to the train carriage, the newspaper headlines to the housing tenements in an attempt to work towards framing a broader theory of borders in geographical terms. Focusing on everyday encounters generates more complicated and nuanced understandings of subjectivity and power, while it brings to the fore the multiple borders that are simultaneously embodied and transcended, performed and challenged, established and subverted.

Keywords: migration, borders, everyday life, urban space, gender, race

> Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word. (Du Bois 1968:2)

This paper invites the reader to reflect on how borders proliferate in everyday life, how they form and deform subjectivities, bodies, relations and places in the most mundane and *insignificant* moments in the city. The city is Athens between 2009 and 2013, a time that saw the beginnings of the "economic crisis" in Greece. During those years, migrants were being increasingly illegalised and racialised by dominant policies and media discourses compared to the previous decade of "economic growth".

It is well established in the critical literature that borders have a polysemic nature, as they do not hold the same meaning for everyone (Balibar 2002). As Caton

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and Zacka (2010:209) write, "A border is not a line, but a space with depth. And this space changes, morphologically, on the basis of the identity of the one who enters it". Taking a step further, this paper will discuss not only how meanings, experiences, and spaces change in relation to the identity of the people who cross the borders, but how identities, bodies, and spaces are themselves produced through bordering practices.

By using fragments of narrations of everyday encounters between migrants and locals in the city, I create a film script, turning the spotlight on the different acts and scenes, shedding light on different moments, places, people, and encounters. Every act and scene zooms in on a different aspect, practice, thought, and experience: brought together they create a map of the multiple and complicated ways borders operate as technologies of power within everyday life.

Everyday life, as described by Lefebvre (1971, 2008a), is defined by conflicts and contradictions which become particularly apparent when we approach borders ethnographically, starting from the everyday life experiences of migrants: moments and spaces of exclusion, powerlessness, and subordination but also of inclusion, emancipation, and subversion.

In this sense, the focus won't be on the bordering practices of the state, of the police and other institutions, nor on the collective and public practices of subversion, solidarity and resistance, even though such examples have proliferated in Athens during the past few years (Dalakoglou 2013; Lafazani 2018a; Mantanika and Kouki 2011; Teloni and Mantanika 2015; Tsimouris 2014). The focus is on these *microbe-like*, *clandestine*, and *insignificant* acts of everyday life, in which borders are renegotiated between the ones who belong and the ones who do not, when belonging is not conceived as a *sense* but as a socially constructed position that manufactures bodies, acts, and feelings. In encounters, such as the one Du Bois describes in the above quotation, in which the border is performed in the different ways of recognising and approaching the stranger, in the gazes, the feelings, in the questions posed and those that cannot be framed, in the answers given, and the ones left hanging.

Drawing from critical geography, border and migration studies, as well as from feminist and postcolonial critique, I argue that these *insignificant* encounters in everyday life—the less visible and the most ignored in public and in academic discourses—are in fact very significant. Significant in order to elaborate on the continuities and dis-continuities of experience, on the multiple power relations, as well as on the "identities" of subjects and places, showing them to be not stable and fixed, but constantly under construction in multiple and interlocking socio-spatial scales.

In the first part of the paper I describe the scene by framing the ethnographic research and sketching out the dialectic tensions between migration and the wider economic, social and political transformations in the Greek context of the last 30 years. In "Montage", I briefly outline some basic methodological choices. The following section aims to track the "Inaudible Dialogues" of the theoretical discussions that inform this paper. The four acts and their scenes shed light on these everyday life encounters as narrated by different individuals. Lastly, when the "Lights Fade", a summing up and some preliminary suggestions for further research are proposed.

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Describing the Scene / Migration in Greece

> I am renting my flat from an old couple living two floors above. Every afternoon they invited me for coffee, they were lonely and I was a company for them. Nothing bad had happened between us but around 2010/11 they started avoiding me, not a lot of invitations, not a lot of words. Gradually, even the first day of the month that I was knocking their door to pay the rent they didn't invite me in. (Nasim, 27 years old, coming from Afghanistan)

For Greece the last century was marked by multiple arrivals and departures. From the refugees that arrived in 1922/23 from Asia Minor to the thousands of people who left the country in the following decades to make a living in Germany, Belgium, the US, or Australia. In the beginning of the 1990s the fall of Soviet Union and the contemporaneous growth of the Greek economy led to massive migration movements towards the country from Balkan and Eastern European countries. During this period, migration was handled in terms of "illegality" in regard to entry, stay, and work, while living and working conditions were very harsh (Marvakis et al. 2001).

