Foreword

"We're having problems" was the title of the foreword to the next to last issue of "Here", which explained: "We feel the need for more assistance with the concrete creation of the magazine: translation, layout, proofreading, promotion, subscription management, envelope-stuffing, mailing"; and "nor is the money enough". The first "need", thanks mainly to the new translators whose names you will find in the last pages, has been lightened, although not solved. The second, the need for money, has remained. (In brief, please take out a subscription.)

However, in that foreword we also expressed "the need to talk more about the magazine together" and our intention to try and form a "working group" between "the readers and contributors who are closest to it". And we have done this. Since last December about ten of us have been meeting once a month: we distribute tasks and talk. The first result of this is the present issue edited by: Eugenio Berra, Johanna Bishop, Sebastiano Buonamico, Lella Fusi, Erica Golo, Bruno Manelli, Marina Massenz, Bea Mathieu, Giorgio Morale, Massimo Parizzi, and Laura Zanetti.

Contents

The news items in the right column were taken from "The New York Times".

Cover by Sebastiano Buonamico

The pictures. On the front cover: Mexico-US border wall. On the back cover: "Sino-Burmese border hop" (copyright by Nicholas Farrelly). "This photo, snapped in a small border settlement in southwest Yunnan, shows just how easily some parts of this border can be negotiated. The official border point - staffed by soldiers and marked by bollards - is about 100 metres south of where this photo was taken. For context, I am standing in China, and the women are crossing from Burma." (Nicholas Farrelly)

This review exists through the voices it gives expression to, in their variety. All contributions are welcome. Please write to **Here-notes from the present, via Bastia 11, 20139 Milano, Italy, phone-fax 0039-02-57406574, email: massimo parizzi@alice.it.**

"Here-notes from the present" is written so that it can be read "as a novel": from the beginning to the end in sequence. This is **an invitation and an exhortation** to the reader: many diary pages make little sense if not read immediately after the previous ones and before those that follow.

Borders

by Laura Zanetti

Here

notes from the present

The faded walls
of evening, the sun crumbling light
And just one swallow
makes a summer riviera...

Me
a little girl of Telve
a girl of alpine pastures
tomato seeds in my mouth
and in my hand and head
the question
still:

Beyond the wall of Mount Ortigara
Lord!
Lord… what must life be like?

I still have a vivid memory of that moment; I must have been seven or eight; I was in our vegetable garden, at dusk. In mid-July. I was walking barefoot between the rows of tomatoes, looking for a ripe one. I still remember the feeling of its seeds in my mouth as I looked at Mount Ortigara and imagined wonderful things, an ocean of lights, on the other side. Over the years I would come to know them, would I ever, and would have flown from them so many times; but Telve was no longer my home, and over the years it has all been one long flight.

Diary: September 2007-April 2008

Here

notes from the present

Yoani Sánchez

Havana, September 3, 2007

Since I was born in the heart of Cayo Hueso, a famous neighborhood in Centro Habana, I like to use every register of language when I talk or

need to express myself. What's more, I'm always amazed by people's ingenuity when it comes to making up new words or expressions. I'm fascinated by phrases like "ese es tu maletín" (that's your problem) or a new one I heard from my son, who says "qué toqueta!" (a descendent of the "qué tocao" we used in the Nineties to mean something was good or cool).

What I really hate are empty words, theorization that avoids calling the things by their names, circumlocutions that hide or disguise. For instance, how poorly the economic definition "double-currency system" reflects the devastating fact of not being able to buy what you need to survive with the currency you get paid in. How the euphemism "giving priority to investing the nation's resources in tourism" seems to pale when you run up against the wall of segregation that keeps Cubans from staying in a hotel or renting a car.

Before getting lost in tangled phrases like "the systemic unfeasibility of the Cuban socialist project" I think it would be better to spell things out with the commonplace "it got screwed up". Let's not let academics and bureaucrats be the ones to name what we're experiencing. Let's not let them use incomprehensible jargon to cloak the day-to-day facts of our lives. Or to use concepts like "system of rationed distribution", "popular support," or "economic emigration" to disguise what comes across to us as "not for you", "don't you dare", or "love it or leave it".

San Salvador, September 5, 2007 **Maria Ofelia Zuniga**

Eight a.m. In that neighbourhood which is no longer what it used to be.

Mother: I've got pains coming on, but it's nothing; I have had them almost all the time I've been pregnant. And then the cot sheets the seamstress is sewing aren't ready yet… *Neighbours*: Um, you'd better get to the hospital, you know, just in case… *Mother*: Ok then, I'll go.

Ten a.m. Hospital Nacional de Maternidad in the city of San Salvador. *Father*: So, I'll leave you here just for now while I run some errands. I'll be back soon… *Doctors*: Well, madam, this time it's not a false alarm. You're too dilated, the baby's on its way.

Mother: But it's not time yet! *Doctor*: It looks like it is. Tell your husband that we are admitting you. *Mother to father*: They say the baby's on its way. *Father*: No, tell them she's still too small (there were no scans at that time, but in his heart my father knew it would be a baby girl). *Mother*: No, I've got to stay; I'm going to give birth.

Half past one. Same place. Sex: female. Weight: exactly five pounds. Size at birth: rather small. Gestational age: around seven months. Name, according to the liturgical calendar: Lorenza. Name chosen by the father (the mother had no say in the matter): Maria Ofelia (after the father's mother whose eyes, heart and character, so they say, she has also inherited… thanks a lot!).

It's been… 34 years since that day!

As those who know me well are already aware, I still love to celebrate my birthdays so much, however old I am (at least, up to now). […] Mum says that when I was a child I used to like to play the piñata game on my birthdays, now I like to play "we all remember her birthday and nobody forgets…".

Well, as it's the "anniversary of my life", I want to

Salame, Arizona. The Border Patrol has reported a large drop in the number of illegal immigrants apprehended at the border with Mexico this year, the consequence, the agency says, of additional agents and the presence of National Guard troops. Yet the number of migrants dying while trying to cross here in Pima County is on pace to set a record. The medical examiner's office handled 177 deaths of border crossers in the first eight months of this year. A primary reason that immigration scholars, the Border Patrol and government officials in the United States and Mexico believe people continue dying at such high rates: As they increasingly avoid heavily patrolled urban areas, they cross with little or no knowledge of the desert, whose heat, insects, wildlife and rugged terrain make it some of the most inhospitable terrain on the planet. The growing death toll here in recent years follows a Border Patrol clampdown in California and Texas. The goal was to drive migrant traffic away from cities like San Diego and El Paso and into the remote desert on the assumption it would act as a deterrent.

thank all my friends (especially those who have sent me their best wishes today and made this day even more special). […] My thanks to all those who have shared a part of my journey, to those who continue to stay by my side and in many different ways let me share a part of their own journeys. […]

Today I don't want to analyse life or ask myself what, from my point of view, is right or wrong. All I want to do today is celebrate the chance to live another year. As our friend R. Rivas said not long ago: on our birthdays, we usually celebrate what we have lived through, but we must also celebrate the life that is still to come. With this thought in mind I invite everyone to celebrate together what has been, is, and will be… with a shot of rum, a *frangeliquito*, a *pisquito*, an *aguita* made with fruit and other delicious stuff, a *singani*, a sip of wine, a little beer, a cup of coffee, a glass of milk or whatever you prefer… so, everybody: *cheers*!

Damascus, September 6, 2007

R.

Two months ago, the suitcases were packed. My lone, large suitcase sat in my bedroom for nearly six weeks, so full of clothes and personal items, that it took me, E. and our six-year-old neighbor to zip it closed. Packing that suitcase was one of the more difficult things I've had to do. […] I packed and unpacked it four times. Each time I unpacked it, I swore I'd eliminate some of the items that were not absolutely necessary. Each time I packed it again, I would add more "stuff" than the time before. E. finally came in a month

A vast internal migration is radically reshaping Iraq's ethnic and sectarian landscape. In Baghdad alone there are now nearly 170,000 families, accounting for almost a million people, that have fled their homes in search of security, shelter, water, electricity, functioning schools or jobs to support their families. The figures

and a half later and insisted we zip up the bag so I wouldn't be tempted to update its contents constantly.

The decision that we would each take one suitcase was made by my father. He took one look at the box of assorted memories we were beginning to prepare and it was final. Four large identical suitcases were purchased: one for each member of the family and a fifth smaller one was dug out of a closet for the documentation we'd collectively need, graduation certificates, personal identification papers, etc.

We waited… and waited… and waited. It was decided we would leave mid-to-late June: examinations would be over and as we were planning to leave with my aunt and her two children, that was the time considered most convenient for all involved. The day we finally appointed as *the day*, we woke up to an explosion not two km away and a curfew. The trip was postponed a week. The night before we were scheduled to travel, the driver who owned the GMC that would take us to the border excused himself from the trip: his brother had been killed in a shooting. Once again, it was postponed.

There was one point, during the final days of June, where I simply sat on my packed suitcase and cried. By early July, I was convinced we would never leave. I was sure the Iraqi border was as far away, for me, as the borders of Alaska. It had taken us well over two months to decide to leave by car instead of by plane. It had taken us yet another month to settle on Syria as opposed to Jordan. How long would it take us to reschedule leaving?

It happened almost overnight. My aunt called with

show that many families move twice, three times or more, first fleeing immediate danger and then making more considered calculations based on the availability of city services or schools for their children. Finding neighbors of their own sect is just one of those considerations. The new figures show that the migration is not neatly dividing Baghdad along the Tigris, separating Sunnis who live predominantly on the west bank from Shiites, who live predominantly on the east. Instead, some Sunnis are moving to the predominantly Shiite side of the river, into neighborhoods that are relatively secular, mixed and where services are better, according to Red Crescent staff.

September 16, Baghdad. A U.S. State Department motorcade came under attack in Baghdad, prompting security contractors guarding the convoy to open fire in the streets. At least nine civilians were killed. The shootout occurred after an explosion detonated near the convoy. In response, the security contractors "escalated the force to defend themselves," a U.S.

the exciting news that one of her neighbors was going to leave for Syria in 48 hours because their son was being threatened and they wanted another family on the road with them in another car: like gazelles in the jungle, it's safer to travel in groups. It was a flurry of activity for two days. We checked to make sure everything we could possibly need was prepared and packed. We arranged for a distant cousin of my mom who was to stay in our house with his family to come the night before we left (we can't leave the house empty because someone might take it).

It was a tearful farewell as we left the house. One of my other aunts and an uncle came to say goodbye the morning of the trip. It was a solemn morning and I'd been preparing myself for the last two days not to cry. You won't cry, I kept saying, because you're coming back. You won't cry because it's just a little trip like the ones you used to take to Mosul or Basrah before the war. In spite of my assurances to myself of a safe and happy return, I spent several hours before leaving with a huge lump lodged firmly in my throat. My eyes burned and my nose ran in spite of me. I told myself it was an allergy.

We didn't sleep the night before we had to leave because there seemed to be so many little things to do… It helped that there was no electricity at all: the area generator wasn't working and "national electricity" was hopeless. There just wasn't time to sleep. The last few hours in the house were a blur. It was time to go and I went from room to room saying goodbye to everything. I said goodbye to my desk, the one I'd used all through high school and college. I said goodbye to the curtains and the bed and the couch. I said goodbye to the

Embassy official in Baghdad said. "The security company contractors opened fire randomly on the civilians," said Brig. Gen. Abdul-Karim Khalaf, an Interior Ministry spokesman. "We consider this act a crime."

The shooting incident involving private security guards in Baghdad (see above, September 16) has revealed large gaps in the laws applying to such armed contractors. Early in the period when Iraq was still under American administration, the United States government unilaterally exempted its employees and contractors from Iraqi law. Last year, Congress instructed the Defense Department to draw up rules to bring the tens of thousands of contractors in Iraq under the American laws that apply to the military, but the Pentagon so far has not acted. Thus the thousands of heavily armed private soldiers in Iraq operate with virtual immunity from Iraqi and American law. There have been numerous cases of killings or injuries of Iraqi civilians by employees of private military contractors, including Blackwater USA, the company involved in the shooting on Sunday.

armchair E. and I broke when we were younger. I said goodbye to the big table over which we'd gathered for meals and to do homework. I said goodbye to the ghosts of the framed pictures that once hung on the walls, because the pictures have long since been taken down and stored away, but I knew just what hung where. I said goodbye to the silly board games we inevitably fought over: the Arabic Monopoly with the missing cards and money that no one had the heart to throw away. I knew then as I know now that these were all just items: people are so much more important. Still, a house is like a museum in that it tells a certain history. You look at a cup or stuffed toy and a chapter of memories opens up before your very eyes. It suddenly hit me that I wanted to leave so much less than I thought I did.

Six am finally came. The GMC waited outside while we gathered the necessities: a thermos of hot tea, biscuits, juice, olives (olives?!) which my dad insisted we take with us in the car, etc. […] The trip was long and uneventful, other than two checkpoints being run by masked men. They asked to see identification, took a cursory glance at the passports and asked where we were going. The same was done for the car behind us. Those checkpoints are terrifying but I've learned that the best technique is to avoid eye-contact, answer questions politely and pray under your breath. My mother and I had been careful not to wear any apparent jewelry, just in case, and we were both in long skirts and head scarves.

Syria is the only country, other than Jordan, that was allowing people in without a visa. The Jordanians are being horrible with refugees. Families risk being turned back at the Jordanian border, or

Employees of Blackwater USA have engaged in nearly 200 shootings in Iraq since 2005, in a vast majority of cases firing their weapons from moving vehicles without stopping to count the dead or assist the wounded, according to a new report from Congress. In at least two cases, Blackwater paid victims' family members who complained, and sought to cover up other episodes, the Congressional report said. It said State Department officials approved the payments in the hope of keeping the shootings quiet.

American diplomats resumed travel in convoys escorted by Blackwater USA, the private American security contractor, three days after the Iraqi government banned the company following a shooting in which at least eight Iraqis were killed (see above, September 16).

Blackwater Worldwide, its reputation in tatters and its lucrative government contracts in jeopardy, is mounting an aggressive legal, political and public relations counterstrike. It has hired a bipartisan

denied entry at Amman Airport. It's too high a risk for most families. We waited for hours, in spite of the fact that the driver we were with had "connections", which meant he'd been to Syria and back so many times, he knew all the right people to bribe for a safe passage through the borders. I sat nervously at the border. The tears had stopped about an hour after we'd left Baghdad. Just seeing the dirty streets, the ruins of buildings and houses, the smoke-filled horizon all helped me realize how fortunate I was to have a chance for something safer.

By the time we were out of Baghdad, my heart was no longer aching as it had been while we were still leaving it. The cars around us on the border were making me nervous. I hated being in the middle of so many possibly explosive vehicles. A part of me wanted to study the faces of the people around me, mostly families, and the other part of me, the one that's been trained to stay out of trouble the last four years, told me to keep my eyes to myself: it was almost over.

It was finally our turn. I sat stiffly in the car and waited as money passed hands; our passports were looked over and finally stamped. We were ushered along and the driver smiled with satisfaction. "It's been an easy trip, Alhamdulillah," he said cheerfully. […]

The Syrian border was almost equally packed, but the environment was more relaxed. People were getting out of their cars and stretching. Some of them recognized each other and waved or shared woeful stories or comments through the windows of the cars. Most importantly, we were all equal. Sunnis and Shia, Arabs and Kurds… we were all equal in front of the Syrian border personnel. We

stable of big-name Washington lawyers, lobbyists and press advisers. Blackwater is pursuing a bold legal strategy, going so far in a North Carolina case as to seek a gag order on the lawyers for the families of four Blackwater employees killed in an ambush in Falluja in 2004. The company argues that the dead men had signed contracts that prohibited them from talking to the press about Blackwater and that this restriction extended to their lawyers and their estates even after death. In the aftermath of the Sept. 16 shootings in Baghdad (see above), the formerly reclusive Mr. Prince, the founder and chairman of Blackwater, has conducted a series of media interviews intended to polish Blackwater's tarnished brand. The company has changed the name of its major operating division from Blackwater USA to Blackwater Worldwide and toned down its warlike logo. It has sent out a mass e-mail message to workers, suppliers and clients hoping to inspire them to send letters to members of Congress and make other public statements of support.

were all refugees—rich or poor. And refugees all look the same; there's a unique expression you'll find on their faces: relief, mixed with sorrow, tinged with apprehension. The faces almost all look the same.
The first minutes after passing the border were overwhelming. Overwhelming relief and overwhelming sadness… How is it that only a stretch of several kilometres and maybe twenty minutes so firmly segregates life from death? How is it that a border no one can see or touch stands between car bombs, militias, death squads and… peace, safety? It's difficult to believe—even now. I sit here and write this and wonder why I can't hear the explosions. I wonder at how the windows don't rattle as the planes pass overhead. I'm trying to rid myself of the expectation that armed people in black will break through the door and into our lives. I'm trying to let my eyes grow accustomed to streets free of road blocks, hummers and pictures of Muqtada and the rest… How is it that all of this lies a short car ride away?

Departures I

by Yannis Ritsos

They leave one by one. The rooms empty, grow.
The furniture stands in the void like scattered islets. Soon secret groups gather in a corner; they prattle out their news.

The chairs turn their backs to the door. The shadows
walk sideways to dodge some blow. At night,
when you turn off the switch, from the outer corridor, you hear
the secret agents of some foreign power shuffling and shoving
in rubber tin shoes; then the creaking
in the wall joints, for, while the rooms are growing,
the house narrows, and behind the mirror in the parlor,
the mercury moults in small silver leaves, leaving behind
dark stains or holes on the faces of those who never return.

