

in the jasmine vines

NADA EL-OMARI

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN FILM
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

April 2021

© Nada El-Omari, 2021

Abstract

“in the jasmine vines” is an experimental film portrait of my relationship to home. Within a discourse between my grandfather Fawzy and myself, the yearning for home becomes a part of the home. This film is a memoir of my personal return, not an explanation or a contextualization of a struggle for the right to exist. Rather it’s the assertion that the amalgam that makes my complex identity belongs, gifted by my grandfather and his story and honoured by the generations following his. Told through our mutual artistic practices in words and images and versed with perspectives separated by half a century, our personal experiences of displacement unite us in the memories, and thus, the existence. The land is our witness and the memory, our resistance, becomes our performance. The experiences of Palestinian diaspora, identity, belonging and yearning exist across generations and peoples and the displacement and its trauma are transmitted along. And so, I look for the scents they carry *in the jasmine vines*.

Envisioned over three years and created during the Covid-19 pandemic with restrictions on travel, the film’s process of conception and construction provides a rather accurate representation of the way I live my identity. Travel restrictions and bans accentuate the uncertainty and confusion residing in the Palestinian unable to be home. Thus, the images and the sounds are gathered and created with other displaced creatives, but most importantly with the help of fellow Palestinian artists and voices, the most important being a two-hour interview I recorded with my grandfather at the age of eleven. In this interview, he recounts his story, immortalizing it for me: at the time seen as a gift, later a resurgence, through this piece’s process a guidance, and always an existence. Forming an imagery of complex memory, archive, story and imagination, *in the jasmine vines* is a learnt way to place my existence within a narrative.

Dedication

To El-Omari Fawzy, Majdi, Samir, Basma, Zeyad, Hana, Ram and Karma.

Acknowledgments

My immense gratitude and thanks to Ali Kazimi and Philip Hoffman for their support, insight, guidance, and encouragement throughout this process. Thank you to John Greyson, for your ongoing help, guidance, and belief throughout the last six years and throughout the MFA program. Thank you to Brenda Longfellow for your time and valuable advice.

Thank you to Kuowei Lee for your endless help, hard work, and for your deep care and thank you to Manfred Becker for your constant and timely presence.

Thank you to my professors, colleagues, and fellow graduate students at York's Graduate program in Film, all your thoughts and time have helped me more than you will know.

Thank you to Sonya Mwambu and Carine Zahner, you are the greatest collaborators and I couldn't have done any of this without your presence, work, creativity, insight, eyes, ears, hands, and time.

Thank you to Majdi El-Omari for going through every step of this film and process and to Basma and Samir El-Omari for always providing immediate and thorough assistance. Thank you to Clara Petit for her attention to detail and continual support.

Thank you to Akram Ameen, Franci Duran, Emily Jacir, Katherine Jerkovic, Nathan MacKinnon Rana Nazzal, Rehab Nazzal, and Yumna Patel, you were more than invaluable in the making of this film and I'm so grateful to have met you.

Thank you to my friends in Toronto, in Montreal, and in Bethlehem, your art and your friendships have often kept me going.

I give my deepest love and my deepest gratitude to all my family scattered around the world in Montreal, in Ithaca, in Madison, in San Francisco, in Egypt, and in Palestine. Thank you for everything you do for me.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Introductory Notes.....	3
Memory.....	3
Imagery of the Displaced.....	5
Background.....	8
Treating through Orality.....	11
Orality.....	11
Fragments.....	11
Visual.....	12
Formal.....	14
Textual.....	19
Auditory.....	21
Production process.....	24
Covid-19.....	24
Collaboration.....	24
Animation.....	25
Editing.....	25
Archives.....	26
Ethical concerns.....	28
Speaking nearby not for.....	28
Orientalism.....	29
Conclusion.....	31
Bibliography.....	33
Filmography.....	36

Introduction

My grandfather's death was a mix of quickness and slow wait. The way I remember his passing, it took a month and a few days. I was in Palestine when his health drastically plummeted and unfortunately I couldn't afford the trip to Egypt, returning to Canada instead. There, waiting, I was rummaging through notebooks, something I do whenever I feel grief coming, and I found a poem my grandfather had asked me to phonetically transcribe when I was eleven. At the time I had no idea why. So, upon finding it, I sent it to my aunt and asked her to read it to him. Later, she wrote me in tears and said she had gotten through half when he interrupted, finished the poem himself and said he loved me very much. Here it is, in translation:

*"Yaffa my love
My heart and my soul
From your Eastern gate
With the burning sun
Remember as I left?
The day I hung my heart
On a Jasmine branch
And told you I'd be back
I promise I'll be back*

Fawzy El-Omari

”يا يافا يا حبيبتي
ياروحي و عقلي انتي
من بابك الشرقي
و الشمس حميانه
فاكرة و انا طالع
يوم ما علقت قلبي
على فرعة ياسمينه
وقلتك اني راجع
والله لاتا راجع“

فوزي العمري

This story is the reason this project exists. My grandfather and I didn't spend much time together but the time and effort that we did created a bond based in the stars of Palestine, the sea of Yaffa, and the jasmine branch I promise to look for and after. My story is my grandfather's, my father's, my uncle's, my aunt's, and my cousins', but also the story of so many more with us. The day he died, I thought that his heart and jasmine branch had fallen off, but through this process I've come to realize it's still there, moving with the breeze, anchored in the soil, waiting for our shared return. I am Palestinian: nothing less than an uproar, but certainly more than I've ever been called. And so this project is my story, in which I'm finally ready never to apologize for the

long tale that is my identity. I am Arab, I am confused, I am diaspora and the lands I was raised on and through. I am the child of Arab immigrants, Palestinian and Egyptian, who were never given a fair chance. I am Palestinian. I am proud, and where my grandfather hung his heart on a jasmine branch I have hung mine on our collective story, in the fragments and vines of the tale. Those fragments are composed of many different aspects, the three main ones being the visual, the auditory, and the textual. Designed as a visual poem, the film meshes together the three components, interrogating them in the process. Structured around the land as the witness, the film is grounded in five characters: the sea, the mountain, the city, the embroidery, and the desert: chosen based on my perception of the land. These five characters then travel through the three ways I navigate my internal notion of home: the physical, the imagined, and the experienced. Through a process of researching memory and imagery within the context of Palestinian art and displaced craft, my work erupts from the memories and the imagined and morphs from my experiences transposing the storytelling from a linear past, present, future to a malleable nonlinear practice, interpretation and interaction. The purpose is not to create consequence but to establish an ever-resisting presence.

So what is memory, and the imagery associated with it? This document is divided into those main three aspects of visual, auditory, and textual treatment, with its questions and its evolutions. Starting with one main question: whilst the fragments that create the narrative of a people inhabit different generations, choices, histories, exiles, transmissions, pasts, and presents, how is their common imagination definable? How can the visual library of Palestinian filmmaking be defined between the different types of exiles? And finally, does the Western dominant literacy affect the process of filmmaking for displaced filmmakers and artists creating and/or raised in the West?