Nonetheless, the economic growth of the 1990s and the demand for precarious labour (in construction and domestic sectors among others) coupled with the structural characteristics of the Greek economy (large informal sector, seasonal labour in the agriculture and tourism industries) made it possible for the migrants of this period—even the ones without papers—to live and work in Greece (Vaiou and Hadjimichalis 2003). In part, the deficiencies of state policies were complemented "from below": the migrant communities and wider social networks, the anti-racist movement, as well as the everyday interactions of immigrants with locals in places of work, in neighbourhoods and in the city, gave shape to an "informal" social space where migrants were accepted and supported (Vaiou and Lykogianni 2006).

The country entered the millennium under the banner of a "Powerful Greece". The joining of the "European family" and the Eurozone, the high levels of economic growth, the expansion of the Greek capital in the Balkans, the hosting of the 2004 Olympic Games were all hailed as heralds of development and progress. In this period migration became "invisible" in the public discourse and policies: it was no longer a problem or a threat, as migrant labour—especially informal one—was more than necessary to build this "Powerful Greece". Greek nationalism was also transformed during these years: from a defensive nationalism which primarily referred to the ancient Hellenic glory and the constant attempt to disregard the Ottoman past (language and religion played a crucial role in this) it became more aggressive, especially in relation to the neighbouring countries and their citizens who lived and worked in Greece (Marvakis et al. 2001).

By 2007/2008, signs of financial recession began to increasingly belie the ideology of "Powerful Greece". The December 2008 uprising showed the pervasive extent of social discontent and insecurity. The signing of the first Memorandum in 2010 imposed harsh austerity policies, privatisations, and a reduction in public spending; in the next years unemployment soared and incomes were reduced to never seen before lows (Hadjimichalis 2017). The economic and social crisis

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rapidly led to a political crisis and the emergence of massive radical social movements (Douzinas 2013). In that time—the period during which this research was conducted—migrants became the scapegoats of the crisis, by both mainstream political parties and media. As the Minister for Public Order Michalis Chrysochoidis—who today occupies the same post since the 2019 elections—declared, "illegal migrants are a threat for the system of social welfare and solidarity, the public health, public order and security as well as national security. It is a time bomb in the foundations of the Greek society" (Vythoulkas 2012). Harsh and discriminatory policies were implemented (Dalakoglou 2013; Karamanidou 2016), while the ultra-right grew aggressively (Brekke 2014; Kandylis and Kavoulakos 2011). The invisibility of the previous period was transformed in a hyper-visibility, with hundreds of newspaper articles and TV reports presenting Athens as a dangerous city due to the presence of "illegals" (Lafazani 2018b). Within this context, and as my own research clearly showed, Athens became a more hostile city for migrants. This was not only attributable to the police operations and harsher laws, but also to the fact that migrants were being seen and treated as unwanted and illegal in everyday life encounters. As the initial quote by Nasim indicates—a recurring theme in my research—personal relationships changed and people who were once welcoming and warm gradually became more distant and suspicious.

In this sense, this paper is not (only) about racism in everyday life but also attempts to follow the intersections of the *colorline* and the *borderline*, approaching racialisation as a process connected to a wider grid of border and migration policies, discourses and practices—from the borderlands to the centre of the Athenian metropolis.

Montage/Methodology

From 2009 to 2013, I conducted a *multi-sited ethnography* (Marcus 1995; Tsianos and Karakayali 2010) in different hubs (Tehran, Istanbul, Athens, Patra) following the transnational geographies of migrants coming from Afghanistan. In Athens through participant observation, life history interviews but also statistics, media discourses, policies, maps, and secondary literature, I reflected on conflict and coexistence in the urban space. The research period in Athens lasted 2.5 years, during which I spent long periods in the field together with my informants, also accompanying them to other cities and visiting their families and friends in Tehran and Istanbul. In that time, 35 life history interviews were conducted, amounting to more than 300 hours of audio material. In addition, the research questions and the methodology drew heavily from my experience in and commitment to grassroots anti-racist and anti-capitalist struggles in Athens and beyond spanning over 20 years. Starting from the subjective experiences of migrants is a methodological choice in line with critical research on migration, as outlined below. This is not about giving voice to the voiceless—a quite colonial idea I could argue—but so as to unpack the invisible forms of privilege and dispossession, of belonging and estrangement, of subversion and struggle, and shed light on the *imperceptible* negotiations around borders and migration.

