

# CROSSING THE BORDER OF BAB SEBTA: BODY-TERRITORY AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN RANDA MAROUFI'S ARTISTIC PRACTICE

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## Introduction

A partir de aquí estamos como a 2 km de la frontera.



**Fig. 1.** Randa Maroufi, *Bab Sebta*, 2019, film, 19'. Courtesy of the artist.

Framed by a naturalistic soundscape of fragments of conversations, the crying of seagulls, the sound of a helicopter and traffic noise, the viewer is introduced to Randa Maroufi's short film *Bab Sebta*. The statement locates the scene near a border, which is visually identifiable as part of Spain's external EU border by a customs sign with the word 'España' and the twelve golden stars against a royal blue background - we are at the *Frontera Sur* (fig. 1). Bab Sebta is the Arabic name for the Spanish enclave at the Strait of Gibraltar on the African continent and means 'door to Ceuta'. The enclave - along with Melilla - not only forms part of the European external border since 1991, by decision of the Schengen Agreement but is also the last legacy of the colonial occupation of North Africa.<sup>1</sup> When you walk through that door, you enter not just another city or country, but another continent. In the film, the enclave becomes the scene of large-scale smuggling activity and the actions in this literal grey zone become visible.

<sup>1</sup> See: Shore, Chris (1993). Inventing the "people's Europe": critical approaches to European community cultural policy. *Man, New Series*, 28, 779-800.

“هادي بلاصتنا حنا البراغدية”<sup>2</sup> emphasises a female voice from the off. By focusing on the smuggling activities at the Strait of Gibraltar, Maroufi continues a visual thinking that also can be found in Ursula Biemanns and Angela Sanders’ *Europlex* (2003), Yto Barradas’ *The Smuggler* (2006), and Irene Gutierrez and Yousef Drissi’ *Connected Walls: #Mujeres* (2014). By making the borderlandscape visible, the artists subvert the prevailing regime of invisibility, since filming is strictly prohibited on the border. As Maroufi states: “It is impossible to film the border as I am showing it in the movie.”<sup>3</sup>

In academia, both enclaves have been described as “Limboscapes”<sup>4</sup>, “Exceptional territories”<sup>5</sup>, “Sets that overlap geopolitics and biopolitics”<sup>6</sup>, spaces of progressive externalisation<sup>7</sup> and technologization<sup>8</sup> of external borders. A border geography that manifests itself not only as “always gendered, always raced, always economical and always sexual”<sup>9</sup> as Irit Rogoff notes about the construction of geography and space, but also through ongoing coloniality. By understanding colonialism, from a decolonial perspective<sup>10</sup>, not as a historically completed episode, but as deeply

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<sup>2</sup> *Bab Sebta*: Min. 7.28. “This is the place for us smugglers.” The translation was provided by the artist.

<sup>3</sup> Maroufi, Randa. Interview with author, 04/2021.

<sup>4</sup> Ferrer-Gallardo, Xavier and Albert-Mas, Abel (2013). EU-Limboscapes. Ceuta and the Proliferation of Migrant Detention Centers across the European Union. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 23,(3).

<sup>5</sup> Gabrielli, Lorenzo and Ferrer-Gallardo, Xavier (2018). *Estados de excepción en la excepción el Estado*. Barcelona:Icaria Editorial.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, Corey and Jones, Reece (2018). The biopolitics and geopolitics of border enforcement in Melilla. *Territory Politics Governance* 6,(1), 1-20.

<sup>7</sup> Zapata-Barrero, Ricard and Ferrer-Gallardo, Xavier (2012). *Fronteras en Movimiento: Migraciones hacia la UE en el contexto Mediterráneo*. Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson et al, (2011). Interventions on Rethinking ‘The Border’. *Border Studies Political Geography* 30.

<sup>9</sup> Rogoff, Irit (2000). *Terra Infirma. Geography’s Visual Culture*. London: Routledge, 28.

