

That boat wasn't much bigger than an adult porpoise. It was a boat I knew, one that belonged to my sister's family. I'd been out in it many times already, ever since I was old enough to go fishing offshore. It was an adult boat, a dinghy, but still it surfed well on the surges of the *détroit*—the strait—and surfed even farther on the Atlantic side. I left my sister's wedding when it grew dark. I departed with four of my colleagues. We planned this endeavour together. We knew the wedding would go on all night, and only in the dusky dawn would they find that the dinghy was missing. By tomorrow we would be at the other side of the strait. That's what we'd planned. We would be somewhere on the mountains on the other side, and it would be like another life already. The dinghy had a small outboard two-stroke attached to the stern, and we'd brought a pair of oars with us. A canister of water and some bread. A flashlight. Cigarettes. It should take no more than four hours to cross the strait. The swell of the ocean was as quiet as the night sky. I think it was the ocean that invited us to jump on the boat and quietly row ourselves further from the shore. Leave, for good. We started the two-stroke motor. Lucky strike. There was no moon in view. The swell rose higher and it was confusingly similar to the night. We only knew the direction that pulled us towards the other side, but after awhile all we could do was guess. Sometime later, the motor coughed and stopped. We tried to start it again, but to no avail. I don't know if we were out of petrol or if there were some evil thoughts aimed to do us harm, from the ocean or from the blind depths of the stars. The dinghy swung like a bobbin on the waves, and we picked up the oars and began to row the direction we intuited, toward the mountain range of Sierra Nevada, avoiding Tarifa and the Gold Coast of Andalucía. Cargo boats passed by, but they were already behind us, making it difficult to see the Atlas range at our backs. There were four of us. We were all young and able, and after four hours of rowing, we began to reach Andalucía's eastern coast, close to the city of Almería, the 'watchtower'. The sky began to lighten, but we were growing more anxious and exhausted, and we needed to find a spot on the beach with no lights or roads. We had to find the spot before our dinghy would appear to some unfriendly pair of eyes from the coast. I noticed a remote point just before the dawn, and though drained, wet, hungry and nervous, I felt that Europe welcomed me. We docked hastily and left my sister's family's dinghy on the rocks as soon as we touched land, touch-and-go, on our way to the mountains.

We sit on the cliff beside the old necropolis, at the Marshan in Tangier. It's Saturday and the sun is setting on the Atlantic. Crowds of families and young people converse or gaze at the ocean while they sit on the rocks and the grass. We watch the waves in the strait that connects the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. The Iberian Peninsula probes at the distance in the mist. We can locate Tarifa, the protruding snout of a light-hearted bull carrying Europe, caressing her with the mane of the Bolonia dunes. Somewhere in the distance is the old and bloated belly of Europe, where the sun is setting. But today we're in a festive mood, festive as we know how to party, have known it for thousands of years, while we've been gathering around the Océanique. We've partied with the Phoenicians, Iberians, Al-Moravids, Portuguese, Spaniards, Berbers, Moors and the motley crew of the Interzone. And we've partied while remembering the primitive and disconcerting sub-humanizing slavery of the ships, the caravans. In the evening the oceanic particle emissions from the desert stain the crimson sunset, and the ocean is the untimely itself. We watch it gather over and over again, evening after evening, in its furlong gaiety. In the distance, at some point in the funnel of time, there is Cristóbal Colón, his crew and the three wooden ships leaving towards the oceanic insanity from the Palos de la Frontera. The wells have been emptied for drinking water. And in the not-too-far future there is that moment when the last drop of the water has been used for the production of strawberries consumed in the European cities. At some other moment, an undertone is heard from the siege of Alhambra and hints at how an epoch will come to an end. The defeat of the Moorish empire in Europe, and the beginning of another season, one that was fecund for *Neger* ships, the Inquisition, and finally for the autumn of Europe in the form of nationalism and fortressing the end. We sit at the Marshan and from these cliffs by the old Phoenician necropolis, we can sense how the season is recasting new shadows. It's already the thirteenth month of the year.