From *Selected Poems 1938-1988*, BOA (www.boaeditions.org), Brockport (NY), 1989; trans. N.C. Germanacos

Departures II

by Yannis Ritsos

Those that leave us, possibly linger for awhile,
there, further down, at the turn in the road, near the tall electric
pylon (perhaps to appear small in relation
to its height—that their disappearance may not seem important)—
they pause, stare at the house to retain an image of it a little longer,
for even memory collapses bit by bit—and where would the time and
means be found
for repairs and whitewashing?—the silence installs itself
outside the walls and inside; and if someone is about to speak,
he puts his hand immediately to his mouth, expecting to hear
the noise of the uncorking of a gigantic glass bottle—
like that, his hand before his mouth, as though to hide a yawn.

From *Selected Poems 1938-1988*, BOA (www.boaeditions.org), Brockport (NY), 1989; trans. N.C. Germanacos

Havana, September 21, 2007 **Yoani Sánchez**

There are many ways of leaving, even while staying put. I see this every day when I run into people I haven't seen in a long time, and they tell me that they spend their time at home, that they seldom go out, that they barely listen to the news or watch TV. They can no longer deal with the "outside", life on the street, the situation. They have traced a world for themselves that might as well be in Bangladesh or Sydney (except for a few small but very significant details). Shutting yourself in is as hard as leaving, since for some people, isolation is a last resort after emigration has failed. A friend told me the other day that, given the little social contact he has, he could just as well be living in a hut in Tibet, with a picture taped to the wall showing the view from his window in the municipality of Playa.

If probe further into this tendency to stay at home, you come across justifications like "I have almost no friends left to visit, everyone has left", "It's too rough out in the street", "everything is so expensive", "it's not worth going out", "it hurts to see everything so run down". There are the ones who say "Why should I go out? Just to get annoyed?"

Sometimes I too have my days of "inxile". I look out at the city from my balcony and prefer to just stay with the image of the sea, the clouds, the people walking by; but refuse to plunge in. Still, my allergy to the outside world always passes in the end and I go out again, finding solace in that wise song that goes "esto es lo que hay", "that's what there is".

September 20, Rangoon, Burma. Hundreds of Buddhist monks marched through rain-washed streets for the third day in Burma's main city, taking the lead in month-long protests that the military junta has so far been powerless to contain.

September 23, Rangoon, Burma. The largest street protests in two decades against Burma's military rulers gained momentum as thousands of onlookers cheered huge columns of Buddhist monks and shouted support for the detained pro-democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

September 23, Rangoon, Burma. The government began its violent crackdown on nationwide protests, clubbing and tear gassing protesters, firing shots into the air and arresting hundreds of the monks and their supporters.

Gaza, September 25, 2007

Heba

[…] I went to a workshop of a group of youth (males and females) who are our target group for a project on civic education. The project was designed before the Gaza events and the drastic changes that took place [fighting between Fatah and Hamas with Hamas gaining control over the Strip in June 2007]. So a major component of it was attending the legislative council (PLC) meetings to make sure that youth needs are addressed and of course the PLC is no longer working because most of the Fateh members would not attend conducted sessions. We discussed alternatives for this project component. Whilst my mind was blank looking at them in grave silence, they actively—red-faced, strong-toned, and mostly optimistic—started suggesting things; meeting parliament groups, watching previous televised PLC sessions, lobbying the current government, assessing youth needs, and they went on and on. Each suggestion astonished me. It seems active thinking in itself astonished me. […]

Both the Karni crossing and the Rafah crossing for people, which sits between Gaza and Egypt, have been closed since mid-June, and there is little prospect, with Hamas in charge, that Israel will allow them to reopen. The stated reason is security, since Israel regards Hamas as a professed enemy and a terrorist group. Nor is the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah, complaining, since he and his caretaker government in the West Bank also do not want Hamas to succeed in Gaza.

Kyiv, September 25, 2007

Veronica Khokhlova

I was on the way to see my friend, whose husband died of cancer last fall, at the age of 40, and whose daughter is eight months old now. I was bringing her some of Marta's clothes that are too small for her now. I boarded a metro train at Livoberezhna. At Gidropark, the train stopped near the police booth in the middle of the platform, and I saw my father's portrait pasted to its window. It's been there all this time. Very conspicuous. Or maybe

Veronica's father disappeared in Kyiv on July 16,

not. I'm not sure. But for a moment, I stopped seeing things around me. All I could see was papa's face. For some reason, I didn't get off the train right away. Then I did, walked inside the police booth and talked to a heavily made-up woman in uniform there. Asked her to please take it off. She promised they would. What if mama sees it, I thought. She takes the metro every day to visit us at the dacha. What a blow it would be to her.
We went to the park with my friend. At some point, she began telling me about her husband's last months, and his last hours. It was a more detailed story than the ones she had told me earlier. Their daughter is so beautiful, though, such a miracle.

2006; he was found dead twelve days later. See this review, no. 17, p. 64.

Goraždevac, Kosovo, October 2, 2007

It's now been one month since the day I arrived in Kosovo. The days fly by, escorting Serbian people into the city and making various visits to homes of people who live in Goraždevac. About two weeks ago, our neighbour Mrs. M. showed up at the door with her hand wrapped in a white rag, asking whether we could take her to the Italian military hospital (about ten kilometers from where we live is the largest Italian military base in Kosovo, called "Villaggio Italia") to get it looked at. We agreed right away, of course, but suggested that we take her to the civilian hospital in Peja-Peć, instead of the Italian military base. One of the fronts that Operazione Colomba, "Operation Dove", is working on the hardest is the idea of bringing people closer to public institutions, in the attempt to restore a shred of normality to their lives.

Domenico Palazzi

When the Justice Department publicly declared torture "abhorrent" in a legal opinion in December 2004, the Bush administration appeared to have abandoned its assertion of nearly unlimited presidential authority to order brutal interrogations. But soon after Alberto R. Gonzales's arrival as attorney general in February 2005, the Justice Department issued another opinion, this one in secret. It was a very different document, according to officials briefed on it, an expansive endorsement

And so, along with two other volunteers and an Albanian guy, I took our Serbian neighbour to the Albanian hospital in Peja-Peć. The woman hadn't set foot in the city, only seven kilometers away, since 1999, and she was so afraid of being mistreated that she kept repeating, "Don't leave me alone there, promise you'll take me back home".
Fortunately, the hospital staff we met that evening was very kind to Mrs M., whose frightened expression made her look more and more like a little girl. One of the doctors even said to her, "There's no need for you to come to the hospital with an escort, you can come perfectly well on your own. The war is over. Before the war, Serbs and Albanians used to live side by side, and that's how it should be in the future".
A few days ago we took Mrs M. back to the hospital to get the cast taken off of her broken hand. You could tell from her eyes that she was no longer afraid. Actually, at her request we even took her to do some shopping in the market, the same market where she used to come to sell milk before the war, and which she naturally hadn't visited again since 1999. It was a strange sensation to see this little old Serbian lady walking down the main street of the Albanian market in broad daylight. She wasn't afraid, it was if she had reclaimed some part of the normality that had been denied her so long ago.

of the harshest interrogation techniques ever used by the Central Intelligence Agency. The new opinion, the officials said, for the first time provided explicit authorization to barrage terror suspects with a combination of painful physical and psychological tactics, including head-slapping, simulated drowning and frigid temperatures.

CIA says it destroyed tapes of harsh interrogations. It destroyed them in 2005 in the midst of congressional and legal scrutiny about its secret detention program, according to government officials.

Al-Hassa, Saudi Arabia, October 3, 2007 **'Daisy'**

Usually during Ramadan, the streets and shops open and are all lit up as life begins after Taraweeh prayers finish around 8:30 pm. Since we

haven't bought the kids their Eid clothes yet and time's running out, we decided a few days ago that we'd go out after prayers last night. We picked up some of DD's nieces for the trip and set out before 9 pm, but something wasn't quite right. *Daisy*: Traffic seems unusually light going through the souk. *DD*: What time is it? All the shops are still closed. *Daisy*: Prayer's done with, is there something special going on for the Shia today? Ah yes, this must be the reason. I vaguely recall seeing an unusual amount of black clothing on offer at the markets during the past few weeks.

Shia make-up around 1/3 of the population of Al-Hassa, as well as there being small groups of Sufis and almost every denomination of Sunni Islam too. Because the tenuous tranquillity of the town exists at the expense of our Shia neighbors' freedom to practice religion and express themselves as *they* deem correct, we Sunnis are usually completely unaware of various Shia customs and religious practices.

Although we Sunnis work, study, and many times live next to Shia Hasawis, the topic of religion is verboten due to its volatile nature and the gag order that's been imposed on the Shia minority. Sunnis and Shia don't pray together and Shia have their own masjids, labeled "Husaynias", which they go to for prayer but are restricted by the government to announce only the Sunni call to prayer at Sunni designated times over the loudspeaker because it differs slightly from that of the Shia. Marriages between the sects are also virtually unheard of in Al-Hassa and if it does occur, it would usually be a Sunni man with a Shia woman. Due to the lack of genetic homogenization, Hasawis can easily distinguish on sight which camp one be-

October 4, Washington. Last year, when accounts of the killing of 24 Iraqis in Haditha by a group of marines came to light, it seemed that the Iraq war had produced its defining atrocity, just as the conflict in Vietnam had spawned the My Lai massacre a generation ago. But today a senior military investigator recommended dropping murder charges against the ranking enlisted marine accused in the 2005 killings, just as he had done earlier in the cases of two other marines charged in the case. The recommendation may well have ended prosecutors' chances of winning any murder convictions in the killings of the apparently unarmed men, women and children. Experts in military justice say the Haditha prosecutions were compromised by several factors having to do with the quality of the evidence, including a delayed investigation and the decision to conduct hearings in the United States, far from the scene of the killings and possible Iraqi witnesses. Perhaps nothing handicapped military prosecutors more than the delay in investigating the killings, on

longs to due to the distinct facial features and mannerisms each group exhibits which may not be apparent to a non-Hasawi observer. […]

Measures have been taken (read "smackdowns") by several institutions such as schools and companies to quash the expression of many Shia religious observations; the most obvious to Sunnis are the various days of mourning which Sunnis do not acknowledge. Due to nepotism, tribe pride, and wastafarians running rife and most times, unchecked, Shia have long been kept out of even the most basic employment by the Sunni majority. Sound familiar?

Like many minority populations, such as Jews in Europe, this has forced them into self-employment, and +90% of the women's souk in Al-Hassa, as well as most of the gold merchants, are Shia-owned. The majority of times, speaking from my own experience, this isn't a problem as I observe Sunnis buying from our Shia businessmen without reservation.

Now, back to our shopping trip gone bust: DD quickly called one of his Shia acquaintances to ask him what's happening… no answer. Then he tries calling one of his Shia-knowledgeable cousins while driving through a ghost-town of a souk. He confirmed that Shia were indeed mourning the assassination of Ali ibn Abi Talib (RAA), the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet (PBUH) who died on the 21st of Ramadan in the city of Kufa in 661 CE. This is one of several days in which Shia observe mourning but Sunni Muslims in Saudia, although we highly revere Ali (RAA), do not. We Sunnis in Saudia only observe the two Eids within the framework of our religious practice. Had so many shops not been closed for mourning, we

Nov. 19, 2005, because battalion officers initially decided the case did not require an inquiry. The attack began after a roadside bombing of the marines' convoy killed a comrade; led by Sergeant Wuterich, a group of marines then killed 24 people over several hours. Nineteen of the 24 were killed in their homes.

would have never noticed/remembered the event. […] *DD*: "I can't believe I've lived here all my life and didn't realize what was going on!"

The stranger

by Marco Saya

Here

notes from the present

The other day I met an Albanian
He asked me for a light
He wanted to talk
We talked
We were so different
That we had something to say to one another…

Always on the other side as well

by Claudio Magris

Here

notes from the present

No journey takes place without crossing political, linguistic, social, cultural, psychological frontiers, including the invisible ones between neighbourhoods in the same city, those between people, and those winding frontiers which, deep inside us, stand in our own way. Crossing frontiers; loving

From *L'infinito viaggiare*, Mondadori, Milan, 2005, pp. XII-XIII.

them, too—since they define a reality, an individuality, they give it shape, thus rescuing it from vagueness—yet without worshipping them, without turning them into idols which demand blood sacrifices. Knowing that they are flexible, temporary and perishable like a human body, and as such worthy to be loved; knowing that they are mortal—mortal in the sense that they are subject to death, like the travellers, and not a cause and circumstance of death as they have often been and still are.

Travelling does not only mean going over to the other side of the frontier, but also discovering that one is always on the other side as well.

Durham, North Carolina, October 11, 2007

Laila El-Haddad

Federal immigration agents were searching a house in Ohio last month when they found a young Honduran woman nursing her baby. The woman, Saída Umanzor, is an illegal immigrant and was taken to jail to await deportation. Her 9-month-old daughter, Brittney Bejarano, who was born in the United States and is a citizen, was put in the care of social workers.

Ok, I figure it's about time I make an announcement about this. But you know how it is when you forget to tell someone something, until the announcement, or phone call or whatever, becomes obscenely, inappropriately overdue?

Well the big news is: soon, inshallah, Yousuf will have a sibling! That's right, we are expecting our second child around the new year, which makes me 28 weeks/7 months pregnant.

Yousuf has already taken to his new role as older sibling like a fish to water, and has promised to help me change diapers (a proposition I'm not likely to take him up on, unless perhaps I am in a state of sleep-deprivation induced delirium). His curiosity is also peaking, as he endlessly asks "how they will get the baby out" ("do they rip you open?") and when it will be time to bring her home.

The doc says it's a little girl, so we are looking forward to some degree of relative quiet, but then again you never know with these things! Pls. feel free to submit your name suggestions too! Maybe I should hold a competition-most original girl's name? Names we are considering: Rawan, Salwa, Jana, Kawthar, Haya, Malak.

Al-Hassa, Saudi Arabia, October 18, 2007

Slavery is a socio-economic system under which certain persons—known as slaves—are deprived of personal freedom and compelled to perform labor or services. The term also refers to the status or condition of those persons who are treated as the property of another person or household. This is referred to as "chattel slavery".

The 1926 Slavery Convention described slavery as "the status and/or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised…" Slaves cannot leave an owner, an employer or a territory without explicit permission, and they will be returned if they escape. Therefore a system of slavery—as opposed to the isolated instances found in any society—requires official, legal recognition of ownership, or widespread tacit arrangements with local authorities, by masters who have some influence because of their social and/or economic status.

How could the above definition possibly apply to my life?

1. I cannot leave my house without my husband's permission. If I did and my husband wanted to exercise his "power", he can have the police bring

'Daisy'

*Across Russia people are embracing that quintessentially American genre, the television sitcom. "*Married With Children*, with its satire on the American middle class, fits the style of our channel well," said Dmitri Troitsky, a senior executive at the Russian channel TNT. "It seemed interesting and topical for us to do a parody on the Russian middle class."* Married With Children*, which ran from 1987 to 1997 in the United States, has been renamed* Schastlivy Vmeste*, or "Happy Together." Its setting has been moved from the Chicago area to Russia's heartland metropolis of Yekaterinburg. Natalya Bulgakova, a spokeswoman for TNT, said the show, which had its debut last year, is now the most popular scripted*

me back or even imprison me where Muslim women in other countries would only have to contemplate incurring divine punishment in the afterlife.

2. As a Saudi woman, I am not allowed to travel without my husband's documented permission. Even if escorted by my father, brother, uncle, son or other Islamic *mahram* [an unmarriageable kinsman], once married my husband's permission is still requisite and I would be prevented from exiting the country without it.

3. If I had a less-than-understanding husband, I may feel compelled to provide marital "services" to him a legally recognized minimum of several times a month, or he could be granted a divorce from me, whereas Muslim women in other countries would only have to consider "divine" punishment for refusing her husband without a good reason.

4. Even if I were to pursue my Islamic right to request a divorce from an unhappy marriage, I would have to get past the following hurdles as a woman, alone without male family members inside the country:

a) I'd have to make contact with a male lawyer who is not a male relative of mine and therefore, I'm limited with the kind of contact I may have with him. At this point female lawyers are prevented from arguing in court;

b) I cannot drive myself to meet with my lawyer or even to the court in order to pursue obtaining a divorce from my husband;

c) if I did manage to get there, I'd have to deal with entire legions of men who are unaccustomed to dealing with a woman;

series among Russians ages 18 to 30. TNT *is owned by Gazprom-Media, which is controlled by Gazprom, the Russian national resources behemoth that is controlled by the government. The producers and actors of* Schastlivy Vmeste *said that while the Russian scripts followed the outlines of the American ones, they had made changes for a Russian audience, fashioning plots around Russian holidays and using sets that better resemble interiors in Russia. They also insisted that the humor was more Russian. Still, the feel of* Schastlivy Vmeste *seems far more American than Russian.*

d) I'd have to pray that the judge appointed to my case truly tried to follow the Sunna and not a misogynistic, cultural version of Islam. Even if I were never wronged by my husband but simply didn't like him leading to my being discontent, I should be granted a divorce if requested;
e) I do not have access to official documents, which are obtained by my husband, including those vital to everyday transactions such as the "family card". Although legally, to my understanding, a law was recently passed allowing women to procure them, most women would send a male family member to do it (which is not an option for me).
5. I cannot even report the birth of my child and register his/her name.
6. Legally, the house I live in is not mine and I have no rights whatsoever to it. Even if I contributed money to it, unless my husband was kind and loving enough to add my name as partial owner on his own accord, it's entirely his house. Upon divorce or death, I could be homeless if his relatives or children wanted to claim their portions (much larger than mine) as their rightful inheritance. This potential eviction would be delayed fortunately, until my youngest child reached legal adult age.
7. Although I'm a citizen, because I am foreign-born and don't have anyone (male) in the country from my family to be my "guardian", upon divorce those few rights I have as a Saudi woman to remain in the country near my children could be revoked with my citizenship and I'd be sent packing, childless, back to America where my father lives.

