

# **EULOGY FOR THE DEAD SEA**

**POLINA TEIF**

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

**GRADUATE PROGRAM IN FILM  
YORK UNIVERSITY  
TORONTO, ONTARIO**

**September 2018**

**© Polina Teif, 2018**

**Abstract**

*Eulogy for the Dead Sea* is a poetic experimental documentary chronicling the disappearance of the Dead Sea from the initial manufacturing enterprises dating back to 1920's, until 2017. The Dead Sea borders Jordan, Palestine's West Bank and Israel. It constitutes the lowest place on earth and known for its therapeutic high sodium and mineral rich waters. Despite its name, the Dead Sea basin is a host to many wildlife species and is superb for farming. Unfortunately, due to the diversion of water from the Jordan River and mass mineral extraction through evaporation pools, the Dead Sea's water reduction currently measures at 1.3m annually. Through sites of existing and abandoned infrastructure, marking its current and former shores, the film seeks to unify inter-national conflicts through the lens of ecology.

## **Dedication**

Dedicated to Arie Lanczet

1949-2008

+

The man who taught me how to look through a lens and see through the heart.

## Acknowledgments

Many thanks to

Brenda Longfellow

Phillip Hoffman

Kuowei Lee

John Greyson

Ali Kazimi

Eco Peace Middle East

Eshak Al-Guza'a

Maria Portnoy

Lee Barbu

Dany Teif

Amanda Boulos

Hadas Kedar

Akash Bansal

Vlad Lunin

Lubov Yarovoy

Leslie Townsend

Kieran Maraj

Fellow York cohort

+

for the support, mentorship, guidance and patience.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii
Dedication .....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Table of Contents .....	v
List of Images .....	vi
Firsthand .....	1
Geopolitical context.....	6
Rift .....	8
Exhaustion.....	11
Repose.....	14
Form .....	17
Sound Treatment.....	19
Visual Approach .....	21
Epilogue .....	24
Conclusion .....	25
Works Cited .....	26
Bibliography .....	27
Filmography .....	29

## List of Images

Image 1: Classroom, Hotel Lido, West Bank. 2016 .....	2
Image 2: Studio, 2017. ....	16
Image 3: Kieran Maraj and Leslie Townsend at York Foley Studio scoring Eulogy. ....	20
Image 4: Work in progress in studio, 2017. ....	23

## Firsthand

“Civilised man has marched across the face of the earth and left a desert in his footprints.” (Carter and Dale 1974, 6)

As a child growing up in the state of Israel in the early 90’s, I bore witness to the changes in the Dead Sea and the country’s ever-shifting borders through the topography of the national maps that graced the walls of every classroom throughout my early school years. The Dead Sea was at times depicted as a single body of water with Lake Taberias to its North and the Jordan river clearly snaking down and feeding into it. In other times it was depicted as a lake clearly divided into two parts. Although at the time I was not fully cognizant of the scope of political undercurrents which continued to shape the shores of the salty lake which I frequented during family visits to the Dead Sea, through the process of making *Eulogy*, I’ve come to see the layered complexities that intertwine where land meets water, where borders are marked and identities are both defined and denied.

When I was about seven, my family and I visited Atrakzia, an active and lively waterpark complete with slides, a tire swing and a Dead Sea water lazy river in the occupied territories of the West Bank. Currently it remains abandoned since the Second Intifada. My brother and I covered ourselves in mud at Kalya beach, a pre-Israeli Jewish settlement in the territory of the West Bank. Clearly recalling my first dip in the sea, I was met with a body of water whose salinity burned my scuffed knee wounds and the raw scratches of mosquito bites.



*Image 1: Classroom, Hotel Lido, West Bank. 2016*

In my adolescence I'd come to learn about the Dead Sea's therapeutic qualities through the lived experience of a friend who was diagnosed with psoriasis following a severe breakout which even the strongest steroid ointments weren't able to clear. Following her doctor's orders, she would spend two weeks at a time at the Dead Sea, in the salty water and high sun. She always came back elated as her skin ailments vanished.

After immigrating to Canada, as my own Eczema conditioned worsened, I would make a point during family visits to frequent the Dead Sea to relieve the itching, scabbing and flaking that accompanied it. Friends would often join me for day trips at the beach and it became somewhat of a ritual with subsequent visits in the early 2010's. Driving down highway 90 which extends from the Northern most tip of Israel all the way down to the Red Sea, we would drive through the West Bank, passing IDF checkpoints, passing the 1949 armistice agreement line to



Mineral Beach which is the tourist attraction beach developed by the AHAVA cosmetics company. The beach subsequently shut down unexpectedly in 2015 due to a massive sinkhole in the parking lot.