I'm waiting for the decision for our day to be heard in court. The owner of the company doesn't want to make contracts with his serfs. I'm waiting. I've been waiting. During these years I've seen that if a serf wants more, or even a bit better, or doesn't accept the long work hours at the plastic tents where in the summer the temperature can rise as high as 80 degrees Celsius, or if you know what's right, or if you want what you should have under the EU work requirements, then you're confronted with deferral and diminished possibilities. I know now that Europe is a place for waiting, where I'm diminished as part of the norm. Like the other serfs in the funnel of time in the diamond mines of Minas Gerais, the sugar plantations of the Tucuman, the gold mines in South Africa, the coffee plantations in Kenya or, in the worst case, the trees in Alabama, with their strange fruits, swinging. I'm waiting under the guise of the erstwhile western values and traditions. The world for the owner is determined in the last instance by the economy. The right of exploitation is economic. This right makes no change possible for my conditions, boiling up or held under water. The owner is the western djinn, in many variations and guises. I have no more room to think, and my possibilities to think are etiolated but never excised, never cut out. A djinn decides my possibilities. A djinn is my future. Sooner or later the court will summon the djinn: that, I know. Until then, my withering possibilities are drying up in these shitty sand-fields of Almeria. Somewhere beyond us there's an office of the European Union, beside the Interior Ministry of Spain, Agrícolas LTD, and then a djinn from FJJN.

This is my memory of hope turned to broken promises. A pair of men, my fellow expatriates, approached me and my family in Nijar. We conjured up a plan. With two vans we would drive all the way to Belgium, to Antwerp. There, we would buy cheap electronics, kitchen utensils, knickknacks from the jumble and the street markets. We would then head back, drive all the way back to Morocco, where we would sell this stuff at a profit. It would help me and my family tremendously in our dismal circumstances. I'd never met these men before, but some trust had grown between us during our travels, and through their friendly manners. It turns out they were even distant relatives of my sister's husband from the Rif. In France we discussed that it would make our trip with my family a bit easier if we moved the heavy electronics and appliances to their van. It would give us more space in the car for us to rest on this long journey. In turn, we would move the knickknacks and smaller stuff to our own van. Somewhere after Reims we stopped overnight by the road. In the morning we began our trip and hoped to make our way to Toulouse and beyond, before we would cross the Pyrenees. After a dozen miles or so, our van's engine started steaming and we had to stop. In the other van the men continued their trip. When we tried to let them know we were having trouble, they didn't answer their phone. I checked the engine and found that the coolant pipe had been taken out, causing the engine to overheat. My family and I were left by the side of the road, with a van full of useless knickknacks and worn-out kitchenware.

*M.O.*

He was coming home from a friend's place in Nijar. Along the road there are no streetlights and it was already dark, but he'd done this trip many times before. Not far from our home, he was cut off by two white cars. They wheeled in circles around him, pushed him to the ground from his bike. They slashed his face with a bull whip. Like slashing a slave or an old mule. After that, he didn't visit his friend but stayed at home every night. Will he become a bull, pulled into the ring, harassed by the *picadors*, and by the horses with their *petros*?

The field is like a dead classroom, one where the students' final possibilities are about to run out. They're people filled with sawdust, and meshed at the fringes of Europe. Their body parts are collected from Poland, Romania, Morocco, Ghana, South America and the Philippines. This hand is from Sellam *aka* Mohammed. It's from a young man who got wet in the mountains while he was reciting in Arabic his figments of imagination. For this hand, the night apparitions began their regular visits after the crossing of the strait. They were common already at the Rif, but in Almería the same story reappeared like an unwanted cousin every night. Like some schizophrenic neighbour, or some crazy lady at the door. This hand travelled the mountain range of Sierra Nevada. The eyes of the people here are made from cowries, which make them look like mannequins, dummies with fierce stares.

When I arrived in Níjar, I was given a place to live next to the plasticulture tents where I worked. It was a simple concrete block with one room and a kitchen. Also a toilet. It was luxury compared to Sellam's house, where he lived in a box that was smaller than the box for the landowner's dog. In the house there were signs of life left by the previous worker. Also, a note, written in neither Spanish nor Arabic:

*I moved into this house by the plasticulture fields. It's a concrete block just beside the road. The house had furniture and stuff left by the previous workers. On the table I found some papers, written in a language I don't recognize. I share these notes with you, in case you can tell me what they say—if there's some important information for me to know. It seems to me that it's some kind of interview transcript:*

*00:00-00:38 We would like to talk about the situation of the farm labourers here in Almería and in Spain. In Almería, and especially in the regions of El Ejido, Níjar, Campohermoso and San Isidro, the relationship between the workers and the owners or companies is conflicted and exploitative. They do not respect the law and we, the workers, have to do our job in poor conditions.*

