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**NAHNOO &
Antakya Performative Collective**

Tandem Turkey - October - May 2019

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NAHNOO and Antakya Performative Collective gathered advocates for urban change and artists to transgress the borders of disciplines and nations for the sake of reconquering the sense of public space. “Performing invisible borders” is the product of a participatory performative art project where children, artists, volunteers and activists tell stories of transition from the illusion of control to the freedom of practicing the largest public park in Beirut.

NAHNOO
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For someone who lived by the borders most of my childhood, borders tend to be related to conflict such as political boundaries between two countries; and the meaning is engraved in myself with a negative sense of defeat and restrictions. This workshop remains an opportunity to go far beyond the visible, focusing on the scales of borders from the manifest to the unstated, mostly the unstated. We decided on a common goal searching for spatial equity within the same community where human values are the key.

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Borders are political lines transecting spaces into geopolitical, cultural, economic and social spheres expressing the power of exclusion. In a time of increasing conflicts and migration, national borders are being duplicated by local internal borders within a country. Spatial frontiers between cities, neighborhoods, and communities are being constantly created to distinguish landscapes of the ethnic, gender and religious groups. What used to separate two countries into administrative divisions is more and more turning into “a frontier of communities” and “citizens.” These new urban borders are dividing a city into distinct zones of homogeneous identities, often impermeable between each other.

Beirut is a tangible example of how invisible boundaries between districts control urban mobility. Am I welcomed or not? Are constant interrogations that shape the spatial mobility of passerby and citizens in Beirut. “East and West Beirut” and other verbal connotations inherited from the Civil War (1975-1990) still mark the city's geography and the freedom of movement in the space of the Lebanese capital.



The fear of meeting diversity not only affects urban mobility but also the practice of public spaces. Horsh Beirut is a significant example of how a physical space can constitute a frontier between communities. The largest green area in Beirut (dis)connects three political geographies of the Capital: the Christian of Badaro, The Chia of Chiyah and the Sunni of Qasqas. This specific strategic, yet sensitive, location zeroed the practice of the green space for decades. Horsh Beirut reflected the danger of tensions after the civil war and concretized the fear from the other in a spatial dimension. This unique public garden was nearly canceled from the city's memory, forgotten and ignored by young generations until 2010.

In practice and for long years, Beirut residents had become deprived of their right to enjoy the park. This led NAHNOO, a youth non-governmental organization, to spearhead the "Horsh Beirut for All" advocacy campaign to challenge the situation in late 2010 which led to its reopening to the public 5 years later, in 2015.

WE LC OM ING

the (un) Welcome

Since 2016, Horsh Beirut is open to the public every day under specific conditions. The park's morphology produces barriers that limit people's practice. Several gates that give access to the park are officially closed. A fence divides the park into two zones, and visitors from adjacent neighborhoods are not allowed to cross from one side to the other. Three highways mark the park edges and separate it from the surroundings like a green island hardly accessible for the pedestrian.

At the official gate, people are examined and prevented from bringing a number of items, such as a football, a camera, or even a picnic blanket. "Not allowed" signs are spread in the park ordering people not to get on the grass, not to climb on the hill, not to enter the green school, and much more.



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borders*

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[4 days ago I was not ok, and I needed to go out, I thought about going to Horsh Beirut and realized that it was 3 pm, Yet the park opens till 1 pm.]

Sometimes, borders take the form of written orders... Hours are also a form of a written order. They trigger our reactions to accept them or not; they control our right to access or not. And other times borders are neither physical nor explicit and we discover them in our daily life. These are the "borders" that shape how we behave, they predict who we talk to, when and where we choose to go. They control our ability to enter a country, a private property, or any space...

These borders have gatekeepers who control our entry and exit.

[3 years ago I wanted to go to Istanbul, to meet artists to be inspired from. When I tried to go, I discovered that my father had a political background, and due to this issue the visa was revoked.]

THEY ASKED



me : where are you from?

I said: I am from Antakya.

They said: no, you are not from Antakya.

I said why I am not from Antakya, they said: because of your talking [accent], [...]


They wanted to know which ethnicity I am.

And they did not accept that I am Antiochian because I am not Sunni].

Borders can be genetic or inherited: a handicap, a religion, a community affiliation, a language, a country are all undecided conditions imposing us our first inner borders.

There is often a projection of social borders to my own self. Judgments, expectations, and habits are a system of control. Self-judgement is a social construction, constituting an active factor that controls the relation to the other and regulates the grade of openness.