Introductory Notes

Memory

An essential part of the discussions on identity is often memory. Growing up in displaced communities, memory takes on an entirely different role within the personal, familial, social, and collective space. The rootlessness of abstract lives lived in the confines of the need for a constant documentation meant to establish connectivity to a nostalgic place. In Emily Jacir's catalogue about her piece titled *Where We Come From*, she writes, "the meaning of who you are is in part determined by where you're from or even, indeed, when you're from". When I spoke to her, she told me that in her mind the word diaspora is "constantly used to erase our relationship to our land and our identity". In her catalogue, she ends by quoting Edward Said: "For the most part, Palestinians wait, eons of wasted time, gone without a trace".¹ What is this wasted time? Hirsch's *Generation of Post-Memory* defines post-memory within concepts of ethics and aesthetics of remembrance² bringing memory and knowledge into the landscape of duty towards our ancestors. Defining post-memory as the relationship of the second generation to the experiences that preceded their birth, trauma and its transmission become part of the history when it comes to second and next generations "in which received, transferred knowledge of events is being transmuted into history, or into myth".³ So, is part of memory and its transmission only a myth or is it a power and do we collectively hold a duty towards them? When the link with the embodied becomes threatened by time and erasure and that the experience becomes mediated by a fragmented archive, memory becomes linked to re-activation and duty.⁴ Janine Altounian writes on the need to produce a new shared memory. Martin Hovanessian explains her

¹ Jacir, "Where We Come From" under "Do Something on a Normal Day".

² Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory", 103.

³ Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory", 104.

⁴ Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory", 111.

approach to the Armenian Genocide through introspection by its “necessity to the survivor of a life lived backwards [in order] to re-conquer a proper place for its story and the inscription of the traces of a silent murder”⁵. In Fedida’s preface, he states that this “phenomenology of survivance” can be summed up in a concern to articulate the interiority of personal experience in collective history in order to bring out a “writing of the memory of the event which one cannot remember.”⁶

“In the case of Armenian migration, we are faced with a case of exile where migration corresponds to chaos, collective disintegration, a hole in the symbolic. In fact, it is not a repression of memory that will order the social practices of a restarting, as one can perceive it amongst other immigrants nostalgic for their country of origin, but the quest for articulations between the different plans of social reality, which animated the community before the disaster”⁷.

Finally, Altounian talks about a mechanism of a disapproval of time and of a bitterness found in living without really existing due to the expropriation of no longer being in touch with the world of others in any place that is being lived and navigated.⁸ Memory can then promote “a discontinuous, indirect transmission where loss is collected [and] symbolically inscribed”⁹. Memory is less a duty and rather a tool through which different concepts of time can exist in a nonlinear trajectory, where we can remember in order not to get lost in a stolen, still time, and in waiting. Time may become memory, but it in turn transforms into resistance and sustenance because we take memory and inform it into the history consistently rewritten. The link between memory and history becomes a standpoint against the apprehension found in the dominant culture of the West and a structure in acknowledging parallel trajectories. This hegemony infiltrates languages, literatures, and educations, which in turn influence and impose onto deviant

⁵ Hovanessian, “Janine Altounian, La Survivance”, 87.

⁶ Hovanessian, “Janine Altounian, La Survivance”, 87.

⁷ Hovanessian, “Janine Altounian, La Survivance”, 87.

⁸ Hovanessian, “Janine Altounian, La Survivance”, 88.

⁹ Hovanessian, “Janine Altounian, La Survivance”, 88.

identities cornering them into dialectics of otherness. So, how can those displaced rely on western-centric studies and logics when their sense of memory and by extension history, ideologies, origins, narratives, and stories are inherently nonlinear and yet defined according to demarcations living in colonial and imperial languages and politics? As said in Fontini/Cani it's through memory that we level things. Therefore, how do those in a lost time and working backwards and in intersubjectivity, create?

Imagery of the Displaced

I began my research convinced there was a defined place for me to insert my work and practice into, an artistic history and connective layers of places, fragments and, of course, nostalgia. Most films about the world I was yearning for talk for us or through the eyes of what the audiences see as being us. I was looking for familiar and existing templates in a certain generation, creating based on an outlook of coping and dealing with trauma. Edward Said prompts us:

“We must always ask which civilizations are intended, created and defined by whom, and for what reason (...) [and instead take a more] difficult path, which is to try to see [civilizations] as making one vast whole whose exact contours are impossible for one person to grasp, but whose certain existence we can intuit and feel”.¹⁰

It is in this notion of hybridity that I define the displaced. In my own family, according to standardized categories, we are simultaneously considered refugee, stateless, exiled, and diasporic. The very thin lines between the exilic and the diasporic often turns attempts at definitions into misunderstandings, and, in trying to outline belonging, we revert to binaries of home versus not home.¹¹ Why not apply convergence to the multiplicity of those displacements? And it's in those spaces that I consider the displaced, those where multiplicity is the only possible avenue of exploration and classifications simply can't take effect.

¹⁰ Said, “Reflections on Exile”, 537-8.

¹¹ Gelder, “Thirty Years On”.

What then becomes of the understanding of their imagery? How do we view, explain, analyze, and think through the images created by those multiple selves beyond simple dialectics of otherness? In the works of the displaced, there is reciprocity, unity, and understanding, with land and with peoples. As Aljafari demonstrates in all his work, the act of looking at things thought of as abandoned is how we force remembrance. As an identity well-versed in forgetfulness, the self-narration takes a reflective path towards new temporality and spatiality. In a practice that often erupts in the confrontation of erasure and the consistent attempt of colonial and imperialist powers to remove presence from contemporalities, imagination fuels resistance and agency, taking back the idea of permission to narrate that Edward Said mentions¹² and that artists such as Rafeef Ziadah use as a way “to claim the power to name things in the ‘right’ way.”¹³ Because, as Mahmoud Darwish says, “the danger is that the Palestinian will remain a topic, not a self”,¹⁴ the imagery delves in a transgression of specificity of place and creates, in the case of Elia Suleiman for example, decentered images:

“Every center point has a narrative, but I want to create an image without a specific center. In the case of Palestine, my challenge is to avoid a centralized, unified image that allows only a single narrative perspective and, on the contrary, to produce a kind of decentralization of viewpoint, perception, and narration.”¹⁵

Where the displaced is fragmented, its most accurate artistic translation becomes a nonlinear, decentralized, and multiple in viewpoint and in dialogue with image and narration. According to Suleiman, this:

“non-linear image, which is read through dispersed fragments, is the only way you can make the audience participate in the construction of the image and therefore in the construction of the story, of the discourse (...) If (...) you can create an image that calls into

¹² Said, “Permission to Narrate”, 27.

¹³ Albertazzi, “(Post)Colonial Passages”, 238.

¹⁴ Gourgouris, “Dream-Work of Dispossession”, 32.

¹⁵ Suleiman, “A Cinema of Nowhere”, 96.

question this ‘Truth’ and opens new horizons, you can constantly rewrite the story or at least create the possibility of rewriting the story. (...) I don’t want to tell the story of Palestine, I want to open the way to multiple spaces that lend themselves to different readings.”¹⁶

In bridging the gaps between the audience and the speaker, those called other and those who aren’t considered othered, the homeland and the exile, the imagined, the ‘true’ and ‘right’, we encapsulate the possibilities of self-narrations, participatory art, the memory and the lived, the belonging and the wandering, the past, present, and future. Instead of viewing these processes as an enduring inability to work within the known margins of artistic creation, Laura Marks perceives a more haptic sense of imagery where:

“the condition of being in-between cultures initiates a search for new forms of visual expression. [...] Therefore the cinematic language of intercultural cinema is suspicious of conventional visuality (to see is to believe), and presents knowledge through gaps, silences, and absences – an expression of the cultural silencing that many of these artists experience.”¹⁷

In this new way of seeing arrives a new way of noticing and articulating landscapes, which remind us of Elia Suleiman’s incomplete images stirring a participation from the audience meant to incite thought and dialogue on spatial and temporal belonging. Trinh T. Minh-ha speaks of these crossroads where space, time, memory, history, discovery, and layers of dialogue are meant to interact. Where we speak of a gap between generations and peoples, instead we should see multiplicity and confusion:

“When you decide to speak nearby, rather than speak about, the first thing you need to do is to acknowledge the possible gap between you and those who populate your film: in other words, to leave the space of representation open so that, although you’re very close to your subject, you’re also committed to not speaking on their behalf, in their place or on top of them. You can only speak nearby, in proximity (whether the other is physically present or absent), which requires that you deliberately suspend meaning, preventing it from merely closing and hence leaving a gap in the formation process. This allows the other person to

¹⁶ Suleiman, “A Cinema of Nowhere”, 97.

