FOREWORD

As a part of *Tensta Museum: Reports from New Sweden*, which is taking place from October 2013 to May 2014 at Tensta konsthall, The Silent University, initiated by artist Ahmet Öğüt, is established in Stockholm.

The Silent University is a university created from the need to re-activate knowledge that has been silenced. It involves people who have fled from their countries of origin who, for different reasons, are not able to put their knowledge to use here in Sweden.

The fundamentals of the university are meetings, conversations, lectures, seminars, the website and the resource room that will be presented in *Tensta Museum: Reports from New Sweden*.

For this reader, five consultants of the university in Stockholm have contributed texts that reflect upon concepts such as borders, education, taking refuge, utopia, local organization and activism.

To follow the work of the university and to gain access to lectures and articles, you can sign up at the website. In return, you are asked to contribute with your time and knowledge. Tensta konsthall is happy to be involved in the organization of the The Silent University. This is only the beginning. Follow us at www.thesilentuniversity.org.

Special thanks to Massood Mafan and ABF Stockholm for hosting the lectures, and to everyone else who makes our work possible.

*Emily Fahlén, Tensta konsthall*
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WHAT IS THE SILENT UNIVERSITY?

by Emily Fahlén

The Silent University is an autonomous knowledge-exchange platform, initiated by the artist Ahmet Öğüt. The University recruits asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants with a professional background in their countries of origin who, due to systematic social exclusion and processes of discrimination, are unable to put their knowledge to professional use in the countries in which they currently live. Through The Silent University, careers that have been muted are included and reassigned. Taking the form of an academic program, classes, lectures, libraries, seminars, student-cards and a website are created.

The Silent University was founded in London 2012 in collaboration with the Delfina Foundation and Tate, and it is now being established in the Stockholm suburb of Tensta in collaboration with Tensta Konsthall. Parallel discussions about the university’s continuation are taking place in Paris and Berlin. The Silent University does not yet have a permanent space, but the concept of the university is being established in different art institutions as a collaborative effort by Ahmet Öğüt and the team members.

These art institutions contribute the offers of a physical meeting place, the creation of public points of contact, financial means and their own local networks. The workgroups form organically; one person who fits the criteria for the project leads to another person and so on. The long-term goal is for these project-based collaborations to create lasting commitments, as The Silent University aims to be more than a project.
In Tensta, the work-group currently consists of about fifteen people that take on the roles of consultants and lecturers. Among them is a language teacher from Palestine, an engineer from Jordan and a Kurdish journalist.

There are no monetary fees for taking part in The Silent University. Instead, the members invest alternative currencies of time and knowledge. To gain access to the university’s collected materials, classes and articles, interested parties can sign up on the webpage. In doing so, they will be asked to estimate the amount of time they will be able to donate to the project as well as what type of knowledge or skills they will be able to contribute. Over time, a bank of immaterial resources is formed; one that the administrators of the university can put to use: a text might need to be translated, tickets to be handled, or a video to be edited.

The Silent University moves between different fields, and by doing so finds a form of its own, free of the constraints of bureaucratic regulations. That The Silent University is labeled an art-project is not fundamentally important, but the fact that it functions within the context of the art world is not without significance. It is hard to imagine another institutional platform where the same amount of experimenting and stretching of ideas would be allowed to take place.

As The Silent University develops parallel to existing infrastructures and educational institutions, it creates its own platforms rather than waiting for space to be given by someone else. What a university is and can be is partly renegotiated and given new meaning; this project re-constructs the word ‘university’, occupies it, and moves in. In The Silent University of Stockholm, a language teacher becomes a language teacher anew, an engineer an engineer again, and a political scientist regains her discipline.
The word university is associated with power and authority, a large organization and an investment in one's future. Certified lecturers hold lectures. An exam is proof of one's knowledge. A student-card is documentation of one's belonging. The Silent University borrows the weight that the notion of a university carries with it, but leaves its bureaucratic processes behind.

Silence is a central theme in the project. Can silence be viewed as a form of resistance; a protest? In London, the teachers of The Silent University held their public lectures in silence. They withheld their knowledge from their audience; only the members of the university were given access to the material. In this instance, silence was being used as a method of activism. In the micro-situation of the lecture, a structural injustice on a macro scale is pointed out: this is knowledge that has been muted and made unavailable.

In Stockholm, the lectures will also, at least partly, be made unavailable to the public, but the thematics of the knowledge exchange platform, the alternative currencies, the artist- and institution-led models of learning, migration and associated policy, silence and performance are also being presented in other ways, such as publications, symposiums, film programs and a resource room. The Silent University is constantly collecting new material.

The Silent University aims to break silence and re-activate the knowledge of its members. After all, the teacher's teaching is more important than the student's learning. Working within the local context of Stockholm's suburb of Tensta, this framing feels increasingly heated and relevant. Tensta is a large late-modernist housing scheme built in the late 1960s and houses approximately 20.000 inhabitants. Close to 90% of the population in Tensta is comprised of people with immigrant backgrounds. There are many things happening
here simultaneously; the place is marked by social problems and high levels of unemployment, but also a strong local engagement and participation which the many cultural non-profit organizations can be taken as an example of.

Earlier this year, cars were burning in Tensta. Events like these are hard not to interpret as symptoms of something: social injustice, a feeling of meaninglessness. The revolts are struck down by the police.

Simultaneously, people are organizing and creating networks that demand alternatives. In the suburbs of Stockholm and the other major cities, an increasing number of local political initiatives are forming as well as a newly discovered tendency to organize protest. It is interesting to relate these movements with The Silent University, which in a similar fashion disregards the notion that power always has to be focused around a center, or for that matter, that a center is something to strive for. Political initiatives on a grass-roots level are shown to re-construct a logic and put the marginalized in the center of debate, and in doing so transform silence into words.