[Last year I shared my class with an Armenian person and we talked about the Armenian Genocide. This is a sensitive issue for both of us, each one has his/her own vision and his/her own story. At the end of the class, we became friends, and we found so many common things like culture and food, etc. However, it is hard these days to find friends from different backgrounds.]



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[I shaved my head: they started calling me lesbian. The information circulated and spread all over the university].

A different accent, a new haircut, a friendly look, or a joyful smile, might trigger strong stereotypes and the eruption of sudden borders between others and me. My skin is my bubble. I am my own bubble.

Anonymous, my body exhibit superficial signs on the surface of the skin. My corporal surface exhibits messages of representation for the outer world and may hide my true nature. Am I delivering my true self or am I exposing a version of my self?

I decided to exhibit some information about me selectively. I can make very quick judgments about others' personalities too... How do I read the other the first time I meet him or her? First sight impression can build borders or affinities with others by projecting myself onto the other. Projecting my values and my understandings and my experiences can trace limits: the mirror of self is a border.

What does Horsh Beirut express at first glance? The park outer metallic skin exhibit different signs of undesirability. The lock, the fence, the barbed wires and closed gates, they shape the façade. Planted hills on the edges also prevent from seeing the central core. A network of negative signs is obscuring the reality of the park, delivering the image of an inaccessible spatial bubble... a leftover.





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**[... at a
certain
point, there
are a lot of
borders
and at the
same time
and place...
there are
no
borders...]**

I construct and deconstruct the borders' illusion by choice of experimenting the real facts. Two doors mark the gate on the southern side. Both seem closed... A hole caught our attention on the lateral side of the first access... We enter ... The grass is high... the site looks like a leftover... Yet we cross and push the next gate... the door opens and we are inside. Is it a transgression or a right to enter? Should a rule be accepted when it hinders the access to public realm?

Can I criticize the legitimacy of a dominant rule?
How can I decide if a rule should be or not be effective? How can I allow myself to practice my public right? And, who rule the borders in the space of public interest?

I enter from the stated informally... I start listening more intently to my environment, allowing all stimuli in without making judgments.

I BECA ME



more aware of how to explore the material context of my surroundings in Horsh Beirut. There was a harmony between us while doing an exercise that brought good energy and made me think : It is up to us to decide how many borders we set for ourselves. By using the body, guided with spirit and mind, we can break them.



FEEL

around me, I observe the children who are so eager to interact.

[The park was alive... full of people... and the kids were like bees... kids are the ones to learn from to reduce borders, to be creative, to connect with nature and with park users. During the weekend, I saw borderless kids transforming the Horsh into a playful garden. They were connecting to nature, playing with flowers and soil, climbing trees and interacting with people they don't know.]

**[I understood that it
wasn't about
borders. It's more
about us and how
we perceive limits...
present things that
we do not mind, and
other absent stuff
that we avoid].**





**SHIFTING
THE
STATE
OF MIND,**

I CAN BE

**A
CHILD**



We are danger.

We crossed lines.

We touched stones.

**We laid down on the
grass.**

We disturbed people.

We built walls.

We caught the runners.

We sang a song.

And we could do more...

**We started from the inner
world, and we finished
with negotiation with the
official rule.**

**COULD
YOU
ARREST
ME!**



**STORIES
FROM
PERFOR
MERS**



COULD YOU ARREST ME!

13.04.2019 / 45 MIN / HORSH BEIRUT

MELISA KURTULUS, PAWEL KORBUS

Border needs guard. And first guard is “self”

Our starting point was the disconnection from the natural world. It is like a collective trauma, a relationship with our history and inner insanity. How often do we touch the earth with our body? How often do we feel the soil, grass, rocks, air with our skin? How often do we drink water directly from a natural source? How often do we spend time in nature without barrier?

Nature was our home but contemporary urban living disconnects us from natural world. Human being has created an artificial boundary between humans and other beings. We are also losing our human connection physically and emotionally. And it is bringing more and more boundary layers out. Did we forget where we come from? Nowadays we are trying to find connection with ourselves and the others and bring nature back into our urban life.

“Breaking boundaries through singing a song / catch the borders, push the borders”

We used ironic and interactive way as a “border practice” that catches, pushes and crosses boundaries by our body and mind. We started from our inner world to reconnect with ourselves since we forgot where we come from. We are danger! We crossed the lines! We touched the historical stones! We laid down on the grass! We built the human wall! We run to people! We caught the runners! We sang a song! And we could do more!