<sup>10</sup> As introduced by the Grupo Modernidad/Colonialidad. See: Mignolo, Walter (2000). *Local histories/global designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledge, and Border*

embedded in the global world to this day, Ceuta is negotiated as a place where Western-colonial states of domination are still particularly tangible. The Strait of Gibraltar is thus understood as a highly constructed geography embedded in a complex web of colonial and geopolitical entanglements. A texture, as Rogoff follows, that is “daily re-written through a word, a gaze, a gesture.”<sup>11</sup> Gestures, words and regimes of gaze are the main focus in Maroufi’s film, drawing attention to the border experiences and actions that create the Spanish-Moroccan border from an everyday perspective. Maroufi’s exploration of cross-border smuggling and its various actors is particularly apt to negotiate how the ‘colonial matrix of power’<sup>12</sup> is still deeply inscribed in the geography and people who live there to this day. Since Smuggling, according to Chemseddoha Boraki, is a predominantly female practice in North Africa “that appears in periods of disequilibrium: war, famine, colonisation”<sup>13</sup> and thus appears deeply interwoven in the negotiation processes of power between colonisers and colonised.

The paper will explore how border experiences are explored and represented in the artistic practices of Randa Maroufi. In doing so, it will provide a critical analysis of her film *Bab Sebta* and the series *Diwana* on how they contribute to the production of knowledge of issues around the physical and conceptual border(s) at the Strait of Gibraltar. By approaching this border geography from a perspective of everydayness, the artist is, I argue, seen as having a particular potential

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Thinking. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press. Quijano, Aníbal (2007). Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality (168 — 178). *Cultural Studies*, 21,(2), London:Routledge.

<sup>11</sup> Rogoff, Terra Infirma, 28.

<sup>12</sup> Quijano, Anibal and Ennis, Michael (2000). Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1,(3), 533-580.

<sup>13</sup> Boraki, Chemseddoha (2001). Les Contrebandières: Woman as Smuggler. *Women: A Cultural Review*, 12,(2), 176-191, 183.

to disrupt traditional (Western colonial) border discourses and notions. The artistic practice makes it possible to know otherwise by encouraging a thinking of the (border) geography taking the body as a starting point.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the negotiation of modernity, coloniality and de/colonisation goes hand in hand with the question of how far art proposes a possibility for the suspension of modern/colonial power relations? Both works privilege the stories and perspectives of those who live on and cross the border on a daily basis and bring this embodied knowledge into the hegemonic Western discourse. Maroufi not just challenges and changes geographical knowledge production but also Western modern/colonial epistemologies.

### **Aesthetics of the border experience**

“I wanted to give value to the bodies, that they don’t have in the landscape.”<sup>15</sup> With this quote Maroufi reminds us that, since modernity, artistic practices have had an important role in shaping, not only the idea of space, but also the idea of the bodies inhabiting that space. As can be concluded from the quotation, the artist understands her practice not merely as a reproduction of or reflection on an ‘existing reality’, but rather as having the potential of transformation by giving value. Alongside this ethical-political claim, Maroufi places herself in the *Generation 00* designated by Abdellah Karroum. A group of Moroccan artists, who “seek to connect art to life.”<sup>16</sup> Artworks, as those of Maroufi, become in this line of thought useful contributions to society, especially with regard to marginalised subject positions.

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<sup>14</sup> For a more extensive discussion of how art makes it possible to know in a different way, see: Guasch, Anna María. (2021). *Derivas: Ensayos críticos sobre arte y pensamiento*. Madrid: Akal.

<sup>15</sup> Maroufi. Interview, 04/2021.

<sup>16</sup> Karroum, Abdellah (2021). *Moroccan Trilogy 1950-2020*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía Madrid, 25.

In her film, the artist stages the various actors of *Bab Sebta*: border guards, police officers, *Guardia Civil* officers, tourists, and smugglers. A re-enactment of everyday life at the border, which unfolds like an atmosphere throughout the film in the scenes of waiting, praying, playing, listening to music, checking the boots, monitoring, playing sports and smuggling. The narration of the film takes place as a tour of the checkpoint, which is commented on by several different voices, each giving insights into their experiences. An everydayness that at the same time enables an understanding of the border in its multifaceted modes of articulation as experienced through the body. Maroufi thus draws attention to the everyday dimension of the border and how it is experienced by people, the border experiences. In this way, she links to the idea of the border as social (re)production, in which the sum of the different experiences of those who 'inhabit' it daily determines its constitution. Borders, as well as their transgression, are closely linked to aesthetics. If, as Johan Schimanski and Stephen Wolfe suggest with the concept of 'border aesthetics'<sup>17</sup>, as well as Mieke Bal's approach to 'migratory aesthetics'<sup>18</sup>, we understand 'aesthetics' from its etymological meaning as sensation and perception, it can be assumed that borders always have something to do with aesthetics. Sensations and perceptions are always conceived in the plural and subject-dependent. By looking at the experiences of the border from the daily and multifaceted ways of articulation through the medium of video - a medium that is itself characterised by movement - Maroufi designs an

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<sup>17</sup> Schimanski, Johan and Wolfe, Stephen (2017). *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*. New York: Berghahn Books, 150.