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IS A WORLD WITHOUT BORDERS UTOPIAN?

by

Shahram Khosravi

Those who do not move, do not notice their chains
— Rosa Luxemburg

Utopia is an imaginary future. It is well-organized and just. The need for utopia is an escape from the present time, a dystopian time, far from an ideal society. Dystopia is not, however, the opposite of utopia. Dystopia is a utopia gone wrong; a situation in which utopian ideas are available and accessible only for a particular group of people. This is exactly the case of mobility. Free mobility exists already, but only for a small category of humanity who enjoy unrestricted mobility rights while most people are caught within and between borders. The present situation is dystopian for 45 million forcibly displaced people, categorized and labelled as refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced, and stateless. Likewise, our time puts travellers without papers, so-called illegal migrants, illegalized human beings, in a dark and terrifying predicament. This dystopia is our contemporary world, built on visible and invisible borders.

Borders and mobility restrictions have not stopped or reduced human mobility and migration. The borders do not stop the mobility across borders, but they make it in many ways more costly for migrants. The regulation of mobility operates according to social sorting that involves sexual, gender, racial, and class inequalities.

Travellers without papers are paying the price for harsher border controls not only with their money, but also with their lives. Since border crossing by air has become almost impossible for travellers without papers, human smugglers
now use land and sea routes. To circumvent the most controlled border areas, smuggling routes have been relocated to more inaccessible and dangerous places. The closure of the most accessible border sections means that “geography will do the rest.” And it does.

The borders between the poor world and the rich world are turned into an exhibition of death. On average, 2.3 persons die every day along the borders of Europe, a number based only on the documented cases. Commodities, however, are free to move. Not surprisingly, travellers without papers are hidden in containers and trucks among commodities, or rather as commodities, to be able to cross borders. Borders impose a forced immobility on undesirable migrants. Fixing them in camps: refugee camps, transit camps, detention camps. Temporary camps become permanent. Refugee-ness becomes protracted. Undocumented-ness becomes lifelong.

In the nation-state system, all human beings are supposed to belong to a state. This is also mentioned in the utopian Declaration of Human Rights, article 15: Everyone has the right to a nationality. The Declaration is, however, silent on the obligation of states to grant immigrants such nationality. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights thus offers available but not accessible rights to the stateless people who need them. Outside the nation-state system, there is no space for humanity, for the pure human being in herself, beyond legal and political status.

A permanent status of statelessness, of existing just as a human being, is incompatible with the logic of the nation-state system. Statelessness is regarded as a temporary status, even though it may last for generations. Those outside this order, the stateless, constitute a ‘leftover’ population. Only in the nation-state system, this universal form of organization of humanity (in terms of citizenship), could result in an effect
in which, as Hannah Arendt put it, “the loss of home and political status become identical with being expelled from humanity altogether”.

Borders are used by states to expose migrants to exclusion, discrimination, and exploitation. Borders legitimize the use of states’ discriminatory powers against refugees, travellers without papers, and non-citizen migrants. Through the use of borders, even people who are actually deemed citizens find themselves turned into quasi-citizens whose rights can be suspended, rejected, delayed, and denied because of their religion, ethnicity, colour of skin, or class.

The Swedish REVA project is an illustrating example. The project operated as an internal border control in the Stockholm subway system to arrest undocumented migrants. The racialized profile of a so-called illegal migrant reminded many Swedes (born in Sweden or Swedish citizen since long time ago) that the state still does not recognize them as real Swedes. Borders violate not only human rights but also citizen rights. Another example is the case of Romani people deported from EU countries, even though they are EU citizens and have the right to stay in another EU country for three months. The mobility of Romani people is different from the mobility of other EU citizens. Their mobility is undesirable because of their ethnicity and class. Their mobility is the mobility of the mob. As Popudopoulos et al show, the term mobility refers not only to movement but also to the common people; the working class. The mob. Borders are instruments for controlling the mobility of the mob and the working class. Borders also give employers power over workers, as borders are an essential part of the capitalist mode of production. Borders produce ‘good workers’. In some countries, like Dubai, the passports of migrant workers are confiscated by their employers, making the migrants immobile. Workers are placed in labour camps
outside the city. They are not allowed to switch jobs. If the worker leaves her/his employer, or so-called “sponsor”, she/he becomes a fugitive, or unlawful. Wanted-like notices in newspapers appear with pictures of the “run away workers”. In order to get their Visas extended, migrant workers must display a “good work attitude”. Borders also produce ‘good wives’, docile prostitutes and many other members of the mob (Anderson et al, 2009).

The whole border issue is about foreigners, those who never stop being foreigners no matter how long they have lived in a respective country; people with black skin, Jews then/ Muslims now, Romani people and others regardless of how integrated they are in society. As Étienne Balibar puts it, borders have become invisible, situated everywhere and nowhere. Hence, undesirable people are not expelled by the border, they are forced to be the border. The question is not what or where the border is, but who is the border?


A world without borders is possible. Human beings moved freely for a long time before free mobility became stigmatized and criminalized. Free mobility is also carried out every single day by those who do not recognize or respect borders; by travellers without papers. This kind of border-crossing, done by hundreds of thousands every year, shows that free mobility is possible. And we should remember that the only difference between she who has a paper and she who has no paper is only, and only, a piece of paper.