8. If I ever did need to dig up male family members to represent me, these are my options:
a) I wait for 15 more years for my son to grow up and represent me;
b) I make a couple more sons as backup in case the first one isn't willing;
c) I find my estranged scam-artist half-brother from my father's second marriage who lives in America, who I can't tolerate and who'd attempt to milk me dry for every riyal I have;
d) I contact my other half-brother from my father's first marriage on another continent who despite being a kind man who would no doubt help me out in desperate times, I can no longer communicate directly with because I've forgotten his language for the most part;
e) I put my ailing, elderly father on a boat from America. He can't fly because the pressure may cause him to have another stroke.
At this point I'd like to reassure my readers that these are *not* the circumstances of my life at present or anyone I know. Also, most Saudi women will live their entire lives without any/most of these list items ever affecting them. Not every Saudi man is out to flex his muscles and exercise his legal "power" over his wife. I could cite several examples of women with similar circumstances to my own within my social circles whose houses are in their names or who are bequeathed their "husband's" house despite their being housewives and not contributing to its purchase (my mother-in-law), as well as women who rule the roost. What pains me is that if the Devil took over my husband, these could be some of the potential results. […]

Damascus, October 22, 2007 **R.**

Syria is a beautiful country; at least I think it is. I say "I think" because while I perceive it to be beautiful, I sometimes wonder if I mistake safety, security and normalcy for "beauty". In so many ways, Damascus is like Baghdad before the war: bustling streets, occasional traffic jams, markets seemingly always full of shoppers… And in so many ways it's different. The buildings are higher, the streets are generally narrower and there's a mountain, Qasiyoun, that looms in the distance. […] The first weeks here were something of a cultural shock. It has taken me these last three months to work away certain habits I'd acquired in Iraq since the war. It's funny how you learn to act a certain way and don't even know you're doing strange things—like avoiding people's eyes in the street or crazily murmuring prayers to yourself when stuck in traffic. It took me at least three weeks to teach myself to walk properly again, with head lifted, not constantly looking behind me.

It is estimated that there are at least 1.5 million Iraqis in Syria today. I believe it. Walking down the streets of Damascus, you can hear the Iraqi accent everywhere. There are areas like Geramana and Qudsiya that are packed full of Iraqi refugees. Syrians are few and far between in these areas. Even the public schools in the areas are full of Iraqi children. A cousin of mine is now attending a school in Qudsiya and his class is composed of 26 Iraqi children, and 5 Syrian children. It's beyond belief sometimes. Most of the families have nothing to live on beyond their savings which are quickly being depleted with rent and the costs of living.

Syria has closed its borders to all but a small group of Iraqis and imposed new visa rules that will legally require the 1.5 million Iraqis currently in Syria to return to Iraq. The change quietly went into effect on Oct. 1. For more than a year, 2,000 to 4,000 Iraqis have fled into Syria every day, according to United Nations officials. On the last four days that the border remained open, the officials said, 25,000 Iraqis crossed into Syria. Under the new rules, Iraqis must apply for visas at the Syrian Embassy in Baghdad. Only academics, merchants with commercial interests requiring travel to Syria, and taxi and truck drivers qualify for visas. Syrian officials have said they were responding to a longstanding request from the Iraqi government to close their border. They said the Iraqi prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, told Syrian leaders on a state visit in August that the constant flow of refugees undermined the Iraqi government's effort to bring greater security to the country. Jordan is the only other neighbor of

Within a month of our being here, we began hearing talk about Syria requiring visas from Iraqis, like most other countries. Apparently, our esteemed puppets in power met with Syrian and Jordanian authorities and decided they wanted to take away the last two safe havens remaining for Iraqis: Damascus and Amman. The talk began in late August and was only talk until recently— early October. Iraqis entering Syria now need a visa from the Syrian consulate or embassy in the country they are currently in. In the case of Iraqis still in Iraq, it is said that a approval from the Ministry of Interior is also required (which kind of makes it difficult for people running away from militias *of* the Ministry of Interior). Today, there's talk of a possible fifty-dollar visa at the border.

Iraqis who entered Syria before the visa was implemented were getting one-month visitation visa at the border. As soon as that month was over, you could take your passport and visit the local immigration bureau. If you were lucky, they would give you an additional month or two. When talk about visas from the Syrian embassy began, they stopped giving an extension on the initial border visa. We, as a family, had a brilliant idea. Before the commotion of visas began, and before we started needing a renewal, we decided to go to one of the border crossings, cross into Iraq, and come back into Syria: everyone was doing it. It would buy us some time, at least two months.

We chose a hot day in early September and drove the six hours to Kameshli, a border town in northern Syria. My aunt and her son came with us: they also needed an extension on their visa. There is a border crossing in Kameshli called Yaarubiya. It's one of the simpler crossings because the Iraqi and

Iraq to take in a substantial number of refugees, housing an estimated 500,000 to 700,000 Iraqis. But Jordan limited admission to Iraqis more than a year ago.

In the spring of 2004, Robert D. Blackwill, then the influential Iraq director on the National Security Council, pushed hard to make Ayad Allawi, a tough, secular Shiite with close ties to the Central Intelligence Agency, the interim prime minister of Iraq. Mr. Blackwill's efforts worked. Now, a little more than three years later, Mr. Blackwill is back in the same business: pushing hard to make Mr. Allawi prime minister of Iraq again. But this time, Mr. Blackwill's powerful lobbying firm, Barbour Griffith & Rogers, is receiving $ 300,000 from Mr. Allawi for his work. In the nearly three years since he left the White House, Mr. Blackwill has built a thriving business lobbying for the foreign governments, officials and companies he knew as President Bush's deputy national security adviser, as the United States ambassador to India and as a veteran of decades in government. Among his

Syrian borders are only a matter of several meters. You walk out of Syrian territory and then walk into Iraqi territory; simple and safe.

When we got to the Yaarubiya border patrol, it hit us that thousands of Iraqis had had our brilliant idea simultaneously: the lines to the border patrol office were endless. Hundreds of Iraqis stood in a long line waiting to have their passports stamped with an exit visa. We joined the line of people and waited. And waited. And waited…

It took four hours to leave the Syrian border after which came the lines of the Iraqi border post. Those were even longer. We joined one of the lines of weary, impatient Iraqis. "It's looking like a gasoline line…" my younger cousin joked. That was the beginning of another four hours of waiting under the sun, taking baby steps, moving forward ever so slowly. The line kept getting longer. At one point, we could see neither the beginning of the line, where passports were being stamped to enter Iraq, nor the end. Running up and down the line were little boys selling glasses of water, chewing gum and cigarettes. My aunt caught one of them by the arm as he zipped past us, "How many people are in front of us?" He whistled and took a few steps back to assess the situation, "A hundred! A thousand!". He was almost gleeful as he ran off to make business. […]

We spent the four hours standing, crouching, sitting and leaning in the line. The sun beat down on everyone equally: Sunnis, Shia and Kurds alike. E. tried to convince the aunt to faint so it would speed the process up for the family, but she just gave us a withering look and stood straighter. People just stood there, chatting, cursing or silent. It was yet another gathering of Iraqis: the perfect

clients are India, Serbia, Taiwan, the Kurdistan Regional Government, the Alfa Bank in Moscow and Thaksin Shinawatra, a former prime minister of Thailand and a billionaire communications tycoon who was ousted in a coup in 2006. Since late 2005, lobbying disclosure reports at the Justice Department show that Mr. Blackwill helped bring in fees to Barbour Griffith & Rogers from foreign clients that total more than $ 11 million.

October 23, California. Wildfires fed by gale-force winds ravaged Southern California, destroying hundreds of buildings. More than 400 square miles have been consumed. At least 500,000 people were estimated to have evacuated.

Out of the burning brush, several immigrants bolted toward a group of firefighters, chased not by the border police but by the onrush of flames from one of the biggest wildfires this week. The firefighters let them into their vehicles. But with the discovery of four charred bodies in an area of heavy illegal immigration, concern is

opportunity to swap sad stories and ask about distant relations or acquaintances.

We met two families we knew while waiting for our turn. We greeted each other like long lost friends and exchanged phone numbers and addresses in Damascus, promising to visit. I noticed the 23-year-old son, K., from one of the families was missing. I beat down my curiosity and refused to ask where he was. The mother was looking older than I remembered and the father looked constantly lost in thought, or maybe it was grief. I didn't want to know if K. was dead or alive. I'd just have to believe he was alive and thriving somewhere, not worrying about borders or visas. Ignorance really is bliss sometimes…

Back at the Syrian border, we waited in a large group, tired and hungry, having handed over our passports for a stamp. The Syrian immigration man sifting through dozens of passports called out names and looked at faces as he handed over the passports patiently, "Stand back please, stand back". There was a general cry towards the back of the crowded hall where we were standing as someone collapsed; as they lifted him I recognized an old man who was there with his family being chaperoned by his sons, leaning on a walking stick.

By the time we had reentered the Syrian border and were headed back to the cab ready to take us into Kameshli, I had resigned myself to the fact that we were refugees. I read about refugees on the Internet daily… in the newspapers… hear about them on TV. I hear about the estimated 1.5 million plus Iraqi refugees in Syria and shake my head, never really considering myself or my family as one of them. After all, refugees are people

growing that others may not have survived. Immigrants from south of the border, many illegal, provide the backbone of menial labor in San Diego, picking fruit, cleaning hotel rooms, sweeping walks and mowing lawns. The wildfires exposed their often-invisible existence in ways that were sometimes deadly. The four bodies were found in a burned area in southeastern San Diego County, a region known for intense illegal immigration. It is near Tecate, where a chain securing an evacuated border crossing was cut and people were seen flowing into the United States. As firefighting continued, makeshift camps for immigrants in the northern part of the county stood largely abandoned. Some immigrants were said to be hiding in even more remote terrain. Others sought help from churches. Terri Trujillo, who helps the immigrants, said she saw several out in the fields as the fires approached and ash fell on them. She said many were afraid to lose their jobs. "There were Mercedeses and Jaguars pulling out, people evacuating, and the migrants were still working," said Enrique Morones, who takes food and

who sleep in tents and have no potable water or plumbing, right? Refugees carry their belongings in bags instead of suitcases and they don't have cell phones or Internet access, right? Grasping my passport in my hand like my life depended on it, with two extra months in Syria stamped inside, it hit me how wrong I was. We were all refugees. I was suddenly a number. No matter how wealthy or educated or comfortable, a refugee is a refugee. A refugee is someone who isn't really welcome in any country, including their own… especially their own.

We live in an apartment building where two other Iraqis are renting. The people in the floor above us are a Christian family from northern Iraq who got chased out of their village by Peshmergas [Kurdish guerrillas] and the family on our floor is a Kurdish family who lost their home in Baghdad to militias and were waiting for immigration to Sweden or Switzerland or some such European refugee haven.

The first evening we arrived, exhausted, dragging suitcases behind us, morale a little bit bruised, the Kurdish family sent over their representative—a nine-year-old boy missing two front teeth, holding a lopsided cake, "We're Abu Mohammed's house, across from you; mama says if you need anything, just ask—this is our number. Abu Dalia's family live upstairs, this is their number. We're all Iraqi too… Welcome to the building."

blankets to the immigrants' camps. "It's outrageous." Some of the illegal workers who sought help from the authorities were arrested and deported. The Border Patrol also arrested scores of illegal immigrants made visible by the fires. The American Civil Liberties Union said it had received reports that people had been denied help at shelters because they lacked proper identification. Officials have been checking identification to prevent people not affected by the fires from taking advantage of the free food, clothes and other services. For the immigrants, the fires may have dried up some work. But some speculate on strong work prospects like cleanups. By early afternoon near a heavily damaged neighborhood in the Rancho Bernardo area, four men stood on a corner, waiting for work offers. "It is a shame what happened," said a man who gave just his first name, Miguelito. "But we think there will be jobs to clean or build."

Milan, Italy, October 26, 2007

Germana Pisa

The sign on the door reads: "SOS Central Station." The door leads into the room where the homeless are welcomed and their needs are taken care of. I

was supposed to be meeting a volunteer who works there. I wanted to ask him questions for an interview to be published on my website. I also wanted so much to *see*. Every year, when the cold season comes around, appeals are made in the press, inviting people to bring blankets and other gifts for the homeless. It occurs to me that, although I had always wanted to, I had never had the time to heed those appeals until then. The same old story: *time* is a tyrant, and our lack of it is the excuse we give for not doing what we would like or ought to do.

I went in, carrying my bags in which I had put the things I thought would be most useful. My friend, the volunteer, showed me in; a dozen men and women of various ages were sitting on benches all around. Still, silent; just a look, a casual look in my direction as I came in. I had been there for a while, just sitting too, when a man came up to me asking if, by any chance, there was a blanket. Then others approached, one asking for socks, another for a second blanket, and so on. Socks I hadn't brought, but I let them know with some satisfaction that I did have some padded slippers. They emptied the bags in a jiffy. I remember a woman asking me if I had a t-shirt for her son, but it had to be an *XL*... I did!

I didn't do the interview, I'll do it in the next few days, and in any case it hadn't been arranged for today. I was there to bring things and to see as well. But there isn't much else to see or understand about the homeless than what people already know or imagine; nothing different. It is *you* who are different afterwards, that's it. And maybe (maybe?) one of those men was actually hinting at some *difference* when he asked me, "Got any ID

Across the developing world, migrants move to other poor countries nearly as often as they move to rich ones. Yet their numbers and hardships are often overlooked. They typically start poorer than migrants to rich countries, earn less money and are more likely to travel illegally, which raises the odds of abuse. They usually move to countries that offer migrants less legal protection and fewer services than wealthy nations do. Yet their earnings help sustain some of the poorest people on the globe. There are 74 million "south to south" migrants, according to the World Bank, which uses the term to describe anyone moving from one developing country to another, regardless of geography. The bank estimates that they send home $ 18 billion to $ 55 billion a year. (The bank also estimates that 82 million migrants have moved "south to north," or from poor countries to rich ones.) Some south to south migrants are "pushed" by wars and political crises. Others are "pulled" by jobs and

on you?" I didn't pay much attention to those words, not the first time. Yes, because he repeated them twice, and the second time, as I was already leaving, he finished the sentence: "Got any ID on you?… Because if not, you can't…" Maybe he said "enter" or "stay here." I answered, as I was going out, "I think so." Very banal.

There and then I thought it was more of a sort of friendly provocation, a joke. But when the last words, which the first time I had not heard clearly, began to sink in, I understood. And if I got the message right, this is what he really meant: "Here you are in a territory which is not your own; so, show your ID!" Or: "What's your identity here?" Or maybe: "This is the place of *my* identity; yours is outside of here." As if to say: "What are you doing here? If I were outside, I would be more fragile and would never have thought of asking you for your ID, while outside of here you would've asked *me*, and if not you, somebody from your world would have—the world where I am more fragile, while here I am stronger…"

And I could go on and on. The man was a bit worked up, perhaps he'd been drinking, and yet…

better wages. Some follow seasonal work. Some put down roots. Some countries — Argentina is one — have been quick to give amnesty to migrants. Others, including Nigeria and Indonesia, have subjected them to mass deportations. Many countries simultaneously send and receive large migrations.

Goraždevac, Kosovo, November 5, 2007

Goraždevac is a small village inhabited by about eight hundred Serbs, built around the road that runs through it. At either end are two checkpoints guarded by soldiers (these posts are managed in rotation by the Italian, Slovenian, Romanian, and Hungarian contingents), cutting off the part where the Serbs live from the surrounding area, exclusively inhabited by Albanians.

Domenico Palazzi

November 12, Gaza. At least six Palestinians were killed and more than 100 wounded when a rally by the Fatah movement to mark the third anniversary of the death of its founder, Arafat, ended in armed clashes with Hamas.

When you visit the people's houses here, the subject that sooner or later gains the upper hand is the war, the one that we Italians heard only a distant echo of, even though we played a leading role in it, consciously or not. The NATO war planes took off daily from a military base in Pisignano, Romagna.
These bombs that set off from my "backyard" transformed the life of both J., a young Serb who has lived in Goraždevac for 29 years, who enrolled in the Serbian army and fought in Belgrade and Montenegro, and S., an Albanian from a working-class neighbourhood in Peja-Peć, which became famous for having organized its own defense during the conflict. These two young men now work side-by-side in the "Conflict Team", along with another Serb named R., and H., an Albanian-Egyptian, creating a quartet that is pretty unusual around here.
Their main job is handling "escorts", i.e., accompanying Serbs who live in Goraždevac to the Albanian city of Peja-Peć, since the Serbian population is not currently free to move at whim outside the enclave where they live. The creation of this "mixed escort" lets people carry out the little everyday errands that seem normal and obvious to us in Italy, but which in a context like this have the taste of real victory. So that's how the little old lady from Goraždevac can go to the hospital or buy groceries at the city market, or the young people from the enclave can go shopping in the stores downtown.

