



ART IN THE AGE OF SIEGE

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In this article, the author discusses how artists have responded to the globalization of fear.

The metaphor of flight has dominated our landscape in the age of globalization. Even those who have never left home are affected by the movements of others and by the arrival of new messages. Between the fall of the Berlin wall and prior to September 11, visions of the immediate future were dominated by images of free movement. Neo-liberal economists celebrated the innovations of 'just-in-time' delivery systems, calculated the benefits of out-sourcing and urged companies to develop new collaborative practices. The global hype of 'no frontiers' pumped oxygen in the old dreams of free trade as economic paradise. Container ships, sailing under flags of convenience, and overnight air cargo dispatches, became the twin icons of global traffic. Commodities could arrive with minimum cost and maximum speed. However, this fantasy of uninhibited mobility hides the violence of penetrating boundaries, and projects an image of the world as a flat grid system. All distances and objects, it presumes, can be calibrated according to a single value system.

This idealised map of the global trade sits uneasily with contemporary migratory patterns and the dispersal of new communication networks. Here the fantasy of mobility discovers links but also encounters new monsters, viruses and barriers. As Saskia Sassen has argued, while there is a greater proportion of the economy that is dematerialised and circulating within digital networks, there is also an uptake in cross-border communication initiatives in poor and marginal communities [1]. However, unlike digital transactions on the foreign money exchanges, or even the re-distribution of commodity production, human movement and communication has unintended and multi-directional consequences. Complexity and contradictions unwind in every point of contact. In every moment of human communication, as in every journey, there is a process of change.

According to Blair, all the state can do is adjust and react to the forces of global markets: "modernisation", he argues, "is about adapting to the conditions that have objectively changed". This pathetically timid

ISSUE 2
October 2005

response to the invisible hand of globalization stands in contrast to wildly assertive stands taken against the flight of refugees and phantasmagoric responses in the war on terror. These contradictions have opened a credibility void in mainstream politics.

The critical responses to these issues are now being driven from within the cultural domain. Artists have set out to challenge the labelling and create new perspectives on both the refugee crisis and the war on terror. In these practices, we can witness both the loss of faith in the official political discourses and an exploration of different modalities for expressing hope and developing ethical relations with others.

In this article I will focus on some select examples in contemporary art that challenge the mainstream political discourse, explore the complexities of cultural difference, represent the hidden forms of violence in contemporary society and propose ethical alternatives through interpretative strategies that emerge from collaborative practices in specific communities.

Alongside these cultural practices, I will critically examine the academic debates on cultural identity in order to expose another dimension of the blind spot over the violence towards the other. In particular, I will explore the backlash against the concept of hybridity as not only part of a rejection of a multiculturalist agenda but also as the re-inscription of the binary that differentiates the self from the other, polarizes differences and limits the possibilities for genuine dialogue. I will argue that these debates fail to articulate the levels of critical consciousness that artists contain in their cultural practice and also contribute to the violence and reductionism of neo-nationalism.

Artists have also seized the new communicative technologies to transform the modes of production and interaction with their work. They have argued that neither the context of their practice, nor the meaning of their work, is bound by an exclusive locale. However, the common desire to be visible on a global scale or participate in transnational dialogues does not mean that all contemporary artists have embraced the logic of global capital. On the contrary, they have been among the most outspoken critics of the homogenising tendencies in globalization, and among the most reluctant flag-wavers in the contemporary displays of neo-nationalism.

The events of September 11 and the global refugee crisis have sharpened the ethical demands in cross-cultural communications and re-defined the politics of transnational exchanges. Art cannot stand outside of these ethical and political challenges. From the diverse range of artistic responses that I will examine, we can witness strategies that have opposed

the border politics of exclusion, offered an alternative perspective on cultural identity and initiated a new ethical quest for community.