¹⁷ Totaro, “The Skin of the Film” 106-7.

come in and fill that space as they wish. Such an approach gives freedom to both sides and this may account for it being taken up by filmmakers who recognize in it a strong ethical stance. By not trying to assume a position of authority in relation to the other, you are actually freeing yourself from the endless criteria generated with such an all-knowing claim and its hierarchies in knowledge. While this freedom opens many possibilities in positioning the voice of the film, it is also most demanding in its praxis”¹⁸.

Background

As the daughter of two immigrants, my identity has always fluctuated within different realms of confusion. From an Arab to an Egyptian and Palestinian, I was raised in Montreal, Quebec amongst Quebecers on Indigenous land and in a French school whose curriculum was committed to a colonialist perspective. My dialect, a mixture of Egyptian and Palestinian vernaculars, my education, and my upbringing were more than disjointed. This theme has guided my artistic exploration from the beginning of my filmmaking and writing practices. As a writer, my work resides in allegory and a game of shocking as abruptly as possible, making the image and the written story feel complementary yet independently functional. Following that idea, my films dialogue together around these notions of what the text, the auditory, and the visual say individually and together and to whom they speak and when. These strategies erupt from the fragmented identity to construct an encompassed one in making, but most importantly in being. Palestinian artists create tales of the Palestinian condition and that is the process I generate through. As Edward Said pens: “no clear and simple narrative is adequate to the complexity of our experience”¹⁹. This complexity becomes fragmentation in practice and in the work, as well as experimentation with and within the mediums. The hybridity of the self is transposed not only onto the work, but also the means of creating the work to characterize the experience of

¹⁸ Balsom, “There Is No Such Thing as Documentary.”

¹⁹ Said, “After the Last Sky”, 5.

dispersion and displacement as an internal facet as well as an external one.²⁰ Palestinians such as Edward Said, Elia Suleiman, Majdi El-Omari, Mona Hatoum, Rehab Nazzal, Rana Nazzal, Kamal Aljafari, Emily Jacir, and Larissa Sansour have shaped my practice in the fragmentation of their archival, fictional, nonlinear, and futuristic works, but filmmakers such as Franci Duran and Heidi Hassan have also informed my practice as a diasporic filmmaker. Whilst Palestinian artists inherently create works that are fragmented in form, diasporic filmmakers additionally create not only fragmented pieces but also an entirely different fragmented medium, and it's in this merging oscillation that I create my work, by fragmenting the medium in itself and experimenting with the physical aspect, the process and the narrativization of identity. The Palestinian consciousness is one reverberating with the theme of survival that collides with a multiplicity of selves. As part of the diaspora, my exploration of my Palestinian identity begins with the inheritance of what those before me have seen. If, in the photograph, some see the return of the dead, then the diasporic art would have no purpose because the current landscape is entirely scattered and transient; it is a postponement of return,²¹ not a place of finality. We yearn to place our alienation and ourselves within a continuity; to attach ourselves to the details of its daily life and its lived experiences, because the memory is not enough, and neither is the dream.²² While we are our own “network of witnesses, and authorities threaded through our dispersed community [which] amplify our assertions with such insistence as to be positively numbing” we also, through the repetition needed to assert, become a people entirely made of “messages and signals, of allusions and indirect expression [...] speaking through the given, expressing things

²⁰ Rahman, “In the Wake of the Poetic”, 32.

²¹ Said, “After the Last Sky”, 150.

²² Said, “After the Last Sky”, 67.

obliquely and mysterious as to puzzle even ourselves”²³: a space that belongs to the displaced. And so representation, and how we choose to do it, becomes the way to recuperate our past, our present, and our future. We self-produce, self-determine and self-imagine a new multiple consciousness that is intimate, transient, vulnerable and yet always remains collective because of the spaces where fragmentations can meet. If our landscape is constantly being altered and taken away, then our only way to uphold our struggle against effacement is to have an evolving landscape made of fragmented and transformed interpretations. Ghada Karmi writes:

“The story has not ended, after all – not for them, at least, the people who still lived there, though they were now herded into reservations a fraction of what had been Palestine. They would remain and multiply and one day return [...]. Their exile was material and temporary. But mine was a different exile, undefined by space or time, and from where I was, there would be no return”²⁴.

A return to a lost past is not possible, a place where my grandfather walks back to where his heart hangs on a jasmine branch is not possible. But a different return does exist and as Said says:

“we are a people whose national experience belongs at those terrifying frontiers where the existence and the disappearance of peoples fade into each other, where resistance is a necessity but where there is also sometimes a growing realization of the need for an unusual, and to some degree, an unprecedented knowledge”²⁵.

Embodied by exile, fascinated by our history, postponing our return, we remain in a placeless state recapturing the memory: the image that will never go away²⁶ and the image that will continuously change and grow, never to be confined and examined as finality.

²³ Said, “After the Last Sky”, 53.

²⁴ Karmi, “Epilogue”, 451.

²⁵ Said, “After the Last Sky”, 159.

²⁶ Said, “After the Last Sky”, 41.

Treating through Orality

Orality

Orality exists in all our lives, and even more in those with a fragmented history. I often hear my generation speak of places they've never been, but emphasize that they've heard and spoken about these places their entire lives. Each exile is different and there are a multitude of stories, and so what does the imaginary mean in exile? In the oral history, we find figures and images that reappear, thin lines that follow from tale to tale, from breathing archive to another, and, in those in-betweens, in the images that we hear and imagine, in those moments and parcels that we gather: in the fragments, we find the jasmine vines.

Fragments

The process of understanding where I stand amongst the fragments of my ancestors and how I've morphed my identity around them is a discourse often heard by and amongst the diasporic artistic community: was I fighting against the fragmentation or embracing it, and what do each option entail? Watching Mona Hatoum's film *Measures of Distance* a number of times, I always wondered how those who didn't connect with the language and the history chose to interpret her work:

"I'm often asked the same question: What in your work comes from your own culture? As if I have a recipe and I can actually isolate the Arab ingredient, the woman ingredient, the Palestinian ingredient. People often expect tidy definitions of otherness, as if identity is something fixed and easily definable"²⁷

How can one circumvent the idea of definitions within the very personal assertions of identity? In the case of this project, the research led to the fragmentations translating very literally in the formal elements of the experimental film. The visual, textual, and auditory were composed and

²⁷ Antoni. "Mona Hatoum".

constructed completely individually. For example, the editing took place without any sound and the sound design without a timeline or edit. Even internally, each sequence was assembled as independent dimensions and elements before being a whole, focusing on the fragments and what each of them had to say. While the artistic choices led in the discourse, another dominant factor in the creative decisions was the contextual meaning. In the case of the textual, language and dialect (my family speaking Palestinian and Egyptian dialects) were major considerations. The music was created through collaborations based in the active part the two musicians played in the evolution of my identity (from playing in orchestras together and helping me learn the Palestinian dialect to introducing me to Arabic music and improvisations). Sounds and images guided the structure through their background in the real and the imaginary. Each may stand on its own but together they form the multiplicity that defines my identity and presence.