What is utopian is the idea of a successful and effective border control. A look at our world, every part of it linked
to other parts through roads, cables, flight routes, media, economy, or personal connections, tells us that preventing the mobility of those who are motivated to move is unrealistic. What is illusory is the belief that we can keep the current border regime and at the same time respect and follow human and citizen rights. Instead of thinking about the possibilities that would come as a result of radical change, we extend the dystopian situation to displaced people through humanitarian interventions: building larger and better refugee camps far from Europe, granting a few more people asylum, giving a little more money to UNHCR.

A radical change does not mean opening borders, but rather rejecting the idea of borders all together. Open borders can be closed again. Open borders are selective and discriminatory. They permit entry only to those who are deemed most useful, most productive. Borders are a technique used to measure the worth of foreigners.

A radical change, unlike open-border politics (a romantic cosmopolitanism), rejects the notion of home and homeland all together. It is only in homelessness that genuine hospitality becomes possible. Homelessness means not recognizing anywhere as home. Only in that condition does humanity cease to be territorialized, the plagues inherent in the nation-state system can vanish and the ‘botanical’ way of thinking about human beings, in terms of roots, and the uncritical link between individuals and territory can fade away. Homelessness designates de-territoriality, discontinuity, inconsistency and interruption; all in contrast to the botanical image of national identity. Homelessness as a paradigm, as a way of being in the world, as a lifestyle, as ethical and aesthetic normativity, opens the door to accept the other as she is, not as how we want her to be. “What is the alternative?” is the question usually asked to undermine possibilities of change. What is crucial is to generate new
possibilities for questions and political visions, as well as for critical thinking. The idea of homelessness, a world without borders, is an inspiring vision for a better future than the one that awaits us.

SEEKING REFUGE:
TWO FRIENDS IN
CONVERSATION

Trifa Shakely and Lawen Mohtadi return to a conversation on personal states of emergency, shame and memory.

Trifa: Today on my way home, I discovered a tailor shop by the square. It was a Kurdish one, with lots of beautiful fabrics and clothing. Everyone in the shop was beautiful and spoke elegant Kurdish. I felt shabby in my glasses and my training shoes, so I spoke only Swedish, giving the impression that I did not understand what was going around me. I don’t know why I’m telling you this, it was just weird.

Lawen: What made you stick to the Swedish?

Trifa: The feeling of not being able to match up to the nice Kurdish aura surrounding the people in the tailor shop. They seemed so sophisticated, professional. I was tired from dragging my old wheeled bag around. Haha!

Trifa: Speaking about going on the run, becoming a refugee, one often talks about traveling between different spaces. You leave a place and you migrate. And that place is many things: your home, your memories and so on. When I came to Sweden I had lived as an adult in Kurdistan. I had finished law school and was at the height of my life. But in Sweden I was seen as a young person, not as an adult. The journey in time and age was the thing that marked me as being a refugee the most.

Lawen: Why was the change so big? In what way did youth come into your life?
Trifa: If you are 23 years old in Sweden you are considered a youth and are supposed to possess certain youthful qualities. You’re expected to have certain experiences, which I did not have, and my studies and my adult experiences didn’t really fit with the Swedish norm.

Lawen: How did you go about building a new self? Or was that how it was, that you needed a new self?

Trifa: I actually was young then, really. I left Sweden for a while and when I returned and started studying again, after gaining my new experiences, things felt a bit more right.

Lawen: Where did you go?

Trifa: I went to England. I couldn’t deal with Sweden. I didn’t want to live here. I applied for a class in English literature and left. Life was different there. People knew what it was like to have experienced catastrophes and trauma. There, I was much closer to the war I had experienced.

Lawen: How did you live over there?

Trifa: I lived with an English family that I became very close with. A secure family. The school I attended was small. I worked at different restaurants, saw as many plays as I could and went out every night.

Lawen: Was there anything in particular that made you feel safe with them?

Trifa: Perhaps their relaxed attitude towards me, and the way the couple talked to each other; their conversations. That was new for me, an adult couple that had been married for many years and really discussed things. Real topics.
Lawen: Haha. What attracted you to the theater?

Trifa: The stories that came alive in the small theater-groups. People were hanging out, smoking, and coming up with different topics, often relating to the second World War. I was so surprised.

Lawen: In what way?

Trifa: You know when you’re new in Sweden and people ask why you came... or, at least people used to when I came here, to Boden, seventeen years ago. Back then I told the whole story. About the war. The chaos. All these crazy things that sound, at best, like something out of a movie. People looked at me funny. Later I understood that no one believes the stories. I can understand that. But in England, war wasn’t such a remarkable thing. Neither was being a refugee. No one asked me where I came from. I was new then, in my identity as a refugee from the Middle East, living in the West.

Lawen: An identity?

Trifa: Yes. It became that later. I had been a refugee both in Iran, as a Kurd from Iraq, and in Iraq, as an Iranian-looking Kurd. But neither of those places made me feel as though I had to get rid of parts of my person... languages I knew, my interest in politics and literature and all of these experiences. These were parts of me that didn’t fit into the Swedish notion of what an immigrant woman from the Middle East was supposed to be. The constant discussions at the university in Göteborg and in other places...it just became too much. After a while, I stopped reading books in Kurdish, Arabic and Persian in public spaces. I wanted to assimilate myself in order to make my life livable. To have friends. To participate in social activities. So I made myself a little bit younger in Swedish eyes; a bit more naive. It wasn’t until much later that I picked
up all those things again, the things about me that I had discarded, and started cultivating them anew.

**Lawen:** Have you ever felt ashamed of having been unsafe and vulnerable as a refugee?

**Trifa:** One time my brother said to me that becoming a refugee is the third most severe catastrophe a person can be subjected to. I had never thought about it in that way.