What sort of an alternative does this cultural resistance produce? Looking at the examples from some distance one can observe a diversity of struggles, some of which operate in isolation, and others that are interlinked by different media. They are concentrated in very specific sites but also connected to parallel events or like-minded agents in distant locations. These collective or collaborative ventures contest particular historical and political constructions but also draw on a broader discourse of cultural exchange and human rights. We can look at these instances of resistance as individual dots that either spin deeper into a terrain, or as clusters composed of diverse entities that work within a locale but also draw into their field information, support and motivation from a broader network.

These flashes of resistance can be seen all across the landscape of the contemporary world. The difficult question that now confronts us is whether all these dots and clusters are connected in a way that offers an alternative response to the dominant fears. This is not necessarily answered by an empirical calculation of the sum or scope of resistance. Although we have seen large-scale popular protests against the Iraq War and sporadic symbolic skirmishes over the consolidation of globalization, this has not led to any new ideological opposition movements. This has dented the authority and stripped the trust in the political and economic elites, but it has not provided a platform for a new form of leadership.

What has emerged is a complex amalgam of diverse nodes from within which like-minded agents have made tactical alliances. These fragmentary pockets of social interaction have sporadically produced intense bursts of resistance that have risen like flares but then faded into the horizon. The lifespan of these entities is limited. They do not consolidate within formal structures but have the dynamic of cluster. They combine elements from near and far in a loose configuration but also throw out signs that loop into other systems. Creative juxtapositions, unstable identities, non-linear feedback – these are some of the features of these new clusters.

The complexity of this cultural resistance is another indicator of the collapse of the ideological opposition between Western capitalism and Soviet socialism and a marker of the decline of US geo-political hegemony. This struggle cannot be grasped in terms of two rival discourses in conflict over supremacy. Similarly, the increasing scepticism and outright hostility to US unilateralism has also produced the most peculiar of social and political alliances. The forms of cultural struggle that are evident in the artworld – in large scale exhibitions like Documenta and the Venice Biennale, in major international surveys like ARS in

Kiasma, or even the modest artist run initiatives and collaborations— are all symptomatic of this complex process of local resistance and global feedback. The energy that sustains these events cannot be explained within the old binarisms of centre versus margin, or even the oppositional discourses of class struggles. There are paradoxical alliances that are being forged that defy the classifications in the conventional models of analysis. In the absence of proposing a single political umbrella that can cover all these diverse responses, I will suggest that we need to examine these events as part of a complex system. In particular, the shock of September 11, and the refugee crisis, have not only highlighted our complicities and proximities with global affairs but also the appeal to ethical forms of practice. Ethics has risen as a social need, rather just personal duty, because of the deepening void and aimlessness in contemporary politics.

ETHICS AFTER IDEOLOGY

Philosophers have differed on whether art either is subservient to ethical concerns or operates with relative autonomy within a zone that Nietzsche described as 'beyond good and evil'. My concern is not to privilege art over ethics and politics. It is more important to clarify whether art can serve as a counterpoint to the dominance of technocratic realism, and whether artists can overcome the collective state of hopelessness and challenge the ever-narrowing political frameworks. Sarat Maharaj has argued that artists contribute to the production of social knowledge in ways that are faster and more lateral than any academic model, as well as being broader and more direct than political discourse [2]. With speed and insight, artists can identify new trends or uncover secrets that have barely emerged in public consciousness.

Art is no panacea. While artists are nimble in their searching for clues and sharp in their observations of everyday life, they are not necessarily the ideal agents for proving arguments or consolidating new social structures. The function of art is therefore neither confined to its capacity to reflect, anticipate, clarify and expose social problems, nor related to the production the academic forms of social knowledge: analysis, revelation, explanation and prediction. Unlike the more conventional version of the social sciences, art does not proceed from within a singular or totalising theoretical framework. The language of modern art is always hybrid. It is composed from a multiplicity of conceptual threads and experiential sources. Art is not a substitute for theory and politics but rather an interlocutor with the metaphorical domain of ideas and the embodiment of power relations. The significance of artistic knowledge is, as Kant observed, a form of imaginative understanding that bridges the restricted domain of practical reasoning to the open space of freedom.