<sup>18</sup> Bal, Mieke (2008). Migratory Aesthetics, double movement. *Exit*, 32, 152. Bal, Mieke and Hernández Navarro, Miguel Á. (2011). *Art and Visibility in Migratory Culture. Conflict, Resistance, and Agency*. Amsterdam/New York: Editorial Rodopi, 11.

‘aesthetic of border experience’ that has a productive potential, the ability to initiate change, to set things in motion, as will be shown in the following.

The staging in a dark and monochrome space, as well as the slow-motion, emphasises the bright colours of the clothes, textiles and goods and directs the viewer’s attention to the performance, the actors and their actions. A *mise-en-scène* that recalls Lars von Trier’s *Dogville* (2003): the bird’s-eye view, the location in a dark and ‘empty’ space, the minimalist props, the clean lines and invisible walls, and the ‘cleanliness’ that emphasises the ostensible theatricality of the production. In *Bab Sebta*, the ensemble is focused from a double point of view: from above, like the gaze of a cartographer structuring spaces or indicating administrative and practical divisions; or rather like the view from a helicopter seeing, monitoring and controlling what is happening. And from the ground, life-size and at eye level. A radical change of perspective, through which the “monarch-of-all-I-survey point-of-view”<sup>19</sup> is abandoned, and which puts us in almost distance-free proximity to people.

### **An immersive methodology**

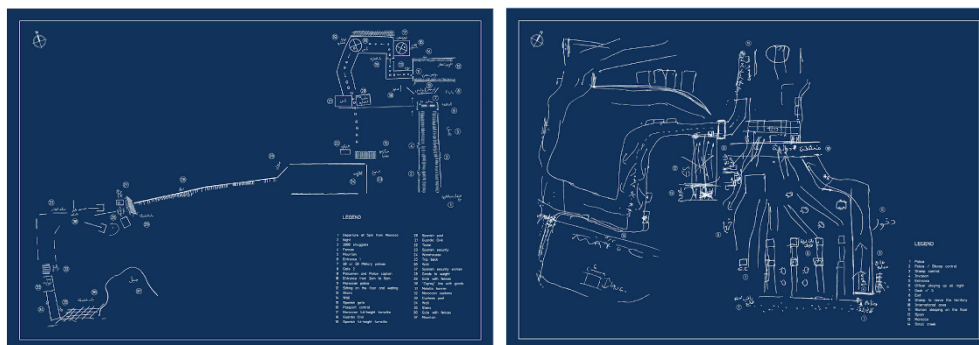
It was important that the inhabitants were part of the project since we were on their territory. We spent a lot of time together and in this way got into a relationship.<sup>20</sup>

In preparation for the film, the artists interviewed several inhabitants of the region in order to understand everyday life at the border from different perspectives. Excerpts of these conversations appear as off-screen voices in the film. In the resulting relationship that emerged

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<sup>19</sup> Pratt, Mary Louise (2008). *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 197.

<sup>20</sup> Maroufi. Interview, 10/2021.



**Figs. 2 and 3.** Randa Maroufi, *Diwana*, *Sans titre 1* and *Sans titre 2*, 2018-2020, cyanotype print on Velin d'Arches paper, 100 x 135,5 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

during the interviews, Maroufi's artistic practice manifests itself as an 'immersive methodology' that attempts to interrupt the subject/object dualism established in the colonial context between the researching artist and the object to be explored. A method that recognises the borderland dwellers as knowledge-producing subjects. Maroufi thus questions the 'norms' of creative practices of previous generations, as Karroum postulates for *Generation 00*, driven by the desire to no longer be complicit in a system that (re-)produces inequalities.<sup>21</sup> In order to achieve a more precise understanding of the border, the interlocutors made drawings during the conversations, which were transferred into blueprints by the artist and recorded as a series of works.