*00:38-00:55 On top of that, the plastic houses are extremely hot. The owners do not respect us as human beings. We work for eight hours a day in the plastic houses for 30 or 32 euros per day. At best this rises to 35 or 36 euros.*

*00:55- 01:35 In general it is like that: most of the food production companies exploit people. My colleagues and I are a good example. There are twenty-two of us, and we work for the company called Juárez y Maldonado at San Isidro in the region of Níjar. For a month (in 2017) we have gathered outside the main office of the company to demonstrate, because they laid-off all twenty-two of us, workers who had requested that they respect our rights as employees.*

*01:36- 02:36: This year, 2017, they have not given us our monthly payment, as always. For instance, we were waiting for our salary from October until January, and we still have not received it. We just have to accept this, because we have no choice. We have accepted that we need to work in poor conditions for eight hours a day, for a 32 € payment per day. It had been going on for like this for so long, until we finally got fed up, and we requested that they respect our right to a fair payment. We contacted the union called SOC-SAT, which helped us talk to the owner. They arranged the meeting where there were also people present from SERCLA, an association that helps negotiate labour disputes. Eventually they nullified the strike that we had started last December. The lawyers and the owner of the company promised to arrange our situation, but they are lying. It is a trap.*

*02:36-03:21 We are only halfway through the season. The tomatoes have not been picked and the planting of the watermelons has just begun. For instance, last year the watermelons were ready to be planted around the 8th or 9th of March, and on that day we, the twenty-two workers who requested respect for our rights, were laid off, with the excuse that the season was already over. It is a lie. The work has been going on normally since we were fired, but we, the old workers, have not done the planting. The planting has been done by the new people, who arrived in the company on the same day when they told us old workers that there was no more work.*

*03:21-04:07 What can a woman do when she has worked over four years in these horrid conditions, and then when she gets pregnant she has nothing. She has no social security and she won't receive any benefits. At*

M.O.

*times, she'll be hired and then laid off again. Now, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April, she was laid off, like the rest of us, and maybe she will be given another job later. But then what happens to those who have worked over eight years but won't be called back to work. Where will they get their money to survive?*

*04:07-05:02 We're simply fighting for our rights. We won't accept exploitation anymore! We can't go on this way. We've got families and responsibilities. We have the right to decent living. We want a life, and fair pay for our labour. Still, we haven't received the payment set in the collective bargaining agreement. We work eight hours a day in the torrid greenhouses, inside the plastic, and we're paid 32 € per day. It can't go on like this. This company annulled our strike, which we threatened to organize if they wouldn't accept our demands. They distort our payment receipts. They don't count all the days we've worked. When it should be 23 days, they say we've worked 16. It's robbery. I'll use every opportunity to talk about this. I'll talk about it with everyone I meet, everyone who'll visit me in my home or at the union. Thank you very much.*

This is the present moment. No future story will develop any longer: it all takes place here. There are the Europeans with their fear of everything outside themselves, and there are the ones on the rowboat crossing the strait and then soaking wet hiking across the Sierra Nevada. Being afraid of being caught. The Senegalese bag-sellers and the Vuitton knockoffs. There's only the present. There's no place for being human. Only trouble and problems. Only water from the Océanique. Duration, migration and lost homes. Slavery, identity and cancellation of the future. These characters won't meet, and they won't communicate. They're like the states in the two-slit experiment, both wave and particle at the same time and in retrospect. This place, where I ended up, seems to have been a different place at each moment.

My name is Waiting. I'm defined by waiting. Europe is a terminal. There's no way to get through this night. They say I'm an outlaw, from a necropolis, and therefore they need to limit my possibilities. I'm like a slave or a mule, who needs to be whipped, they say. What's the point of the oceanic for me? The universe? I climbed the mountain with Sellam. We travelled a long distance, several days. Looking for a place to meet our friend. We lost our money when a friend turned out to be a thief. My sister: I would like to send her money, after I stop waiting. For her, because she wants to educate the illiterate. Waiting for a job. Waiting for payment. Waiting for a break. I'm being cut out and cut off from the world. Like a spectre in a dead classroom.

They're using and exploiting me in different ways, at different levels. They're doing it between me and the other Moroccans, or with Malinese, with Senegalese, sometimes with Romanians and Poles. But always they're pitting me against the poor workers from Almería itself. I'm the thief and robber of their living. I'm waiting for my boss, Francisco Jose Juarez Naquerol from Agrícolas Juarez y Maldonado. I'm waiting for him in the courthouse.