Al-Hassa, Saudi Arabia, December 4, 2007 **'Daisy'**

"Athaan?", my nearly-deaf and almost blind father-in-law asks as he pops his head out of his

bedroom at 1 am to see if the call to the pre-dawn prayer has passed. “Not yet Dad, it’s still early”, I’d assure him at the top of my lungs. He brought me his alarm clock almost every night before going to bed to make sure the time was accurate and the alarm was set to go off about a half-hour before the *athaan* was called so he’d make sure to be up, washed, dressed and sitting in the first row by the time they got around to calling for prayer. “Set it to a quarter-to-four” he’d instruct me, then hold the clock at the end of his nose, straining to confirm my settings after handing it back to him. Despite my assuring him of its accuracy, he’d proceed to fiddle with it after returning to his bedroom, usually to set it a bit earlier just in case, so he’d be sure not to miss prayer. This meant that his alarm was going off at all times during the night. Sometimes he’d pop out three times a night to ask if it was time to pray yet or not because he couldn’t hear it himself nor see a clock well enough to check the time. Each time we sent him back to his bed to await pleasing his Lord a few hours longer.

My father-in-law spent his last few weeks in this life asking every few minutes if it was time to pray. Much of the speech he was capable of in the days after his stroke in September was used to invoke the name of God and thank him for everything in his life that he could remember through his delirium. May Allah have mercy on him, forgive him of his sins and accept him into the highest levels of heaven. He passed away last night, Allah yarhamma.

His alarm went off at 3:30 this morning.

It is one p.m. and the meeting comes to an end. Throughout the entire morning the management representatives have been wrapped up in discussion with their English counterparts who have crossed the Channel to exchange views on hospital management. How to cope with health costs rising year after year, considering budget constraints on the one hand and the demands of the patients voiced more and more strongly on the other? And what about ethics? How much importance should be given to respecting the dignity of the "horizontal" person, forced by illness into a weaker position than that of the "vertical" man who instead holds on to his health and, therefore, his power?

But now is not the time for discussion. It is lunch time and each of us receives a sumptuous tray ordered for the occasion from an upmarket delicatessen. Chatting and laughing, we enjoy the salmon tartare, the exquisitely seasoned vegetables and the cheeses, served with a small, flower-shaped piece of butter, all the while using genuine cutlery and drinking wine from a small goblet made of genuine glass. This is all included with the tray and is destined to be thrown into the dustbin along with our leftover food.

After coffee we all gather around the discussion table again: what about planning a programme of cutbacks to be spread over a three-year period?

In the hematology department a dilemma awaits us: a twelve-year-old girl, who has come here from a distant island in the hope of receiving a transplant, is decidedly unbearable. The nurses

December 10, Moscow. President Vladimir Putin named First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev as his favoured candidate to succeed him.

December 11, Moscow. Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said that he would propose that President Putin become Prime Minister in a future government.

have no hesitation in defining her as "psychologically disturbed": she turns up her music to full volume (which disturbs the others—but who are these others?), she dashes everything on the ground in her fits of rage and has had a notice stuck up on the door of her room asking not to be disturbed for any reason whatsoever. Lending her a portable computer might make her feel better, but her mother does not have the money for the deposit. She is a poor woman, overwhelmed by the unexpected events that have befallen her and completely at a loss before her daughter's outbursts of anger. After lengthy, animated and difficult negotiations, an association agrees to provide a guarantee for them. Only towards the end of the afternoon can the computer finally be prepared and disinfected before it is introduced into the sterile room. Then a beaming smile lights up Manuela's face.

Havana, December 10, 2007 **Yoani Sánchez**

Last Saturday, at the entrance to the Acapulco Cinema, to see the film *The Lives of Others*. I think it must have been the biggest mob scene to take place during this festival. Those of us on the outside were yelling "Open up!" at the sight of them closing the doors against the stampede that wanted in. It seems to me that this outcry was about more than getting through the door of the Acapulco Cinema, it was a call for "Opening" with a capital O. I yelled it too, thinking about the barricades, obstacles and borders that have to yield and let us through.

Open up! we yelled outside the cinema, and an

hour later we heard the character in the film saying "the wall has fallen". Open up!—we said with our faces against the glass, as people pushed us from behind. Open up! we kept thinking, even when we were already in our cushy seats, the lights about to dim. Open up! Those were the words that stayed with me from that evening, the words I kept repeating the next morning.
And so, the movie, here retitled *La vida de nosotros*, "Our Lives", allowed us to shout out openly, right in the middle of Calle 26, a verb that sums up all of our desires: Open up!

If the air was free …

by Mario Rigoni Stern

Here

notes from the present

On the level ground at the hamlet of Schbanz they had built large hangars that could have housed more than a hundred sheep, but instead they put airplanes in it that had landed from the sky. One day Tönle's grandson, on his return from school, went straight to the Hano woods to tell his grandfather that the poet Gabriele d'Annunzio, now a commander, as the school principal Müller had explained, had flown with these airplanes all the way to the sky over the city of Trent, and there had dropped leaflets and the Italian flag. Tönle, on hearing this story, shook his head and drew sharply on his pipe. The first time he had seen those big

From *The Story of Tönle*, Marlboro/Northwestern, Evanston (Ill.), 1998, pp. 56-57; trans. John Shepley.

birds flying noisily over the Valle d'Assa, his astonishment had been mingled with scorn: they were nothing but diabolical contraptions for making war and who could say how many lire they cost, and how much flour for polenta one could have bought to feed people, or how many sheep. And if for them there were borders, what good were they if they could fly over them with airplanes? And if there were no borders in the air, why should there be any on land? And by this "for them" he meant all those who held the borders to be something concrete or sacred; while for him and those like him—who weren't as few as they might seem, but the majority of men—borders had never existed except as guards to be paid off or gendarmes to avoid. In short, if the air was free and the water was free, the land also ought to be free.

Mario Rigoni Stern was born in 1921 in Asiago, in the mountains of northeastern Italy. Tönle Bintarn's story takes place in the mountains of the Veneto region, which once bordered the Austro-Hungarian Empire and where smuggling was a means of subsistence for the peasant population.

Gaza, December 11, 2007 **Heba**

[…] I go to the theater to attend a play acted on stage! 1200 people attended the play, which was titled *In Reverse* and was acted as part of a campaign conducted by the Women's Affairs Center-Gaza to celebrate the 16-day campaign of combating gender-based violence. The play was about a writer who hates how women are treated in our society and wants to reverse gender roles. So he imagines four men, who are still dressed as men and talk as men but have all the problems of women. So the four men go, one at a time, to a fortune teller to tell her their problems, seeking solutions. One was forced to do house chores and is hit on a regular basis by his wife. The other was deprived

of his inheritance and is forced to quit school by his sisters. The third was denied his right to marry the woman he loves and is forced to become a male spinster. And the fourth had an affair and is afraid to be killed if his mother and sisters find out!
And you know, the audience was interacting ardently, clapping, whistling, and shouting in discontent—as men could not tolerate seeing other men humiliated! […]

Havana, December 24, 2007

Yoani Sánchez

December 27, Pakistan. The opposition leader Benazir Bhutto was killed in a gun and suicide bomb attack at a political rally being held near Islamabad.

Today I'll be celebrating Christmas Eve with my family and friends. We'll put together an improvised table with old elevator doors and as bedsheet on top to serve as a tablecloth. Everyone will bring something to the party. We won't have grapes, cider or turrón, but we'll get to spend time together in harmony, and that is quite a luxury in itself. The children will be guaranteed soft drinks, while a nip of rum with lemon or honey will be the nectar of choice for the adult crowd. My mother will talk about how complicated it was to get tomatoes this morning, and my niece will remind me that on Tuesday the 25th she's playing the role of an angel in the mass at her parish church.
At the head of the table, we'll place a chair that has been empty since Christmas 2003. It is the place of Adolfo Fernández Saínz, who was sentenced to fifteen years in prison during the Black Spring [the 2003 crackdown in which 75 journalists and dissidents were arrested]. It will be sad to feel his absence, for the fifth time now. If his jailers allow it, we'll get to hear his voice in the phone,

cheering us up (How ironic life is! He, in jail, still finds the strength to offer us encouragement.)
I remember when we told my son that he had been arrested. My husband told him, "Teo, your uncle Adolfo is in jail because he's a brave man", to which my son answered with innocent logic, "Then you are free because you're sort of chicken". Children have such a direct way of telling the truth! Yes, Teo, you are right: this Christmas we'll be warming our chairs because we are "chicken". In the privacy of our homes, we long for a new year of freedom, but we can't manage to turn those wishes into reality. We fall back on the myth of national destiny, since we have given up on trying to change things.
Adolfo's empty chair will be the space of greatest freedom at our improvised Christmas table.

Istanbul, January 1, 2008 **Veronica Khokhlova**

This has been the funniest New Year's I've had in a long time. We spent the last 30 minutes of 2007 climbing stairs at the hotel, up and down, with Marta. It's her newest hobby, to climb stairs, almost all by herself. She's a very stubborn girl. And so it was pure luck that at midnight we happened to be downstairs, where everyone else was. We all exchanged kisses and greetings, I finished my wine, and followed Marta upstairs again. Then she fell asleep. […]
My mother, back home in Kyiv, opened the balcony door at the very end of 2007, to air that damn year out completely. She was wearing an overcoat when 2008 arrived. Happy New Year to everyone!

Gaza, January 1, 2008

Heba

[…] The pilgrims left Gaza from Rafah crossing suddenly, after it seems some negotiations took place between Egyptian authorities and Hamas, or what have you, as these things are never clear. That is not the point. These pilgrims had to take the road instead of planes and spent like three to four days to arrive in Saudi Arabia. The problem arose when they wanted to get back to besieged Gaza. It is kind of ironic, you know, to be prevented from getting back to a prison. So these pilgrims left Jordan via the Aqaba seaport to Egypt. Some of them were floating on a ship for about two days without food or water. And those who were allowed to enter Egypt were sent to Al-Arish to stay in refugee camps! Does that ring any bells? It is the refugee status stamped on our foreheads, it seems. And all this because Israeli authorities insisted that they go through the Kirim Shallom terminal and not the Rafah crossing. "My feet are swollen and some of the pilgrims are really sick. We got hungry and thirsty and were denied going to the bathroom at times", a pilgrim friend of my mother's said in a tired husky voice over the phone. Of course, it is freezing cold now and these pilgrims are in tents in Al-Arish and some are still in a ship. […]
"Please let these pilgrims get back to shackled, besieged Gaza!"

Shvut Ami outpost, West Bank. For three months, Jewish youths have been renovating an old stone house on this muddy hilltop in the northern West Bank. The house is not theirs, however. It belongs to a Palestinian family. And their seizure of it, along with the land around it, for a new settlement outpost is a violation of Israeli law. The police have evicted the group five times, but they keep coming back. Yedidya Slonim, 16, one of the renovators here, who grew up in another West Bank settlement, Tzofim, said of the police: "We come back straight away, as soon as they've gone. They come every week for half a day. It doesn't bother us so much."

Havana, January 6, 2008

Yoani Sánchez

People start arriving before seven am. There's all kinds: the dreamers, the disillusioned, even the

provocateurs. They wait under a tree—maybe a *flaboyan*—near the Central Committee. They're there to present their letters, repeat their requests, or try—for the umpteenth-time—to see if their pleas will work. Some of them have come so often that they know how to interpret the gestures the soldier makes to wave them in. At the sentry box, they hand over their identity card, and inside—behind bulletproof glass—a man takes their letters and issues a receipt.

An appeal to the "highest authorities" is the hope of everyone who comes here. Many of them have traveled hundreds of kilometers to explore this last avenue. They believe that once the "top officials" come to hear about their problems, they'll be quickly solved. Under the "Wishing Tree", you often hear phrases like "This has happened to me because Fidel doesn't know about it. If he finds out, he'll take care of it for sure". These are the kinds of utopias they sit in, as they wait to be called into the building.

The lady in the red pants is here because her house fell down twelve years ago and she's living in a shelter; the old man—with a cracked voice—is demanding a pension that bureaucracy and negligence have snatched from him; a young woman asserts that her imprisoned boyfriend is innocent. There's also a man crouched in the grass that seems—like me—to belong to the ranks of the skeptics. This scene repeats itself every morning, Monday to Friday. Some times the tone of the demands grows more urgent, mothers bring their kids to beg in chorus, and someone calls for calm saying "People, quiet down and wait, 'cause otherwise you won't achieve a thing".

Every time I walk home I can see the Wishing Tree casting its shadow over more and more people. Every time, it's bent lower beneath the weight of problems.

I try to imagine an incredible span of twenty-four hours without the need to turn to the informal market. What would a day be like without milk from the people who knock on my door to make up for the absence of dairy—on the rationed market—for those of us over seven and under sixty-five? I can't conceive of a day without plunging into the black market to buy eggs, oil, or tomato paste. Even to buy a paper cone of peanuts, I must cross the line of illegality.

If I'm in a hurry to get somewhere, I'll probably have to take an unlicensed taxi. Not to mention the wide spectrum of underground workers I go to when my washing machine breaks, my gas range blocks up, or the shower stops working. All of them—in the shadows—prop up my everyday life and supplement the limited services offered by the State.

I even have to pay extra for the newspaper, to the old men who—waking at dawn—buy up all the copies of "Granma" and "Juventud Rebelde" to resell them and round out their measly pensions. Let alone the "unmentionable items" that the black market supplies us with, and the innumerable "open sesames" we obtain with a bill slipped into the right hands. But the most surprising thing is the infinite capacity for regeneration shown by these informal vendors after one of the frequent raids against them.

I don't know about you, but I couldn't get by a single day without the black market.

Havana, January 15, 2008 **Yoani Sánchez**

For three days the newspaper "Granma", in its two central pages, inundated us with all the anniversaries that can boast a round number in 2008. Along with the 155 years since the birth of José Martí, we could read about the 125th anniversary of the death of Karl Marx and the semi-centennial of Fangio's kidnapping by the 26th of July Movement. The act of gathering together that data and presenting it as a compendium for subsequent commemorations and memorials has made me reflect on the relationship between Cubans and the past; the excessive weight of yesterday in our lives.
All of these references to bygone things that must be recalled contrast with the little time we dedicate to talking about the future. The long lists of anniversaries remind us that on today's date—quite a few years ago—something happened or someone died. Most of these things happened forty, fifty or a hundred years back, while a gap in events covers our more recent periods. Those of us under forty have not taken part in almost anything, we have been just spectators of other people's glories. Passive consumers of the fattened repertoire of dates past. […]

Durham, North Carolina, January 23, 2008 **Laila El-Haddad**

Last night I received a text message from my dear friend Fida: "It's coming down, it's coming down!" she declared ecstatically. "Laila! The Palestinians destroyed the Rafah wall, all of it. All of it not part of it! Your sister Fida." More texts followed, as I received periodic updates on the situation in

Rafah, where it was 3 am. "Two hours ago people were praising God everywhere. The metal wall was cut and destroyed. So was the cement one. It is great, Laila, it is great," she declared. For the first time in months, I sensed a degree of enthusiasm, hope… relief even, emanating from thousands of miles away, via digitized words, from Gaza. Words that have been all but absent from the Palestinian vocabulary. Buried. Methodically and gradually destroyed.

Of course the border opening will only provide temporary relief, and the ecstasy it generates will be fleeting, as it was in 2005 when shortly after Israel's Disengagement, the once impervious and deadly, sniper-lined border became completely porous. It was an incredible time. […] It was then that I met a pair of young boys, nine and ten, who curiously peered over the fence beyond the wall, into Egypt. In hushed whispers, and innocent giggles they pondered what life was like outside of Gaza and then asked me: "Have you ever seen an Egyptian? What do they look like?". […]

Here

notes from the present

False directions

by Giorgio Caproni

"Border," the sign read.
I looked for the Customs house.
Not there. I saw, behind the sign,
no trace of a foreign land.

From *The Wall of the Earth*, Guernica, Montreal, 1992, p. 13; trans. Pasquale Verdicchio.

Rafah

by Laila El-Haddad

Durham, North Carolina, November 11, 2006
We're beginning our journey back to Gaza tonight, but first of course we have to fly in to Cairo; from there I will make a brief detour to Doha where I will be attending the launch of "Al Jazeera International" on November 15 (yes, finally!).

Cairo, November 14, 2006
Some people are just more trustworthy than others. You know what I'm talking about, right? More honest, more amenable; the friendly, happy-go-lucky, type that cause no problems. To the Gulf States, this means rich Westerners that they just lovvve to let into their countries' fancy resorts so they can spend spend spend, and tan their future skin away. Others, however, well, are not so trustworthy. Take Palestinians for example. The moment you see someone holding that ominous, forest-green Palestinian passport or travel document, you know there's trouble on the horizon; you know to be afraid, very afraid. Because Palestinians are stateless, and, by extension, squatters; whoever they are, wherever they go, they will squat, seek jobs, and eventually citizenship, if they can find a way; and if they don't, they'll simply become beggars or a huge burden on the economy. Even if they live in the US or Europe, or

even Mars, this notion still applies. Even if they are brain surgeons or Astronauts or millionaires: it doesn't matter, they have Palestinian written *all* over them, and it reeks from miles away. Such is the case with most Arab countries and their treatment of Palestinians, and my all-too-familiar experience trying to get to Doha today for the launch of "Al Jazeera International".

It's hard enough finding a flight or hotel reservations in Doha now with the Asian Games being hosted there, but I was almost laughed out of the airport when—upon being prompted to present my visa—I told them that my editors suggested I obtain one in the Doha airport, and this would be no problem. I know what all Palestinians with travel documents out there are thinking: *what were you thinking*? Well, I wasn't I guess. Silly me, for one microsecond I actually thought the Qataris had changed their policy towards us plague-infected Palestinians, that maybe it had become a little more humane; that maybe they'd seen the error of their ways, and had actually realized that I obviously did not intend to come and seek residence in Doha or disturb the precious balance of their economy since my son was staying behind in Cairo with my parents, and my husband was in the United States. But no. No no no no. Again and again I was told: you are Palestinian! So when I attempted to switch my ticket from Egypt Air to Qatari Airways, with whom I heard I stood a better chance, I was literally told: "You might stand a chance at obtaining a visa if you had any nationality *except* Palestinian." And that exception does not include Israelis, who can obtain a tourist visa in the Qatari airport. Or of course Americans, like Yousuf. That's right: my rambunctious little two

and a half year old can go to Doha, no problems, no questions asked. But me? Or his father, a Harvard-educated ophthalmologist in training? Keep dreaming. Silly me. I should have thought of the consequences of being Palestinian when I was a little embryo in my mother's womb. To quote her, 25 years ago, when she was likewise stopped in Cairo Airport (Egypt now allows entry only to Palestinian females coming in en route to Gaza, but Palestinian males must be escorted directly to the border, without stopping in Cairo) and denied entry because she was Palestinian (and pregnant with my young brother): "How is it my fault that I was born Palestinian?"