One day, in England, a member of the family called me into the living room. He pointed at the TV and said “look, boat-refugees”. He wanted to know if they were Kurds from my homeland. I looked at the screen and saw people hanging from the boat, like ants from a sugar stick. The boat had been shot at. Watching this, in that room with everyone in that sofa, made me feel deeply ashamed.

**Lawen:** Why?

**Trifa:** I felt loved in that family. I knew my life there would only last for a limited time. Maybe I didn’t want any shadows cast over that life. The people on the TV screen were desperate, and deeply unwanted. I didn’t want to be associated with that.

**Lawen:** I have no memories of our escape. Everything I know are things that have been told to me.

**Trifa:** Do you believe there are several versions of that escape?

**Lawen:** We went over the mountains at night. My uncle carried me on his shoulders. I was maybe three years old. But I really know very little about this.

I remember a drawing I made in school. I may have been ten.
On half the paper I had drawn black mountains, the other half was blue sky. At the bottom of the mountains there were people, wandering, and a short text about them being on the run. I don’t remember exactly what I wrote, but I remember the last sentence: “Everyone died”. I don’t know why I finished the text that way; we survived.

Trifa: And now? Do you want to know the details of what happened?

Lawen: Yes. I would like to know what it was like for my parents. What they were thinking, what they went through. It’s all a big mystery for me. Maybe I want it for myself also, for me to be able to live my life. I’m not in contact with that child; the child that escaped over the mountains.

Trifa: What was it like being a refugee, having escaped, and then growing up without a memory of that escape?

Lawen: That was a big part of my self-understanding as a child. To be a refugee and at the same time to not have a history. That might sound contradictory, but that’s what it was like.

Lawen Mohtadi is a free-lance journalist, critic and columnist for the Swedish daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter. She is the author of Den dag jag blir fri, the first book on Swedish-Romani writer and civil rights activist Katarina Taikon.

Trifa Shakely is a writer and lecturer with degrees in law and social work. At the moment she is based in Gothenburg, working with issues concerning domestic violence. Trifa Shakely is the initiator of ‘Ain’t I a Woman’, a campaign for the rights of undocumented immigrant women.

Both Trifa Shakely and Lawen Mohtadi have been editors-in-chief of the feminist culture magazine Bang.
“Knowledge is power.” This popular saying is so widespread that most of us have long since tired of it, having it practically force-fed to us since our days in school. The saying is, however, still relevant, but in order to make sense of it in today’s knowledge-based society, the questions we need to ask are these: Which knowledge is power? What kind of power? Power over what, over whom, and perhaps most importantly: Whose knowledge is, in fact, power?

I meet refugees as part of my daily work in the public sector. In addition to my job, I am engaged in asylum rights activism. This activism takes many different forms, and can involve anything from acting as an amateur translator in order to facilitate legal advice to arranging seminars and demonstrations. In my time spent with refugees and recently arrived migrants, it has become clear to me how the knowledge they possess is not properly valued here.

Similar to the way in which exchange of currencies can turn a year’s income into a month’s rent, years of education and experience are reduced to a few words in a new language, such as “does not have the right qualifications” or “needs adaptation to the job market”. So much skill and so many resources are wasted, slipping through the cracks in a system that is supposed to support people in establishing themselves here. Everywhere doors are shut; racist structures put up obstacles that block the possibility of participating on equal terms. This is certainly true of the job market, but also of other social arenas like simply getting into a nightclub, engaging in citizens’
associations, participating in the classroom, and in making new friendships.

The asylum rights movement brings together a mixed array of people, forming a diverse section of the larger anti-racist movement. In it you’ll find devout Christians as well as anarchists, people who can remember the Second World War and people who can’t remember a time without computers. There are groups of refugees giving legal advice to recently-arrived fellow countrymen and there are undocumented migrants coming together with students and other activists to organize in networks. When immigrants and refugees organize themselves in the fields of anti-racism and asylum rights, I feel the movement grows stronger and gains legitimacy.

In a diverse group of people, each with different experiences, the question of power becomes relevant. Who sets the agenda and defines the problems? However our formal and informal hierarchies are set up, our networks and organizations are not free from the racism ingrained in every part of society, even as we engage in anti-racist activism. In this work, we must always be aware of whose knowledge and whose power is being valued. We need to be aware of the pressure that society puts on immigrants and minorities to assimilate. Minorities are expected to adjust to and mimic the majority in order to be able to participate on the same terms. These are tendencies that can pop up in even the most well-meaning NGO. In describing these mechanisms, Franz Fanon states that black people, in order to be considered civilized, had to distance themselves from “blackness”. But according to Fanon, black people can never be fully assimilated, and will thus never be able to truly partake in society on equal terms as long as assimilation is required. Apply this to any network, group or organization, and it becomes clear that it’s a matter of constantly working against the sorting and grading of participants, thus creating possibilities for everyone’s full participation.
Part of the anti-racist work of today deals with the reclaiming of power over knowledge by talking about migration and what it means to be an immigrant in ways that challenge various stereotypes. This is accomplished when people whom themselves have experienced migration claim their place as subjects in the discourse on migration today.