Visual

As mentioned earlier, there are two portions to the visual treatment; the animation that represents the imagined, and the edited footage, which is fashioned on the experienced. This treatment is divided into five characters. Each one is represented in both the animation and the five different edited sequences.

The first character is the sea. The first time I travelled to Palestine and made my way to the seashore, I experienced a moment of departure. Having grown up listening to the stories of Gaza's constrained fishermen, I watched the horizon unable to fully grasp the landscape I was seeing. In the imagined drawing, while the sea is simultaneously powerful and quiet, two men sit poised against the element, finding refuge in one of the oldest professions in the world; we might not always recognize the city but the sea is unmistakable. As if swelling, the following sequence

appears, in layers of lengthy strips and overlays. Through their internal movement, matching and blending into each other, the motion feels like stepping into the waves.

The second character is the city. When my grandfather talked about his siblings, his inner child's eyes always twinkled at the thought of marbles, and, in a city falling apart, what remains is a drawn narrow alley and a gleeful win. Two children ignore the world, a city protecting the innocence of its own. Followed in suit by its sequence, the experienced is as busy as the cities I traveled through, imbued with structured commotion upon each restricted parcel of land.

The third character is the mountain. Growing up on a geography of planeness, meeting the mountains of Palestine and the olive and orange groves of its people, I smiled with understanding when my cousin showed me the bag of soil she brought back from a visit to Palestine as a gift for her exiled father. In the imagined animation, plucking olives from a tree, a woman and her aging father lovingly tend to the land that offers them life and sustenance. In the overlays of images, roots grow over each other, time intersects, at the crossroads of branches, ever so slightly and onto the next image and tree.

The fourth character is the embroidery. On one of my trips home, my father and I were walking in the old city of Bethlehem and, in a dark little store, we found an old woman offering me a silk scarf she had embroidered herself with the culturally recognizable patterns locked in her mind. In its animation, in the timeless activity that unites generations and stitches the land, two women pattern their world. Following, images patch the experienced into patterns and repetitions, the loops of images weave into and onto the images of my land.

The fifth character is the desert. When I first began to take interest in my history, the first question I asked my grandfather was where the prettiest stars were. He told me they were in Palestine, and, when I travelled there to see them, it was in the desert that I understood what he

meant: the desert shows you the world. Finally, in the last drawings, in the unit of family, a child listens to their ancestor, and together they break the quiet of the desert into the songs of rhythmic routine. Lastly, the quiet overlays, where space feels wider than the frame, we quietly nod to the landscape.

All of these imagined and experienced sequences tell the story of my navigation through the land as it witnessed me and I witnessed back. The fragmentation of both the animation and its associated sequence was essential because the imagined is based on and exists in fragments, and the experienced oscillates between fragments and moments within fragments, always creating a collage of thoughts and memories which are embodied in the visual story. The order was discussed but also deeply felt, as though I was travelling from Yaffa's seashore through the city and into the mountains on the way to the olive groves of the West Bank, pausing in the embroidery that represents each place and, finally, when you drive far enough from the city, arriving in the desert, again, a witnessed witness to the land.

Formal

Approached as a new lens, viewing different spaces as parallels, opaque identities as multiple and consistently shifting, the visuals needed to represent these different facets. As Larissa Sansour says, the creative space is not the political space, it exists in parallel, accompanying the story yet different, but its visuals exist within it:

“I think I'm most comfortable when I function in a parallel space that's not separate from political reality, but somehow comments on it from a different portal. The crisis in the Middle East has been ongoing and repetitive and I feel solutions on the ground have reached an impasse. It is somehow necessary to change the way we approach commentary on the subject. I do think that erecting a meta-space that functions according to its own autonomous abstractions and logic could be more effective in finding ways of dealing with the problem at hand, than using our standard tools of analysis.”²⁸

²⁸ Rae, “A Re-Imagined Palestine”.

Designing the form of this film began in the question of how the represented story could be told through the lens of film. Unable to find a pre-moulded form that could echo the fragmented identity of my story, the film had to become in itself fragments and windows as pieces to describe a presence that the languages available to me individually could not trace, but together these techniques allowed me to speak within and with. In the crafting of the fragmented tale around those elements –splitting imagined into animation and experienced into archival and produced footage, windows open onto faceless bodies, and it’s in the process that pieces paint a whole. As clichéd as it might sound, such a memoir had to begin at the source: family. As my uncle rummaged through old boxes for tapes of my cousins and our childhoods, we found three tapes. One documented a time before my father or any of his siblings moved to Canada, in my grandfather’s home and the only one I’ve ever seen him in. The second tape documented the time at the beginning of their collective migration to Montreal, isolated in the winter, three siblings, two spouses and three children. The third tape presented our family within a community of exiled, smiling in the fragmented relocation. Looking at the three of them, the middle tape bothered me. The isolation was so striking, the narrative it came from angered me, which I chose to translate by modifying the physical film. In choosing to reticulate the footage, I wanted to provoke the image. The stories and paths that led us where we were, in this deep isolation, were made of complete coincidences stemming from the consequential choices made by my grandfather. Substantial choices forced by the violence imposed on his body, his story, and his past, present, and future. And so too, the violence that put us in this complete fragmentation, the violence I saw controlling their lives and existence, seemed to need disruption. The parallel I created adapted into the fragment of my thesis where my grandfather’s face dissipates and where the fragments first erupt: the archive screams and so, we listen.

Once I had listened, I needed to find a way to create the imagined Palestine, and the experienced Palestine on the land and in the diaspora. The rupture between the two was originally going to be perceived in movement. The imagined was going to be shot in Palestine, amongst a community of artists and each imagined scene was going to be presented as tableaux. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, a travel ban was put in place and forced me to rethink the process. Would I be able to direct from abroad? But why was I going to create imagined scenes from abroad and shoot them on the land? Shouldn't I shoot them here, from my displacement? The second rendition of the imagined scenes was meant to be dreamy sequences, close-ups within places that could be confused as home. But, again, lockdowns restricting this possibility, the process directed to the conclusion that no matter what alternatives I found, they wouldn't properly depict the stillness and the partitions that the mind faces in imagining a land and its daily life within the drawings in my mind, and so, the process of imagined turned to animation.

Wanting to keep with the idea of paintings, I picked the backgrounds of each animation from a book my father was gifted by his own father, the origin of the book almost entirely unknown. Using this piece of home as the tapestry for this imagined world, the question became how to incorporate the imagined scenes, which represented my dreams of those on the land, within the rigidity of the depicted past. Needing to find a controllable motion that could translate what the mind saw directly onto the tapestry, I wanted to avoid the intermediary of technology. It seemed important that what the mind saw, the body directly portrayed, and so the animation became hand-drawn. The control offered by hand-drawn animation came with its own questions and complications. The dichotomy of having absolute control versus finding constraints in the borders of imagination opened up a new dialogue between what can be drawn and what should be drawn. The process became a game between the negative space and the animator's hand,

slowly elucidating the details, which we have to accept to omit, and remain up to the viewers' own imagined, a place of, not incompletes, but rather openings. What I can picture is what the animator could draw, and so the negative space began its own fragmentation, speaking as loudly as the drawn lines, breaking into pieces, reinterpreting itself through the layering of collage. With these incomplete images came incomplete characters. As the animator drew the figures, they remained faceless. The act of imposing an expression on them would be lying, as though something was embedded into my mind, and the imagined would not only become a pastiche, but a restriction to the viewer's interpretation. Creating a collage of tapestry and drawn impression alluding to sight, another fragment we worked into the animation was texture. This texture came out of the objects surrounding us: dried seaweed, lemon seeds, textiles, rocks, leaves, etc.