September 11 provided a stark reminder of the need to re-think the connections between art and politics. However, this task met considerable resistance in the mainstream artworld. Even after September 11, many critics and curators responded with disdain towards art that they perceived as either pointless activism or tedious literalism. They accepted that art needed to be more serious, but they did not want to be bothered by the sudden rise in poster production, involved in the tedious negotiations to facilitate critical urban interventions, or feel obliged to sit through the hours of video-based work. By dismissing these direct and difficult works as being inappropriate or even inconvenient for the artworld, they colluded with the slothful fantasy that the aesthetic impact of art in global culture is still instant and instinctual.

Perhaps the deep rifts that pass through the international artworld were made even more explicit by the events of September 11. Cosmopolitan fantasies were challenged by ambient fears. Against this growing atmosphere of uncertainty and paranoia, numerous artists, curators and theorists sought to comprehend how art could intervene in the public debates. The Australian curator/artist Mary Lou Pavlovic noted the urgency for an alternative, since the government's response was confined to "a discourse of racism and revenge" [3]. There was a renewed self-belief that art could expand our consciousness of the political and psychic dimension of tragedy [4]. The curators of *Slanting House/Statements by the Artists in Japan since 9/11* felt the need to go beyond the image of apocalypse and examine the deeper notion of ruin. The title of their exhibition expressed both a lament for collapsing structures and a reflection on the crisis that is not simply a relay of political messages. This redemptive task was powerfully expressed by the participating artist Tadasu Yamamoto: "We can probably assume that we entered a new century on September 11, 2001. The commencement was announced in inverted form through an overwhelmingly eschatological scene. The incident distinctly divided time into before and after. What used to be hidden became visible through that incident. What had been silently in progress somewhere deep in the world suddenly emerged in an apocalyptic spectacle. And ever since that incident, all acts of expression appear to have had a huge hole cut through by an absurd spectacle to the extent that they are so deeply wounded that they suffer a feeling of helplessness... Although there is no telling how certain the terrorists were about the effect such an image would have in carrying out those attacks, it is obvious that the sight of those planes crashing into the WTC and other buildings proved far stronger a weapon than a patriot missile, cluster bomb and daisy-cutter. People all over the world were attacked by the sight of those attacks broadcasted on television. I intend to convert the image shot into me into an artwork and throw it back to the world together

with a premonition of catastrophe” [5].

For the curator/theorist Okwui Enwezor, the image of Ground Zero provided an even broader metaphor for recognising the crisis of globalization. He argued that the old ‘dead certainties’ of ‘East versus West’, and Bush’s cowboy rhetoric, would only inflame further violence. For Enwezor, September 11 marked a moment of critical transformation: the problems of modernity were brought ‘home’ –the tensions that had been previously relegated to the margin were now being played out in the centre [6].

This is a profound challenge and it requires us to acknowledge that both political forces and cultural identities are caught in turbulent patterns of interconnection and displacement. As people move across boundaries, they bring with them different ideas and values. Interactions between different people may commence along old pathways, but they quickly bifurcate and develop within new networks. Traces of this dynamic process are evident in all aspects of social life. However, it is now necessary to understand the complexity of this dynamism, and in particular, the mutual transformation that occurs at both the margins and within the centres of contemporary culture. The dynamism of cultural exchange has been the subject of numerous exhibitions across the world. I will focus on a range of activities from the global art events like *ARS 01* in Helsinki (2001), *Documenta XI* in Kassel (2002), transnational projects by the Stalker collective *Via Egnatia* (2003-2005), to local collective interventions like *Borderpanic* in Sydney (2002), and also a number of individual artistic projects. In these wide-ranging events, artists and curators have challenged the national myths of belonging, investigated the process of cultural exchange, and proposed new models for ethical relations in everyday life.