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Inaudible Dialogues/Theory

> Already, to city people the urban center is movement, the unpredictable, the possible and encounters. (Lefebvre 1996:172)

Several scholars have already explored how the borders are (re)constructed through different agreements, laws and directives (Andreas 2003; Prokkola 2013; Van Houtum and Pijpers 2007; Walters 2002), through institutions (Andrijasevic and Walters 2010; Kasparek 2010; Léonard 2010), and technologies (Amoore 2006; Pötzsch 2015; Tsianos and Kuster 2016). The border is also analysed in relation to infrastructures of control, be it hotspots (Antonakaki et al. 2016; Tazzioli 2018; Vradis et al. 2019) or camps (Martin et al. 2019; Tsavdaroglou 2018).

Although most of this research focuses on border zones or on the bordering practices "from above", there are several theoretical attempts to re-locate the borders away from the border zones or certain infrastructures (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015; Dzenovska 2017; Garelli and Tazzioli 2017; Mezzadra and Neilson 2012) and to understand them through the subjective experiences of migrants (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013; Picozza 2017; Scheel 2017). At the same time, there is also a burgeoning interest in how borders proliferate in the urban space through policing, local state agencies, private and semi-private institutions, and stratified access to social services, housing and the labour market (De Genova and Roy 2020; Fauser 2019; Lebuhn 2013). However, there is a paucity of research analysing how these bordering practices in the urban space interrelate to the subjectivities of people situated "inside", "outside" or "on" the border (but see Khosravi 2010; Trimikliniotis et al. 2015). In that vein, De Genova (2015:6) invites us to think about the border struggles in the migrant metropolis. Using Mexican Chicago as a reference, he emphasises that it is a city confined within the boundaries of the US nation-state, but also a site for their production as fractalised and mobile: "When the border materialised in this space, it tended to be localised on migrants' bodies. In effect, they wore the border on their faces, carried it on their backs. That is to say, the 'national' border was now re-articulated as an everyday marker of racialised class distinction, racial discrimination and segregation".

In this paper I elaborate on the idea that the border is materialised on the bodies of migrants in the urban space. In the different acts and scenes in this paper, the bodies of the migrants wear the border on their faces and carry it on their backs: from the train carriage to the city squares, the border is re-articulated as a racialised class distinction. But I will also try to complicate this idea: do they only wear it and carry it, or are their faces and backs themselves formed and de-formed by the border? And are only the bodies of those who "don't belong" formed and de-formed by the border, or the bodies of the ones "who belong" too?

In order to unpack these questions, I will work on some interrelated concepts: analysing borders as technologies of power, starting from encounters in everyday life and thinking around space and subjectivity.

The analyses of border spaces, camps, or city neighbourhoods that take Agamben's (1998) concepts of spaces of exception, sovereign power and bare life as a starting point, have undergone serious criticism mainly by the autonomy of migration thesis. One point of this critique is that such an analysis risks

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underestimating the multiple and spatially differentiated regimes wherein power operates, thus conceiving it in a monolithic sense—as if it is beyond history, space and social relations (Mezzandra 2011). Foucault (2003:29), on the other hand, works on an understanding of power as a relation, as a wider grid of practices and technologies that penetrate social life while individuals "…are never the inert or consenting targets of power; they are always its relays. In other words, power passes through individuals. It is not applied to them". Power is exercised upon subjects as "it is a mode of action which … acts upon their [others'] actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future" (Foucault 1982:789). In this sense, borders as technologies of power do not function only as administrative, bureaucratic or policing institutions, but fabricate everyday life itself: by producing differences, divisions and hierarchies, by locating and dislocating certain bodies in relation to others, by disciplining and subjugating, by manufacturing positions of superiority and subordination, of privilege and dispossession, by crafting places of belonging and not belonging.

Everyday life, analysed following the work of Lefebvre (2008a:97), is the space that connects all processes and encompassing all their differences and conflicts —"it is their meeting place, their bond, their common ground". Through this lens, everyday life is not an unchanging routine, or a separate sphere from the world of rules (Smith 1987), but the means by which to overcome binary divisions and shed light on the continuity of experience within different spheres and scales. Starting from the study of the everyday does not necessarily lead to a micro-level socio-spatial analysis or to an exclusive focus on the local (Vaiou and Lykogianni 2006). On the contrary, it as an entry point to the study of processes, practices and power relations which develop across different and interlocking geographical scales, ranging from the body to the global (Dyck 2005).

Everyday life consists of a "contrasting diptych", including on one hand the misery of the everyday as the sphere of the mundane, of repetition, of adaptation and preoccupation with the bare necessities, and on the other hand the power of the everyday, the ability to create, the re-production of meaningful relations, the sphere where need coincides with satisfaction and pleasure, and where the extraordinary can be found in the very ordinary (Lefebvre 1971:35). Viewed in this way, everyday life is (also) about conflicts and negotiations related to processes of collective and individual consciousness. Therefore, in the everyday lies the possibility of emancipation (Lefebvre 1971).

