

Nadia Seboussi is a ceaselessly active artist who, since 2009, has tirelessly questioned her own trajectory and that of her country of origin, Algeria. In her most recent works, she deconstructs the stereotypes surrounding the figure of the “displaced person”, that is, someone who in extreme conditions has had to flee from a country grappling with problems of economic or political instability. The personal stories of these displaced persons, invisible to the spectator, are at the heart of these new video installations that are themselves part of a broader ongoing project. Whether identified as “refugees” or simply “immigrants”, these people are faced with numerous ordeals, beginning with the harrowing decision to hastily leave their country, often without being able to inform their families, for fear of putting their lives in danger, up to the daily struggle in their adoptive countries to reinvent their lives, while haunted by memories of the past. What motivated their departure? What course have their lives taken? How have they managed to cross borders – these zones of transition that seem to exist outside of laws and time?

Through the creation of a patchwork of video snapshots, Nadia Seboussi gives these displaced persons – the “cursed of the borders”, illegal and unequal in the eyes of the law – a face and a voice. These new Montrealers, of every age and from every walk of life, come from everywhere – the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa. These modern-day adventurers, unsure of whether they are making the right decision, accept losing everything, even their roots, to move to a place yet unknown to them. Beyond the politically engaged nature of her installation work, Nadia Seboussi attempts, with an economy of means, to make the spectator grasp the human dimension of the phenomenon of displacement affecting countries all over the world in this time of crisis. She connects this status of displaced person to the ideas of exile and urgency, for example in her appropriative use

of an emergency exit sign – evoking a place that we are not sure we can return to after leaving. This video-sculpture, entitled *Les Déplacés*, takes on the appearance of a living monument, paying homage to all the exiles of human history.

The condition of being a displaced person is not limited however to land-based borders. In this increasingly virtual world, supposedly border-free, the mind – like the body at earthly border check-points – is not always free to move around as it pleases. This immaterial confinement is illustrated in *Violence politique*, where the “Black Decade” (violent period of civil war in Algeria in the 1990s and 2000s) is “displaced” onto the internet... and censored. This video work denounces the tool of propaganda that the media becomes in times of war, where the control of images – and thus of information – is crucial.

This projet, a work in progress, not only speaks to the situation in Algeria, historically characterized by forced displacements, from the deportation of anti-colonial resistant fighters to the refugees of the 1900s, but also to the history of displaced persons in Québec and Canada. *Zone de transit* endeavors to give these people a voice.

Érika Nimis is a photographer, researcher, author and curator. She holds a PhD in History (with a specialization in African photography), and presently teaches in the History Department at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM).

- Translated from French by Simon Brown



The work of Nadia Seboussi questions the immigrant status, post colonialism and the complex relationships between East and West through an approach at the crossroads of documentary, essay and video, in which installation art is used as a means to explore new narrative structures.

The exhibition *Zone de transit* explores the concept of migration, from personal life stories to a broader perspective on the issue.

In the large exhibition room, the three videos entitled *Parcours 1* and *Parcours 2* make reference to the history of Algeria in the 1990s, by drawing on the stories of three immigrants who left the country in 1994, right after the beginning of the wave of political assassinations.

Against the backdrop of night-time images of the cities that they were hoping to reach, their voices describe their experiences in tractor-trailers at borders—transition zones that seem to exist out of time and out of any legal framework—where they waited among immigrants from other countries such as Mexico, Syria, Lebanon, etc.

Based on narratives from the artist's country of origin, the work that follows in the exhibition is more abstract. Making use of a flashing sign that brings to mind a sense of urgency and of images of gazes of immigrants from various nationalities, Seboussi evokes the conditions and the universal emotions relating to immigration and exile. Beyond the stereotypes of race and class commonly attributed to migration, Seboussi presents it as a reality that affects our social reality worldwide.

The artist wishes to thank the Claudine and Stephen Bronfman Foundation, Nadia Mérou, Nacer Abad, Azzedine Achour, Chloé Turpin, Jean Pierre Mot, Gérard Collard and all the immigrants of multiples nationalities that participated to the projects.

Nadia Seboussi is an Algerian-born Montreal artist with an Electrical Engineering degree who worked for the francophone press in Algeria before her emigration to Canada. She has received many scholarships and awards, including the Prix Pierre-Ayot award and the Prix d'excellence Jacques de Tonnancour. In 2013, she also received the Claudine and Stephen Bronfman Fellowship in Contemporary Art. Her work has been shown in France, Spain, Mexico, Cuba and Canada. In 2014, she will participate in the Biennial of Moving Images, in Argentina.

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