ARTISTS IN OPPOSITION TO BORDER POLITICS

In times of crisis and conflict, artists are among the first to protest against authoritarian tendencies and propose alternative ways for relating to social issues. In Australia, for instance, artists were quick to show their solidarity with the asylum seekers in the wake of the Tampa crisis. One of the most prominent responses was Juan Davila’s *Woomera* (2002), a series of paintings and drawings in which he depicts the plight of the asylum seeker through the frontier myths of Australia’s colonial history. While the government was actively preventing the media from interviewing and photographing the asylum seekers and pushing their presence out of the public consciousness, Davila makes a point of depicting their struggle as part of the national mythology. Davila stages the drama of the detention camps against the background of the outback

combining the discordant codes of Albert Namijira and the fiery tones of colonial landscape narratives. To intensify the parallels between Aboriginal displacement, colonial settlement and contemporary migration, he repeatedly portrays the 'monstrous' figure of the refugee in the physiognomy of the dominant race.

In the painting "Detention Place" (2002), two figures dominate a desolate, turbulent and parched landscape. At the centre is a middle-aged man, probably from the caring professions. He is kneeling – possibly as a sign of penance, or perhaps in stunned exhaustion. Behind him, there is the red and brown glow of an industrial city. The whole atmosphere is dominated by whirling remorseless skies and a wind that seems to have stripped the trees of any vegetation. At the forefront of the painting is a strong, beautiful and naked woman. There are signs of blood having been smeared on her arms and thighs. She holds the shutter cable for a camera that faces the viewer. The image of violence has been turned awry and only points to the outsider: the one who is not inside the camp.

Almost three years after this painting was completed, a story emerged of the incarceration of a former Qantas crew member in an Australian detention centre. Cornelia Rau, German born Australian resident, suffered a mental breakdown and became delusional over her origins. The local Aborigines in northern Queensland who found her were convinced that she was ill and delivered her to the police. At this stage, she was detained along with the other 'illegals'. After ten months of searching, her family found her in tatters. She had been eating dirt, refusing to wear clothes, and did not recognise her own sister. The story sparked a national scandal: based on her 'foreign', uncooperative and clearly schizoid testimony, the Australian government had not only falsely imprisoned one of its own residents but had made numerous efforts to deport her to Germany. As noted by one of the commentators, this ordeal gripped national attention and provoked unparalleled protest against the detention system, when it was revealed that, like the central figure in Davila's painting, she turns out to be one of us [7].

Mike Parr's *Close the Concentration Camps* (2002) [8] was a performance in which his lips and eyelids were sewn together. It was a gesture of solidarity with the refugees, and an attempt to expose the inhumanity of a system that the Australian government was shielding from public view. Even before this performance was executed, the art critic David Bromfield dismissed the idea as a kind of "false realism" and questioned the vicarious motivation. In a letter to Parr, he remarked: "we both know that it is no good simply becoming a glorified stand-in for a camp inmate" [9]. Parr replied that doing something "bad" might have a greater social effect. Prior to the performance, Parr underwent a rigorous process of preparation that involved fasting and sleep-deprivation.

Through these experiences he sought to “violently split off whole zones of my body”, and perhaps mimic the state of bodily objectification that occurs in the traumatic experience of self-mutilation.

Parr’s re-naming of the government’s detention centres as “concentration camps” and the imperative to close them was not only an unambiguous political protest but also an act of symbolic shifting. It catapulted the seemingly sterile discourse of detention into the history of state barbarism. His use of terminology was a deliberate attempt to challenge the state’s terminology that evoked a false benevolence and concealed its own use of violence. Suspended in the hell of the ‘concentration camps’ and isolated from the outside world, many desperate individuals commenced acts of self-harm. With crude instruments and string they stitched shut their eyes and mouth. The government interpreted this gesture as moral blackmail and saw it as a sign of their superior moral fortitude and administrative integrity that they offered no response. Parr’s performance may not have caught the public imagination like the ‘real story of Cornelia Rau’, but those who paused to reflect could see that he had temporarily used his body as a metaphor for the disfiguration of civic space.