“A border is a passive-aggressive negotiation”

We finished our performance by a negotiation with the guardian. A guard of Horsh Beirut was a symbol of authority. We run towards him and we tried to forced him to come and sing with us. It was something unthinkable for him. This surprisingly attack generated confusion in his mind. “Could you arrest me!” It was a question that aimed to challenge fixed rules and forbidden clichés and made people question their perceptions of rules and borders.



دائم /USUAL/OLAĞAN

13.04.2019 / 50 MIN / HORSH BEIRUT

KENAN NURAYDIN-

Horsh Beirut, in the Levant, has collapsed as the result of wars, occupations, and destruction in the historical context of the city. The current geometric shape of Horsh Beirut is triangular and divided into three parts. As a result of political conflicts, Horsh Beirut has been divided into a secular area and is no longer public and accessible. Thus, the current situation of the park represents the painful reality of the city, which is normal nowadays, and the genes of this geography became more visible and obvious.

The different cultural and beliefs surrounding the park in the region is a local factor. The Orontes is a northward-flowing river which begins in Lebanon and flows to Antakya, the city I was born in, before entering the Mediterranean Sea. The Orontes River which is older than Horsh Beirut tries to keep the positive connection and vibes flowing through the river by crossing the geo-political borders of three countries that have been separated although they share a similar culture, food and traditions. Although for many, Orontes river is a natural border yet It has connected the civilizations through time.



Performance description

The water hose geographically symbolizes the Orontes River, the Horsh and both visible and invisible sides of Beirut City. The historical context or timelines is symbolized by the walk, which often comes with a different rhythm, and it also represents the phases Horsh Beirut has gone through. Thus, it indicates the transition between the visible and invisible borders and also it represents the resistance movement against the repressive mindset and corruption.

While taking steps up and down on the water hose that's been stretched out along the grass. Pausing at some selected point and fixes a red cable tie around the hose which indicates events occurred on Horsh Beirut during the historical context. The performance continues to attach more cable ties until his brow sweats and he gasps for air.

The park is divided into three parts and each part has an entrance, referring to the three-main belief system. Thus, the hose has three entrances marked in red and given the triangle shape which is the current geographical shape of Horsh Beirut and inside the triangle, the quote of Ibn Khaldoun is visible for the audience and the performance ends right after.

According to Ibn Khaldun, geography is destiny. The quote means that there's nothing called race or nationality but there's geography. So, whoever has the sunstroke in his geography, has more tanned his skin is and whoever has less, his skin stays white. Thus, before judging someone based on his skin color or where he's from, just take a moment and think, what if you were born in his geography...

Unfortunately, where are you from is the most racist and separatist question used in our daily life.

"I'm from the Earth."

MERGING IN-VISIBLE BORDERS!

13.04.2019 / 30 MIN / HORSH BEIRUT

EMRAH GOKDEMIR

From a nomadic lifestyle to civilization, rugs/carpets have had the ability to reshape everything and they not only meet some of the most basic human needs within the home, but they have also long contributed to the evolution of society as it has come to be known. From the dramatic impact of weaving's genesis on nomadic peoples to eventual nourishment of entire segments of civilization, the emergence of rugs, on a large scale, is a noteworthy historical occurrence. Across the ancient Oriental world till today, rugs have been playing a substantial role in religious practices, everyday life or cultural practices at almost every region... in this meaning, they point to the collective memory.

When I am walking through the city of Antakya or along the coast, I used to see carpets/rugs left on the ground, as "living objects". They served with their own heritage to someone's life or place and now turned to be a waste. Reflecting on the Levant and its communities with its borders created by political powers, a carpet appears to my mind as a border itself. A border with its own shape, a border to life, a border to a place, a border for a community and a border for geography... I used "carpet washing tradition" as a motif in "my performance." Though I didn't wash it with detergent - I merged the carpet with the soil and water to integrate it in the ground. I tried to vanish the corners. I tried to merge cultures. I tried to merge them back into the same roots: the soil. My performance was perhaps about asking nature to take back all the fabricated borders we invented individually or socially. My performance was aimed to enlightening and challenging, raising questions and encouraging audiences to delve deeper into particular incidents about national, social or individual borders regarding the Levant history.



A group of performers in a field. One person is blindfolded. A sign in the foreground says "I Can See Now".

NAHNOO & Antakya Performative Collective

simulated a playful shift from unconsciousness to transgression of borders. Performers investigated illusionary controls, and embraced the child spirit to reconquer the freedom of practicing urban commons. This publication is the product of a collective rebellion to the illusionary impossible, a reward for a great collective effort.

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and for all the children...

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Photo: Horsh Beirut, Lebanon