*Diwana* (2018-2020) consists of five sketches of the Ceuta checkpoint. From a bird's eye view, the drawings of white lines on a blue-coloured background show an individual and subjective view of the border. *Sans titre 1* (fig. 2) therefore shows the perspective of a smuggler, *Sans titre 2* (fig. 3), that of a trader, and *Sans titre 3*, that of a warehouse worker from Ceuta. All the illustrations have an English-language legend

<sup>21</sup> Karroum: Moroccan Trilogy, 27.



translating the Moroccan information and providing details about the material objects – walls, entrances, stairways and fences – as well as the people – 2000 smugglers, 20-30 Military Police, and Guardia Civiles. The arrows suggest a Parcours, from ‘1 Departure at 5 pm from Morocco’, along ‘9 Stamp to leave the territory’, to the ‘27 Trip back’. The drawings differ in horizontal and vertical format, in the details and their comprehend-siveness, but also in the lines, sometimes these seem slow and careful, at other times fast and unclear. Looking at the series as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the checkpoint is revealed through the different perspectives of the people, how they experience and remember it from their daily crossing, in what they consider important (or irrelevant by its absence). Drawing here becomes a form of the production of knowledge that leads to a more complex, multi-perspective understanding of the border.

By transferring the drawings to cyanotypes, Maroufi uses a common aesthetic of architectural planning in which the blueprint functions as the basis for the ground plan of a building. An aesthetic that at the same time recalls colonial surveying and space control mechanisms. But the technical and objective character of the architectural floor plan, which reflects a concrete order and dimension of geometric spaces, contrasts with the subjective approach, the irregular lines drawn by hand and the different indications in *Diwana*. In the different versions, it is precisely the variations as a reference to the drawing subject and their situated perspective that call into question objectifying and seemingly universally accepted forms of knowledge as well as geographical assumptions. In the sketches, no supposedly objective reality of the architectural border space is reproduced; rather, it is a variety of subjective border realities that become visible through the

performative acts of drawing. The constellations can thus be read as visual translations of personal experiences and narratives, as inner – daily incorporated – cartographies of the border.

The starting point of Maroufi’s artistic investigation is the people’s daily experiences. It is a starting from the ‘consciousness’ - we could say -, as postulated by Gloria Anzaldúa in reference to *La Frontera*, through the experiential and embodied knowledge.<sup>22</sup> The border is thus not only the object of analysis but also an epistemological framing and standpoint. The knowledge made visible in artistic practice can be understood as *pensamiento fronterizo*. Through border thinking, Walter Mignolo argues for an epistemological shift toward an “epistemology of and from the border.”<sup>23</sup> The concept provides an epistemic framework for the geopolitics of knowledge and (bio-)power that defies the Western paradigm, pointing to the creativity that emerges from subalternised subject positions: thinking *through* or *from* the border, rather than thinking *about* it. This is precisely where Maroufi intersects: a mode of artistic practice that replaces the *over* in favour of a *with, through* and *from*. This immersive and collaborative methodology manifests an epistemic paradigm shift: knowledge does not emerge from distance or a single gaze but takes place as a process of interpersonal relations of grasping and understanding.

The *Diwana* series in particular shows that a specific embodied knowledge emerged from the daily experience of the border, translated into a visual medium through drawing. Drawing, therefore, becomes a

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<sup>22</sup> Anzaldúa, Gloria (1987). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lupe.

<sup>23</sup> Mignolo (2000). *Local histories/global designs*, 52.

means of intervention and rupture. The ruptures with modern Western epistemologies to position 'other' knowledge show a post-/decolonial claim of Maroufi's practice.<sup>24</sup> By acknowledging the hidden and invisible subjects and making their experiences and actions visible, her artistic practice thus becomes a 'third space' itself for 'other' epistemologies. Maroufi's practice emerges as an immersive method through which borderlanders are recognised as indispensable producers of knowledge, subverting traditional forms not only of art but also of geographical knowledge. Artistic practice thus becomes a process of translation into a visual medium based on thinking from an embodied experience of the border, inviting us "to think from the ground up, from the body, therefore averts the generalizations that are common to abstract modern/colonial thought."<sup>25</sup> A catalyst for 'stories

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<sup>24</sup> A rupture as postulated by Zaragocín from decolonial feminisms. See: Zaragocín, Sofía (2022). Ampliando los espacios de los feminismos descoloniales desde los territorios y territorialidades antirracistas. *Epistemologías do Sul: Feminismos latino-americanos, ativismos e insurgências*, 5,(2), n. p.