“Asylgruppen” in Malmö is one of many activist groups in Sweden currently campaigning for the rights of asylum seekers, as well as offering legal advice and assisting in the hiding of people in risk of deportation. The group recently put up a musical, where young refugees were involved in the creative process, from writing to performing to taking the stage in front of sold-out venues. Another project in the same spirit was “Asylstafetten”, a march from Malmö to Stockholm during the summer of 2013. Participants stopped in smaller communities along the way, telling their stories and giving people personal, first-hand accounts of migration. The initiative came from a small group of young refugees, and with the support of Asylgruppen it quickly gained the support of larger organizations and networks. At the finish-line in Stockholm, hundreds of people gathered to hear these young people describing their experiences of life both before and after becoming refugees. The question put forth in all of their stories was this: “Why do basic human rights not apply to us?”

People who for a long time have been defined as belonging to a peripheral minority are now starting to claim the right to be the ones holding the microphones and the pens when the stories of their lives are being told. Putting themselves at the centre of the narrative of their situation, as natural and central parts of the discourse, they refuse to play the role of exotic add-ons. They are part of the growth and development of the Swedish asylum rights movement of today. To organize, to offer different opinions and perspectives and to take part in the dialogue on societal progress on equal terms with the
Swedes made out to be the ones running the country are the first steps towards an inclusive, anti-discriminatory political environment.

I chose to involve myself in migration politics because I consider it as a part of the anti-racist struggle in which one is able to make the debate concrete, and where initiatives for change can be applied in practical, achievable ways. In many ways, it’s easier to get tangible results in this work than by taking on the more abstract task of working against racist stereotypical beliefs in general. To change actual laws on migration or to work towards changing policies on migrant reception are ways of focusing the fight against racism on concrete parts of society and demanding viable change. This can of course also be applied outside the immediate scope of asylum rights. For example, when it became illegal in Sweden to publicly display swastikas, many neo-Nazis stopped doing so; not because their attitudes had changed but because they didn’t want to risk criminal charges.

Another example is the work being done to change the Dublin Regulation, which allows the European Union to deport asylum seekers back to the countries by the Mediterranean Sea, where they first crossed the European border. This is done despite knowledge of the lack of legal protection and security being offered in the region. After much work on many levels, an exception for transfers to Greece was accomplished, followed by an exception regarding children. Although this does not solve the problem of mined fields or violence directed at refugee-boats by the coast guard, the exceptions work on a symbolic level. They are the results of relentless activism, resulting in a small but significant shift towards a more humane border politics.

Migration politics are flawed in so many ways that it’s a challenge to properly prioritize which struggles are the most
urgent at any given time. While some choose to focus on small steps in the right direction, others want an upheaval of the system as a whole; demanding a world without any borders. I think all methods and points of view are needed, and that they need to work parallel to each other in accomplishing both short- and long-term change.

Returning to the notion of knowledge as power, one could say that the knowledge possessed by refugees of their own situations empowers a broader movement fighting for things like the right to asylum, the rights of families to be reunited, or the rights of immigrants to work and education. People who are not refugees, immigrants or asylum-seekers themselves but want to take part in these struggles will gain direct access to the source, and thereby together make agendas on which problems need to be solved and what the most effective strategies for doing so are. These people can then, from their “inside” position in society, use their privileges derived from things as simple as being able to speak the language to help the movement. By utilizing whatever resources they might have through their employment and their personal networks, these activists can play a significant role for the group, even though they lack personal experience of the discrimination they’re fighting against. They can in fact carry many of the important keys needed to open the doors being shut in the faces of immigrants today.

There are many positive examples of the self-organization of refugees in Sweden in recent years, and in most of these cases such networks are aided by and working in collaboration with Swedish activists. Ideally, we do not regard each other as “refugee” and “Swede”, but as activists working towards a shared goal – but always with an critical awareness of the existing power-structures.
I see my work for asylum rights as a way of taking part in a bigger fight; the fight against racism, against borders shutting out those who are not deemed “at risk” enough in their countries of origin, against the differentiating of people and against the discrimination stemming from these perceived differences. This fight should first and foremost be defined by those directly subjected to the negative consequences of racism, but it should be equally supported and driven by all other members of society. As was so often said during the inspiring speeches of this summer’s Asylstafetten, we are all people, wherever we’re from. No one is illegal.

The situation is now this: We’re all here in this place, and together we can change it for the better. Knowing this, we can acknowledge each other’s ability and share it, and by sharing knowledge we can strengthen one another. We can create broader and stronger networks and alliances and accomplish much more. With enough commitment we will be able to change the European policy on migration as a whole!

Baharan Kazemi is a social worker and one of the editors of the political magazine Artikel 14, which focuses on migration politics. Since 2009 she has been a board member of Flyktingarnas Riksråd, a Swedish umbrella organisation organising groups working with asylum rights nationwide.
Born in Chile and politically active under the Allende government, Ricardo-Osvaldo Alvarado was imprisoned for four years after the Chilean coup d’état. In 1977, he was deported to Sweden and has been living in Stockholm since.

Alvarado renewed his degree in sociology at Stockholm University and has held work at the municipal office for more than two decades. He has worked both locally and in the region as a project manager with several programs concerning renewal, participation and promoting democracy.

I’d like to hear your thoughts on the importance of organising?

People don’t organise just for the sake of organising, they do it to fulfill a need. Out here, in Tensta and in other places similar to this, there is a need to gain influence; for people to be able to have some control over their own situation. This is what drives people to organise; what makes people come together. But in order to organise in a meaningful way, having a goal is not enough. You also need to have the resources to attain that goal, and this is really where it becomes a question of power. There needs to be a transfer of power, from the centre outwards; a de-centralisation of administrative and ruling power. There are so many decisions regarding everyday life out here that should be in the hands of the actual members of these communities. As I always say, the ones with the best knowledge of Tensta are the people living here; it is not people from outside. And this is true in every field: culture, education, sports, public space, everything.
This place, Tensta konsthall, is actually an example of an instance in which people had a goal as well as the resources necessary to attain it. A group of citizens, together with local residents, decided that they wanted to have an art institution here. That was the goal, and the resources came in the form of political support. A process was set in motion, and a combination of hard work and no small number of political decisions resulted in the granting of 3.2 million SEK in state funding towards the creation of Tensta konsthall. People are often encouraged to organise, but they won’t if they don’t feel there is a real possibility of getting results from the work they put in. And that’s what is lacking today: people don’t feel that they have the power to influence. This needs to change.