Al-Arish, Egypt, November 21, 2006

After returning from Doha on Sunday, my family and I drove off to the Egyptian border town of Al-Arish yesterday—a five-hour drive from Cairo, and a 30-minute drive from the Rafah Crossing. Al-Arish is the closest (and largest) Egyptian town to the border. During times of extended closure, like this summer, and last year, it becomes a Palestinian slum. Thousands of penniless Palestinians, having finished their savings and never anticipating the length of the closure, end up on the streets. The storeowner and taxi driver relay story after story to us from this summer. In response, and under Israeli pressure, the Egyptian police no longer allows Palestinians driving up from Cairo past the Egyptian port city of al-Qantara if the border is closed and Al-Arish becomes too crowded. "They turn it into a ghetto. That, and the Israelis didn't want them blowing up holes in the border again to get through."

We carried false hopes last night, hopes transmitted down the taxi driver's grapevine, the ones who run the Cairo-Rafah circuit, that the border would open early this morning. So we kept our bags packed, slept early to the crashing of the Mediterranean, the same one that just a few kilometres down crashed down on Gaza's besieged shores. But it is 4, then 5, then 6 am, and the border does not open. And my heart begins to twinge, recalling the last time I tried to cross Rafah; recalling how I could not, for 55 days; 55 days during which Yousuf learned to lift himself up into the world, during which he took his first fleeting steps, in a land which was not ours; 55 days of aloneness and displacement.

The local convenience store owner tells us he hears the border may open Thursday—"but you know how it is, all rumors". No one can be certain. Some say tomorrow, some say Thursday, but in the end no one ever knows. Even the Egyptian borders officials admit that ultimately the orders come from the Israeli side. […] Even the Palestinian soccer team has been unable to leave Gaza because of the Rafah closure, to attend the Asian games. No one is exempt. […]

Al-Arish, Egypt, November 22, 2006

We've been in Al-Arish 48 hours now. Our journey, not including the days spent in Doha, has spanned more than five days now. We've rented a small beachside vacation flat here. They are cheap—cheaper than in Cairo, and certainly cheaper than hotels, and are usually rented out to Palestinians like us, waiting for the border to open. It's low season now, and the going rate is a mere $ 12 a night. In the summer, rates jump to a min-

imum of $ 35 a night. We can afford it. But for many Palestinians who come to Egypt for medical treatment, and without large amounts of savings, even this meager rental fee can begin to add up. We went downtown today to buy some more food. We are buying in small rations, "just in the case the border opens tomorrow". I feel like we've repeated that refrain a hundred times already. […]

So now we are back in the flat. We sleep, and wake up, and wait for the phone to ring for some news. Every time we receive a knock on the door, we rush to see if the messenger brings good tidings. Today? Tomorrow? A week from now? No, it's only the local deaf man. He remembers us from last time, offers to take out our trash for some money and food. We sit and watch the sunset. […]

Al-Arish, Egypt, November 23, 2006

It's our third day in Al-Arish, and still, no word about the border. Everyone is suddenly a credible source on when the border will open, and anxious ears listen to whatever they dish out. One local jeweller insisted it would open at 4 pm yesterday, a suggestion that the taxi drivers laughed off; they placed their bets on Thursday, but Thursday has come and gone, and still no sign of the border opening; the woman staying in the flat next to us—a Syrian-Palestinian businesswoman also waiting to enter Gaza—says she has "credible information" it will open in a matter of "days". Atyiya, our taxi driver, says *he* heard it wouldn't open until the Muslim pilgrimage (Hajj), a few weeks from now. A border official we call every morning at 5 am says only the Israelis know for sure.

How is it that when waiting for passage through borders, time is suspended, yet somehow, the rest of the world goes on living? How is it that all sense of time and belonging and life come to a standstill here I cannot understand. We've packed and unpacked our bags a dozen times. My mother finally gave in and opened hers up in a gesture of frustration, and maybe, pragmatism. It seems like a bad omen, but sometimes things work in reverse here: last time we were stuck for 55 days in Egypt, and the day we decided to buy more than a daily portion of food, the border opened. But every night, it's the same ritual. We pack all our things, sleep early, and wake up at 5 to call the border. As an Israeli friend put it, "uncertainty" is used as part of the almost endless repertoire of occupation. In the end, security is all that matters and all that ever will. As Palestinians, we've come to despise that word: Security. […] It has become a deity more sacred than life itself.

It used to be that anyone with an Israeli-issued travel permit or visa could cross Rafah into Gaza—but never refugees of course. Since the Disengagement last year, all that has changed. With few exceptions (diplomats, government delegations, UN staff, Red Cross, press with Israeli-issued cards) no one besides residents of Gaza carrying Israeli-issued IDs can come in. No foreigners, no Arabs, no West Bankers, not even spouses of Gazan residents, or Palestinian refugees, can enter Gaza now. Our identity has come to be defined by restrictions and borders and permits and limits. That is the nature of the Occupation. "If you are from Gaza, you cannot travel to the West Bank; you cannot travel to Jerusalem; you cannot use Allenby, il-Jisr, or Erez, or any of the airports. You

cannot obtain travel permits for your or your spouse. Nor family reunification. You cannot obtain identity cards. You cannot fly, you cannot fish, you cannot move, you cannot breathe, you cannot live." If you meet all these cannots, then you know you are from Gaza.

Al-Arish, Egypt, November 26, 2006
[…] As we continue our wait, Yousuf of course waits along with us. Kids are remarkably agile, more than we give them credit for. Of course for Yousuf, this is the second time in his young life he's had to wait for such a long time for the border to open (the last time, he was a tender eight months). No that doesn't mean he doesn't notice what's happening around him—say something once, and he picks it up. He's remarkably intuitive that way, I think he gets that from his father. Now he's taken to the habit of asking us regularly "when will the border open? I want to go to Lazza" (yes, Lazza… he still has trouble pronouncing the "G"). He provides the lot of us (my parents and I) a bit of comic relief when out of the blue, or when he has just woken up, stammers "you know, I think today is the day. I think they will open the crossing today", when of course he has no idea what he's going on about. In the meantime we've tried to make the experience as enjoyable as possible for him—walks on the beach and playing in the sand with my father, taking him on tacky manually-run park rides, and his favorite of all, the one that gets him jumping up and down: riding the public bus, jam-packed with people of every shape and color, downtown. Who knows… We've also finally chopped off that mane of his: people were beginning to confuse him with a sheep!

Al-Arish, Egypt, November 27, 2006
We've given up trying to call the "hotline", a direct line to some bored-stiff Egyptian border official for the latest news. Inevitably, the answer is always "no 'instructions' from the other side yet." But today finally came the call we were waiting for: my cousin from Gaza phoned to tell us the border is opening tomorrow, for three days only, in both directions! My neighbour in Gaza City confirmed it by MSN Messenger. My mother says it's because she finally cooked a meal yesterday instead of us always eating out in case the border opened. Of course, they are still all rumors until we hear for certain from the border…

False alarm! Just when we were getting excited… We turned on Palestine TV this evening to read some breaking news out of Gaza, reporting that the Rafah Crossing will in fact *not* be opening tomorrow, Tuesday, despite earlier reports to the contrary. A friend who contacted the EU representatives stationed in Rafah confirmed the bad news, and thinks it might be because of reports in "Haaretz" that Ismail Haniyeh [a senior political leader of Hamas and, at that time, Prime Minister of the Palestinian National Authority] was due to leave tomorrow for a three-week tour to different countries, and that the Israelis may have "intervened" to stop him. Makes perfect sense… as usual… According to Palestinian wires, there are over 3200 people waiting to cross, many directly in the border itself. Our wait continues.

Al-Arish, Egypt, November 29, 2006
We stood and we waited and we cried and we returned back to Egypt yesterday, and again today.

We and thousands of others. It was anguish. Anguish and misery and desperation personified in every woman, man and child. One hour turned into two, then three, then five, as we stood shielding our eyes from the piercing midday sun on Wednesday, when we were told the Crossing would be opening for a few hours. Some wailed in exhaustion, others fainted, still others cracked dry humor, trying to pass the time. We stood, thousands of us, packed together elbow to elbow like cattle, penned in between steel barriers on one end, and riot-geared Egyptian security guards on the perimeter, who were given orders not to allow anyone through until they hear otherwise from the Israelis—and to respond with force if anyone dared.

Many of the people had been waiting for more than two weeks to cross back into Gaza, sometimes making the trip to the crossing several times a day upon receiving word of its imminent opening. "We have been waiting for 15 days now. Only god knows when it will open: today, tomorrow, the day after?" said 57-year-old Abu Yousuf Barghut, his shrapnel-riddled arm trembling by his side. His tearful wife, Aisha, added: "God knows we only went to seek treatment for him and to come right back. And now we are stuck and waiting us in Gaza are my four children. This is the most basic of rights, to be able to return to our homes, and we are even denied that." "The only way anyone will actually pay attention to our plight is if one of us dies here, and even then, I'm not sure the world will care," stammered one young man, Isam Shaksu, his eye heavily bandaged after having received a cornea implant in Jordan. […]

There were mixed Israeli orders: first to open the crossing for three days, starting Wednesday, yesterday; then breaking news at 11 pm retracted that order; and by Wednesday morning, another about-face saying that the border would in fact be opened. By the time we arrived, it was 11 am, and already somewhere around 2000 had amassed in front of the gates. And no one was budging. Yousuf waited along with us, asking incessantly "When would the crossing open?", and begging me to pose the same question to the Egyptian officers manning it. Every time he'd see the gate budge open he would get excited and yell "It's open!! It's open!!". And everyone would heave a heavy sigh. When we finally did make it inside the "Second Sector" of the Egyptian side, the relief was overwhelming: we had moved fifty metres! And we could wait another four hours if it meant we'd finally be allowed through. But instead we faced yet another uncertain wait; it was like some sadistic game with no certain ending.

As we waited, we saw members of the Palestinian athletic teams heading to the Asian games after a two-week delay. We also saw Ismail Haniyeh on his way out to his Arab tour. He stopped to mingle with the desperate crowds, some hailing him, some complaining about how long they had waited. We finally learned that the crossing had been closed this entire time, and the Egyptians were only allowing people through to give them some hope to cling on to, and to prevent the masses from rioting, which has happened before. We thought once he'd passed, we'd be allowed through. But it is then we learned that Mahmoud al-Zahar [co-founder of Hamas and, at that time, Foreign Minister in the government of Ismail Haniyeh] had crossed ear-

lier that morning, carrying suitcases full of $ 20 million. The European Monitors were not pleased. How could he not declare the money, and how could he have the audacity to try and bring in money to feed his people in the first place? They filed a "complaint" with the Israelis, who immediately told them to shut down the crossing, without giving a reason, leaving thousands, including Yousuf, my parents and I, stranded.

My mother and Yousuf had gone ahead of my father and I, and our bags, into the terminal, and Yousuf fell asleep in the mosque. It was then that the officers had informed us the crossing was no longer operational, and everyone who was inside, even those who had already made it as far as the Palestinian side, would have to go back. We pleaded with an Egyptian officer: "It took us six hours to get as far the inside of the terminal, please let us through". "Big deal—it took me ten hours to get here from Cairo," he retorted, as I reminded myself they get paid a measly 180 Egyptian pounds a month and couldn't care less. Another officer was more sympathetic. "What you lot have to understand is that no one gives a damn what happens to you; you could sit here and suffocate for all they care. You are simply not human enough for them to care." When is it that we lost our humanity, I wondered? And when is it that the humanity and desperation of a people, waiting desperately to be let through to their homes, was less important than the call of duty? And that a government was made to choose between feeding their own people, or giving them passage to their homes? Inside the terminal, the scenes were dizzying. Already disoriented form lack of sleep and little food, I looked around in awe. It was nothing short of an inter-

ment camp, and I lost myself somewhere between the silent anguish of old men, aching, teary eyed-women on the verge of collapse, and children, some strewn across the floor in exhaustion, others who were sick, in wheelchairs, wailing…

We returned to Arish, exhausted and sleep-deprived, only to find that all of the apartments were occupied by returning passengers. The only flat we found was one without hot water and leaky ceiling pipes, but we couldn't care less. The next morning, we left again to the border, where we had left our suitcases, despite word from taxi drivers that the crossing would not open. We waited again, this time for only five hours, until we decided it was an exercise in futility. Everyone was looking for answers, some answers, any answers. When would the crossing open? Was there hope it would open today? If so, what time? Should we wait, should we return to Arish? Nobody knew. Every now and then someone would make a call to some secondary source they knew in Gaza or on the border, and rumors would spread like wildfire across the masses. "At noon, they say at noon there is a possibility it will open! Patience, patience!" And then we wait some more.

One man, frustrated, took his bags and began to push them back on a trolley and out through the throngs of exhausted passengers. "Where the hell do you think you're going?" bellowed one of the Egyptian officers. "To Jerusalem! Where do you think?" he snapped. It was nearing the end of our long day, and overcome by exhaustion, we didn't know whether to laugh or cry. A friend in the UN told me the Europeans had left their posts after yesterday's "incidents" and thus the Palestinian side of the crossing has shut down indefinitely

now. And so now, we return to square one. Back in Arish, waiting, as ever, for the border to open.

Al-Arish, Egypt, December 4, 2006

He keeps asking me about the border. Yousuf, I mean. He overhears things, and so naturally inquisitive, he asks what we are doing and why are we still here and each question is followed by another and another. "Mama, can I ask you something?" "Anything, my love." "Why are we still here, in Arish?" "Because we are waiting to enter Gaza, dear." "But then, why don't we go to Gaza?" "Because the crossing is closed, my love." "Why is it still closed?" [silence] "Mommy, why is still closed?" "I don't know." I know, my dear, but do you really want to know? Do you really need to know? "Well, who's closing it mommy?" What do I tell him? "Some bad people." "You mean like in the stories, like Sheer Khan in the Jungle Book?" "Yes, sure, like Sheer Khan." "But who are they? Who are these bad people? Is it the *yahood*?" He asks, mimicking what he's heard on the border. What do I say? I hesitate. "Look, there are some people; some are good, some are bad. And the bad ones are closing the border." But why? What did we do? I wish I knew, my dear. I wish I had all the answers, my love, so I could answer all your questions. I wish I didn't have to answer such questions to start with. But now I do, and what can I say to you? "Mommy, please tell them to open it." "I tried, my dear." "Try harder. Try again. Tell them again. Please, tell them 'Yousuf wants to enter Gaza'." And so it goes: Dear Mr. Peretz [at that time, Defense Minister of Israel]: My son Yousuf, two years and nine months, would like me to inform you that he wants to enter Gaza. He

has asked me to tell whoever it is who is keeping it closed to open the border for him immediately. In fact, he asks me every day. And now, asking is no long sufficient: he wants answers, too. Why is the border still closed? And who is keeping it closed and why? So, in addition to asking you to open the border, I am also writing to ask you what I can tell a two-year-old to satisfy his insatiable curiosity. What can I tell him of borders and occupation and oppression and collective punishment? What would *you* tell him? Lying doesn't work: two-year-olds are like natural born lie detectors. And so he figures it's the bad guy, like in the stories that we all read growing up. And now, he demands to know who the bad guy is. What do I tell a two-year-old, Mr. Peretz, about the bad guy who won't let him return home? A Palestinian mother.

Al-Arish, Egypt, December 5, 2006

My mother saw a group of men collecting some wood off the beach the other day. She assumed they were custodial workers and thanked them for their work, asking why the Municipality didn't send people out to clean up the beach more often. It was then that she realized they were actually not trash collectors but Palestinians searching for driftwood to light a small campfire with. Not only that, but as she would learn, it was the Palestinian Minister of the Environment, Yousuf Abu Safiya (who has a permanent post that predates this January's elections) and two of his co-workers. It appears they are also stuck in Egypt, and staying a few flats down from us. They came over later at night as we discussed everything from politics to the adverse affects of the water's nitrate content on children in Khan Yunis.

Apparently he tried calling Mahmud Abbas's [Abu Mazen's] office today to ask whether they knew when the border might open. Their answer: "Well, we heard maybe today. But if not today, for sure tomorrow, or the day after… or Friday…". As a cousin in Gaza joked: "There's only one thing for certain, and that's that nobody knows when it will open!".

Al-Arish, Egypt, and Gaza, December 6, 2006
More rumours: everything beeped and rang at once. Our cell phones, chat programs… Even the phones of our guests from the Ministry of Environment, who were over, began ringing… news from Gaza, from such-and-such a source at the border, from a local radio station, from an internet news site, that the border would open tomorrow for one day, from 8 am to 5 pm, during which thousands will try to return home, and thousands of others to go out, including pilgrims on their way to Mecca. The news seemed to confirm itself one phone after another; then Palestine TV brought the breaking news, and more and more internet sites. So, once more, we are packing up our belongings, just when our neighbour was contemplating buying a frying pan, and we head to the border tomorrow at 7 am. From there, as ever, we will wait and see what happens.