<sup>25</sup> Lugonés, María following Icaza, Rosalba (2017). Border Thinking and Vulnerability as a Knowing Otherwise. Browne, Victoria, Danely, Jason, and Rosenow, Doerthe (Eds.). *Vulnerability and the Politics of Care: Transdisciplinary Dialogues*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3.

from below', 'oral stories' and 'stories of everyday life'. Stories that, in their coming together as different voices from off-screen in the film, lead beyond a situated point of view to a 'multi situated structure of knowledge'<sup>26</sup>: not an objective reading of the border is proposed, but multiple subjective narratives (also) in relation to each other. By focusing on divergent perspectives, material practices and deviations, the perspective of border experiences enable a dynamic and transformative understanding of different dimensions of geography that goes beyond the symbolic fixations of the ground plan or cartography. Maroufi's works open up a critical space of counter-mapping in which border thinking unfolds, privileging knowledge that is not recognised in the 'grand narratives' of hegemonic knowledge production but, rather, emerges in the cracks of dominant discourses of modernity/coloniality. Following this, the drawings can be read as

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<sup>26</sup> Following Donna Haraway's call for situated knowledge, Maroufi's practice relates, as I argue, to multiple situated points of view. Haraway, Donna (1995). *Situiertes Wissen. Die Neuerfindung der Natur. Primaten, Cyborgs und Frauen*. Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag.



**Fig. 4.** Randa Maroufi, *Bab Sebta*, 2019, film, 19'. Courtesy of the artist.

“hidden transcripts’ of people who are faced with superior power.”<sup>27</sup> The transfer into an artistic medium not only makes these transcripts visible but also unfolds their subversive potential. In the appropriation and adaptation of traditional mechanisms of control and structuring of territoriality, as depicted by mapping, the borderland dwellers in *Diwana* become architects of the border space constituted in the film and thus detached from the passive object status assigned to them in modern/colonial logic. Blueprints, designs of the border that serve as the basis for *Bab Sebta* (fig. 4).

### **The potential of the (in)visible border space**

In the film, the border is reduced to a flat monochrome theatre stage with lines on the floor to mark different zones and functions. The missing backdrop allows a view into the border space, making visible what is otherwise hidden behind the materiality of walls and roofs. In this aesthetic of (in)visibility, the border only comes into being through

<sup>27</sup> Barrada, Yto following Higgin, Jennifer (2011). Talking Pictures. *Frieze*, 142. <https://www.frieze.com/article/talking-pictures-0> (13. 09.2021).

the 'border dwellers'. Through their modes of action, movements, and gestures, the border is appropriated and at the same time (re-)produced. It is the sum of the different actors "at, on, or shaping the border"<sup>28</sup> who construct the space as a *borderscape*<sup>29</sup> and make it visible.

Thus, the borderline is expanded into a (staged) space in which the different figures become visible in tense relationships and thus enter into a process of negotiation. The entire film unfolds along moments of interaction, a brief conversation, a casual exchange of gazes (fig. 5), a move that demands a reaction (fig. 6). This staging of everyday actions neither excludes marginalised nor privileged actors. Instead, they appear in relation to each other and the traditional (linear) border – one of the most powerful discourses and domination formations of 'modernity', as María do Mar Castro Varela underlines<sup>30</sup> – is (re-)defined as part of an experienced relational space and hegemonic border regimes are questioned. The border becomes conceivable in the film, as Edward Soja and Homi Bhabha would call it 'third space'.<sup>31</sup> A space that is defined by the doing in it, as Michel de Certeau already pointed out.<sup>32</sup> *Bab Sebta* is therefore defined by cross-border smuggling activities.

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<sup>28</sup> Rumford, Chris (2012). Towards a Multiperspectival Study of Border. *Geopolitics*, Vol. 17/4, 887-902.

<sup>29</sup> Brambilla, Chiara (2014). Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept. *Geopolitics* 20(1), 1-21.

<sup>30</sup> Castro Varela, María do Mar (2015). *Unzeitgemäße Utopien: Migrantinnen zwischen Selbsterfindung und Gelehrter Hoffnung*. Bielefeld: transcript, 52.

<sup>31</sup> Soja, Edward W. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Cambridge: Blackwell. Bhabha, Homi K. (2000). *Die Verortung der Kultur*. Tübingen: Springer Link, 37.

<sup>32</sup> De Certeau, Michel (1988). *Kunst des Handelns*. Berlin: Springer Link, 218.