An encouragement to self-organise must in other words be part of a bigger political vision?

Yes. There will always be passionate individuals in every neighbourhood, but if the establishment doesn’t utilize that passion and commitment in meaningful ways, it won’t lead anywhere, and this leads to frustration and resentment. This is what’s happening a lot in our communities. People want to do things, and there are plenty of good ideas and initiatives, but the administrative powers do not make room for them. What you’re left with instead is a negative trend of disappointment, bitterness, hate and so on. This is why it’s so important that the doors be opened for these people. Politics in Stockholm in its current state is very limited to top-down decision making.

Another important concept that I have often experienced in my work is that organising can be a way of gaining entrance to society. If you look at Tensta and Rinkeby as examples, there are not many ways into society if you’re an immigrant. A functioning organisation with a structure that turns commitment into results can become a gateway into society.
People learn how an organisation works, how society works, how to cooperate, and so on.

You were one of the key figures in the state-funded initiative ‘Ytterstadssatningen’ that took place in the 1990’s and involved several peripheral parts of Stockholm, among them Tensta. Can you speak about the work that was being done in this project?

We put a structure in place in which residents could come up with ideas for changes in their neighbourhoods. This took many forms; there were smaller work-groups, but also large public meetings with up to 300 people where discussions were held and issues were addressed. These issues could be anything. The initiative for Tensta konsthall is a great example, or something like brainstorming ideas for park development is another. Lots of people were involved; I remember a group of Somali women who came to a meeting even though they did not speak the language, but we arranged translators so that the women were able to participate, vote and so on.

You developed different methods for decision-making within the project. Would you like to share something about how things were done? Voting, for example?

Yes. That was a big discussion. People would come up to me and claim things like “I represent sixty people” or “I represent one hundred people”, but I said “No, you only represent yourself.” I made it clear from the beginning that the system was built on the principle of one person representing one vote. This turned out to be a very positive thing, because it made everyone who wanted to engage with the issues actually come to meetings themselves to say what they had to say.

Also crucial to the success of the project was that decisions made within the project were taken seriously by the powers that be, and that there were actually means to attain the goals.
While local residents can’t decide over the entire city budget, the special board put in place for this project did in fact respect the will of the local community organizations. I believe about 95% of the projects that went through the decision-making procedure set up within the initiative ended up being approved. This is one of the reasons I feel that this is the most successful democratic project in Stockholm in the last thirty years, at least that I’ve been a part of. The ambition was also that gradually, this would become something permanent. To leave the project state and become the normal way of doing things; of making changes in these communities and engaging their residents. That did not happen unfortunately, and there are no projects like this today.

What is your opinion on the situation here in Tensta, as well as in other places today, in which there is a strong presence of local organisations and associations? How can these play a part in a larger democratic context?

I am currently involved in an organisation called ‘Hela Sverige ska leva’ where we aim to bring the local organisations together by deciding upon one or two issues on which they can unify, and which we can pursue as a coalition. I think we will succeed, but it is unfortunately a slow process. This is because people do not believe change can actually be made, as they do not see support from their politicians. To combat this, we are working to convince people that we really can accomplish great things if we come together and organise. As I said, it’s a slow process, but the combination of longevity and persistence is always the key.

Ricardo-Osvaldo Alvarado is a sociologist and history teacher. In recent years, Alvarado has focused on issues of social economy and he has started several social businesses. Today he is CEO of XpandiaVision which is a social enterprise in Järva. Alvarado lectures at national and international events on issues concerning marginalized areas, inclusion, social economy and local development.
The narrative of the nation-state frames people and places within a suitable narrative, making them tools for creating histories from which the national narrative can be taught. A telling example is that of the “Ebrat Museum of Iran” that exhibits the harsh and insane techniques of interrogation and torture used by the Pahlavi regime. The Ebrat Museum of Iran was originally a secret prison that became known to the public in 1972. After the 1979 Revolution it remained a prison, meant for opponents of the revolution and the new government. After severe criticism in 2000, the prison was closed. Three years later, the prison was transformed into the Ebrat Museum of Iran. “Ebrat” literally means edification, a term mostly used to describe historical events that serve as a form of instructive pedagogy aimed at preventing the repeat of mistakes. The State wanted visitors to learn about was what happening during the Pahlavi regime. The re-opening of the prison as a museum framed a specific relationship between a specific place and time as history. It staged history as an artifact: as something in the past, closed and finished.

We want to introduce another method of learning that goes beyond these traditional narratives; a technique that will highlight the frame and the learner, opening up the arena for new stories. Because states use institutions such as museums as tools for their framing, we will use this method to highlight how borders are performed in the everyday. At museums, people are invited to look at things that are
staged, that are ‘there’ to be looked upon; things whose histories certify them as relevant ‘objects’ for our future, our culture and our history. These are things that we as citizens are supposed to be edified by. However, the comfortable gaze offered by the officialised and institutionalised witnessing performance in museums can tell us something else. For this, the Ebrat Museum is a good example. As it invites people to look at historical crimes, it simultaneously bans observations outside the frame at which we are not invited to look. The Ebrat Museum of Iran indirectly creates an awareness of places such as Kahrizak, the unofficial prison outside of Tehran – a place well-known for its torture and harsh interrogation of not only so-called “thugs”, but also of demonstrators in the post-election protests of 2009.