Looking at how borders work on the level of the everyday leads to more nuanced understandings, not only of borders and power, but also of urban space and subjectivities.

When we approach the urban space through everyday life according to Lefebvre, we approach it as a social space, as a space constructed not only "from above" but also in the ways it is *conceived* and *lived*. Massey pens her book *For Space* (2005) with some propositions: firstly, to recognise space as a product of interrelations, as constituted through interactions "from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny". Secondly, to understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity, as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist, as the sphere of coexisting heterogeneity. Thirdly, to recognise space

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as "always under construction, as a product of relations-between, as never finished and never closed". Taking the *intimately tiny* as the starting point of this paper, and following Massey's propositions, I elaborate on how different spaces are constructed and interrelated through the encounters of distinct trajectories, as relations-between, as always under construction.

This paper takes as a starting point the intimately tiny, as it can be found in the encounters between "migrants" and "locals". This distinction serves as an analytical lens *across the borderline*, placing at the forefront how the subjectivities of those entitled to a certain national space and those who are excluded from it—even if they inhabit it—are constructed and performed. Nonetheless, this distinction does not conceal other forms of social difference as gender, race and class—the interplay of these relations will be central to the paper.

Moreover, Ahmed (2000:5), writing on stranger fetishism, describes that "the process of fetishisation involves not only the displacement of social relations onto an object, but the transformation of fantasies into figures". By displacing social relations and fantasies onto the figure of the migrant, the latter is portrayed as dangerous, threatening, and illegal, or as vulnerable and a victim. A migrant fetishisation also takes place within academic discourses: instead of analysing social relations themselves, these are displaced into subjects; in this way migrants become bare lives, voiceless, invisible or nomadic, hybrid or revolutionary subjects. Moving beyond the pre-determined figures of a migrant and a local, I approach subjectification as an ongoing, conflictive, complicated and open process within the everyday. Or, as Butler (1990:142) suggests, one should not presuppose a "doer behind a deed" but to think of the ways "the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed". Furthermore, approaching the negotiation of borders through everyday encounters can signify that identity is not constituted in the private realm as the subject's relation to itself; "rather, in daily meetings with others subjects are perpetually reconstituted" (Ahmed 2000:7). Each encounter does not only happen in the present, but re-opens past encounters, each carrying traces of wider relations of power and antagonism, as the bodies that meet each other have already been formed and de-formed by the norms and relations of gender, race, and class within multiple and interlocking geographical scales. Nonetheless, encounters are meetings, and as such "involve surprise and conflict" (Ahmed 2000:6). The way Ahmed conceptualises encounters is essential in this instance, as it can really capture time and space in different forms: starting from the here and now, the particular encounter, and thinking about how it is played out; including the past as memory, history, other spaces, previous experiences and structured power relations; but also opening the possibility of surprise, or, in other words, the possibility of another future and space than the one that seems already predetermined.

Act 1: Means of Transportation or Producing the Stranger

Early winter morning in the Athens subway. Mubarak, a 28-year-old man from Afghanistan, who at that moment has been waiting over six years for a decision

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on his application for political asylum, narrates his encounter with a middle aged Greek man.

> I was sitting on the train, looking outside the window. A man comes and sits next to me, he starts talking to me, he talks about the weather and such stuff. I immediately understand he thinks I am Greek, from the way he talks, from what he says.

Encounters are meetings which are not simply in the present as "each encounter reopens past encounters" (Ahmed 2000:8). In this way Mubarak seems to know from other previous accidental encounters that he is not (yet) recognised as a stranger.

> When I turn my head to talk to him, when he sees my face, hears my voice and my accent he understands I am a migrant. He changes the way he looks at me, talks to me, the sound of his voice is different. His first question—always the same—where are you from? And he continues, where do you work, do you like Greece, how many years you are here? I feel I am being interrogated.

"The first question—always the same—where are you from?" A question that serves to point out that he is not from here, that he does not really belong here. A question that delineates the stranger, that keeps him "in his place". And then a series of other questions, questions that would not be asked in other accidental encounters, as Mubarak seems to know well. Questions that mark the difference, that shape the figure of the one who is considered to be "out of place". Discussing this story in a university class with some students, some kept repeating that the local man is just a "weird person" on the train and Mubarak is just "taking it personally". It is true that even for anthropology students who are taught to think along the lines of race, class and nation, whiteness and masculinity still go unnoticed. So, I kept asking them, who can it be, this weird person on the train? Can it be a 20-year-old girl? Can it be a man of colour? Can it be a gay person? The body of the "weird person" on the train has certain characteristics in terms of gender, age, race and nationality. The one who is asking the questions has embodied the power to do so, has embodied the institutional and social demarcations, the dominant discourses and policies, the bordering practices. As a white, older, man, he exercises the power to designate, to produce the "other" bodies within encounters in everyday life. The "weird person" not only feels that *he belongs* there, but that he *owns the place*, that he can challenge others but cannot be challenged himself.