At last—we've made it through. We left at 6 am, and by later afternoon were in Gaza City. But we were only a handful of thousands—I estimated 5000—still stranded and unable to get through to Gaza, or out of Gaza. All of Rafah's roads have been blocked off by the sheer number of people trying to get out.

Gaza, December 10, 2006

So we're back and I think I'm only now beginning to recover from what I call the "Rafah Crossing Hangover". You feel fine at first and once you finally get home and set your bags down you think "hey, that wasn't so bad!". Then, around 6 pm, it hits you like a sack of rice. First your back gives way, and it feels like a truck ran it over. Then you begin to lose sensation in your legs as they go numb. Disorientation… and soon, collapse! By 8 pm we were all out cold and woke up the next day not knowing where I am and with a headache no amount of coffee could fix. Yousuf woke up and walked to the door leading to our balcony instead of the house, not realizing where he was either. It took us a few days to finally regain consciousness.

The Border itself was a picture of agony. Because of the sheer numbers of people waiting to cross, the Egyptians had sectioned off the crowds via several roadblocks. Our final goal of making it into Gaza seemed formidable at 7 am, as we arrived and saw thousands upon thousands of passengers trying to get through in any way possible. When my parents realized they wouldn't be crossing anytime soon—with a donkey cart full of luggage behind them—Yousuf and I went ahead with only our passports and my backpack, only to find about 5000 people amassed in front of the Egyptian gate awaiting entry. Only a few were being allowed in at a time, because ultimately the buses that were sent off in to the Palestinian side can accommodate about 80 people—procedure passed down from the Israelis. As we reached the outside of the gate, all I saw in front of me was people climbing on top of each other, looping their bags around and through the crowds to try and make it

to the front. Simply making it *to* that gate was a task. It was every person for themselves. In the chaos, one woman forgot her daughter, about Yousuf's age, and I picked her up lest she be crushed under the thousands of legs. A few hours later, I made contact with my parents—they had miraculously made their way to the front, while I remained in the back. With a lot of yelling and jostling, I managed to wind my way through the crowds to join them, and of course there was more waiting ahead. By the time we finally made it to the Palestinian side, it was about 1 pm. We waited in the infamous "bus" for the Israelis to give the approval for us to pass: apparently the video monitoring extends to the outside of the terminal as well. Blue-bereted EU monitors watched intently. I looked around at the faces of each of the people on our bus, including a man who had metal rods in his leg after his fifth leg operation in three years. I couldn't help but think how no one will realize what every one of these people have been through, just to return to their homes. The crossing closed shortly after we made it across, and thousands remain stranded behind us. I looked back, feeling for one second I had abandoned them, not knowing what more I could do.

I keep getting asked how it feels to be back. My first impression was feeling as if I was sucked into a black hole or vacuum. Very eerie going into a place that has methodically been turned into one of the world's most isolated. You feel sort of distant and displaced and unsettled. And of course, there is a mixture of exhilaration and relief and uncertainty. But you also feel accomplished, as though by merely being able to cross you have exercised a act of awesome proportions: defying

the far-reaching grip of the occupation in the even the remotest and seemingly insignificant of ways. I think the most disturbing and overwhelming feeling of all is having to come to grips with the realization that your life—and how you live that life—continues to be controlled wholly and absolutely by an Occupier, and that their ability to deny you entry to your own home so abruptly, so arbitrarily, and yet so methodically, largely to the acquiescence and complicity of the world, has become accepted.

On the map - a place's exposed

by Marina Tsvetaeva

Here

notes from the present

From *Verses to Czechoslovakia*, trans. Andrey Kneller.

On the map - a place's exposed:
Blood flows to the face!
In the agony of the cross,
Villages here blaze.

The land is split - a pole ax
Is the border pole.
On the world - an ulcer:
Will consume the world!
[…]

Milan, Italy, January 25, 2008

Massimo Parizzi

A picture in a newspaper. People—women, men, children, the old and the young—trampling over rubble, wire and metal sheets, crossing "to the

January 21-25, Al-Arish. Hamas broke the border barrier in 20 places, and Egypt has allowed 200,000

other side." From Rafah in the Gaza Strip to Rafah in Egypt. The soul responds and leaps up with joy. As if it were saying, "at last!". A feeling of being released from a burden, from some sort of gloom. Something it has always longed for, but gradually lost hope in, is coming true. Even "the soul" had almost stopped hoping. A sense of release from resignation, that is what it feels.

The soul, unlike reason, conscience and knowledge, knows nothing about history and politics. It is still a child. It does not even know what that knocked-down border was there to divide. It was a border and that is all. Nor does it consider that in a few days it will be raised again. It can see nothing, think nothing, know nothing but that torn-down metal fence, and the people crossing over it. People, not soldiers.

The soul has a deep and concentrated look. So concentrated that it is limited: a narrow, blinkered visual field. It cannot see right or left, ahead or behind. Only that picture. Its eyes stare at it, so fixedly that it is spellbound. So fixedly that it sees nothing and everything, loses itself in the depths of history, all that was and is to be, and travels around the whole world. Like the look of a child who is being "spellbound."

And yet this look is the look of an adult, with almost old eyes. One that has learnt, a lot. It has learnt disillusionment—the world is different from what it had imagined as a child. So it has learnt to hope. One must have been a child, but not be a child any longer, to be able to hope. To lose hope and still keep on hoping: it has also learnt this paradox. And it has learnt to speak using reason, conscience and knowledge—but without letting itself be overwhelmed by them.

Palestinians to enter. Thousands of Gazans are in Al-Arish, complaining about the doubling of prices, but happy about their chance to get out of Gaza, and even melancholic about having to return, as if on the last day of a vacation. Muhammad al-Hirakly, 22, said he had been here for two days, but could not get past the police to get to Cairo. "I tried to go there, to see the big city, and also the girls." The police ordered hotels not to take in Palestinians, but residents and mosques provided beds. "We've been sleeping in the Rifai Mosque. It's nice they let us in," Hirakly said. He was interviewed in a line to ride the bumper cars at a little amusement park. "It's the most fun we've had in years." Muhammad Abu Samra, 18, came to buy cigarettes to resell. "Being here makes me feel like I want to see the world," he said. "I wish they could keep the border open; maybe one day they'll even let us go to Cairo." Adel al-Mighraky, 54, was returning to the Rafah crossing with his grandson. "We were like birds in a cage," he said. "Once the door is open, birds will fly away as fast as they can; this is what we did. But what kind of bird has to go back to its cage after it was freed?" It was the first time his grandson had left Gaza. "We felt free today."

San Salvador, January 26, 2008

Maria Ofelia Zuniga

In the eighties in Salvador we lived through what are now called "the war years". I don't have a good memory, but I do remember that no one spoke about the war: it was a taboo subject, because, after having spoken, many lost their freedom, others their right to live in their own country, close to their dear ones. And—needless to say—many others lost their lives. It was not just a matter of not speaking in the sense of not accusing anyone, but also of not letting drop sentences such as "last night we heard something", "we saw something", "something strange happened to us". For instance, every now and then in front of my house one could hear gunshots, people running, whispers, strangled cries. The sun usually rose and in general no dead body sprang up… Whole families disappeared overnight, as if by magic. People knew about a young man who had been forced to leave his house and had then been pumped full of bullets in the street, though very few today can remember anything more than just having been aware of it, because in those moments no one went out, and if, by chance, someone realized something had happened, I can swear they would have cancelled it from their memory at once, so as not to fall into the temptation to talk to someone about it. Just to make sure the next family to disappear would not have been theirs.

I only have very vague memories, because I was only a little girl then—and you can't imagine what an opaque crystal sphere our parents had built around us—but there are some real events I can't forget, and I have tried to extract from the cracks in my mother's memory some extra information to

February, 3. Egyptian troops closed the border with the Gaza Strip, ending 11 days of free movement by Palestinian residents of the blockaded territory. Egyptian forces were allowing Gazans and Egyptians to cross the border to return home, but prevented any new cross-border movement.

help me piece together my own memories. Though she cannot remember much either, as if the fact of witnessing the death of people you have watched grow up, or seeing families run away without leaving any traces were such "trivial" things that one can no longer remember them. I say "trivial" ironically, because in fact we know it was fear. As usual, better not to open one's mouth. So many have died for having spoken about what they had seen or heard!

Sometimes I get the impression that we have gone back to living as we did in those times, when, at least in the capital city where I lived, one never spoke to *anybody* about "those things", above all because one didn't know "what colour" the person in front of us was, or the one sitting behind us on the bus, or those sitting at the next table in a public place. And repression was the "queen of the Carnival".

I can remember when, during my teenage years, I started having direct contacts with people who had their heart tinged with red. First of all, in my parish church, where there existed standard ecclesial communities and a whole insurrectionary movement which, one way or the other, backed up the San Salvador guerrilla warfare. We tried to live following the precepts of "liberation theology". Priests, catechists, teachers, and anyone who gave the impression of having a slightly more advanced mind, was branded "suspect", and might have died just because he or she had left the house with a Bible under arm. A lot of the people I met in those years fought in the thick of it, through the printed word, in rural areas, in the cities, some from the pulpit, others from their exile, and others simply

Thousands of foreign workers have come to the Kurdish districts in the last three years, a huge turnaround for a place that had hardly any before, making it one of the fastest-growing Middle Eastern destinations for the world's impoverished. They come from Ethiopia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Bangladesh and Somalia, supporting an economic boom here that is transforming Kurdish society. But nearly all foreign workers interviewed over a two-week period here said they had been deceived by unscrupulous agents who arrange the journeys. Unable to communicate, some arrive not knowing what country they are in. Once here, their passports are seized by their employment agencies, and they are unable to go home.

by dreaming of a Salvador in which one day peace and social justice would rule. Many, very many, are no longer here, and such a utopia is still a long way away. However, as Galeano rightly says, sometimes the matter is simply that "utopia is on the horizon: when I walk two steps, it takes two steps back…. I walk ten steps, and it is ten steps further away. What is Utopia for? It is for this, for walking".

War as war, with its forces and non-forces, is over—fifteen years have gone by since peace was signed—and Salvador is still immersed in violence, people keep disappearing from their homes overnight, young people keep dying and I ask myself what phase we are going through. Years ago they called it "post-war period", but, honestly, I don't know for how long one can speak of "post-war", for how long one can keep on thinking that what we are going through now is a consequence of those times. What we do know is that, although there have been some changes since peace was signed, we have seen "the queen" come back and, when faced with all these violent acts, many of which end in meaningless deaths which give us the shivers, there is mass silence.

One day a young woman is raped in the street, in full daylight, by 5, 6, 7, 15 young lads, some of whom are still children. In the end they kill her, and put a card round her neck on which they explain that it has been a payoff between rival gangs, and no one tries to know more, simply because *no one has seen anything*, because seeing entails too big a responsibility. As Saramago perfectly recounts in *Blindness*, when any society is dominated by panic, its inhabitants, without exception, erect invisible walls behind which everyone tries

A vast flotilla of industrial trawlers from the European Union, China, Russia and elsewhere, together with an abundance of local boats, have so thoroughly scoured northwest Africa's ocean floor that major fish populations are collapsing. The coastal stock of bottom-dwelling fish is just a quarter of what it was 25 years ago. In Mauritania, lobsters vanished years ago. The catch of octopus — now the most valuable species — is four-fifths of what it should be if it were not overexploited. A 2002 report by the European Commission found that the most marketable fish species off the coast of Senegal were close to collapse — essentially sliding toward extinction. In 2002, a scientific report commissioned by the European Union stated that the biomass of important species had declined by three-fourths in 15 years — a finding the authors said should "cause significant alarm." But the week the report was issued, European Union officials signed a new four-year fishing deal with Senegal, agreeing to pay $ 16 million a year to fish

to survive, although at the expense of other people's lives. In this country we have learned to survive, but each of us on their own, behind walls, some of which are invisible and others visible for those who want to see them; they are personal safety walls in the shelter of which what happens outside is not important, provided it does not involve us directly. We are sorry, we make comments in low voices with our wife, our son, our brother, our husband, it's sad to know that last night out there, in the street we use every day, they killed another person, "with no face and no name", because nobody knows who it was, although they might have lived there all their life, whether for fifteen or seventy years, in the same neighbourhood. Now that he or she is dead, no one knows anything, no one wants to know anything, and no one is concerned about going any further.

The inertia we have learned to live with in this society terrifies me. Since the war finished, we have apparently regained possession of our rights as citizens, we can get together, demonstrate, speak openly, have our heart tinged with any colour we wish and shout it to the wind. We have taken on the responsibility of constructing peace, but if all this has been written somewhere it has remained only there, and here we are, living day by day, every morning asking luck to be on our side, hoping not to go past the wrong place at the wrong time.

Yesterday evening, at about a quarter past seven, my mother was going to buy some bread, my brother opened the door to get the car and go to a meeting, my father was watching TV on a wheelchair, my sister was doing the washing up, Roco, our Boxer, was dragging his bowl around demanding his dinner, which no one had remembered to

for bottom-dwelling species and tuna. Four years later, Mauritania followed suit. Despite reports that octopus were overfished by nearly a third, in 2006 Mauritania's government sold six more years' access to 43 European Union vessels for $ 146 million a year: the equivalent of nearly a fifth of Mauritania's government budget. The huge economic benefits that come from processing and exporting the catch remain firmly in European hands.

"Life is better there. There are no fish in the sea here anymore." Ale Nodye, a Senegalese fisherman yearning to immigrate to Europe. ("The New York Times", January 14, "Quotation of the day")

give him, the fish in the aquarium demanded the same thing, I was getting the supper ready, and just as all this was happening, we heard some gun shots, "bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang", one after the other, not the machine-gun burst we have heard other times. (As in the war years, we hear shooting so often that sometimes I think I can recognize the weapon. During the war I always knew if they were shooting with an AK-47, which meant that a guerrilla had broken into our area, or if what I could hear was an Armed Forces gun, which might have meant a load of other things.)

"Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang", I said. I screamed at brother and my mother, so that they would not go out. She said she hadn't heard anything, while my brothers and I did hear, indeed. They were very close, ten seconds passed and… life goes on. Supper, the TV, the dog, the fish, dirty dishes, the bread.

Yesterday evening, around a quarter past seven, at a stone's throw from my home, they killed a person whose face or name no one knows. We learned it when my brother came back. He had left to go the meeting, but had to come back because the dead man had been left in the street he was supposed to drive along. At that very moment, at home, we realized that once again we had come very close to death. We asked ourselves where our friends and family members who had not yet come home from work were and we called them to tell them to be careful. The neighbourhood has become dangerous again, we told ourselves; we asked ourselves who the dead man was; we asked ourselves where we would all end up: all our questions will remain unanswered. But we did not manage to find out more. The evening went on at

Global food prices spiral out of reach, spiking as much as 45 percent since the end of 2006. In Cairo, the military is being put to work baking bread as rising food prices threaten to become the spark that ignites wider anger at a repressive government. In Burkina Faso and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, food riots are breaking out as never before. The rising prices are altering menus, and not for the better. In India, people are scrimping on milk for their children. Daily bowls of dal *are getting thinner, as a bag of lentils is stretched across a few more meals.*

the usual pace and we all went back to ordinary life with a calm which, thinking back now, gives me the shivers. I realize we have got used to death. When someone dies in this way we are terrified, but only because we think it may happen to ourselves or to someone we love. It seems that, if we did not know him, the fact that a human being has died does not upset us. One life has suddenly ended, but this does not make us think, let alone act.

They say that action without reflection is blind, and that reflection without action is useless. I believe—and this is very sad—that many of us in this country are living according to new values, which we have created ourselves. In the midst of serious safety problems, in the midst of a crisis which is plunging people into hopeless poverty, it seems we still believe that if we do not pick a quarrel with anyone, if we say nothing, nothing at all… we are safe. If I live in a neighbourhood surrounded by a high wall, nothing will happen to me. But if I cannot live in such a neighbourhood, then I can install an electrical burglar's alarm around my house, and I'll be fine. Nothing will happen to me and my family. If I don't go out at night, nor during the day, unless for absolutely necessary reasons, if I keep my usual friends and don't get together with strangers, if I don't try to learn something more than what "is going round", then nothing bad will happen to me.

As for the economy, well, nothing can be done; the rich have always existed; even the Bible says so… And then, how could the rich mend their ways if there were no poor around anymore? And how on earth could we all be rich? What with all this nonsense, nobody has taught us to think that safety is the responsibility of a whole community,

and that social justice does not mean that "there are neither rich nor poor people"; nor has anyone taught us that there are minimum conditions that a people can expect of its State, that there are responsibilities everyone shares, that if I pay taxes on petrol I have a right to see their effects on the good conditions of the roads, that health is not a "charity service"—as hospitals and public clinics are called here—but a right, as is also education, and that it is not enough to be able to go to school, because school is free now, but did any of us manage to study when they were hungry? […]

Today was a quieter Saturday morning than usual, and I went past the exact place in my neighbourhood where last night, at quarter part seven, a person died. I went past that place where blood could still be seen, where a person died by the hand of another person, also without a face or a name. Two people nobody saw, although at that time children play in the street, some people come home from work, while many others go shopping, or go and get some bread, say hello to their neighbours, or just have a rest watching people go by. And despite the fact that a life ended under my nose, today things are going on and, if I want, I can forget all about it. Nothing happens… until it happens to me. I wonder where we will all end up by thinking this way. And then, do we really believe we will always save ourselves?