**Figs. 5, 6 and 7.** Randa Maroufi, Bab Sebta, 2019, film, 19'. Courtesy of the artist.

It is precisely in the scenes in which the smugglers pass the border control that the understanding of the border is expanded from a line as an in-between space to a cross-border interaction space (fig. 7). One smuggler after another takes a bundle and lifts it onto the customs control station, where it is pushed along by officials, only to be picked up again by the smuggler on the other side. A ritualised, repetitive sequence of movements of interlocking processes emerges. The visible interactions remind us of work processes in a factory, the procedures seem mundane, monotonous and rehearsed. It is a technical and almost mechanical aspect of the daily use of the border, where bodies move in a structural way. The double perspective allows capturing a ritual ballet in the space between Africa and Europe, where mobility is strictly regulated and at the same time recalls the choreographies of body control during Spain's colonial presence in North Africa. The notion of the border constructed in colonial logic as an instrument of a dichotomous order of two opposing positions – separated by a borderline – is initially (re-)produced in the scene, but immediately contradicted by the following interactions. These interactions are thus “[...] acts of destabilisation, of setting in motion and keeping in motion”<sup>33</sup>, as Beatrice von Bismarck introduces with her concept of *Grenzbe-spielungen*. A ‘border acting’ is initiated in the film and thus connects agencies – since agency is thought of in its plural form - and border space. By translating everyday actions into this empty stage space, the sequences of movements are specifically visualised and at the same time become legible as performative acts. Performativity, as argued by Judith Butler regarding the un/doing of gender, implies the

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<sup>33</sup> Bismarck, Beatrice von (2005). *Grenzbespielungen: Visuelle Politik in der Übergangszone*. Köln: Walther König, 10.



fixation on a person's gender as well as the possibility of undoing dominant notions of sex/gender, sexuality and identity.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, in *Bab Sebta*, one can speak of a de/stabilisation of the border and de/construction of hegemonic forms of border drawing and processes of de/bordering. The visual staging as a performance of everyday actions defines the border as a performative space in which bodily movements take place and it thus has a shifting function. Only the stage as temporally unstable ground enables the productive and destabilising connections. In *Bab Sebta*, the border is a stage on which subjects, goods and things can be together in their relationship of movement.

Thinking of (border) space as a stage that is performed on and on which complex and multi-layered power relations unfold, as postulated with the 'spatial turn'<sup>35</sup> of the 1980s, can already be found in the novel *La Grande Maison* by the Algerian writer Mohammed Dib, published in 1952.<sup>36</sup> It seems remarkable that he, as well as Maroufi later, links the negotiation of territorial borders to smuggling. Through the figure of Aïni, he describes the smuggling of goods across the Moroccan-Algerian border as a primarily female reality in North Africa. Smuggling is conceived as a tragic-ritual dance that the smugglers perform with the customs officials in the 'border (stage) space'. A choreography, just as in *Bab Sebta*, with ritualised steps and traditional hierarchies between the dancers, which are at the same time renegotiated. Both authors do not create outside of the capitalist/colonial power logic, but rather think of

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<sup>34</sup> Butler, Judith (2004). *Undoing Gender*. London: Routledge.

<sup>35</sup> The spatial turn refers to a turn in cultural studies, inspired by Michel Foucault and discussed since the 1980s, which foregrounds space as a stage for historical and cultural events. See: Bachmann-Medick, Doris (2006): Spatial Turn (284-328). *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*. Reinbek: Rowohlt. For a broad discussion on the introduction of conceptual turns into the field of visual arts, see: Guasch, Anna Maria (2016). *El arte en la era de lo global 1989-2015*. Madrid: Alianza Forma.

<sup>36</sup> Dib, Mohammed (1954). *La Grande Maison*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, n.p.

the seemingly dichotomous positions in their tense webs of relationships as a choreography of everyday life.

Precisely the tension of the invisible border space, which makes the bodies, goods and actions more visible, simultaneously illustrates the subversive potential of smuggling and points to the destabilisation of the border as a line of power. This seems to change the border in its construction, from a line as a sign of power on a map, to an anthropogenic space that people build through their actions and interactions as “a web of moving elements”<sup>37</sup>, as *bordertexture*<sup>38</sup>. The gestures, acts and actions in the film create a space of interaction that thrives on going back and forth, on re-engaging and re-connecting. The daily interactions form what Rogoff describes as the ‘texture’ that ultimately constitutes geography. These are acts of border texturing<sup>39</sup> since the interaction performatively creates the border as a texture. In the (in)visible interlocking strands of action, the apparent dichotomy of two opposing positions is dynamized and traditional hierarchies and fixed roles are questioned and renegotiated.