In the case of the Ebrat Museum, it is evident that the frame is porous, even elusive. The act of framing does not simply call our attention to that which is overlooked, but it also makes us observe the framer and consequently the frame itself. As Judith Butler argues in Frames of War, the point is not to locate and define what is ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the frame but what vacillates between those two locations, and what, foreclosed, becomes encrypted in the frame itself (Butler, 2009:75). That which is outside the frame is also inside. The undesirable is part of the desirable.

In 2009, the so-called REVA project, Legal and Effective Enforcement (Rättssäkerhet och Effektivt Verkställighetsarbete), was initiated by the police, the Swedish migration board (Migrationsverket) and the Prison and Probation Service (Kriminalvård) in response to a request by the government. The project was co-funded by the European Return Fund. REVA aimed to search for, arrest, and deport people who stayed in Sweden “illegally” and who did not leave Sweden after being denied the state’s permission to stay in the country. The project did not do something that
was not already happening, but rather it functioned as a communicative platform; a sort of branding and marketing of a section of the authorities work. A unified, collaborative, national and efficient will over the willfulness of individuals who did not leave.

REVA is a peculiar choice of name, as in Swedish the noun “reva” refers to a tear, or a rip. This is what the project did. It did not just materialise the border by defining who is allowed to cross and who is not, it also tore at society and left a split in the social fabric. A tear was created in what it meant to belong, as well as in what it meant to be living in Sweden or being Swedish. The police stopped people if they matched a certain profile, using racial profiling in order to find “deportable” persons. People were being forced to perform the border; the border was performed.

But it was not a staged performance that we were invited to look upon. Despite the traumatic effects on people living in Sweden, these episodes will not last beyond individual effects and will not materialise or be staged outside the police archives. These incidents will not form a materiality for “our” future, nor will they become lessons of history. Yet, these events are as much a part of the national narrative as are the objects in a museum. Even if they are not staged to be visible, they are events as much inside as outside of the frame.

In order to bring attention to these actions, we created the project borderframing.eu together with the graphic designer Johanna Lewengard. It was initiated to mark the places where the border was materialised: at town squares, in cafés, at bus stops and in community centres. Places of racial profiling and deportation-arrests were to be marked so that we could create a collection of material testimonies. Such testimonies become meaningful at sites of arrest and
racial profiling, where a form of impossibility of speech has been introduced. Sites, or bodies, that are recorded in police and migration office reports will form an archive. The instability that borderframing.eu would bring into such archives by materialising testimonies through an enactment of the possibility of impossibility of speech can be understood in the comparison that Giorgio Agamben makes between archive and testimony:

The archive’s constitution presupposed the bracketing of the subject who was reduced to a simple function or an empty position; it was founded on the subject’s disappearance into the anonymous murmur of statements. In testimony, by contrast, the empty place of the subject becomes the decisive question. (Agamben, 1999:145)

Borderframing.eu is an attempt to sustain the materiality of the places and practices of deportation, to create testimonies and stage discourse. It also calls attention to what is inside the frame, the discourse that produces these assaults and the very condition that makes such injustice possible. By marking these places, a pattern of the nation-state border system within the everyday life of the city is drawn. It is a design that fluctuates inside and outside of the frame. It makes the frame an evident entity. It is a method of framing and materialising the borders. It is a starting point from which to write histories and make shifts in what has to be witnessed, testified to, and learnt from.

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BEIRUT—The Silent University operates at the intersection between contemporary art and modern pedagogy in a space filled with misconceptions about culture and institutionalized art practices. Cultural institutions such as public and private museums, non-profit art institutions, and private art and cultural foundations employ models of education that are radically different in their methods and structures from educational models practiced by institutions with a focus purely on teaching. Specifically, traditional universities are characterized by centralized bureaucratic structures and an expanding administrative apparatus, leading to sprawling costs and the reproduction of class distinctions. At their core, culture and art practices are inherently disposed towards transient projects, while pedagogy on the contrary requires extended commitment.

The Silent University, which was founded in London in 2012, aims to bridge the divide between art and institutionalized pedagogy by suggesting a new structure, not as an alternative, but as a parallel knowledge-transfer platform. It is specifically geared toward refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants who are degree-holders with a professional background who can no longer gainfully practice their trade due to their status and their exclusion through the political and social system.

Misconceptions about socially engaged art practices appropriating pedagogical methods are visible in the way we speak of these artistic practices. "There is a certain slippage between terms like ‘education,’ ‘self-organized pedagogies,’
'research,' and 'knowledge production,’” as Claire Bishop, in her book *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, quotes Irit Rogoff. While all of these terms have distinct meanings, they are too often used interchangeably. Most importantly, artistic pedagogical practices need to be emancipated from commonly used terminologies such as “projects” and “workshops” referencing them as “tests” or “short-term engagements.” On the contrary, pedagogic practices require long-term engagement, commitment, and determination. This faulty characterization is built outward from and perpetuated by the internal administrative and bureaucratic structure of most art institutions. Especially in the field of art, most institutions show a lack of capacity to invest the required long-term commitment, reducing artistic engagement to short-term practices and mere experimentation.

Bishop focuses her analysis on independent artists who are involved with long-term pedagogic efforts. While these are important examples to be aware of in order to gain a better understanding of how alternative systems can develop from self-organized autonomous practices and how they can be sustained long-term, the perspective must be confined to more firmly institutionalized cases in order to better understand the fundamental intersection between art and pedagogy.

