

Tidal Waves: Reporting on Water

A one-day gathering on the longest day of the year

Yasmine Ben Abdessalem

June 21st is the longest day of the year, and this one was marine, saline.

It began with Mikki. Why the sea?

They began with telling us about sailor lore and boyish adventures, Dutch myths of seafarers in the '40s and '50s—passed down, re-imagined, re-told, by their grandfather.

Mikki spoke about the figure of the beaver. Beavers are water's allies. When Mikki says: Colonizers hate water. The Dutch are the best hydraulic engineers. Policing has everything to do with water—I understand: colonizers = Dutch = They hate Water. A simple equation, yet a charged one. Beavers, on the other hand, do not police water.

Trade and water governance go hand in hand. Beavers manage water too—but differently. They reroute. They flood on purpose. They leak. They sabotage property value. They disrupt extraction and capital.

Now, the Dutch state bullies the beavers. What kind of hydro-relationality do beavers offer us? What other ways of dwelling-in-water do they point to? Through the beaver, Mikki told another story, another way of relating to water: one of resistance, of counter-flow.

From beavers, Mikki drifted to Palestine. From rivers to barricades. The bullied beaver becomes kin to students protesting the Palestinian genocide.

Within the barricades, something else begins: encampments, dens, temporary infrastructures. Another way of life emerges—whether in the UVA buildings or in small beaver enclaves.

Then came Fazal.

He turned the discussion inward—toward the water inside us. Toward crying. Water affects rather than water logics.

How do we cry, really?

Fazal spoke of emotional flooding. Of collective mourning in Shia Islam. With mourning comes sound—not music, but voice. South Asian rituals. A drone-like, oral lament. Where he is from, they are called Marsiya and Soz khwani.

He invited us to consider the politics of tears. Tears are not to be flushed but welcomed. Witnessed. Metabolized.

It reminded me of the lamentatrici—Italian women who cry professionally. Grief happens through tears but not only. Their mourning was both visceral and performative, giving space for collective grief. Through their cries, they made private sorrow public, legitimized mourning, and held space for emotions others couldn't yet express.

Fazal says:

'*When he cries, I taste the sea knocking at my tongue'

'We are all impregnated by the tears of our mother'*

Somehow, it all feels oddly familiar.

Fazal now works on tear management. The extraction of tears. If water is surveilled and privatized, so too are our teary lives. The right question becomes: Who do we cry for? What can't we cry for?

People cried while hearing Fazal's solstice performance. Their tears were welcomed. A full-circle moment.

Speaking of circles—Adjoa's performance moved in 77 laps, each one walked alone. Ancestral invocation. Bodily and sonic movement. The number 77 holds meaning: linked to the 77 deities of Cape Coast in Akan cosmology, but also to the idea of the infinite in Ghanaian culture. A loop that resists ending, like water in sand and sand in water.

Adjoa says the beach is the footnote of the ocean. 'I'm not interested in citations as knowledge', she said. Alternative modes of knowing are important. Adjoa's work rethinks historiography. It legitimizes beach-based memory.

She invoked the link between *cit *—orality, repetition—and site: knowledge passed down through place, through elders, through the land itself. Through 77 laps, she offered another way of doing epistemology. The sand as an archive, the sand as utmost knowledge, full of epistemic potential. Knowledge as sandy, unstable, and deeply ancestral.

Later, we walked.

With Sara and Chandra, we walked in conversation. Walking as a collaborative methodology. Wet landscapes and dry leaves. We talked about fluids, about containment, about bodies as currents. What might we learn from tidal logics? From watery relations that refuse straight lines? From La Piti -Salp tri re to Amsterdam—we traced canal systems, histories of control and (mental) disorder(s). Walking became a way to think like water, to be like water, in flux.

And then, Arnisa made the fire.
It burned, slow and steady. Then dimmed.
Dinner was served. Goodnights were said.

That night, maybe the tides turned.
Maybe they didn't.