> And then he starts touching me, he claps me on the back two–three times, like a good friend would do, only a little harder, he says "you have to work hard here in Greece", he says that a couple of times. I feel very bad, threatened and violated. There is no chance if I was Greek he would treat me this way in the first minutes of our meeting on a train.

Refusing touch is certainly a way of forming and de-forming some bodies in relation to others (Simonsen 2007). We could also think about the different ways of touching, and how they form the bodies of "others". We can see in this particular gesture in this encounter, that the type of touch is a way of subjugating, of

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placing the stranger in a subordinate position. Touch performs the border and its disciplinary role.

> I felt very bad and my first thought was to get out of the train and take the next one. And then I thought "I have done that too many times, I cannot always get off the train". And although I was anxious, afraid of what will come next, probably of a big fight, I sat there I looked him straight in the eye and said loudly "get your hands off me". He looked at me really surprised, he removed his hand, turned on the other side and never talked to me again. I felt so relieved that I did it.

Borders in everyday life are embodied and performed but at the same time they are also challenged. In this accidental encounter on a suburban train in Athens, the Greek man seems to embody the power to demarcate spaces and bodies: his words, his look, and his touch designate the stranger. On the other hand, Mubarak says "many times I have got down from the train", and his words seem to condense the feeling of subordination, the embodiment of his inferior position. As mentioned earlier, encounters are meetings which do not simply take place in the present: a new encounter reopens past encounters, but it is not fully predetermined. Every new encounter may involve an element of surprise, as everyday life is not only about continuous adaptations, but also about conflicts relating to processes of collective and individual consciousness, and thus the possibility of emancipation lies in the everyday itself. In this encounter Mubarak decided he has to stay and deal with the problem, acknowledging in a way the fact that *he* is considered to be the problem. He decided he cannot always get off the train. He looked the Greek man straight in the eyes, he spoke out loud, and he challenged his inferior position, defying the given bordering not only through words but also with his body.

Act 2: Public Spaces or Rejection and Acceptance

A summer afternoon in Pedion tou Areos, a park in the very centre of Athens. Rahim, an 18-year-old man from Afghanistan who has tried several times to reach Germany, describes his walk in the park.

> We were in a park with my friend, in Pedion tou Areos and there was an open theatre play for young children, and we wanted to watch. We weren't even seated, when a huge bald guy came and told me stand up, stand up, now, go, go, go away, not even a minute he didn't let me … And he was saying really bad words to me, he was talking in Greek and I replied in English and Farsi, some other people gathered around us and I was so mad that I insulted everyone, because all these people were saying bad things about migrants and about me, no-one came in support for us.

As discussed earlier, the border is not only to be found in the borderlands and it is not only exercised by state authorities and institutions: it (also) proliferates in urban public spaces, within the most mundane encounters in everyday life. Who has the power and the "right" to perform and to (re)define the border in the urban space? As Athanasiou and Tsimouris (2013) write, the nationalised, possessive, white and heteronormative masculinity is incorporated as the cultural norm that regulates the contents of the human and the political. A norm which is

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manufactured within multiple and interlocking scales across the borderline: the Eurodac system and the Dublin regulation (Tsianos and Kuster 2016); the building of the wall in the Evros border region and the opening of new detention centres in the Aegean (Grigoriadis and Dilek 2019); the advertising of the numbers of deportations and arrests by the Xenios Zeus police operation (Dalakoglou 2013); the TV news overflowing with words such as "illegality" and "criminality" while what one can actually see on the screen are three alleged migrants simply walking in the street (Lafazani 2018b); the daily pogroms, attacks and assaults against migrants, women and LGBTQI people in the centre of the city, for which usually no one gets charged or even arrested (Tsimouris 2014).

In 1943, albeit in a vastly different context, Arendt (2007:271) wrote that this "silent [public] opinion and practice is more important for our daily lives than all official proclamations". Within this particular encounter in the park, the norm is not just materialised but entrenched, not only because it is repeatedly performed in the public space but mainly because it is widely accepted by everyone else present. The institutionalised superiority of the white man, his right to demarcate public spaces and to define "who" belongs "where" in contrast to the also institutionalised inferiority of the stranger, the "illegal"—with or without papers—becomes entrenched and pervasive in this silent public opinion and practice; either because it is widely accepted, or because no-one considers themselves to be "in the position" to challenge it.