Maroufi thus refers less to a fixation of meaning by border practices than to interrelated, networked, regularly occurring but never completely constant social practices that enable an understanding of

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<sup>37</sup> Certeau. *Kunst des Handelns*, 218.

<sup>38</sup> The concept of *bordertexture* and the approach of *bordertexturing* are introduced as a perspective by the *Bordertexture*-working group. Here, an understanding of borders as effects and generators of complex formations is proposed. Weier, Sebastian, Fellner, Astrid, et al. (2018): *Bordertexturen als transdisziplinärer Ansatz zur Untersuchung von Grenzen: Ein Werkstattbericht. Berliner Debatte Initial* 29(1), 73-83.

<sup>39</sup> Fellner, Astrid (2020). *Counter-Mapping Corporeal Borderlands: Border Imaginaries in the Americas* (287-300). Florian Weber, et al. *Geographien der Grenze*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS. Burgos, H., Fellner, A. M. (2021). *Desbordes/Undoing Borders: hacia nuevas epistemologías fronterizas*. *Post(s)*, 7.

border geography as a choreography of movements, interactions and entanglements. “Meaning” as Rogoff has also described “is never produced in isolation or through isolating processes but rather through intricate webs of connectedness”.<sup>40</sup> The movements and processes in border space reveal “how the notion of the mobile, moving body as a textual, geographical and information-organising system becomes a geographical subject that constitutes the very spaces it inhabits, traverses, leaves occupies or acts upon in some other significant way”.<sup>41</sup> In this way, the agencies become conceivable as a mutually constituting and intertwined structural framework and is thus not a question of the inherent ability (or not) of the individual subject, but rather of the discursive-materially constructed conditions in which subjects perform in space.

### **Body-territory-border**

“The body is at once... the actualizer of power relations and that which resists power.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Rogoff, Irit (2006). ‘Smuggling’ – An Embodied Criticality. *Transform*, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Biemann, Ursula (2005). Videographie. Bismarck. *Grenzbespielungen*, 79.

<sup>42</sup> Feher, Michel (1987). Of Bodies and Technologies (159–165). Hal Foster (Ed.). *Discussions in Contemporary Culture* 1, Seattle: The New Press, 161.



**Fig. 8.** Randa Maroufi, *Bab Sebta*, 2019, film, 19'. Courtesy of the artist.

Highly visible on this 'border stage' are the *porteadoras*, women who tie smuggled goods and textiles around their bodies up to twice their size, or tie them onto their backs as a bundle. The women help each other to layer goods around their bodies (fig. 8). While a standing woman pulls up her white *djellaba* so that another can wrap contraband around her leg with packing tape, more layers of fabric and goods already taped to the body become visible. Two other women help a third to tie a package on her back.

The border geography thus materialises – in its intersection as 'always gendered, always raced, always economical, always sexual, and always colonial'- in the bodies which cross it, as Anzaldúa has shown.<sup>43</sup> It inscribes itself into the flesh and is literally carried on their backs. The body is materialised through the bodily experience of the border, not only in the crossing of the territorial border, but also in the

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<sup>43</sup> Anzaldúa. *Borderlands*, 25.

transgression of the physical boundaries, the de-/ and re-/bordering of the body, and by crossing the body. The border manifests itself *with* the body, *on* the body and *through* the body. The body of the smuggler is thus conceived as *cuerpo-territorio-frontera*.<sup>44</sup> This perspective implies the idea of the body as a territory in conflict with patriarchal as well as colonial power, but also as a space of subversion and agency. Different categories of social inequality across the *cuerpo-territorio-frontera*, metaphorically held together by the strings and packing tape that is (re-)produced and negotiated daily in women's actions. It is the result of a symbolic-discursive practice in which the categories interact in different power relationships and are interwoven in multiple layers. This instability, as Bal and Hernández Navarro note, holds a productive potential that can be seen as a moment of vulnerability, as power relations that become visible in the film, and at the same time as spaces of possibility that emerge from it. The perspective of the border experience, I argue, strengthens the role of the actors crossing the border, those who are entangled in it and who continually negotiate it through their everyday practices, actions and gestures. The smugglers' actions are specific and focused, indicating a concrete strategy, developed from the daily experience of the border. The women do not hesitate; they know what they are doing and, more importantly, how the border works, and are recognised as active agents of it.

