

***Lost in Moments*** by Zied Ben Romdhane

**Our Methodology of Writing Image descriptions** by Salima Punjani and Dresda Méndez de la Brena

Our work together started with a phone call. We wanted to hear each other's voices since it was the first time we worked together, and we also wanted to hear each other, especially during this time of social isolation.

Dresda: I felt an instant click with her voice, sweet and melodic. We laughed a bit and we had a lovely conversation about how we wanted the image description process to be for us. We both agreed that we wanted to have an organic methodology that is not preparing so much or have a script of what we could ask Zied. We wanted the conversation to organically lead us somewhere. Sometimes letting things go their natural course leads to unexpected places where we are supposed to be.

Salima: I really appreciated the chance to work with Dresda and to get to know each other better. We both agreed that going with the flow was more suited to us, and I believe our openness to seeing where things went let us deeply listen to Zied's stories without expectations of what the image descriptions should be.

We sent an email to Zied (our language of communication was English, mostly because it was the common language shared by the three of us) to which he kindly replied days later. We met on Zoom. Different time zones, different contexts, different nationalities, and different languages set together in a virtual room.

We started our conversation by asking Zied if he was familiar with the image description. We did not want to assume anything. He explained that our colleague Roï had mentioned something about it and that he would like to learn alongside us during the process. And this is how it started: our image description in the making.

In the beginning, we explained to Zied that we wanted to capture the sensorial elements of the photographs. We were looking for Zeid's sensorial experiences: the lighting, the smells, the textures the photographs evoke in him. This opened the conversation of a very complex and nuanced reality of Tunisia's Northwest coastline where the 15 photographs displayed in this exhibition were taken.

During our two-hour conversation, Zied patiently scrolled down over each photo, not only narrating the sensorial elements but also explaining the political implications and ethical concerns behind the process.

“Trust is not easy to earn from people but I tried to talk to them about what and why I was doing this project. To me, it is important to show the situation but I am not so sure how much visibility I can give to this project or the region. This raises an ethical concern since there are no guarantees of how my photos will change anything. People in these villages are quite isolated so when they see a photographer, there is a sentiment of hope. I am trying to show what they need but at the same time, there is a lot of hope and expectations of how much a journalist or photographer can change. I said from the beginning how limited my project is since I am just a photographer.”

Zied's methodological concerns let me think about the decisions we make (or not) when we start a process. Who we are, where we are, what language we speak, our positionality, all these elements (and more) influence our doings/makings/knowings. Methodologies are not innocent; they carry our stories and we have to make room for all the uncertainties and doubts that this can bring to the process. For instance, during our conversation, we managed to describe using three different languages, especially when there were moments when we needed to translate some words we did not know. This made me think about the 'politics of translation and the sensorial' since translation can be a violent process when words are forced to match the others or by disrupting the production of feeling and experience by imposing meanings.

Salima expressed other concerns regarding 'not knowing' and 'not stepping into' other people's experiences. She wrote in the shared document, "I admittedly know very little about Tunisia or socio-political issues existing in the region captured by Zied's photography series. I am completely relying on the photographer's perspective, and for me, I feel it is important to make sure that any observations are attributed to his point of view. As Zied said himself, situations are complex and nuanced. I think this is an interesting part of working from an artistic perspective. There is less obligation for ethical nuance than in journalism for instance. This is one side, one perspective of a story, and we can't gloss over this reality. I feel a lot of empathy and our meeting with Zied felt quite heavy. From what I heard, the struggles of people in this region are not dissimilar from the tendency for people with more power to exploit land and people for their own gain or to not distribute the gains from resource extraction equitably. At the same time, I acknowledge that I am finding it difficult to remind myself that this exercise of image description is for people to understand what is happening in the photographs without imposing interpretation as such. I would love to hear the perspectives of blind/low-vision folks on just how much info they would appreciate in image descriptions."

Trying to address these concerns, we collaboratively worked on a shared document. Salima and I decided to meet in person after our meeting with Zied to go through the document together and have the opportunity to share and feel our words or try to make sense of them. When finished, we sent the document to Zeid, asking him to check it and add anything else in his language or to change anything he did not feel comfortable about. He replied saying that he felt comfortable with the final document and no further additions were made.