In the eighties in San Salvador we lived through what we today call the "war years", and in those years those who spoke about the war and denounced acts of injustice and violations of human rights were killed. In 2008 in San Salvador we are living through what is called the "post-war" phase, the phase of peace reconstruction, and those who

speak about violence and denounce acts of injustice and violations of human rights still taking place are killed. During the war decade we were scared. In 2008 we are still scared. In the past we thought "someone must do something", and sometimes we still think so today. Apparently, certain things never change.

Al-Hassa, Saudi Arabia, February 26, 2008 **'Daisy'**

This is the phrase I've heard several old women using when emphasizing how old they were when they were married off: "I was playing out in the street when they came and brought me to see this strange man and…". My mother-in-law estimates that she was probably around eleven years old when she was married off to her husband, a man twenty some years her senior (we never did know exactly how old my father-in-law was, God rest his soul). She claims that she hadn't even started menstruating yet, as once a girl hits puberty she can no longer play "out" in the street. The woman he'd been married to passed away suddenly, and at the wake, his uncle came to comfort his grieving nephew. "Why don't you marry my daughter", he offered him. The man felt in his heart of hearts that having a new wife would ease his nephew's suffering as well as provide his daughter with a husband he knew and trusted. And so, my mother-in-law was married off to my father-in-law.

As was common in those days, a new bride did not become the managing force in her household but rather, became a part of her new husband's family's home. His mother was the matron and called all the shots. She was expected to be an

February 17. Kosovo declares its independence from Serbia.

February 18. Cuban leader Fidel Castro said that he will not return to lead the country, retiring as head of state 49 years after he seized power.

February 24. The Cuban National Assembly named Raúl Castro, the 76-year-old armed forces minister, to succeed Fidel Castro, his brother, as president.

apprentice to her husband's mother, bear the children and eventually, after her mother-in-law became old and infirm, she would take over the managing the household.

More than likely due to the strain on my mother-in-law's as yet undeveloped body, her first three children died immediately, within a day or so, after birth. Although in the days "before oil" the infant mortality rate was astounding, three in a row would be tough! She was probably not even in her mid-teens before her first living child was born, at home, as were all children at that time. After having lost three children in a row, they didn't take *any* chances with this one. Believing that someone had given them an "eye" resulting in their babies' deaths, they hid the newest baby for over a year and didn't announce the delivery to anyone outside of the family. As a result, my husband's oldest brother didn't get circumcised until he was around eight or nine years old, as well as never discovering exactly what his age is. Such was life, back in those days.

Both my mother-in-law and father-in-law were illiterate and had to work hard for everything they had. My father-in-law was a manual laborer and worked various unskilled jobs throughout his life, jobs that South-East Asian workers now do for less pay. There were no other options for girls back then; they were destined to become wives and mothers. Education for men was only available to the elite and the clergy in the past and upon attaining puberty, a girl was ready for the next stage in her life: marriage. There wasn't anything else. These days it's unheard of for a man to marry an eleven year-old girl in Saudia and attitudes

have changed towards young marriage. Although you will hear of the occasional fourteen year-old getting married, it's a rarity, and teenage pregnancy rates in the west are probably higher than the rate of Saudi girls the same age marrying. Even marrying in high school is becoming more infrequent with every successive year. Some become engaged in the last year or so of high school or immediately after graduation. Many young women now are trying to finish university and get a year or two in working before marrying.
Occasionally, especially during exam times, I hear comments from some of the older women. "I don't see why they're killing themselves with all this studying for university when they're just going to get married and stay at home with the kids."

Beijing, March 2, 2008

Hao Wu

A friend of a friend who's a well-known British TV journalist and presenter has been commissioned by this foreign broadcaster to make two long and five short documentaries. He asked if my film partner and I would like to make one of the ten-minute shorts. We jumped at the opportunity.
We proposed following three university seniors of different social and economic backgrounds for a day to see how their class background affects their lifestyle and outlook on the future. It is simple, risk-free (both my partner and I hold Chinese passports), and easy to execute, compared to the TV journalist's ambitious plans to examine China's present cultural landscape, evolving political structure, rise in Christianity, growing citizen unrest, and many other hot-button issues in his other six documentaries. So we thought.

March 9. Spain's governing Socialists triumphed in elections. The victory gives Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero a second four-year mandate.

March 10-13, Lhasa, Tibet. Chinese security forces were surrounding three monasteries outside Lhasa, after hundreds of monks took to the streets this week in what are believed to be the largest Tibetan protests against Chinese rule in two decades. Robert Barnett, a Tibet specialist at Columbia University who has communicated

Three weeks later, the TV journalist has come back with more than half of his filming done. He has interviewed Christian pastors, citizen groups protesting to protect their rights, cold miners in Shanxi, and dissidents from all over. Local dissidents helped organized their interviews and his crew were duly followed and harassed by the police. Moving forward, he has lined up many big names in the Beijing social and cultural scenes for even more interviews.

In the meantime, our little pre-production has generated only one and half candidates. […] How is it possible that the TV journalist could access so many dissidents yet it seems impossible for us to find a straightforward rich kid who enjoys touting his/her wealth? We had a long lunch with an upper-middle class kid. He said in his generation few care to discuss and comment on contemporary political issues. Most are focused on improving their lives, and they are careful not to leave any mark that could come back and bite them in the future.

"I know you two are nice," he said. "But how could I be sure that there won't be any risk associated with the footage. What if the broadcaster does something with it? What if it gets on the Internet? What if someone uses it against me? You never know, right?"

It dawned on us then that unless one could "benefit" somehow from talking to the media—either to voice their grievances or to broadcast their views—few in China are willing to share their minds publicly. The endless What-ifs. There's our political reality and also thousands of years of mandarin culture in which one verbal slip could send the entire family to the gallows during a time of political turmoil.

with Tibetan exiles, said the initial incident occurred Monday (March 10) when about 400 monks left Drepung Loseling Monastery intending to march five miles west to the city center. Police officers stopped the march and arrested 50 or 60 monks. "They were demanding specific changes on religious restrictions in the monastery," Mr. Barnett said. He said monks wanted the authorities to ease rules on "patriotic education" in which monks are required to study government propaganda. On Tuesday, about a dozen monks staged a pro-independence demonstration, waving a Tibetan flag. Police officers arrested them. The arrests set off another protest on Tuesday.

March 15, Lhasa, Tibet. Violence erupted yesterday morning in a busy market area, as Buddhist monks and other ethnic Tibetans brawled with Chinese security forces in bloody clashes. Witnesses said angry Tibetan crowds burned shops, cars, military vehicles and at least one tourist bus. State media said at least 10 people died. By this morning, Chinese armored vehicles were patrolling the center of the city.

What if… What if we all realize the depressing inhumanity of worrying too much about too many what-ifs?

Moscow, March 5, 2008

Around 9 am today, Mishah left for a three-day corporate get-together in Rome. He was flying via Helsinki, because he had a Finnish Schengen visa. He did not have an Italian visa, since the Italian embassy in Moscow wouldn't give it to him because he's a Ukrainian citizen, and he had no time to go back to Kyiv and apply for a visa there. Around 3 pm, he called me and said that the Finns weren't letting him proceed on his way to Rome, so he'd be flying back to Moscow later tonight.

Needless to say, both he and I are pretty upset. Actually, I'm pretty furious.

Mishah has never been to Rome and was looking forward to it. I had asked him to bring me a Riccardo Fogli CD, and perhaps something from the Vatican. Not that I really need any of it, but it would've been nice. Marta had requested a dog, but that's okay, we'll buy her yet another one here.

His flight back to Moscow is at 8 pm. He's at the Helsinki airport now, drinking beer and buying books in English for me. I asked him why he decided not to spend the night in Helsinki, and he said that the Finns weren't allowing him to enter their country, either.

There are too many points to bitch about here, and I could go on bitching for the next few hours, until Mishah's back home. But it's all too obvious, so I'm not gonna bother.

Veronica Khokhlova

March 24, Lhasa, Tibet. In the chaotic hours after Lhasa erupted March 14, Tibetans rampaged through the city's old quarter, waving steel scabbards and burning or looting Chinese shops. Foreigners and Lhasa residents who witnessed the violence were stunned by what they saw, and by what they did not *see: the police. Riot police officers fled after an initial skirmish. "The whole day I didn't see a single police officer or soldier," said an American woman who spent hours navigating the riot scene. The absence of police officers emboldened the Tibetan crowds, which terrorized Chinese residents, toppled fire trucks and hurled stones into Chinese-owned shops. In turn, escalating violence touched off a sweeping crackdown and provided fodder for a propaganda-fueled nationalist backlash against Tibetans across the rest of China that is still under way. Domestic opinion is inflamed with*

Mishah is back home. He has spent two hours in a cab (to and from Sheremetyevo), and three hours on a plane (to and from Helsinki), bought me a book about Anton Chekhov's niece, a toy puppy for Marta, a sixpack of Finnish beer (or two, or even three, I don't know), and got fingerprinted, among other humiliating things. The way it appears now, he is barred from entering the Schengen Zone for the next three years.
Fucking assholes.

nationalist anger as state television is repeatedly showing images of Tibetans rioting in those early, unfettered hours. The police hesitation did not last long. The crackdown began within 24 hours. By March 16, the paramilitary police were searching Tibetan neighborhoods and seizing suspects.

Moscow, March 6, 2008

Veronica Khokhlova

Mishah is very angry. […] I'm well aware that we are not the first ones to get a kick in the ass, nor are we the last ones, unfortunately. […] Anyway, what's truly upsetting about it is that the silly visa regime prevents some of us from thinking of foreign travel as something natural (buy a ticket, book a hotel, pack and go ahead) […].

The world of yesterday

by Stefan Zweig

Here

notes from the present

Indeed, nothing makes us more sensible of the immense relapse into which the world fell after the First World War than the restrictions on man's freedom of movement and the diminution of his civil rights. Before 1914 the earth had belonged

From *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln (Neb.)-London, 1964, pp. 409-411.

to all. People went where they wished and stayed as long as they pleased. There were no permits, no visas, and it always gives me pleasure to astonish the young by telling them that before 1914 I traveled from Europe to India and to America without passport and without ever having seen one. One embarked and alighted without questioning or being questioned, one did not have to fill out a single one of the many papers which are required today. The frontiers which, with their customs officers, police and militia, have become wire barriers thanks to the pathological suspicion of everybody against everybody else, were nothing but symbolic lines which one crossed with as little thought as one crosses the Meridian of Greenwich. Nationalism emerged to agitate the world only after the war, and the first visible phenomenon which this intellectual epidemic of our century brought about was xenophobia; morbid dislike of the foreigner, or at least fear of the foreigner. The world was on the defensive against strangers, everywhere they got short shrift. The humiliations which once had been devised with criminals alone in mind now were imposed upon the traveler, before and during every journey. There had to be photographs from right and left, in profile and full face, one's hair had to be cropped sufficiently to make the ears visible; fingerprints were taken, at first only the thumb but later all ten fingers; furthermore, certificates of health, of vaccination, police certificates of good standing, had to be shown; letters of recommendation were required, invitations to visit a country had to be procured; they asked for the addresses of relatives, for moral and financial guarantees; questionnaires, and forms in triplicate and quadriplicate needed to be filled out, and if only one of this

Born in Vienna in 1881, Stefan Zweig was the youngest son of a wealthy Jewish family who owned a textile factory. From early on he became interested in traveling and in exploring other countries. His journeys around Europe, Asia and America included visits to Great Britain, Spain, India, Burma, the United States and Cuba. During the First World War, he took a pacifist stand. During the 1920s and 1930s he ranked among the most famous writers in Europe. He fled Austria in 1934 following Hitler's rise to power, then lived in England, before moving to the United States. In 1941 he went to Brazil, where in 1942 he and his wife Lotte Altmann committed suicide together.

sheaf of papers was missing one was lost.
Petty details, one thinks. And at the first glance it may seem petty in me even to mention them. But our generation has foolishly wasted irretrievable, valuable time on those senseless pettinesses. If I reckon up the many forms I have filled out during these years, declarations on every trip, tax declarations, foreign exchange certificates, border passes, entrance permits, departure permits, registrations on coming and on going; the many hours I have spent in ante-rooms of consulates and officials, the many inspectors, friendly and unfriendly, bored and overworked, before whom I have sat, the many examinations and interrogations at frontiers I have been through, then I feel keenly how much human dignity has been lost in this century which, in our youth, we had credulously dreamed of as one of freedom, as of the federation of the world. The loss in creative work, in thought, as a result of those spirit-crushing procedures is incalculable. Have not many of us spent more time studying official rules and regulations than works of the intellect! The first excursion in a foreign country was no longer to a museum or to a world renowned view, but to a consulate, to a police office, to get a "permit." When those of us who had once conversed about Baudelaire's poetry and spiritedly discussed intellectual questions met together, we would catch ourselves talking about affidavits and permits and whether one should apply for an immigration visa or a tourist visa. The acquaintance with a stenographer in a consulate, who could cut down one's waiting time was more significant to one's existence than friendship with a Toscanini or a Rolland. Human beings were made to feel that they were objects and not subjects, that nothing was

their right but everything merely a favor by official grace. They were codified, registered, numbered, stamped, and even today I, as a case-hardened creature of an age of freedom and a citizen of the world-republic of my dreams, count every impression of a rubber-stamp in my passport a stigma, every one of those hearings and searches a humiliation. They are petty trifles, always merely trifles, I am well aware, trifles in a day when human values sink more rapidly than those of currencies. But only if one notes such insignificant symptoms will a later age be able to make a proper clinical record of the mental state and mental disturbances with which our world was seized between the two World Wars.

San Salvador, March 11, 2008 **Maria Ofelia Zuniga**

Last March 1 we gathered together (in the middle of the street and without asking for a permit) to toast the still living, cultivated, renovated and present friendships, which, whether close or distant, nourish our lives with knowledge and emotions. […] Our meeting point was "La gran vía". […] We got there and looked for parking (on a Saturday evening…). […] Roberto was next to the fountain with a little table embellished with a lovely tablecloth, a vase of red flowers, a bottle of wine, four glasses and a tray of pistachio nuts: "Since we didn't manage to meet to celebrate Friendship Day either on 6 January or on other days, I thought today could be a good chance…". […] People looked at us and smiled, some maybe thinking we were a bit crazy, others that it was a very unusual thing. […] A toast to lots of things: to friendship, to those who are close, to

those far away, to the men and women we shall start meeting again one day and to ourselves, fellow-travellers on this special day. […]

Gaza, March 27, 2008 **Heba**

It's been very quiet lately in Gaza. And though it may sound funny, it is very strange. We are not accustomed to quietness and this seemingly peaceful atmosphere makes us wonder… no bullets, no bombing, so what's next? […]
They say Rafah crossing will open. I wish it would. It's been five years since I last traveled outside Gaza. I was pregnant with my first daughter when I went to Jordan for the last time. And my daughter is four and a half years old now. My youngest, who is three, keeps saying "I want to go to Egypt". I don't know where she picked that up from. When I ask her "What's Egypt?", she says "Egypt is pretty". By time, I figured out that Egypt symbolized for her a beautiful state of being! So Egypt is where all the toys are, the zoo is, merry-go-rounds, running in a park and so on! […]

To cross the border

by Ryszard Kapuscinski

Here

notes from the present

Te closer one got to the border the emptier the land became, and the fewer people one encountered. The emptiness only increased the mystery

From *The open world*, in "The New Yorker", February 5, 2007.

of those regions, a mystery that attracted and fascinated me. I wondered what one might experience upon crossing the border. What would one feel? What would one think? Would it be a moment of great emotion, agitation, tension? What was it like, on the other side? It would, of course, be… different. But what did "different" mean? What did the other side look like? Did it resemble anything I knew? Was it inconceivable, unimaginable? My greatest desire, which gave me no peace, which tormented and tantalized me, was actually quite modest: I wanted only one thing—*to cross the border*.

Havana, April 8, 2008

Yoani Sánchez

At the secondary school where my son studies we had a parents' meeting which lasted three hours and almost ended up in a fight. The headmaster read the Ministry of Education resolution No. 177 which was approved last December. It states that, in order to pursue one's studies in secondary school, one's school results will no longer be decisive. Students to be rewarded with the best places in pre-university courses in Exact Sciences, and at Arts or Technology, Informatics or Communication Schools, will no longer be those with the highest marks. Selection will benefit the most "upright". […] According to the new method of judgement, the standards which will determine a young person's "uprightness" are: 1. Attendance and punctuality; 2. Attitude towards work; 3. Attitude towards studying; 4. Discipline; 5. Appropriate use of the uniform and emblems of the Pioneers; 6. Political-patriotic demonstrations

April 7, Paris. China dubbed its Olympic torch relay the "Journey of Harmony". But what was supposed to be a majestic procession through the French capital resulted in waves of chaos, as human rights groups used the event to assail China's record on rights. The torch went out several times, forcing the police to place it on a bus.

April 9. "We haven't turned any corners. We haven't seen any lights at the end of the tunnel." Gen. David Petraeus, the American commander in Iraq. ("The New York Times", "Quotation of the day")

and activities; 7. Participation in cultural and sports activities; 8. Concern for social property and the environment; 9. Human relationships.
Point six is enough to alarm us: it fertilizes the soil in which expediency and simulation will grow stronger and stronger. […]

Havana, April 10, 2008

Yoani Sánchez

I live in a utopia that isn't mine, one to which my grandparents made the sign of the cross and my parents sacrificed the best years of their lives. I carry it on my back, unable to shake it off. Some people who don't live inside try to convince me from afar that I need to hold on to it. But it's alienating to live out someone else's illusion, take on the burden of other people's dreams. To those who thrust this illusion upon me, without caring to hear my opinion, I want to make it clear, starting now, that I have no intention of bequeathing it to my children.