Scanning and building them into the imagined world, referencing Laura Marks' haptic visuality, the seaweed feels like the sea my family pushed me into as a child in order to break my fear. The lemon seeds burn in my hand as when my father would rub slices on my face. The textiles that sit around my house now have been around me since I can remember, and on the leaves my family drinks tea and sits in their isolation. Embedding these into the animation, the fragments of textures elicit in me a memory and in others another, but they participate in the imaginary of the memory, in multiple existences and presences. This curated expression of others' memories stations the viewer to embark on a journey where silences guide us towards the land.

The experienced Palestine is composed of layers of different footage. Gathered collectively the footage spans a fragmented timeline, dating at the most from 2012, except for the family archives dating from the late 1990s. Mostly all digital, the textures vary from VHS footage, to phone video recordings, digital cameras, and finally super8 analog footage. Finding inspiration specifically in the films of Rita Azevedo Gomes, Gariné Torossian, Mona Hatoum, Trinh T.

Minh-a, Larissa Sansour, and in the visual art of Steve Sabella, as well as collage artists, the overall formal treatment operated on a method of cut and paste on a virtual digital space as opposed to a physical canvas. Focusing on the up-rootedness of the process, the rearranging and shifting within the multiple forms relate increasingly to the physicality of visual mediums, such as textile work. As Charlotte Bank describes Steve Sabella's work:

“In many of these collages it is difficult to discern any clear directions; there seems to be no clear up or down. When drawn into these images, one finds oneself caught in a dizzying, free-floating condition, disturbing at first, but maybe also offering the promise of endless freedom, to be found somewhere, sometime. (...) Like cracks in a broken mirror, the montage of the image (...) becomes clear, pointing towards a mental process that has not yet been accomplished (...) It is a breaking free of all bonds that now allows the artist to embark on new quests”.²⁹

Resembling Sabella's treatment of images, the intent in my thesis was to not only rearrange and collage a story, but also exercise a free-flowing process of creation.

Beginning with the treatment of the sea's character, the water's ebbing and flowing creates a motion that the footage emulates. Through the deconstruction of the full frame into strips, each was treated as a part of the collective motion, and at the same time an individual part within it, creating on the screen an experimental rendition of waves within the sea.

In the second character of the city, the arranging of moving through a backdrop with overlapping moments are made to be a sequence where we travel through the city, its roads, architecture, and cars, overlaid with its people and the ongoings of its residents. The background is the city, and as you travel through its roads, in windows inside of the frame, its occupants inhabit the space. As time goes by, the past is placed beside a nearer past, the place and its people in constant dialogue; the city is very much its people and a people is very much the land they reside on. Once we've left the city, the journey leads us to the mountains. This sequence, in the middle of the film and

²⁹ Bank, “The Works of Steve Sabella”.

in between cities, a geography which varies widely in Palestine and whose history has been broken with little care, comes together effortlessly to become the central collage of the film. Dividing and dislocating within itself each moment, the intent is to reminisce on the multitude of different soils we walk on, and carry from peak to peak. The fourth sequence represents the embroidery. The footage prioritised was the one permeated with history, moments in VHS tapes where patterns flowed through, glitches in the tapes repeating and creating their own designs. With these designs, and in homage to the cultural tradition of the Palestinian art of stitching, we used footage of moving and drifting through the different places to create an elaborate digital manipulation. Anchored in the tactile and the physical, the patterns move and shift to the rhythms of my identity. I don't belong to the stitching of a specific city or place, but I can create a sense of travelling on the roads that have led me home. Finally, reaching the desert, the form shifts with the landscape, in a perpetual state of stillness, the hues and tones warm with the sun, controlling cuts and the pace. As the final sequence, and landscape, the desert allows for the most personal expression of my attachment to land.

Constructing the experienced, in collaboration with the editor, and with the intention of collaging, the canvas was also given the right to speak. As the process was a complete experimentation of pieces on timeline, happy accidents were constant, and the software often switched things randomly and played with our own expectations. One attempt would lead to an entirely different outcome, a canvas in endless construction, free to flow whichever way it might.

Textual

In the context of this project, text refers to my written texts put on screen. Firstly, the importance of using my grandfather's interview came from the idea that I am making this project on the basis

that I am speaking with the aid of my grandfather's story. His story and mine may be complementary, however they are shaped by different multiplicities and so I did not wish to speak over my grandfather about his and our story. I truthfully know little on his views of the world and his experience besides the deep yearning for home that we quietly shared. However, I can speak to him and alongside him. It was thus an important choice to have the presence of his voice in the sections of animation, recreating the moments where he told me of a place I had no personal images of and had to illicit entirely from the confines of my mind. I was eleven when I recorded this interview; I had never been to Palestine, but he planted a jasmine seed and waited patiently for the day I too would yearn. While I originally intended to include his interview, I ultimately chose to layer his voice thirteen times into a whirlwind of presence rather than a clear voice because I knew it was unfair to treat his speech and pick and choose what I would share of his journey without him having the ability to collaborate.

The text is not conventionally placed at the bottom of the frame; rather the words sit within the image. Text on screen is often considered simply a translation or a distraction from the images on the screen. As there was a necessity to dialogue with his presence, I wrote thoughts and stories I would've shared with him, in a language that is not our own. It was important to acknowledge that no matter how close the words read are to the words said, they are still fragments and an interpretation stripped of our intonation, sentiment and turn of phrase. Consequently, it seemed necessary to place the text within the imagined frame and not in a space where they would be interpreted as literal.

My responses are shaped by the replies I never got to share with him, my impressions of the land, my adventures on the land, and my responses to the land. Intentionally, my responses are written in English. Language is a dominant part of ethnic cleansing; it's an incredibly important part of

diasporic and exiled history and is important in the communities I've navigated. So why did I choose English? Am I compromising on my identity?

“In language, even when you work with nonsense, people find meaning. In my writing and film practice, I work simultaneously with sense and nonsense and the new is often made to fare with the very old. It is naive to think that we can simply raze to the ground everything we have learned – which is a modernist delusion. Once you are colonized, it's not as if you can simply reject everything the colonizer has brought in. We unavoidably import, internalize and adapt, often unintentionally, the master's tools and values. However, to put them to use when necessary is very different from unquestioningly letting them drive our political outlook on life. In homage to Frantz Fanon, one can say there are three phases marking the struggle of the colonized and the marginalized. The first is that of assimilation – to survive, the dominated has to assimilate. The second is that of rejection – the younger generation often rejects with anger whatever e. /their parents have assimilated, for example. The third phase, the most challenging one, is that of speaking 'nearby', with, across and in between: it is the phase of struggle. You can borrow the master's tools, as long as you know that you are merely borrowing for strategic purposes.”³⁰

I choose to speak about home in a place that isn't. To be heard, I compromise into the audience language I'm creating to and within. Finally, a last addition to the textual facet is hiding words within the imagined. Some words are written in Arabic, others in English: languages that I navigate and speak towards. In the same way that subliminal messages are often used in mainstream media to propagandize and push an impression onto the eyes of audiences, the process here is reversed, reclaiming the use of subconscious viewership as a tool of resistance.

