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Fuck the Fucking Lines: A Provocation for Disquiet in the Academy

The Circle's Conspiracy of Writers

Notes on the making of this provocation

- ★ How do we build transnational solidarity
- ★ How do we imagine and tell the story of occupation from different perspectives and contexts
- ★ Hijacking Manual – tips on what to do other than write statements and from within one's comfort zone
- ★ How we cross borders... like these colonial borders just crossed us... but we can and will cross the borders... even by existing
- ★ Languages – and writing around the terms

Ghost: Should we just edit, and actually be magically one collective writing, or with suggestions and track changes? I might work this into the text...

“In the beginning there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world.
And because the road was once a river it was always hungry.”
- Ben Okri in *The Famished Road*

Maybe solidarity means to branch out into the whole world, more rhizome than root, defying boundaries of existence, identity, nation, state, nation(e)states. On 4th May 2021 a Belgian farmer accidentally shifted the French border to drive his tractor across farm lands between both countries. Nothing happened. A funny anecdote in the news. A mayor lolled. The Belgian farmer is a white man. No one feels threatened by this little border transgression. What happens when brown, queer, feminist, and decolonial movements try to shift lines and borders drawn on old maps invented by old white men, in a bid to abolish the problems that were created by said old white men dawdling across lands, cultures, and borders?

What is the shape of solidarity?

Ghost: I haven't heard the sounds of disruption bellowing in the wind, in so long. A spring of discontent, then a winter of protests, now a summer of grief has arrived fused with shorter nights of intifada. I am writing this from a memory of a memory. Bear with me.

Arrey ayi ayi azaadi, woh mehki mehki azaadi/ woh phoolon waali azaadi...jo tum na doge azaadi, hum chhin ke lenge azaadi/ har gali-galin mein azaadi/ har sheher sheher mein azaadi/ har gaon gaon mein

*azaadi/ iss manuwaad se azaadi/ ptrisatta se azaadi, har behnein mange azaadi/ har maaein mange
azaadi/ jo tum na doge azaadi/ hum chhin ke lenge azaadi¹*



Figure 1: Kashmiri activists waving Palestinian flags on top of a platform adorned with a graffiti that says “We are Palestine” made by Kashmiri graffiti artist Mudasir Gul. Courtesy: The Wire

May 2021. After news of settler-colonial state Israel’s violent attacks in Sheikh Jarrah and Al-Aqsa mosque and relentless aerial attacks killing children in the streets of Gaza reached the world, Kashmiri graffiti artist Mudasir Gul along with several others were arrested in the India occupied valley. Gul painted a graffiti which read “We are Palestine” accompanied by a face of a woman covered with a Palestinian flag, in solidarity with the self-determination movement of the people of Palestine against Israel’s forceful occupation.² He was made to destroy the graffiti by the police and granted bail in exchange of Kashmiri activists who raised anti-Israel slogans and Palestinian flags at the demonstration.

¹ Rejoice, azaadi is here/ Witness, the sweet note of azaadi, fragrant/ Witness, the blooming azaadi, embowered/ ...Understand, even in your absence/ we will have to fight for our freedom/ Azaadi in every street and promenade/ Azaadi in every city and town/ Azaadi in every village and neighbourhood/...Azaadi from manuwaad (Brahmanical tyranny)/ Azaadi from patriarchy/ “Azaadi!”, screams every sister/ “Azaadi!” demands every mother/ ...Understand, even in your absence/ we will have to fight for our freedom.

² <https://thewire.in/rights/police-arrest-kashmiris-for-palestine-mural-peaceful-protests-and-speeches>

Decolonisation as a counter mapping process.

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them, who drew the lines, plotted the maps, built the borders. Curse them, learn from the witches. We are the children of the witches they couldn't burn. There were no borders when the conquistadors landed, none when the East India Companies were set up, none when China built the great wall. There were no borders when they came to steal the land; they only put up the borders when they realised we are coming to get it back.