Alongside the individual works, there were also numerous collective responses to the refugee crisis in Australia. The exhibition called *Borderpanic* was a powerful guerrilla styled response to the ‘refugee crisis’. Upon entering the gallery my attention was immediately captured by Hossein Valamanesh’s photographic installation titled *Longing Belonging*. The absence of a preposition in this title also launches these two terms into orbit. They are drawn to each other, but an invisible and perhaps unbridgeable distance is also maintained. This work represents neither the exile’s nostalgic longing for belonging, nor the citizen’s slothful belonging in longing. The photograph shows a Persian carpet, a campfire and a clearing in the bush. By magic, the carpet seems to hover just above the ground, and the fire seems to be drawn by the carpet’s uplift. Is this an unhomely arrival, or the co-existence of two types of landing in a strange landscape?

The tense juxtapositions between place and meaning that are projected by Valamanesh in *Longing Belonging* are further echoed in a collage by Vivienne Dadour titled *Legislation Affecting Aliens 1895*. This work combines images from archival photographs of a family wedding, a small gathering of people squatting together, an early Christian building and a historical document that declares that Chinese and Syrian people should be excluded from Australia because they are carriers of unwanted parasites and intransigent customs. They are represented as biological and cultural risks to the integrity of the yet unformed nation. Dadour takes these images from her own family history, sets them on a canvas covered

in a black tar and washes the surfaces with a soft blue. The relationship between image and text is intended as a direct counterpoint. The racist texts are juxtaposed against images of community and hospitality. At the center is the peculiarly inviting gaze and gesture of a man looking up. His gaze immediately focuses the viewer's attention and offers 'us' the position of guest in his scene. It is an ancient invitation to share in food and drink. The gesture is unequivocal, the arms are open to embrace and receive. This gesture is aimed at the photographer, but it also goes beyond into the future of the unknown viewer. Generosity is declared despite the subject not knowing who will be on the other side of the photograph, and it prefigures the same gestures made from across the wire by refugees in Woomera: "tell them we are human, we are not animals" [10].

Carlos Capelan's sculpture "My House is Your House" (2005) is a stark reminder that hospitality is not unlimited service in a hotel. Capelan has repeatedly used the chair and a glass of water in his installations as a symbol of the minimum offering we can make to strangers. In this recent work, as part of his exhibition *Only You*, at the National Gallery of Uruguay, he has tied two stakes to the legs and back of an old fold up chair. These prosthetic legs transform the chair to resemble the frame of a tent, but the sculpture also carries the more sinister echo of a body thrust rigid by shock treatment. The invitation to share a house is a precarious gesture, for it splices the guest's acceptance onto the host's tensions.

Jacques Derrida has stressed that hospitality, unlike charity or other forms of investment, is made without any expectation of return. The 'gift of hospitality' is not offered with any expectation of gaining an appreciation in terms of economic security or social status. "Let us say yes to who or what turns up, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any identification" [11]. However, such an open-ended 'gift' can never find a place within any given legal or political structures. As Derrida argues, the gift is also held together with strings. An unconditional welcome, a concept that he concedes is practically inaccessible, is also posed against its opposite, the imperative of sovereignty. The right to mobility must be positioned alongside the host's right to authority over their own home. "No hospitality, in the classic sense, without sovereignty of oneself over one's home, but since there is also no hospitality without finitude, sovereignty can only be exercised by filtering, choosing, and thus by excluding and doing violence" [12].

