

Something extremely serious needs to happen for us to agree to move: wars, famines, epidemics.

We find it hard to get acclimatized. Those who arrived a few days before you did look down on you. You stay in your own small corner, with the people from your corner. You remember with nostalgia your little village, your little river, the big field of mustard you could see when leaving the main road.

The Country

1 *Frontiers*

Countries are divided from one another by frontiers. Crossing a frontier is quite an emotive thing to do: an imaginary limit, made material by a wooden barrier which as it happens is never really on the line it purports to represent, but a few dozen or hundreds of metres this side or that of it, is enough to change everything, even the landscape. It's the same air, the same earth, but the road is no longer quite the same, the writing on the road signs changes, the baker's shops no longer look altogether like the thing we were calling a baker's shop just a short while earlier, the loaves are no longer the same shape, there are no longer the same cigarette packets lying around on the ground.

(Note what remains identical: the shape of the houses? the shape of the fields? the faces? the 'Shell' emblems at the filling stations, the 'Coca-Cola' signs that are almost identical, as a recent photographic exhibition showed, from Tierra del Fuego to Scandinavia and from Japan to Greenland, the rules of the road [with a few variations], the gauge on the railways [with the exception of Spain], etc.)

In 1952, in Jerusalem, I tried to set foot in Jordan, by getting underneath the barbed wire. I was stopped by the people I was with: it seems it had been mined. It wasn't Jordan I would have touched in any case, but a piece of nothing, of no man's land.

In October 1970, at Hof in Bavaria, I took in at a single glance, as they say, something that was West Germany, something that was East Germany and something that was Czechoslovakia. In the event, it was a vast grey, sullen expanse with a few clumps of trees. The – West German – inn from which you could take in this panorama was much frequented.

In May 1961, not far from the ruins of Sbeitla, in Tunisia, somewhere over towards Kasserine, I saw the frontier with Algeria: a simple row of barbed wire. A few hundred metres away, you could see a ruined farm that was in Algeria. The Morice Line, which was still in operation, passed just behind it, I was told.

Frontiers are lines. Millions of men are dead because of these lines. Thousands of men are dead because they didn't manage to cross them. Survival then depended simply on crossing a river, a small hill, a peaceful forest: on the far side was Switzerland, a neutral country, the Unoccupied Zone.

(*La Grande Illusion*: they didn't fire at escaped prisoners once they were over the frontier.)*

Tiny morsels of space have been fought over, bits of hillside, a few yards of seaside, needles of rock, the corner of a street. Death has come for millions of men from a slight difference in level between two points less than a hundred metres apart: they fought for weeks to capture or recapture Hill 532.

(One of the commanders-in-chief of the French Army in the 1914–18 war was called General Nivellet.†)

2

My country

The national territory (the Motherland – in German, *Vaterland* –, the Nation, the Country, France, the Hexagon) is a state in Western Europe corresponding in large part to Cisalpine Gaul. It is contained between $42^{\circ} 20'$ and $51^{\circ} 5'$ of latitude north, and between $7^{\circ} 11'$ of longitude west and $5^{\circ} 10'$ of longitude east. Its surface area is 528,576 square kilometres.

*The reference is to the celebrated Jean Renoir film.

†The sardonic point being that *niveler* is a French verb meaning 'to level off', making (*il*) *nivelle* the third person singular of the present tense.

For roughly 2,640 kilometres, this territory is bordered by a maritime space constituting French 'territorial waters'.

The entire surface area of the national territory is surmounted by an 'air space'.

The defence, integrity and security of these three spaces, terrestrial, maritime and aerial, are the object of constant concern on the part of the authorities.

I don't think I have anything special, or spatial, to add where my country is concerned.