Auditory

My father sometimes calls me at night in Canada, which is dawn in Palestine. When I suddenly hear in the background, the *adhan*, the call to prayer from the nearby mosque, I always ask him to quickly go outside on the balcony and let me listen as each mosque of the area echoes and the tranquillity of dawn shifts with the motion of the call. In those reverberations of sound, an entirely new memory exists, one that shifts every step you take when you walk through streets of

³⁰ Balsom, “There Is No Such Thing as Documentary.”

home where every inch is filled with an entire soundscape. The sound treatment was planned around the idea of a gallery hall where sounds interlace, intersect, and accompany as you walk through the piece. Each sound was chosen from a vast library of recordings collected over different trips to Palestine and by different Palestinians, living there as well as away. Borrowing from my and their library of fortunate moments, during which phones and cameras would be pulled out and we'd each have been lucky enough to witness through our ears the people, the space, and the land speak and communicate together: the call for prayer at dawn or during the day, in unison with the church bells, the stillness of the desert, the sound of waves hitting the back of a rock, the sudden joy of a rhyme in a loud coffee shop, or the wedding clamour during an entire day. While these sounds seem so normal when we spend time at home, the instant we aren't they become a missing piece, something that we have no way to access but in the library of sounds, the memories, and amongst each other. The sounds of the characters and the place, the ones we all dream about at night when we're far away. Hence these sounds were treated as completely separate from the images on screen, and constructed as their own fragments of the stories.

Having first experienced Palestine through my career as a musician, it was important to include the process of the musical language through the collaboration with two Palestinian musicians, one living in the city of Bethlehem, and one currently living abroad in Europe. The process was entirely a shared effort, but, most importantly, an unrestricted one. In my opinion, an important part of music is to know the musicians behind the sound. I asked these two musicians specifically for the history that we have together, separately. Both artists being classically trained violinists as well as working within Arabic repertoire, I felt they understood the place I came from and was attempting to speak with, the dichotomy of training one way and functioning in the other.

Moreover, knowing each other's history and style, communication was less about the details and more about the emotional connectivity we could grow in the sound. Having worked and toured together, often in the same violin section and sometimes as stand partners, they both deeply knew my ears. Violin is an instrument I grew up playing, and when I finally discovered Palestine I was introduced to an entirely different way to know an instrument and to experience and practice music. On the other hand, oud is an instrument present in all my memories of my grandparents' home. My grandfather composed and sang, and my grandmother played, composed, and taught. I have often found myself pulling the instrument from its dusty case and trying to understand it. Mostafa and Carol master these instruments and intimately know and love them. The same way I stand with these instruments, I know they do with their own and it's in this unspoken understanding that additional layers of interpretations arise. They each, separately, not working together, gave me a few different tracks of improvisations based on the emotional prompts I had set for them, with the understanding that I would layer, speak with, rearrange, but always listen to the tracks they sent, and, collaborating with the images and sounds, include their music in the voicing of my disjointed story. Speaking with the help of another language carrying its own history of fragmentation.

Production process

Covid-19

As Covid-19 hit and an entire generation found itself moving back home, my restriction from the homeland grew, along with an entire community of displaced young adults. In these communities, I found my collaborators, abroad and locally, all prohibited from being around their peoples and their lands. So while the pandemic ruined many ideas, it also heightened the emotional process and created a collaborative undertaking entirely rooted in residing in the spaces of away. Having to cancel every shoot, the project turned more and more into a process piece, building each experiment into the next within the confines of a home away from home.

Collaboration

The process of collaboration has always been essential to my practice. Instead of a simple execution of demands, I prefer that collaborators help guide me through the fragments I present. In and through the process, they unearth the compass through which I can revisit the land, and tell our combined story. A crucial decision in choosing the collaborators was the importance that they could inherently understand the fragmentation of my story. From the collaborators who helped me gather the footage used throughout the film, to the animator, editor, and musicians, each individual has a story of yearning for home. With Sonya and Carine, respectively Ugandan and Malagasy, their distinctive eyes and sensibilities allowed for a synergy between the three of us as creatives from marginalized groups. It's in those important links that they could also tell their own piece of the story.

Animation

The process of collaboration in animating spanned a period of three months during which the animator, Carine Zahner, and I were able to get to know each other's hands and eyes. Having almost carte blanche, Carine's work became as much research as understanding the recollections that needed to remain undrawn. Coming to an understanding of what first frame would be, it was important to establish a level of trust between us as it would then take hours of work to develop the drawings. This freedom allowed for a more spontaneous approach to a saturated illustration of the imagined in my mind.

An additional important collaboration took place between Carine and Sonya. With the goal of finding cohesion in not only their personal styles and approaches, but also the multitude of perspectives in our collective methods and the contexts of the images, their collaboration centered itself around a joint rediscovery of the fundamental elements of building individually from snippets with a large body always in mind.

Editing

Sonya Mwambu, the editor on this project, and I have worked collaboratively since 2015.

Together, our work spans experimental media art, creative writing, and installation, often through the themes and lenses of displacement, race, migration, and cultural identity. Exploring the intersections of these landscapes was meant as a means to re-contextualize not only my voice but also Sonya's as an editor and as someone yearning for home, reclaiming agency. Not knowing the origin of most of the footage allowed Sonya to have a necessary distance with the images, which enabled them to see each frame as more than the experiences I remembered. Focusing on a way to develop the experience of the piece as an active audience, the collaboration bases itself in the understanding of the other creator's personal emotional memories. Both being experimental

filmmakers and editors for each other, the collaboration was inclusive and equal rather than having any kind of hierarchy: while the story is mine, their voice exists within it, complementing and adding a depth through the very physical work of cutting and manipulating.

Archives

The majority of the footage comes from a community archive gathered for this film, based on a process of in-built trust between community members and I, starting with my own family. I began the entire project by taking the time to obtain permission for the use of my grandfather's interview. For me, it was important to ask his three children for consent, as this is not only his story and my story, but also theirs. By extension, my cousins also had to approve the usage of their family's footage as it also includes them and their ancestors in stories and in images. The relationship of family within archive is one filled with emotional memory, and it felt necessary to not only place myself on the timeline, but also those who share and understand most closely my specific story of displacement, and with whom multiplicities always completely align. Hence it is not just my story but our story; the film is my response and interpretation of it. The second part of the archival footage was accumulated from my own documentation of my experiences on the land, but also, and most importantly, from the archives of friends, family, and different Palestinian artists. The objective was always to ask for moments that they instantly felt were necessary to document, little experiences such as watching a movie on the television that has been sitting in our grandfather's home for decades, or the alleys we only remember when we finally set foot in them again. The third part of the archival footage was shot on an old super8 camera, borrowed from an artist with a story of yearning for home, over the month of December 2019. The consumer-friendly and old-fashioned appearance of the camera was disarming, it

allowed for a spontaneous approach, the camera was even borrowed and tried by people I filmed. Not knowing how the footage would turn out and only developing and watching the rolls a month later, it remains a bit of mystery what was shot and when, adding even more to the fragmentation of the material. The multitude of voices, eyes, ears and hands, the ephemerality of the experiences, of the moments, of the presence and the memory emphasize the transitory understanding I have of the land. In the spaces of displacement, I am again gifted the personal stories of multiples in the collective: moving fragments within the story.