[To proceed further the reader is requested to invoke the following phantoms]

Palestine, Kurdistan, Kashmir, Sinai, Nubia, Western Sahara, Sapmi, Oaxaca/Chiapas, The Umbrella Movement (雨傘運動) – Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Tibet, Aoetearoa (not New Zealand), Turtle Island

Decolonisation as a counter mapping process. Counter mapping, not as drawing new lines and maps onto old ones, but defying them altogether. Instead of replacing the old map with a newer or even older one, focus on the process, on the “de” in decolonisation. On the refusal. And based on that, on the process. What new paths can we walk, after abandoning colonial maps and their opposition?

Ghost: Can there be any map of world-making, of worlds in the making? Perhaps world-making as mapping? Not cartographical, not one that's built on borders and lines but one that's based on overlapping networks of transmission. *More rhizome than root.*

Those fucking lines! They are the number of lines on my grandmother's forehead that tell the story of how her house was taken by a stranger. How she was beaten unconscious. And most importantly, of how she will never stop fighting in rage until she finds home again. People tell me that I look like her and *have* her anger. One day... I will have her lines on my forehead and like her I won't be giving up.

Decolonise the curriculum that defines lives – mine and yours – in the classroom. Hammer and break free from knowledge that has distorted meanings of power and oppression for us. Let voices pierce monolithic texts that we are asked to read for solidarity; they cannot be covered with that robe of objectivity at the

University. Call it what it is. Call it occupation, not conflict. Call it colonialism, not civilisation. Call it genocide, not self-defense.

Those fucking lines. We read and re-read, parrot and remember them in history books and newspapers and frantic messages until one day the entire region is cast away, pushed underground, and then hidden graves, open air prison, half widows, chinar trees, pellet guns, no phone calls, *Mother, I want to see you*. No news for 100 days. 6 months. Then a year. Now, a land of Agha Shahid Ali's "doomed addresses."

Those. Fucking. Lines.

[To proceed further the reader is requested to invoke the following phantoms]

Palestine فلسطين, ***Kurdistan*** کردستان, ***Kashmir*** کشمیر, ***Sinai, Nubia, Western Sahara, Sápmi, Municipios Autónomos Rebeldes Zapatistas/Chiapas, The Umbrella Movement (雨傘運動) – Hong Kong/Hēunggóng 香港, Altishahr, Dzungaria,.. (not Xinjiang/New Frontiers), Tibet (Bod) བོད, Aotearoa (not New Zealand), Turtle Island, the départements et régions d'outre-mer (DROM), the Dutch Caribbean/Caribbean Netherlands***

Last year on new year's eve I went to Sinai for the third or fourth time in a year, but specifically to Nuweiba for the first time. When I told my dad (who has lived through the Israeli colonization of Sinai and war on Egypt), he let me know that Nuweiba has a direct ferry from/to Israel and that there would be many Israelis there and told me not to go so I wouldn't deal with them. I retorted that it is my country and if anyone shouldn't be there, it's not me. Fortunately, by the time we had arrived, Israel had enforced a COVID shutdown and no Israelis were to be found in Nuweiba. However, as soon as we set foot on the camp, we were greeted with Hebrew writing on the umbrellas, a menu in shekel, and Israeli books strewn about. The first thing my friends and I said to each other was, "Are we in Israel?" We stayed for a week, and throughout that time, we'd come across little reminders of the colonization of Sinai that had supposedly ended. My friend let me know she had just visited Taba with her family right before she came to stay with us in Nuweiba and sat by the borders, surrounded by Israeli soldiers on Sinai land. I kept thinking about how those same people/soldiers/occupation forces drove my dad out of his hometown and childhood home, because they kept bombing his city. His home was one where armed Egyptian civilians/resistance stashed their weapons, since they had a hidden basement. He never went back to that home again, and doesn't know what happened to it.

Ghost: Why do white Germans have tears in their eyes when talking about the Berlin wall but not the one that partitions al-quds?

CARTOGRAPHY OF DECOLONIAL STRUGGLES*

Figure 2: Image reads “Cartography of Decolonial Struggles*”

Ghost: Solidarity is difficult and painful. It means "returning the gaze." We now embrace the discomfort, the unsettling part of this document.

Ghost: Ignorance as a shield and way to disengage/ignore - what to do about the incompleteness of this list?

Ghost: Perhaps acknowledge the ambiguity or work the “incompleteness” of this list into the text?