Strong education and learning departments are important components of good art institutions. But transforming entire institutions into pedagogic spaces by failing to compartmentalize departments is excessive and in fact does not even replicate typical educational structures. Only when individuals leading such institutions challenge bureaucratic and administrative structures by changing the policies with creative strategies, rather than bringing in artists and cultural practitioners for temporary collaborations, can we
arrive at a truly successful pedagogic practice. Concrete results will only arrive when policymakers, artists, cultural practitioners, and institutions all come together in genuine and sustained collaboration. This is the core idea behind The Silent University.

**First Error: Bureaucracy**

Cultural institutions should learn to adopt characteristics of adhocracy rather than bureaucracy. Decentralization and participatory horizontal models of transferring knowledge must be inevitable priorities. Decision-making and proactive effort must be designed as non-hierarchic processes involving all members of the organization. This will only become possible when individuals leading the institutions hold on to their visionary priorities, even at the risk of challenging the institutional profile.

In his text *The Promise of Deschooling*, Matt Hern describes the scale of school bureaucracy as monstrously wasteful, and schooling as a depressing, oppressive, authoritarian, centralized, compulsory and regimented environment – designed to monitor our daily lives and control the way we spend our time. When it comes to pedagogy, art and cultural institutions should not replicate the typical school structure, but should instead follow a new transformative vision.

Cultural institutions need to be aware of the difference between management and engagement when welcoming the public. The true engagement of their publics should be the core priority of every action, leaving room for freedom and flexibility instead of falling victim to strict health, safety, security, insurance, and display restrictions.

The Silent University is a challenging institution within different host institutions that establishes its own
ad hoc tratic structure while being fully recognized by the hosting institution.

**Second Error: Administration**

Pedagogical establishments and large-scale cultural institutions also diverge from each other in their administrative structures. “Schools are huge businesses and they command massive amounts of capital, huge administrative apparatuses, they have enormous workforces and sprawling facilities,” writes the Austrian scholar Ivan Illic. He uses a governmental plan known as Title One, which took place between 1965 and 1968, as an example: “Over $3 billion were spent in U.S. schools to offset the disadvantages of about six million children. It was the most expensive compensatory program to the date ever attempted anywhere in education. In the course of this program no significant improvement was detected in the learning of these ‘disadvantaged’ children.”

This astonishing fact is explained by the diversion of the money to “administrative costs,” instead of going directly to pedagogical measures addressing the specific situation and the actual needs of the disadvantaged children. The reality of these expenses is that they painfully limit the projects that an institution can imagine and undertake. Another prominent example of expense concerns carrying the day is the dismissal of globally renowned artist, activist, and educator Joseph Beuys from Düsseldorf’s Kunstakademie after his accepting of too many students into his course. Beuys did not see the School as a place for certified and registered teachers offering the students a service to gain a certificate, rather he was envisioning a new kind of learning place that could be open to anyone who wanted to engage in an open space of free exchange, shared interest, and mutual non-hierarchical experience-based learning. Cultural institutions inherently share the advantage of being able to address,
engage, and integrate a wide range of the public and therefore hold the capacity to turn themselves into learning centers that invite everyone to freely meet and exchange knowledge.

Third Error: Class Distinction

Pedagogical establishments also differ from cultural institutions in the establishments’ endemic perpetuation of class divisions. The enormous levels of debt shouldered by participants in the mainstream education system constitute, in the words of Franco Berardi Bifo, “a form of slavery.” Bifo also writes that, “…the indebtedness is the new condition of submission.” It is ironic when, as a MoveOn petition states, the interest on federal subsidized Stafford student loans is set to increase this summer while Wall Street banks are granted inappropriately low rates. Meanwhile, Strike Debt, a collective student movement organization, paved the way for alternative debt bailout strategies such as Rolling Jubilee—a network of debtors who liberate each other through mutual aid. They buy distressed debt from financial firms, often for pennies on the dollar, and then cancel it so that borrowers do not have to repay.

In this context, Cultural Institutions should promote strategies that offer equal learning opportunities to everyone regardless of class distinctions.

The Silent University: Value in Place of Service

Given the pronounced differences between pedagogy and cultural institutional practice, where does an organization like The Silent University fall? The Silent University defines itself as “an autonomous knowledge exchange platform by and for refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants” who hold professional backgrounds but cannot gainfully practice
their trade due to the limitations of their political and social status. By inventing alternative currencies in place of money or free voluntary service, The Silent University creates a process of exchanging knowledge and experience that is mutually beneficial to everyone involved in order to allow democratic access to education beyond social hierarchies and class distinctions. Initiated at Tate and Delfina Foundation, London, in 2012, The Silent University has already reached out beyond the UK. Currently, Tensta konsthall is hosting The Silent University in Stockholm and collaborations in Paris, New York, and Berlin are in planning. In its operations in London and Stockholm, The Silent University relies on collaboration with local art institutions, community, and education centers, as it uses the existing facilities and networks of these various institutions. With these community contacts, The Silent University activates the all too often unrecognized knowledge of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants that have been condemned to silence in their new countries of residence. Instead of awaiting the accreditation and legitimization through the established institutional structures, The Silent University concentrates on direct measures and immediate action, defying the deleterious aspects of the modern educational system in an act of genuine social liberation.

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IS A WORLD WITHOUT BORDERS UTOPIAN?
By Shahram Khosravi


A METHOD FOR MATERIALIZING BORDERS
By Mahmoud Keshavarz & Christina Zetterlund


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