April 11. "Fifteen months ago, Americans were worried about the prospect of failure in Iraq. Today, thanks to the surge, we've renewed and revived the prospect of success." George W. Bush. ("The New York Times", "Quotation of the day")

Bethlehem, Palestine, April 13, 2008

Rana Qumsiyeh

Yesterday was not the first time I saw those three blind women at the checkpoint. They are familiar to many who cross the Bethlehem checkpoint on daily basis to get to Jerusalem. Two middle-aged Palestinian women and one elderly woman who seems to be a foreigner; could be German, as I have heard them talk to each other in German at times. I have always wondered how they manage to make their way through this maze, being blind, when most people with perfect eyesight struggle

to find their way through, when crossing this checkpoint for the first time, and have to ask for directions.

So yesterday, despite it being a Saturday, there was a long line forming when those three blind women walked in, and it was taking too long for the door to open and let people in one by one. As usual, they were let through ahead of everyone because of their situation. A few minutes later, they got inside and it seems two of them got through the metal-detector door and the third one "beeped". The female soldier on duty screamed at her in Hebrew to take her shoes off. This female soldier is known to all of us, the crowds who go through everyday, we call her the screamer. We know she is on duty before we even get into the terminal, because her yelling reaches outside the Wall! Of course, standing in line outside, we can barely see anything of what is happening inside, we just listen and try to understand what is going on. Thus we assumed that the blind woman took off her shoes and passed again and she still "beeped", the soldier screamed again, now louder, in Hebrew, ordering her to take her jacket off. Once again, we hear beeping, then we hear crying. Apparently, the blind woman started to cry at that point. The soldier screamed louder, and this time, I didn't understand what she was saying.

Half an hour had passed since I got in line and I was still there, and the line was not moving. People started complaining, calling, so a male soldier's voice came through the loudspeaker saying "You have to wait, we have 'problems' inside". We heard more beeping and then a loud laugh from the "screamer".

Eventually, they opened the door and I got to the ID and permit inspection point; there were the two other blind women, apparently still waiting for their companion, who had been forced into one of the "further investigation" rooms. I went outside and got on the bus, and soon after the three women followed. The third one was very stressed out and in tears. It turns out, her skirt zipper was the problem. I am not sure if she was forced to take her skirt off in that closed "cell", no one dared ask. As the bus drove off, I watched her cry all the way from the checkpoint to Jerusalem…

Havana, April 14, 2008

Yoani Sánchez

I'm taking a new university-level course. It's not a specialization, but I can get my degree in "bureaucracy dodging". The required subjects are the procedures and documents necessary to travel outside Cuba, and the assignments include a considerable amount of patience, meekness, and unknown quantities. I'm not enrolling in this crash course in "red tape" as a beginner, since for ten years now I've been getting daily practice in the din of formalities. And then you have to count innumerable run-ins with officials and a creeping resignation amid the stench of offices.

My experience in talking to bureaucrats—who always find that some document, stamp, or signature is missing—will help me carry off top grades in some subjects. Nevertheless, I need to overcome a certain tendency to get carried away, an unseemly rage when they tell me "your documents didn't get to us in time", or "this needs to get approval from higher up".

April 14, Italy. The billionaire Silvio Berlusconi's center-right coalition won a convincing majority in both houses of Parliament.

The final result of this exercise will be a little white card authorizing me to leave Cuba to receive the Ortega y Gasset award. I should emphasize that this isn't about "travelling", since no Cuban uses that word for the action of going abroad. We take the leap, cross over, get out, or leave, but travelling is not enough when you're talking about getting off an island. Moreover, the longed-for authorization that I need is known as an "exit permit" and is accompanied by the rattle of unlocking shackles.

I don't know if all this will do any good—the hours of waiting in line, the notarized birth certificates, the habit of bringing even unnecessary documents, like my vaccination records or my most recent electric bill. I don't know, but I feel that the fate of my travel application has already been decided and is waiting for me in a drawer somewhere. Nothing I do can keep the key from opening or closing that door.

Meanwhile, I hold on to the belief that "getting out" is possible.

Hangzhou, April 16, 2008 **Hao Wu**

As soon as I got to work this morning, I began receiving invite after invite on MSN Messenger to add a "(red heart) China" next to my name on Messenger. Apparently people all over China are doing this today to show solidarity in the face of the foreign media's recent antagonism towards China. I didn't add the red heart to my name, feeling not particularly patriotic this week. […]

In the office at 10 pm, two of my colleagues noticed my MSN Messenger did not have enough red

hearts. "You are not patriotic enough," one girl giggled. Then she began talking with the other girl about how every single friend of theirs was doing the red heart China today, about how foreigners so misunderstood China. "They think Chinese men still wear queues and Chinese people are very rude. Yet they have no idea how far China has progressed." They nodded at each other in complete agreement.

I wanted to defend the clueless "foreigners" but I quickly remembered there exist too many clueless foreigners just like that. Moreover, I didn't want to get into one more argument about patriotism and the reason for my lack thereof. […]

I jumped into one of the cabs waiting outside the office building; cabs did better business at this hour, since everyone working late, past 9 pm, could get their cab fare reimbursed by the company. The driver had a heavy Sichuanese accent. I asked if he was from Sichuan. He said yeah, are you? I said yes. His Sichuanese accent was different from mine—though only a true Sichuanese would be able to tell that—still it made me feel close. I asked why he had traveled so far to drive a cab in Hangzhou. He said he'd been working in Hangzhou for ten years as a migrant worker before cabbying. He said life now was much easier except for his messed up sleep schedule due to his night cab shift.

When I handed him my ten-yuan cab fare, he inquired with big smiles piled on his endearing wrinkled face: "Do you need a receipt with a bigger sum for reimbursement?" That made my heart warm—only a true compatriot would offer that chance to fleece the company! Living in China, I realized once again, gave me chances everyday to

April 20. Fernando Lugo was elected president of Paraguay. After living more than 60 years under Colorado Party, Paraguayans finally mustered the strength to wrestle the ghost of the dictator Alfredo Stroessner to the ground. The stunning victory by Lugo, a former Roman Catholic bishop, closed the book on the authoritarian regimes of the 1970s and 1980s in Latin America. The Colorado Party was more than a mere political organization. It was the country's largest employer, the bureaucratic apparatus that helped keep General Stroessner in power. In his 35 years in charge, the general amassed one of the worst human rights records in the hemisphere, with thousands of political arrests and numerous documented cases of torture and disappearances.

enjoy this closeness of my people, to feel the subtle differences in us being Chinese—accents and all—and to love my people because we share the same blood despite the illusions of a shiny exterior and the jingoism so contrary to my taste.
I *heart* China.

Durham, North Carolina, April 18, 2008 **Laila El-Haddad**

[…] Last week my parents left for Egypt to try and return to Gaza. They were stuck here for nine months. They grew tired. So they figured they'd change pace, and grow tired somewhere else. And wait; and wait some more, for the border to open, so they can return home; as if borders open on their own. And if after a month of waiting, or maybe two, there is no hope in waiting, they will return here to wait again. […]

Al-Hassa, Saudi Arabia, April 21, 2008 **'Daisy'**

My mother-in-law finished her mourning period of four months and ten days, as is the Sunnah. During these months she only wore plain, undecorated clothes, didn't apply perfume or make-up, and didn't leave the house. […] Now, if only one out of her five adult sons that she was "blessed" with, *mashallah*, would get off of their ungrateful butt and take the woman somewhere! […] While all of her old-lady friends have been taken to Dubai, Syria, Egypt as well as other exciting places, the only place this poor unappreciated woman has been taken in her life is to Mecca and once to Bahrain. […] She deserves a well-earned trip replete with pampering, just for her.

Contributors and translators

Johanna Bishop (icchiojo@tiscali.it) was born in Chicago in 1974, and lived in Pennsylvania and New York before moving to Tuscany in 1998. She translates from Italian into English. In this issue she has translated the texts by Laura Zanetti, Domenico Palazzi, and Yoani Sánchez (April 10 and 14).

Sebastiano Buonamico lives in Milan, Italy. A graphic designer and a photographer, his photographs have been shown in several exhibitions. He is the author of the covers of this magazine. cover

Maddalena Chataignier was born in Milan in 1942, but has lived in France since 1967. She is member of an association which assists leukaemia patients and which is carrying out a campaign to sensitize hospital staff to the importance of "accompanying" terminal patients in their last days. Her text was translated by Claudia Ricchiari. p. 38

Brigitte Ciaramella (brigitte.ciaramella@fastwebnet.it) was born in 1966 and was brought up bilingual Italian/English. She is a freelance translator with a special interest in literary works. She has translated the Foreword and the texts by Maria

Ofelia Zuniga (January 26, and March 11) and Yoani Sánchez (April 8).

Daisy: "I'm a 30 year-old American-born, British-educated Saudi citizen, presently living and raising three children in the city of Al-Hassa in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia." Her diary pages come from *Saudi Stepford Wife* (http://saudistepfordwife.blogspot.com). We thank her for allowing us to publish it. pp. 20, 25, 36, 75, 91

Laila El-Haddad, born in 1978, is a journalist and divides her time between Gaza and the United States, where her husband Yassine, a Palestinian refugee denied his right of return to Palestine, resides. They have a son, Yousuf, and a daughter, Noor. Her diary pages come from the blog *Raising Yousuf: a diary of a mother under occupation* (http://a-mother-from-gaza.blogspot.com). We thank her for allowing us to publish them. pp. 24, 47, 49, 91

Hao Wu, born in 1974 in Chengdu, Sichuan, is a documentary film maker. He got back to Beijing after living in the USA from 1992 to 2004. His diary pages come from the blog *Beijing or bust* (http://beijingorbust.blogspot.com), which is inaccessible from inside China. We thank him for allowing us to publish them. pp. 77, 89

Heba: "I'm a Palestinian woman born in 1979. I worked in different humanitarian NGOs in Gaza, which helped me come into contact with the general context of Gazan people. I struggle everyday to bring up my two young daughters in a very changeable environment. I'm fond of writing and maintain a blog: www.contemplating-from-gaza.

blogspot.com." Her pages come from this blog. We thank her for allowing us to publish them. pp. 18, 41, 44, 84

Veronica Khokhlova was born in 1974 in Kyiv, and moved from there to Moscow in December 2006. Her diary pages come from *Neeka's backlog* (http://vkhokhl.blogspot.com). We thank her for allowing us to publish them. pp. 18, 43, 79, 80

Andrey Kneller (akneller@gmail.com) was born in 1983 in Moscow. He currently lives with his wife near Boston, and teaches high school mathematics. When time allows, he writes and translates poetry from Russian. In this issue, he has translated the poem by Marina Tsvetaeva.

Deirdre Nuttall has degrees in anthropology from the Universities of Dublin and of Durham (UK), and taught and did research in Mexico and Guatemala before becoming a writer. She has translated the poem by Marco Saya.

Domenico Palazzi was born in Ravenna, Italy, in 1984, and now lives in Nuvoleto, near Cesena. He holds a degree in International Development and Cooperation, and works with young disabled people over the summer months. Before visiting Kosovo as a volunteer with Operazione Colomba ("Operation Dove", a non-violent peace corps: www.operazionecolomba.org), he worked with children in Romanian orphanages. His texts here are translated by Johanna Bishop. pp. 19, 35

Massimo Parizzi was born in 1950 in Milan, Italy, where he lives. A translator, he is the founder

and editor of this magazine. His text was translated by Claudia Ricchiari. p. 66

Germana Pisa was born in 1941 in Milan, Italy, where she lives. She is actively involved in the peace and environmentalist movements. Her text was translated by Claudia Ricchiari. p. 33

Rana Qumsiyeh was born into a Lutheran Christian family in Beit Sahour, a small town near Bethlehem. Employed over the years by several different non-profit organizations in Palestine, she is currently National Program Coordinator at the YWCA of Palestine in Jerusalem. p. 86

R. Born in Iraq in 1979, she left Baghdad in 2007 to find refuge in Syria. Her diary page comes from *Baghdad burning* (riverbendblog.blogspot.com). We thank her for allowing us to publish them. pp. 10, 29

Claudia Ricchiari (claudiaric@libero.it) was born in Palermo in 1971. She has a university degree in translation studies and works as a freelance translator with a special interest in art and literature. She has translated the texts by Maddalena Chataignier, Claudio Magris, Maria Ofelia Zuniga (September 5), Germana Pisa, and Massimo Parizzi. Her translations were edited by Carole Greenall, CIoL.

Yoani Sánchez was born in 1975 in Havana, where she lives. She is a contributor to the online review "Consenso" (http://www.desdecuba.com). Her diary pages, translated by Brigitte Ciaramella (April 8), and Johanna Bishop (April 10 and 14),

come from *Generation Y* (http://www.desdecuba.com/generaciony). We thank her for allowing us to publish them. pp. 7, 17, 39, 42, 44, 47, 85, 86, 88

Marco Saya was born in Buenos Aires in 1953 and now lives in Milan, where he works in the field of IT. He has published several collections of poetry. His poem was translated by Deirdre Nuttall. p. 23

Laura Zanetti was born in 1949 in Telve di Valsugana, Italy. He lives between Verona and Telve. For over twenty years she has been involved with issues related to the protection of the pre-alpine environment. She's an ethnographer, a journalist and writes poetry. Her poem was translated by Johanna Bishop. p. 7

Maria Ofelia Zuniga Platero was born in 1973 in San Salvador, where she still lives. She had the experience of working as a volunteer on social programs aimed at helping children in poor Peruvian and Bolivian communities. Now back in El Salvador, while waiting for other opportunities in social service, she manages a shop. Her texts come from the blog *Enchufados estemos donde estemos…* (http://estabocaesmiamo.blogspot.com). We thank her for allowing us to publish them. They were translated by Claudia Ricchiari (September 5) and Brigitte Ciaramella (January 26, March 11). pp. 8, 68, 83

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Last issues

Number 15 (October 2006), "away from home", diaries May-August 2006 **- back cover**: *Away from home*. At first this headline referred to Veronica leaving Kyiv to spend her holiday in Pushcha Vodytsya; to Giorgio travelling from Milan to Slovakia, where his wife comes from; to Jihane travelling for work from Casablanca to a *douar* in the Moroccan countryside; to Antonio visiting the "hill tribes" in the North of Vietnam on a mission for the Italian Embassy in Hanoi; to Ken, an American who has expatriated to Thailand. (Here you will find their diary pages, essays, and stories.) Then, since July 12, this headline has taken on a new significance. Israel has invaded Lebanon. One million refugees are reported. - **contents**: Diary pages from Ukraine, Israel, the United States, Italy, Iraq, Morocco; *From Slovakia. No Tramps*, by Giorgio Mascitelli; *Football and the "dream of something"*, by Franco Toscani; *World (Cup)*, by Giusi Busceti; *From Vietnam. Speechless glances for glimpsed words*, by Antonio Maconi; *From Thailand. A Couple of Days in Mer Awng*, by Ken Klein

Number 16 (February 2007), "in mourning", diaries September-December 2006 **- back cover**: *In mourning*. For Bruno, our friend and contributor, who died a natural death. For Cecilia, and for Guillermo, Edgar, Rigoberto, Pablo, Orlando Adonay, Eduardo Alexander, Douglas, Carlos Antonio…, who died violent deaths in El Salvador. For Anna Politkovskaya, killed in Moscow. For the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who have died as a result of the war and occupation. For the 22 members of the Athamneh family, killed by an Israeli shell in Gaza. For the three sons of Baha Balusha, victims of the fighting between Hamas and Al Fatah in Gaza. For the over 3000 American soldiers who have died in Iraq since the beginning of the war. For… In mourning. - "…As I start, I feel I'm doing something which is against common sense. Ordinary people do not pursue death. They shun it. If anything, they pursue life. So do I. But I can't go on like this…" (Mayra Barraza, San Salvador) - **contents**: Diary pages from El Salvador, Israel, Italy, Morocco, Ukraine, the United States, Iraq, Gaza, Russia; *A Prince*, by Michele Zaffarano; *When Your Child is in Pieces* and *Melissa: Games 1-5*, by Claudia Hernández; *For a return to "idiocy"*, by Bruno De Maria; *The Address Book*, by Marina Massenz; *A Red Apple*, by Michele Zaffarano; *A Cry Against Indifference*, by Maria Ofelia Zuniga; *From a Prison*, by Chiara Maffioletti; *From a poem* by Wisława Szymborska

Number 17 (October 2007), "family, work", diaries January-August 2007 **- back cover**: This issue of "Here" is dedicated to Igor Sergeevich Khokhlov - **contents**: *We're having problems*; diary pages from Italy, Russia, Gaza, El Salvador, the United States, Morocco, Iraq, Saudi Arabia; *traces 205-256*, by Gherardo Bortolotti; *Notes on family and work*, by Massimo Parizzi; *My father's disappeared*, by Veronica Khokhlova; *Two brief items*, by Franco Buffoni

Number 18 (February 2008), "Hao Wu's diary" **- back cover**: Once we got used to the opposite of the true, it took no effort at all to adjust to the opposites of the good and the beautiful (a young Chinese man, from the generation born in the Eighties, to Hao Wu) - **contents**: Hao Wu's diary, June 22, 2005-July 29, 2007; *A different visit*, by Saverio Caruso; *Are there fireflies in China?*, by Marco La Rosa; *Somewhere close by, asphalt*, by Andrea Inglese; *Between ideology and consumer culture*, by Giorgio Mascitelli - **Hao Wu**, born in 1974 in Chengdu, Sichuan, is a documentary film maker. He got back to Beijing after living in the USA from 1992 to 2004. On the afternoon of 22 February 2006, he was arrested by State Security agents. No one has ever said what he was accused of. He was freed nearly five months later, on 11 July 2006.

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