Ghost: Decolonial struggles envelop the globe; trying to list all the occupied, disputed, patrolled, locked, unrecognized, annexed, displaced, ravaged, and destroyed pieces of land/earth/أرض will always amount to a task that can never be completed - and surely, tracking the lines will not and never be enough to blur and dismantle them. But it matters to say the names - Sápmi, not Lapland; Aoetearoa, not New Zealand - names that are ignored, names that too many are ignorant of. Ignorance is a shield behind which we hide our disengagement, our detachment. It is another line we draw - ignorance is not innocent. Calling things by their names is an act of resistance. It's not Tel Aviv, it's Jaffa! It's not Israel but the occupying state (*dawlet al-ihtilal*). This piece of land that they occupy is Palestine.

[To proceed further the reader is requested to invoke the following phantoms]

Palestine فلسطين, **Kurdistan** كردستان, **Kashmir** کشمیر, **Sinai**, **Nubia**, **Western Sahara**, **Sápmi**, **Municipios Autónomos Rebeldes Zapatistas/Chiapas**, **The Umbrella Movement (雨傘運動)** - **Hong Kong/Hëunggóng** 香港, **Altishahr**, **Dzungaria**,.. (not Xinjiang/New Frontiers), **Tibet (Bod)** བོད, **Aoetearoa (not New Zealand)**, **Turtle Island**, **the départements et régions d'outre-mer (DROM)**, **the Dutch Caribbean/Caribbean Netherlands**

Ghost: “More indigenous territory has been claimed by maps than by guns.” Was it a quote by Nietschmann? I am trying to find a better source...

Ghost: To get back to mapping, among many others, Canada-based [MappingBack Network](#) was made “to provide mapping capacity and support to members of Indigenous communities fighting extractive industries”³ and [Native Land Digital](#) is focused very much on indigenous lands in the settler colonial states US/Canada/Australia, work in progress for the rest of the world.

A view from the South: How does solidarity building across decolonial struggles look like?

Leaving the nation-state framework. Thinking transnationally. Thinking of local struggles as separate from local elites. Solidarity is dangerous, solidarity is risky but these must be the risks we are willing to take. Building solidarity and connections transnationally. Solidarity is also recognising the risks you can take, and taking them, for the struggle and especially if your body passes. Understanding contextual differences (everything is interlinked) but forging ways of collective struggle and decolonising. Friendships, intimacy, conversation, conversation, conversation, deep listening, making space for people struggling to take up space. Solidarity can mean building spaces for conversations to happen. Helping each other grow. Listening to each other, and caring to learn about others’ specific decolonial struggles. Holding each other accountable. Showing up. Taking disability into consideration. Building spaces that accommodate people with mental illnesses and illnesses that are not bodily or visible. Showing up even when the ones you are showing up for aren’t present in the room. Defending the right to self-determination even when the outcast has left the room or has been forced to leave. Continuing the work and hard work of preparing the garden even in the absence of flowers, so that when the spring comes, and one day it will, the flowers will be at home. Faiz wrote from prison,

*Those who decoct the poison of tyranny
Can never flourish, today nor tomorrow
So what if they have already
Extinguished the lights in the hall
Of union with the beloved?
I dare them to put out the moon!*

The private is political is private – decolonizing the way in which personal experience of colonization is represented. The more privilege you have, the more you can and should risk losing them. Solidarity is unlearning your national, racial, gendered, and sexual consciousness when and if it separates you from another human being. It means undoing a lifetime of internalised harm. It means doing the work to be able to recognise the walls we internalise, borders we build in order to separate “us” from “them,” to be bound

³ See the manifesto of MappingBack Network here: http://mappingback.org/home_en/aboutus/