> As we were walking later in the park, I was very frustrated and I was kicking anything I found in front of me, trees, benches … And there were some old men seated there, they called me, they asked me "what happened to you my child?" They asked us "did they speak bad to you up there?" My friend was translating, he explained [to] them what happened. The grandpas brought us some orange juices and water to drink. This surprised me. So close, so different people. The fascists on the one hand and within a few metres so kind people … The grandpas were laughing and were saying "these people are stupid; they think there is something wrong with you and they don't want you around". [Would you look at the] difference … the old men lifted my spirits while the others had pushed me to the edge. This is what Athens is like.

As Lefebvre (2008b:62) writes, the social control of individual possibilities is not absolutely imposed but "it is accepted, half imposed, half voluntary, in a never ending ambiguity". The border, as a technology of power, is thus not imposed into subjects and spaces in an absolute way: it is also challenged and subverted in a *never-ending ambiguity*. "Within a few metres" as Rahim insists, there are practices of rejection, exclusion and violence, but also of affection, care, and reciprocity. "This is what Athens is like" says Rahim, in a way recognising the simultaneity and the ambiguity of the urban space.

Act 3: City Streets or Fear and Daring

Scene 1: Being the Problem

Nur, a 33-year-old man from Afghanistan who has lived in Athens for a decade and works in the construction sector, describes his accidental encounters with women in the streets of Athens.

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> Athens is deteriorating. If I see a woman walking on the pavement I will cross the street, because I can see she will clutch her bag to her chest when I am near her, and I don't want her to be frightened or to worry, so I move away. It didn't use to be like this … It's not the Greeks' fault, now they are troubled too. They're also right, what can you say? Now they see the foreigners, so many, they want to work and they say "what shall I do, stay at home?" Greece wasn't like that. It has become [like that]. Now they have started locking the main door, the entrance to the tenement.

If for the white male the stranger constitutes an intruder who has to be either disciplined or simply kicked out—as was evident in the previous acts—then for the white female, the stranger in the public space is both a danger and a threat. Women are "taught" to feel vulnerable and afraid: by gender norms, mainstream discourses, institutional policies, but also by social practices and by the collective or individual experiences of violence in their daily lives. Women are taught to be *streetwise*, not to walk alone in the public space, and if they do then to *watch out*, to *be careful*, to *keep their distance* (Ahmed 2000). A differentiated geography of mobility and boundaries in the urban space is delineated in terms of gender, as feminist critical geographers have outlined (see among others Massey 1994; Mountz and Hyndman 2006). The socially constructed diptych depicts the public space as dangerous and the home as safe. Nonetheless, the fear of danger as represented by the stranger in the street serves also to conceal the fact that that home can be an unsafe space for many women, as well as the fact that most sexual attacks are committed by friends and family.

Nur, on the other hand, says that as he doesn't want to frighten the women, he (also) keeps his distance. From his narrative it seems that he has accepted that "he is a problem", that he has accepted and partially embodied the gaze of those that see him as "dangerous", "criminal", and "illegal".

Moreover, the embodiment of inferiority is evident and in Nur's arguments, as he justifies the hostile or even aggressive attitude of "Greeks who are right" because "there are too many strangers". The ideological hegemony of nationalism becomes apparent in the way Nur speaks. The division between migrants and locals and the superiority of the latter (at least in terms of rights in their *own* territory) is presented as being so natural and inevitable, so "commonsense", that even the "victims" of such ideological schemas, the migrants themselves, identify with it. It is possible that during our discussion Nur felt the need to be polite towards me—a Greek woman—thinking that I might be offended if he were to speak ill of the Greek people, therefore implicitly accepting an inferior position, in which he has always to be "careful" of what he says and does.

The ways Nur acts and talks demonstrate acceptance of his subordination. A subordination that has been "embodied" in multiple ways and in several places: through the violence and humiliations in the EU borders; through imprisonment in the detention centres all over the country; through "sweep operations" in the centre of the city; through overexploitation in working sites; through the newspaper headlines and the TV reports; through the looks, words and actions of the people he accidentally encounters in the urban public spaces.

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Scene 2: Reversing

Rahim, a 31-year-old man from Afghanistan is describing an incidental encounter with a woman that took place one evening, in a street in the port city of Patra.

> I was walking in the street in Patra and there was this woman, the moment I was close to her she froze with her back on the wall because we were alone in the street and she was afraid I will do something bad to her. And me, just for fun, I did the same she was doing, like I was afraid of her, and I pushed my back on the car on the other side and we crossed each other walking sideways, like crabs.