Ethical concerns

Speaking nearby not for

In the film *Reassemblage*, Trinh T. Minh-a creates a story that “dismantles the objectification and exoticization of otherness which mark the ethnographic and colonial projects”. Her work is created “to imagine other forms of relation and expression”.³¹ In creating my thesis, I wanted to share with my grandfather’s story:

“If you are close to someone, like your lover or your mother, and you make a film about them, how would you show and tell? It’s quite difficult. Every time you speak about them, you can hear the other person’s voice challenging and protesting: ‘No, I’m not like that. What’s wrong with you?’ My mother, for instance, would certainly not recognize herself; she would deny, talk back and try to rectify (...) In every film I’ve made, whether it relates to my own culture or to another, the commitment to speak nearby has been extremely challenging”³²

In speaking not only about my grandfather but also about an entire family and network, the fear of how to speak was confusing, how much liberty was I allowed to take in people’s footage and visages? How much freedom did I have over my grandfather’s and our family’s story? How can one be sure they are speaking alongside and not for? Approaching the project as a process filled with constant experimentation has permitted for not only a more subjective and fragmented discourse, but for one in which the uncertainty was encouraged and, as the filmmakers whose practice inspire me have shown, there is no finality in the work we create. Speaking alongside is speaking in the questions, allowing each collaborator and the audience to interpret and question things themselves.

³¹ Balsom, “There Is No Such Thing as Documentary.”

³² Balsom, “There Is No Such Thing as Documentary.”

Orientalism

In the consistent need for the Western world to define what is to their East, there comes with it a precondition of the vision attributed to the Orient based in a collective imagination, which, through the impact of colonialism, renders the East as unknowable, filled with misconceptions, stereotypical representations, and inaccurate depictions, rendering the imagination of places such as Palestine dramatically negative. With that in mind, how is the creation and communication process impacted by those ideas of misrepresentation? In a place where we are imagining the Middle East, the depth of what is called the Orient “is fashioned by the power of our imagination”³³ as long as this power is not imbued in fear and the need to dominate. As a Palestinian brought up in the West, creating requires a mindset of unlearning Eurocentric colonialist and imperialist methods, accompanied by an underlying fear of mistakenly perpetrating the dogmas imposed onto us on the land we work through, with and within. In my personal fear of romanticizing through the emotions brought through by nostalgia is also the fear of inadvertently orientalising the landscapes presented in the artwork. In romanticizing through the nostalgia a land of the things I lack in the West, there is a possibility of creating a work based in the internalized romantic representations of my culture. This is then often used to exert control and, unfortunately, having been educated within the Eurocentric system, the inadvertence of accidentally speaking over and for is always possible. In understanding the concepts that Trinh-T. Minh-a encourages of speaking alongside and not for, and as Said marks in his writings, the favoured process residing in a participatory mode of expression that doesn't impose itself on the subject and material one is speaking with and through, I realized the nostalgia could remain a personal probing instead of an imposed imagery. Trinh-T Minh-a's

³³ Hentsch, “Imagining the Middle-East”, xiv.

focus is on the idea of meaning. Viewers have the intent of finding a specific meaning and the conclusion artists intend in their works. This process disconnects the possibilities for collaboration between not only content and artist, but also themselves as audience and artist. Ultimately, they unconsciously place the artist in a position where their word is taken as finality and create a tension where speaking is not expected to reside in the realm of questions but rather in the one of absolutes, and, as Trinh-T. Minh-a points:

“When you do not want to speak as a ‘knower’, you talk with a lot of blanks and holes and question marks. Perhaps you have no desire to fix meaning, which may sometimes lead you to a place of nonsense.”³⁴

Therefore, in Steve Sabella’s words, “it is the role of the individual to stand up and free him or herself from the new form of colonization that most people are unaware of, the colonization of the imagination”.³⁵ Removing the idea of finality from a work, and not speaking from a place of imposition or authority, the possibilities for participation erupt from the work itself, the artist, the audience, and each collaborator, removing the danger of imposing an image and idea. With this approach, Trinh-T. Minh-a’s blanks and holes, question marks, sense and nonsense, allow for the multiplicity of my being and the multiplicity of each of the voices that come into contact within and with the fragments of the tale, the moments in the motion.

³⁴ Balsom, “There Is No Such Thing as Documentary.”

³⁵ Thompson, “Steve Sabella: Independence”.

Conclusion

It is important to learn to voice confusion, embrace the imperfections of meaning around which some things are inexplicable or untranslatable, even if they shouldn't necessarily be. We talk of our identities consistently. We are filled with similarities, commonalities, confusion, and different paths of multiplicities. Collectivity in displacement is a way to perceive environments; we learn to interpret the confusion on different canvases, and with the use of many different languages. I've seemed to hold onto five main characters: the sea, the city, the mountain, the embroidery and the desert. I talk about land because that is where different communities and my grandfather have taught me to learn to listen. The method may vary but the land will remain. And it is in the way we learn to listen to land that we learn to interpret and to respect land. I believe that it is only through that process that we find belonging. My place is not to speak against, for, in place of, or in yearning. My place is amongst multiples, always with the land, the sea, the desert, the city, the pattern, the mountain, and all those willing to collaborate, listen, and learn. The question isn't how the displaced imagine, because they will imagine in numerous and incomparable ways; the question we should always ask is why. I originally titled my thesis film "fragments in tale". I haven't reached the end of the tale, I don't know the entirety of it, and I most probably never will. However, I reside in the repetition, the constancy, the moving, steadfast and existing, the multiple momentums looking for the smell of jasmine within the countless vines. So, where some consider the displaced as difficult to define, I search for complexity, for the second nature that those who raised me continually voiced yet still remained overlooked. And, in turn, I urge the complexity, the multiplicity of selves, and the resistance to be fostered and nurtured from thin roots to growing branches, a thousand leaves and a million more seeds, because what better way to voice your presence in a collective world than turning

away from the expected and the dominant and using what the oppressor gives you to show them out the door.

The day my grandfather died, as I looked at the poem he had written and made sure I transcribed, I wrote a response with the land as witness and the memory of our mutual performance, never effaced, always steadfast. I am Palestinian, I am Arab, I am diaspora, I am confused, and I am learning on many lands and amongst many. And, through my story, I share my pride and, where my grandfather hung his heart on a jasmine branch, I have hung mine on our collective story, in the fragments of the tale, the fragments of the return and inside the jasmine vines.

Oleaceae

As I drink the fruit you once plucked from your trees
I hear your notes chirping to the sound of the mosque,
And I remember why I am here.

Sitting alone by your trees, thanking you silently.
For my roots are the constant visions in your mind
They are the words you speak- the melody
On the tip of your tongue
They are the soil I walk on
Escorted by your memoir as I pray to capture every detail
And back by your side retrace the steps we overlapped on.

When I sit by your sea and look at your stars
I wish I could give you my eyes.
I smell the flower of our homes
Planted by your side
Perfuming my every move.

And somewhere between here and there
I'll find your Jasmine wing
As it hangs by your city's door
Vow of your fragmented return.