This perspective of the border experience, which arises in the works through the women's actions, enables a conceptual possibility to think

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<sup>44</sup> The conceptualisation of the female body as a *cuerpo-territorio-frontera* follows Zaragoza/Caretas concept of *cuerpo-territorio*, as well as Cabnal's *territorio cuerpo-tierra*. See: Zaragoza, Sofia and Caretta, Martina Angela (2020). *Cuerpo-Territorio: A Decolonial Feminist Geographical Method for the Study of Embodiment. Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 111,(5). Cabnal, Lorena (2010). *Feminismos diversos. El feminismo comunitario*. Madrid: Acsur Las Segovias.

of how subjects shaped by different social categories and structures of power and oppression simultaneously create spaces for action from them. Thus, María Lugones, understanding the categories of race, class, sex and gender as Western hegemonic constructs, points out that the potential of resistance against the *poder colonial de género* can arise at their (inter)intersections.<sup>45</sup> The aesthetically visible gestures of wrapping and folding the goods and textiles around the female body thus metaphorically become an 'intersectional weaving' of multiple layers of oppressions that bear and give meaning, but at the same time are recognised as strategies of resistance that possess a productive potential of subversion against these power structures - the potential to challenge the border from below. A continuous negotiation of coloniality and modernity, which in *Bab Sebta* is carried out through the female body in its interplay with goods and textiles. As demonstrated through the film, the border constitutes a dispositive of power that structures the body, its experiences and its boundaries, turning the body into a multi-layered territoriality where the border interweaves with the flesh to form the body. At the same time, these bodies in their actions and interactions constitute the border space itself. Thus, the artist encourages a thinking of the border starting from the body and in this way challenge and change geographical knowledge production.

## Conclusion

National borders, such as the Strait of Gibraltar, conceived in Western modern/colonial epistemology as a line on a flat and two-dimensional surface of the map, invisibilise and intentionally erase territories, loci of

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<sup>45</sup> Lugones, María (2011). Hacia un feminismo descolonial. *La manzana de la discordia*, 6, (2), 105-119, 115.

enunciation, experiences and actions. It is here where the decolonial potential of Maroufi's artistic practice is shown by making these territories and spaces, experiences and actions visible. Maroufi designs the border as a *borderscape*, as a multi-dimensional construction that is experienced, embodied and negotiated by the borderland inhabitants and thus goes beyond the modern idea of clearly demarcated national territories - as suggested by the European customs plate. The border is formed by the people, their actions, and their doing; it is the result of acts, of stylized repetitions of actions. At the same time, the border shapes the reality of people's lives and forms their bodies. In the works, the border does not merely become a visible place that is interpreted and defined according to its aesthetic image but arises from a complex web of conditions of possibility that are not immediately visible and in which the relationship between space, lived experience and power are inscribed.

Drawing on a decolonial option that constantly questions and sets in motion the locus of enunciation - literally and symbolically - and is thus open to change, Maroufi's works enable thinking in motion that is traversed by the concept of border thinking. It is a multi-situated structure of border knowledge that constitutively overcomes binary logic since modernity, as it is accompanied by a shift from epistemic zero point to a production of knowledge from a web of connections and relations. In her work, Maroufi visualises a complex form of knowledge production: meaning emerges from a multi-situated structure, rather than from an independently situated standpoint or even a disembodied position. With her artistic practice, Maroufi abandons a theory of objectivity that promises transcendence - although this is precisely what the cartographic view from above initially suggests - in favour of a

multi-situated structure that relates very different standpoints shaped by power relations. From this perspective, the border becomes comprehensible through the various actors and their 'little stories of everyday life'.

Maroufi's artistic practice is a practice that contributes to the production of knowledge of socio-political issues around (physical and conceptual) border(s) of *Bab Sebta*, in which the experiences of the borderlanders have a particular significance. An immersive methodology that works through the *with* rather than *about* the 'other' and thus enacts an epistemological shift, enunciated from artistic practice. The perspective of borderland dwellers' experiences, which Maroufi privileges in her own practice, contributes to finding new ways of looking at the Spanish-Moroccan border from a multi-situated perspective creating 'new' border epistemologies starting from the body and the subjective experience.

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