The embodiment of subordination is not a linear process that always comes to the same end, or, in other words, every encounter involves surprise. In contrast to the earlier story that saw Nur accept his positioning as the "problem" and keeping his distance, Rahim is trying, with his attitude and his body, to question the gazes, words and deeds that classify him as the "problem". In this story borders are challenged through "the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline'" (De Certeau 1984:xiv–xv). Rahim acts spontaneously, imitating the woman who is pushing herself against the wall, mimicking her attitude, questioning who is in fact the "dangerous" one in this particular encounter.

> In Athens and in Patra there are times that people look at me in a strange way, because I am Afghan, because I look like a stranger, like I am a thief, a killer, like I am something bad. This is very frustrating … Sometimes in Patra I was dirty, I couldn't be clean there, but it was not my fault. Some people were looking at me like I was ready to bite them, to eat them. OK, we were dirty, not we, our clothes, but we have eyes and we see, we have noses and we smell, we have ears and we hear, we are humans not animals. Those acting in these ways are not human in my opinion … I could never imagine that someone who has education, has work, he is in a good situation can act like that.

Moreover, the discourse used by Rahim to describe the way some Greek people regard him is completely different from Nur's. Not only does he not justify them, but he explicitly states that he is very frustrated by the gaze of the people who, by recognising him as a stranger, regard him as "something bad".

Several of the migrants who participated in my research felt the need to emphasise that they were "human". In a social, economic and political context that treats and describes migrants as "illegals", "dangerous" and "criminals", increasingly seeing them as a homogenised group, the need to emphasise being "human" describes, partly at least, this experience of subordination. However, this declaration in itself can be read as an attempt to rephrase and to transgress a subordinate position, a refusal of being a "bare life" as a struggle against processes of dehumanisation (Mezzadra 2020).

Rahim reverses the hegemonic bordering practices through his words, deeds, and his body. He uses his body to mimic the attitude of the woman who is frightened of him, trying to reverse the notion that he is an object of fear. Respectively, in his discourse, he is reversing the attitudes that face and treat migrants as non-human, by stating that "those who have such an attitude are not humans".

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Act 4: Housing Tenements or Correction and Cohabitation

Scene 1: Re-Marks

Ouranous, a 31-year-old woman from Afghanistan, describes her daily encounters with her neighbours who live in the same block of flats in Patissia, a run-down neighbourhood in the centre of Athens. Ouranous has lived in this apartment for over two years, together with her husband and their three children.

> My neighbours usually talk to me when they want me to correct our behaviour. One says, "your children are very noisy, you have to teach them to behave". The other says "one of your clothes fell in the yard, you have to learn to buy pegs". Another says "when you close the elevator door you make a lot of noise, learn to be quiet".

All these small remarks constantly re-mark spaces and senses of belonging and not belonging. Remarks that proliferate in the most common, mundane activities: the noisy children, the closing of the elevator door, the fall of a garment. In 1943, Hannah Arendt (2007:269) was writing that "Once we could buy our food and ride in the subway without being told we were undesirable. We have become a little hysterical since newspapermen started detecting us and telling us publicly to stop being disagreeable when shopping for milk and bread. We wonder how it can be done". Arendt's description highlights how the most trivial, everyday activities can become trigger points of negative criticism. The underlying question, however, is whether it is the acts *per se* that are the trigger points, or the presence of a subject who is constructed as an unwanted and as a stranger.

All these small remarks follow the same trajectory, going from the local, the one who is and feels entitled to a certain national space, towards the stranger, the migrant, the one who has to be always reminded that he does not really belong. If the situation was reversed the answer would most likely be—as it has been innumerable times within such encounters—"if you don't like it go[back] to your country". The national border and its crossing—in a subtle or a crude way—is always present in these encounters. The "legality" or "illegality" of the crossing makes no difference, as the mere presence of migrants in the city is increasingly illegalised. After all, the purpose of these remarks is not really to regulate or organise coexistence, but to reaffirm a certain power relation that demarcates spaces of belonging, from the borderlands to the housing tenements.

> There is this woman who lives in the apartment above, she is very nice. She brought gifts for the children at Christmas, clothes for my younger daughter. She makes a cake and she brings us, I also made sweets one day and offered her. But the last months she started telling me "you are always with the headscarf, this is not nice, you have to take it off, it is Europe here". Some days ago, she told me "I will tell you good morning if you don't wear the headscarf, if you wear it I will not". She says that in a sweet way, but it is sooo difficult for me.

The binary of care and control or compassionate repression (Fassin 2005) is used in migration literature in order to describe the humanitarian migration policies. Here it takes a rather different meaning and form. Bordering practices do not always have to take an aggressive form, nor to involve verbal or physical violence.