When two rights are posed as both legitimate and incommensurable, then the task of negotiation becomes urgent. The competing rights are unrankable. You cannot decide by putting one above the other. To betray hospitality in order to secure sovereignty is a moral loss. To denounce sovereignty for total hospitality is a political catastrophe. In this conundrum, relativism is no help. Decisions need to be made. Curators

Maria Hlavajova and Gerardo Mosquera argued that by virtue of the “dialogic concept of art”, it can play a vital role in participating in, rather than merely observing, the conduct and content of these debates [13]. Artists in the exhibitions like *Cordially Invited* and *Borderpanic* have used the spaces of art not only as a tool for public discourse, but as stages to reinterpret the boundary between sovereignty and hospitality. No nation can ever totally open its borders, but the current hostility towards refugees is symptomatic of a deeper ambivalence towards our own sense of place and the repression of exilic narratives from the national imaginary. This ‘unknown history’ is excavated by the photo-monteur Peter Lyssiotis in his *The Great Wall of Australia*, a fictional documentation of a timber and brick fence that stretches across the infinite suburbia of Southern Australia. Lyssiotis not only probes the smug and self-contained architecture of suburban life, but also links this to the paranoid fantasies of border control. In contrast with the Arabic mythology of paradise as a walled garden, he represents the walls of suburban gardens as a block out. The wall not only limits topographic associations and excludes the ghosts that an indigenous artist like Darren Siwes would summon from the land, but it also protects the fragile forms of homely affection. The wall becomes a metaphor of our insecurity.

ARTISTS AS BORDER SHIFTERS

Between the USA and Mexico, there is a Real Great Wall. It is the place where the two Americas meet and one bleeds. For decades, migrants have been finding ways through the wall by going beneath it and travelling in the sewers or finding a way between the gaps. Others make the crossing over the sea by means of leaking boats and even on inflatable toys. The border between the towns of Tijuana and San Diego is a place of intense violence and creativity. During the 1980s, the artist collective *Border Arts Workshop* mimicked and celebrated the hybrid imagination of the itinerant border crossers. Perched on the Tijuana hills, there where illegal Mexican radio stations that declared themselves as ‘border busters’. These radio stations beamed their own blend of music that formed a bridge across Chicano-California. The artist collectives shared this energy – which they defined as a “formal and intellectual hybridism”- and set out to show that even the most fortified zone can be penetrated, and that ultimately cultural survival requires circulation and exchange [14].

However, a decade later the optimism of border crossing and vitalism of cross-cultural exchange has been overtaken by a far more despairing vision of the journey. On the border there are even more guards. On one side, there are those who live, and, as revealed in Chantal Ackerman’s multi-screen installation “From the Other Side” (2002) at ‘Documenta XI’, there are those who dream of leaving, for whom there is the road of death

and disillusionment before them. The installation is structured around the countless stories of migrants who seek to cross the frontier but fail, and by the silence of those disappeared. Alongside video footage of the guards tracking and pursuing migrants with the aid of helicopters and cameras armed with night vision, Ackerman recorded the stories of those who crossed and returned from the other side. The voice of survivors is not of conquest but of guilty solitude. It is in contrast to heroic stories of the proud migrants who see the journey across the border as the decisive point of destiny, the turning point at which they claim to have made something of one's life. The border is represented as an irresistible and yet fatal encounter. Before the border there are slogans warning "stay out and stay alive", closer by there is shrill pitch of police alarms, and even on 'the other side' there is the monstrous portrayal of 'wetbacks' on the Californian road signs – a man running and a mother pulling her child in flight.

While driving from Los Angeles to San Diego, the Thai curator Apinan Poshyanada contemplated the meaning of this monstrous sign. After considering the various imperatives of vigilance and courtesy, he mused on a more revealing possibility. The sign is a mirror of America's desperate past: "These illegal travellers might escape the authorities to become sojourners and settlers in communities where their status would change to that of housemaids, waiters, teachers, laborers, bartenders, masseurs, chauffeurs, security guards, robbers and so on. Their status one day might be that of American citizens, later driving on that same LA–San Diego motorway to see the signs of their past" [15].