Abandoned sites on the road to the Dead Sea began to capture my interest, they were often situated some distance from the existing shore and have empty pools, deserted docks and stairs which lead nowhere near water. These structures spoke of the traces of the former shores of the Dead Sea whose water-levels are continually declining. Sites of war in the form of military bases and buildings are perforated with bullet holes, point to the ongoing conflict in the region.

In 2016, I was an artist in residence at Arad through the Arad Art and Architecture, an artist residency run by curator Hadas Kedar which provides artists with housing in a town overlooking the Dead Sea, led me to deeper investigation of abandoned sites and their histories in the Dead Sea basin, namely, the Hotel Lido in the West Bank, a former Jordanian hotel which is located at the site of the initial Dead Sea manufacturing enterprise called Palestine Potash Company which was established in the 1920's. The hotel was captured by Israeli forces and turned into a hostel and educational centre for touring groups of Israeli youth until it began to disintegrate and fall apart. I captured the site of the classroom scene. It echoed the maps I observed in my youth, and the mis-education of nationalistic curriculums I was taught in the Israeli school system that seek to justify the ongoing occupation through history and citizenship classes. The classroom stood as a silent witness to the rapidly receding shore situated behind the blackboard.

I took a subsequent trip to the Dead Sea in May 2017 where I did the bulk of my filming, systemically following a location-list over a three week period which I compiled through my field work research in 2016. I filmed largely in the sinkhole affected areas in the North Western

parts of the Dead Sea, as well as the developed beaches and tourist areas at the Southern part including Ein Bokek and Neve Zohar. Nature accounts for itself in its form. The more I frequented the region, the more I learned to read the landscape. I traveled mostly by myself, with the exception of Maria Portnoy, a talented Israeli photographer, who joined me for three days and helped me drive to the remaining locations I sought to document.

After returning to Toronto I began compiling the visual material onto the walls of my Junction studio in the form of compiled screenshots printed as contact sheets. Periodically removing them and sketching them from my memory to see which scenes stood out to me as most memorable. Looking for the story through the scenes I've gathered, I began to find reoccurring motifs, primarily of empty chairs and birds who later became the grounding structural elements in the film. There was an evident lack of talking heads, only segments of recorder audio interviews with people I encountered casually en-route to and from filming locations. Adding voice over interview audio over a scene with an empty chair shifted the focus from the speaker-audience relation to a speaker-landscape one. In a classic interview setup, the interviewee often faces the camera while speaking to the viewer, either through the camera or the interviewer which acts as an intermediate between the speaker and viewers. In the case of *Eulogy*, the Dead Sea becomes not just the subject of the conversation but an active member of the conversation. The voice over interviews are systemically grounded in scenes portraying an empty chair which is embedded in the sea or directly faces the landscape.

July 19, 2018 the state of Israel passed a legislative law revoking Arabic as an official language, which it had been for over 70 years. It became of utmost importance for me to respond to these targeted and exclusionary legislations by maintaining a dual-language practice in my filmmaking. I contacted EcoPeace Middle East, an organization that works for the

environmental conservation in Amman, Ramallah and Tel Aviv. With the help of Eshak Al-Guza'a, I was able to obtain interviews from farmers and council members in the town of Karak in Jordan. These comprised firsthand testimonies from individuals directly affected by the sinkhole phenomenon surrounding the Dead Sea. These interviews were translated with the help of Amanda Boulos, a Canadian-Palestinian visual artist and those were integrated into *Eulogy for the Dead Sea*.

## Geopolitical context

*“We need to think ecology not only through nature but through subjectivity and social relations” (Parikka 2015, 91).*

Borders are malleable constructs, they are established on the ground of national identity and that identity, in and of itself, is malleable. Some borders are defined by geological features, commerce and history while others are further established by hate and war which attempt to forcefully write identity into history through bloodshed and stories of camaraderie, perseverance, victory and loss. Contested borders are scarred with histories of occupation, destruction and those relics are often marked with a loud absence. Many of these contested locations are the subjects of my film. For example, the classroom and hall scenes in *Eulogy* were filmed at the Jordanian hotel Lido in the West Bank. This hotel was built at the site of the first large scale factory around the Dead Sea, Palestine Potash Company which was established in 1930. It was subsequently destroyed in 1948. This site was occupied by the Jordanian forces until 1967 and currently occupied by the IDF, despite the fact that it is technically the designated Palestinian territory of the West Bank.

Didactic language instructs and teaches, but it also requires one to define, in a given language, time and context. This process asserts notions about the world and its understanding through its very structure. In this project the didactic has proven to be problematic. When working in an occupied region, I became concerned with unknowingly using names that have

been established by the occupying state. Renaming villages while developing new settlements and adopting these terms into daily language is an ongoing act of erasure. Excavating names, terms and mapping history became an active component in the making of this film. To speak of the Dead Sea's current state we must recognize its ecological neglect as a symptom of the conflicts that rage around it. The political is ecological in a dense system of interrelation. The borders marked on a map, scar the living surface and in turn the symptoms which nature communicates, hold an opportunity for partnership.