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They can be framed in the most *sweet* and polite manner, that nonetheless comprises a type of punishment. Patronising relations are a subtle, or in some cases not so subtle, expression of superiority. Relations that come to locate and dislocate certain bodies in relation to others, to entrench privilege and deprivation, to craft spaces of belonging and estrangement.

Scene 2: The Extraordinary Within the Ordinary

Early evening in a square in Kypseli, a densely populated neighbourhood in the centre of Athens. The writer, a Greek woman, then 29 years old, describes in her research diary her accidental encounter with two other women: Leyla a 24-year-old woman from Syria, and Maria, a 56-year-old woman from Greece.

> I am sitting on one of the benches in the square and I say something about my dog to a young woman wearing a headscarf who is sitting next to me. She doesn't speak neither English nor Greek. Her friend approaches us, sits next to me and we start talking: "We are very close, Leyla is my best friend. Her apartment is right in front of mine on the same floor. We often go out together; she comes to my house or I go to hers. I am helping her with her young boy now that she is pregnant again", she says. "But how do you communicate since you cannot speak the same language?", I ask. "It is not so important", she replies, "if you want you find ways. With movements, we mime, with signs. We cook together, we watch TV, we go to the supermarket, we are friends; this is what is important.

The friendship of the two women subverts different boundaries and borders that are often produced and reproduced as non-traversable, such as nationality, religion, social and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, their friendship also challenges other boundaries construed through age and language differences. What brings these women close? How do they communicate?

After I spent some time with them during my research, it became clear that it was their gendered and class experiences that brought them together: bringing up children, the loneliness of being at home and not participating in the labour market, while at the same time sharing their (also gendered) daily chores and routines: cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and ironing, going to the supermarket, taking the children to the park. The relation between the two women indicates that language is one code of communication and experience amongst many others, such as movements, signs, as well as the sharing of feelings or experiences like motherhood, loneliness or everyday "routines". If this paper is about the ways borders work in the everyday life, through bodies, gazes, gestures and signs, the relation of the two women indicates how borders are traversed and subverted through bodies, gazes, gestures and signs. Their encounter captures the "extraordinary within the ordinary" and the "significance of the insignificant" within the everyday life (Lefebvre 1971).

Lights Fade

Bordering practices are evident in many different *loci* across the city: in the laws and regulations, policing, the precarious and often humiliating work conditions,

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the stratified access to housing, to health, to education but also in these *insignificant* encounters on which this paper is based. The different acts and scenes shed light on these less visible, less tangible, non-regulated border practices; practices that can nonetheless be really persistent and borders that can be really hard to cross.

Through the acts and scenes in this paper I created a script made up of distinct stories, taking place in different urban spaces, and involving different protagonists. The script focused on the multiple and complicated ways borders as technologies of power *incite* and *induce* possible ways of action—when migrants bend their head, lower their gaze, cross the street in order not to frighten passer-bys, when they get off the train, when they accept the remarks without answering, when they say "there is no more room for migrants in Greece". This same script shows how locals embody and perform the border, when they feel entitled to demarcate the public urban spaces, to ask the questions, to frame the remarks, to undermine, to patronise.

Starting from the everyday life, one can also think about the multiple ways borders are traversed, contested, and subverted by "migrants" and "locals". In the different acts and scenes, one comes across all these moments when migrants did not back down but replied, claimed belonging and their right to public spaces, challenged—with their bodies and words—their subordination. But also to all these moments that "locals" questioned their own privilege, ignored the multiple (b)orderings and demarcations, and built relations of mutual care and reciprocity.

If the "identities" of the subjects are not stable and fixed but continuously under construction through practices and encounters, so are the "identities" of the different places. Thinking of the ways borders are negotiated in everyday life, sheds light on many different aspects of cities: not only those of fear, exclusion and "ghettos" but also the cities of coexistence, spontaneity, care and affection. Cities that are ambivalent, never closed or completed but are *a simultaneity of stories-so-far*.

The suggestions for future research that arise from this paper are simple. In order to understand how borders work, we have to not only analyse the borderzones or conceive them through policies, dominant discourses and institutions: we should also try to elaborate on the continuity of experience, on the simultaneity and ambiguity of space, to elaborate on the particular moment as it is rooted within history and space, fabricated within the multiple and interwoven experiences of violence, dispossession and struggle at the intersections of class, gender, race and sexuality. To shed light on the significance of the insignificant practices of everyday life, on the multiple and conflicting border negotiations that manufacture subjectivities and spaces, from the camp to the train carriage, from the border zone to the city squares, from the body to the globe.

To be continued…

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