-Nada El-Omari

Bibliography

- Antoni, Janine. "Mona Hatoum," *Bomb Magazine*, n.63 April 1, 1998.
<http://bombmagazine.org/articles/mona-hatoum/>
- Albertazzi, Silvia. *(Post)Colonial Passages: Incursions and Excursion across the Literatures and Cultures in English*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018.
- Azoulay, Ariella. *The Civil Contract of Photography*. New York, NY: Zone Books, 2014.
- Balsom, Erika. "'There Is No Such Thing as Documentary': An Interview with Trinh T. Minh-Ha." *Frieze*. Frieze, November 1, 2018. <https://www.frieze.com/article/there-no-such-thing-documentary-interview-trinh-t-minh-ha>.
- Bank, Charlotte. "Independence Reviews: Re-constructing Dasein: The Works of Steve Sabella" Steve Sabella. Institute for Middle East Understanding, March 28, 2016.
<https://stevesabella.com/independence-reviews/>.
- Barthes, Roland, and Geoff Dyer. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2010.
- Bonnefoy, Yves. *L'arrière-Pays*. Geneva, Switzerland: Albert Skira, 1972.
- Duran, Francisca. "Notes on Mr. Edison's Ear." Thesis, York University, 2007.
- Feldman-Kiss, Nichola, Robert Enright, Sara Matthews, Michelle Gewurtz, and Catherine Sinclair. *Nichola Feldman-Kiss – Witness = Nichola Feldman-Kiss - Témoin*. Ottawa, Canada: Ottawa Art Gallery, 2016.
- Fischer, Carolin, and Robin Cohen. *Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018.
- Gelder, Ken. 'Thirty Years On: Reading the Country and Indigenous Homeliness.' *Australian Humanities Review* 58, Canberra, Australia: ANU E Press, 2015, pages 17-27.
- Genet, Jean. "Four Hours in Shatila." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 12, no. 3 (1983): 3–22.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2536147>.
- Genet, Jean. *Un Captif Amoureux*. Paris, France: Gallimard, 1986.
- Gourgouris, Stathis. "Dream-Work of Dispossession." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 44, no. 4 (2015): 32–47. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2015.44.4.32>.
- Hajjar, Christina, et al. "Paper Trace." *Invisibilities*, no. 2, 2019.
- Hentsch, Thierry, and Fred A. Reed. *Imagining the Middle East*. Montreal, Canada: Black Rose Books, 1992.

- Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (2008): 103–28.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2007-019>.
- Hovanessian, Martine. "Janine Altounian, La Survivance. Traduire Le Trauma Collectif." *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, no. 118 (2002): 87–151.
<https://doi.org/10.4000/assr.1579>.
- Jacir, Emily. *Where We Come From*. Hanover, NH: Jaffe-Friede Gallery, Hopkins Center for the Arts Dartmouth College, 2019.
- Kapil, Bhanu, and Leigh Kotsilidis. *Entre-Ban*. Montréal, Canada: Vallum Society for Education in Arts & Letters, 2017.
- Karmi, Ghada. *In Search of Fatima: a Palestinian Story*. London, UK: Verso, 2004.
- Marks, Laura U. *The Skin of the Film Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000.
- Na'aman, Oded. *Journal Of Absence*. Bookiemans Publishing, 2013.
- Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Neruda, Pablo, Mary Heebner, Alastair Reid, and Skármeta Antonio. *On the Blue Shore of Silence: Poems of the Sea = A La Orilla Azul Del Silencio: Poemas Del Mar*. New York, N.Y.: Rayo, 2003.
- Rae, Haniya. A Re-Imagined Palestine. Other. *Guernica Magazine*, September 16, 2013.
<https://www.guernicamag.com/a-re-imagined-palestine/>.
- Rahman, Najat. *In the Wake of the Poetic: Palestinian Artists after Darwish*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2015.
- Ritsos Yiannis, Karen Emmerich, and Edmund Keeley. *Diaries of Exile*. Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2013.
- Said, Edward. "Permission to Narrate." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13, no. 3 (1984): 27–48.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2536688>.
- Said, Edward W. *The Question of Palestine*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1992.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York, NY: Vintage books, 1994.
- Said, Edward W, and Jean Mohr. *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Said, Edward W. "Living in Arabic." *Raritan* 21, no. 4 (2002): 220-236.

- Said, Edward W. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. London, UK: Granta Books, 2012.
- Salih, Tayeb, Laila Lalami, and Denys Johnson-Davies. *Season of Migration to the North*. New York, NY: New York Review of Books, 2009.
- Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York, NY: Picador, 2010.
- Suleiman, Elia. "A Cinema of Nowhere." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 2 (2000): 95–101. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2676539>.
- Thompson, Seth. "Independence Reviews: 'Steve Sabella: Independence.'" Steve Sabella. *Afterimage* – Volume 42, Number 5, March 2015. <https://stevesabella.com/independence-reviews/>.
- Totaro, Donato. "The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses Laura U. Marks." *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 10, no. 1 (2001): 106–10. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cjfs.10.1.106>.
- Ziadah, Rafeef. "We Teach Life Sir", 2011.

Filmography

Abid, Kasim. Dir. *Whisper of the Cities*. UK, Iraq. 2013.

Abid, Kasim. Dir. *Mirrors of Diaspora*. UK, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden. 2018.

Akerman, Chantal. Dir. *News From Home*. France. 1977.

Akerman Chantal. Dir. *Letters Home*. France. 1986.

Aktas, Tarik. Dir. *Spotting Fig Trees*. Germany. Turkey. 2020.

Aljafari, Kamal. Dir. *Recollection*. Palestine. 2015.

Aljafari, Kamal. Dir. *Port of Memory*. Germany, France, United Arab Emirates, Palestine. 2010.

Andoni, Raed. Dir. *Ghost Hunting*. Palestine, France, Switzerland, Qatar, Italy. 2017.

Azevedo Gomes, Rita. Dir. *Correspondences*. Portugal, Argentina, Brazil, France, Greece. 2016.

Cwynar, Sara. Dir. *Modern in Your Life* for MoMA. USA. 2019.

Darwazah, Mais. Dir. *My Love Awaits Me by The Sea*. Jordan, Germany,, Palestine, Qatar. 2013.

Diawara, Manthia. Dir. *Edouard Glissant: One World In Relation*. France. 2009.

Duran. Francisca. Dir. *It Matters What*. Canada. 2019.

Eid, Rana. Dir. *Panoptic*. Lebanon. 2017.

Hatoum, Mona. Dir. *Measures of Distance*. UK. 1988.

Hassan, Heidi. Dir. *Tierra Roja*. Cuba. 2008.

Huillet, Danièle, Straub Jean-Marie, Dir. *Fortini/Cani*. Italy, UK, USA, France. 1976.

Jacir, Annemarie. Dir. *Salt of this Sea*. Palestine, Belgium, France, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, Austria. 2016.

Jacir, Emily. Dir. *Letter to a Friend*. Palestine. 2019.

Mekas, Jonas. Dir. *Lost, Lost, Lost*. USA. 1976.

Minh-ha, Trinh T. Dir. *Reassemblage: From the Firelight to the Screen*. USA. 1983.

Nazzal, Rana. Dir. *Something from there*. Canada. 2020.

Pang-Chuan, Huang. Dir. *Last year when the train passed by*. France. 2018.

Pang-Chuan, Huang. Dir. *Return*. France. 2018.

Parajanov, Sergei. Dir. *The Colour of Pomegranates*. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia. 1969.

Ramsis, Amal. Dir. *You Come From Far Away*. Egypt, Lebanon, Qatar, Spain, Greece, Russia. 2018.

Rodriguez, Lina. Dir. *Aquí y allá*. Colombia. 2019.

Sansour, Larissa. Dir. *In Vitro*. Denmark, UK, Palestine. 2019.

Suleiman, Elia. Dir. *It Must Be Heaven*. France, Qatar, Germany, Canada, Turkey, Palestine. 2019.

Torossian, Gariné. Dir. *Girl From Moush*. Canada. 1993.