within our skin, rather than to recognise that the skin is the body's largest canvas on which the world can make an imprint, if only you can let it. Solidarity is diverting material resources to the global south, to stand up and take on the bureaucracy, to capture the money that has already been stolen from the global south and turn it back to the land, the people, the movements. Understanding that the global south is heterogenous, polyphonous. Identifying the margins of the margins to constantly decenter the center, the dominant, until there isn't any dominant, there isn't any center. More doing the right thing than saying the right thing. Praxis. Praxis that fosters hope. That finds its way into uncomfortable classrooms where students question the oppressor(s). Solidarity is in *never* forgetting. In remembering to ask difficult questions. Solidarity is resisting censorship of thoughts; ideas; narratives; knowledge. Solidarity is *de-bordering*. *De-bordering* that happens on the campus. On the streets. Solidarity is in fists raised together. Solidarity is both less and more than friendship. It overlaps... friendship can amplify solidarity, forms of solidarity. Afford to dwell in the messiness of "figuring out." Some useful questions to think through solidarity and friendship in our everyday lives: Does solidarity need a common political goal? How do we navigate closeness and intimacy, distance and disagreement in solidarity? How do I show my solidarity when we disagree? How far can it be stretched? How does solidarity become and remain a political standpoint, a call for action, a way of life? It is in locating its foundation in the passion for justice. The foundation of solidarity is the belief in human-ness –

Ghost: Is this different from humanism? thinking of land, earth, all forms of life, ecosystems – expanding an anthropocentric notion of solidarity.

– It sounds so basic, but essentially that is it. I will defend your right to live, breathe, and struggle for freedom. By all means necessary. It sounds so basic, but we live in a world where it is too often bracketed or conditional, a question mark. I do not need to like you, agree with you, or even talk to you, to believe that you are a human being; that is the bare minimum: the belief that we are all human. Based on that belief we can build connections, friendships, works of art, anything. Possible futures. So long as my humanity is in question, any performance of solidarity is useless.

Ghost: Is solidarity a performance, then, when our lives are lived within precarious and unliveable conditions? How do we imagine solidarity beyond the framework of rights, sovereignty, and agency? Can solidarity be prescriptive? Listed out at a certain point in the continuum of history, between the ongoing work of publishing and the published text of the future?

Again, what is the shape of solidarity?

Ghost: Strategies to hijack, for Palestine.

Support in archiving transnational solidarity so that it's not forgotten? That decolonial struggles don't just end with a ceasefire. "...educate, agitate and organise... For ours is a battle, not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of human personality" (Ambedkar, 1942). Put stickers on

EDUCATE Israeli products in supermarkets (I found a hommos "made in Israel" that said "Lebanese hommos," I was going to vomit). Lose friends and opportunities – who wants such friends and opportunities anyway? Or has careerism taken over to such an extent that we are willing to bend backwards for occupation apologists? Take it upon yourself to argue, educate, and send resources so that the burden of doing the work doesn't unilaterally rest on the shoulders of Palestinians. Sometimes, remove **AGITATE** yourself from spaces in protest. Refuse and call out normalization everywhere. As writers and scholars, adopt PACBI and spread it at the conferences we are part of. Insisting on reminding them of Palestine, even when they constantly hate any reminders of resistance (@ the Egyptian state that arrests those who raise Palestinian flags or have Palestine patches on their backpacks or dare to think of organizing for BDS). **ORGANIZE** Settler colonialism is not over; it never was. Make the struggle not just transnational but transgenerational, transhistorical, and transgressional.

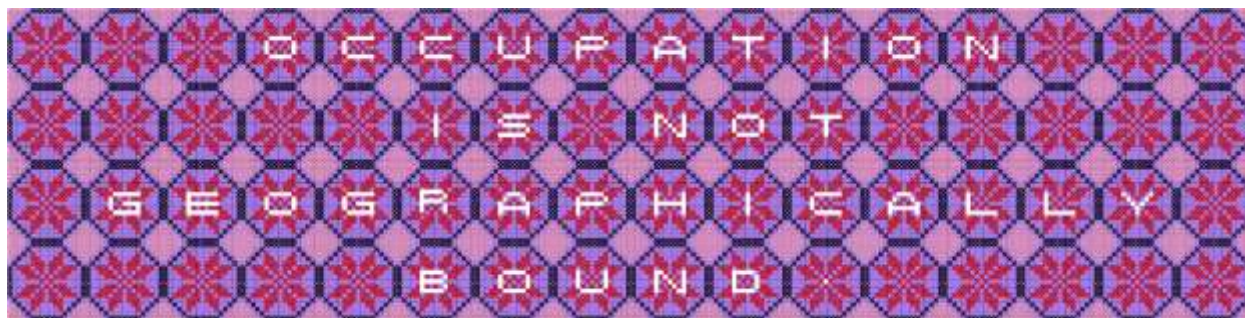


Figure 3: Banner inspired by tatreez embroidery reads, "Occupation is not geographically bound."