Artists have often identified new trends long before they are articulated in mainstream debates. In a prescient video installation for ARS 01, '3-minute survival attempt' (2000), Anna Jermolaewa simulated both the destabilizing effects of conflict and the anxiety over the faceless aggressor. The fragile balance in the social order is played out in the interaction of toys made in the shape of pendulum figures. Accompanied by an ominous soundtrack of jackboots, one piece suddenly falls onto another, precipitating a cascading effect. As the pieces begin to tumble into each other and fall in a multitude of directions, it is never clear in which order they will ultimately fall. The only certainty is that disaster is imminent. Although each toy is uniform in shape, and at first appears to be stable, their movement leads towards a chaotic fall. The displacement effect is compounded by another unseen force that creates a swirling motion. The toys spin and fall into a vortex. Eventually even the surface tilts and everything falls off the edge. But the aggressor who precipitated the fall is never shown.

In Documenta XI, there were a number of collaborative projects and installations that worked with the thesis that power was as evident in the

new mechanisms for the control of flows as it was found in the occupation of territory. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have argued that in the networked and globalized world sovereign power takes a deterritorialized form, increasingly defined in the ability to regulate movement and exclude rivals [16]. 'Multiplicity', a collective of artists, architects and activists based in Italy, presented an installation, *Solid Sea* (2001), on the 'ghost ship' that sank off the coast of Sicily in 1996. A handful of survivors tried to convince the authorities of the tragedy that had happened in their waters, but the incident was ignored until fishermen began to discover the bodies in their nets and the identity papers of the dead began to wash up on the shore. 'Multiplicity' then began its own investigations. In the course of examining the surveillance records from the Italian Navy and the satellite footage from the meteorological department, they demonstrated that the State had callously turned a blind eye to drowning refugees. At one level, this act of exclusion confirmed the prediction, made almost a decade earlier by Etienne Balibar, that after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, 'fortress Europe' would erect a new invisible wall in the Mediterranean to exclude the South. At another level, it was also an index of the way social life is dominated by "borders, walls, fences, thresholds, signposted areas, security systems, check points, virtual frontiers, specialized zones, protected areas and areas under control" [17]. This proliferation of 'border devices' has not merely extended the function of sub-division but also shattered the utopian dream of an urbane conviviality that is based on the co-existence of cultural differences.

In recent times politicians are increasingly caught in a negative competition –who will flex the biggest authoritarian muscle by exerting the greatest ever 'crackdown' on migrants. While seeking to bolster a flagging sense of sovereignty, this 'crackdown' also re-draws the boundaries of social responsibility. Artist projects like *Solid Sea* refuse to accept the declaration that refugees in international waters are in no-mans-land. They prefaced the work with this caption: "An Italian community in Tunisia, an African community in Sicily. The fishing activities in the Strait of Sicily have blurred the border between the two continents: each population can see its counterpart reflected as in a mirror. One landscape crossed by 150 miles of solid sea". The title of the project, *Solid Sea*, refers to the blockage of a historical process and the fluid networks that previously enabled the coastal populations of the Mediterranean to share the view that they possess a common sea. Today this space is not only fraught with tension, but also striated by exclusive zones that regulate mercantile flows, and national boundaries are patrolled with heightened military vigilance. The common sea is now funnelled into separate zones for immigrants, tourists, fishermen and soldiers.

As refugees attempt to leave one place and enter another, they become part of a bridged space that includes both places. This ambiguous bridge

does not sit comfortably within the ever-narrowing administrative categories of civic entitlement, and is increasingly being weakened by the undermining of the existing international laws on human rights. In a variety of ways globalization collapses old distances as it produces new intimacies, compels new platforms of convergence but also bypasses obsolete stations. Yet for all the experimentation between internal and external forces, there is an increasing effort to regulate flows into the antagonistic logic of capital and exclusive categories of cultural identity.

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ISSN 1654-7985