You can't geographically escape the occupation, it travels with you, and not just in a metaphorical sense, but also materially. National borders make visible how some can move smoothly while others are denied passage, or harassed while doing so – but bordering is everywhere, access denial defines the way in which those who are privileged enjoy access.

Occupation sometimes hides in specks of lint frayed from densely cross-stitched *tatreez*⁴ that have crossed many frail borders on the backs of exiled Palestinian women. Textile artist Alia Shiekh-Yousef recounts: "After we were dispersed, all tatreez became Palestinian tatreez. You want to preserve Palestinian tatreez, not

⁴ Considered a cultural heritage, tatreez is a form of traditional Palestinian embroidery and indigenous art practiced by women.

individual villages. They're all under occupation, and it's now gone."⁵ Women, forcibly exiled with feelings of loss and longing, make tatreez embroideries to remember the names and environs of the villages in Palestine (Khader 2009). Each tatreez embroidery, with its rich iconographic and symbolic visuality, tells the story of longing for the villages women had to leave behind and were removed from. Historically, the migratory nature of the occupants of the land lent to the diverse graphic knowledge of varied motifs and significations attached to the tatreez embroidery (Kawar 2011). The transformation of tatreez into a political art practice is witness to the history of the Israeli state's settler-colonialism. After the forced exile by Israeli military forces in 1948, in a remarkable act of resistance, Palestinian women wore their *thobes* or embroidered dresses and carried them on their backs (Farah 2021). Carrying the history of an erased land on their back, carrying the village names carefully hidden in embroideries, Palestinian women infiltrate the future by passing the knowledge of stitching tatreez. Intifada, as we know, will find its scribe.

Ghost: Occupation is everywhere. It is in the narrative of the white man; it forms part of his state, its history and existence. Occupation infiltrates our own minds when we have to choose between our conscience and sustaining our lives (sustaining because a part of us ... a light within us goes out). This week a post circulated saying: "We are not free until everyone is free," and unless we are not dominated and occupied by a mainstream media and mode of thinking/knowledge then we can't claim to be free. People lie to themselves constantly about freedom and how free and liberated they feel when in fact they have the television on telling them some BS about BDS being antisemitic. Domination is occupation.

*A border is not a line in the sand, it is not a wire in the sky
A border is not a checkpoint for a bird, for the wind, or the storm that blows this way
A border is not a stone marking which way a seed can/not fall
A border is not an arrow that can stop a heart from breaking
A border is only the petty arrogance of an old white man marking out his mediocrity.
Fuck all borders. Burn them all down.*

My parents took me to my first Palestine solidarity protest when I was seven and I screamed "Palestine is free" at the top of my lungs. That was in 2005, and since then, my parents and I have gone to every Palestine solidarity protest. In Egypt, we can't raise a flag for Palestine anymore. A supposedly free Arab/African country, where you can't raise the flag of Palestine, a country we'd previously gone to war for. A country where organizing for BDS sends you to jail for years. We are told to believe we are not being colonized, while for the first time in history, we don't have solidarity protests during a Palestinian intifada. My parents took me to my first Palestine solidarity protest when I was seven and I screamed "Palestine is free" at the top of my lungs. That was in 2005, and since then, my parents and I have gone to every Palestine solidarity protest. It

⁵ Alia Shiekh-Yousef quoted in Khader 2009.

makes one feel so helpless and useless not to be able to do that anymore, under a state that arrests anyone who even thinks of expressing an opinion or a belief or carrying out an act of resistance. The Palestinian flag has become a dangerous object to hold, and I think of the Palestinian watermelon. I think about whether I would be arrested if I hold a watermelon in the street now, as I wouldn't put it past this State.

In Lebanon, I grew up with a map of the world that marks our neighbour to the South "Occupied Palestine." I grew up with the Arabic names of the Palestinian cities, in anticipation of the removal of the word "Occupied." How perplexing it was in my adolescence to uncover maps that refer to "Israel" (read "Tel Aviv") and see pictures of lives there. Lives that superimpose over the lives that I knew were there.

First you draw a line, then you call it a name. Fuck names too.

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