The Dead Sea is a terminal lake. Meaning all that fresh river water that flows in, doesn't flow out. It gathers over eons and evaporates, leaving behind a rich concentration of salts and minerals. It also constitutes a finite resource shared by Israel, Jordan and Palestine. According to the Global Nature Fund's Living Lakes project, over the last three decades of the 20th century the Dead Sea has lost a third of its surface area, marking a reduction from 1,250 million cubic meters per year in 1950 to approximately 260 million cubic meters per year in 2010.

Prognosis: terminal.

## Rift

*“Mixed-up times are over owing with both pain and joy—with vastly unjust patterns of pain and joy, with unnecessary killing of ongoingness but also with necessary resurgence. The task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present.”* Donna Haraway (2016, 1)

Haraway’s quote speaks of a practice of acceptance of muddled reality that is often too complex to break down into simplistic binaries of good and bad, right and wrong. In *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway advocates for sitting in the discomfort of the present reality and coming to see and accept life and its intricacies as they are, messy and cruel. The Dead Sea formed following a volcanic eruption casing a rift 6000 kilometres long, commonly referred to as the Great Syrian-African rift. It is also known as the Syro-African Depression due to the lowly terrain it created through its formation making the Dead Sea the lowest accessible place on Earth residing at over 400m below sea level. Palestine Potash was the initial manufacturing enterprise established in the Northern part of the Dead Sea in 1930 alongside a small Jewish settlement by the name of Kalya. It housed and employed both Jewish workers, their families and Palestinians from neighbouring Jericho. In 1948, the northern factory was destroyed and was later rebuilt in Sodom near the Southern basin of the Dead Sea. This factory exists to this day and is known as the Dead Sea Works.

The 1948 Arab-Israeli War produced a new rift, creating further division between the local inhabitants of the region. The rift which has yet to be mended, is further complicated in light of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the Jordanian-Israeli war in 1968 and subsequent Oslo agreements in the early 90’s which brought about a temporary wave of optimism only to be shattered by the events which constitute the Second Intifada.

The Judaea and Moab mountains on the Israeli and Jordanian shores that oppose each other, hold the memory of their unity in the folds of their hills and crevices. They physically shift away from each other by 1cm annually. Politically, these shifts fluctuate on the precarious terrain of ongoing conflict. In 2003 Israeli Director of EcoPeace Middle East, Gidon Bromberg defined the Dead Sea as classic case of the Tragedy of the Commons and argued for the instating the Dead Sea basin as a single Biosphere Reserve through regional cooperation, stating that “the Dead Sea Basin is a single ecosystem. The fact that it crosses international borders does not make one particular area independent of the other in an ecological sense.” (2003)

The three primary factors that contribute to the rapid decline of the Dead Sea are the division of the Jordan River water for agricultural use, the mass water pumping of Dead Sea water to Southern evaporation pools for mineral excretion and the lack of cooperation between governments and regional water governing bodies. As Sharp (2008, 3) argues:

For years, Israeli and Arab governments have diverted for agricultural and industrial purposes up to 95% of the southward flow of the Jordan River, which naturally replenishes the Dead Sea. Israel diverts an estimated 60% of the river, while Syria and Jordan divert the rest. The Palestinian Authority has demanded that it receive a fair share of the river's flow. In the last 55 years, the Dead Sea has lost 33% of its surface area... scientists estimate that even though the evaporation of the Dead Sea may slow in the coming decades, it may lose another 33% of its surface area.

In a region that collectively experiences water-scarcity the fresh water flow of the Jordan River is diverted through a series of man-made dams. In a paper titled “A Palestinian Socio-Legal Perspective on Water Management in the Jordan River—Dead Sea Basin”, Fadia Daibes-Murad (2009) describes the specific water related issues that affect the Palestinian population, namely, an evident lack of access to Jordan River water as compared to their Israeli and Jordanian counterparts. Murad stresses that Palestinians lack access to shared Israeli-

Palestinian underground aquifers and face ongoing contamination of natural water resources by sewage water from Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Palestinian attempts at building new wells and sewage systems are immediately halted and destroyed by the Israeli authorities and this has, in turn, caused a spike in water-related diseases in the population. In a population that largely depends on agriculture, the lack of water access and confiscation of disputed lands furthers the rift.



## **Exhaustion**

The southern part of the Dead Sea has been developed into a series of shallow evaporation pools. The water from the Northern Basin is pumped into the Southern Basin through a tunnel into shallow segmented parts which begin with an array of hotels and spas developed for tourism and end with the Dead Sea Works in Sodom, the ancient hallmark city of sin in the old testament and the Koran which is home to the largest mineral extraction factory in Israel. The evaporation pools are shallow, about 2m deep and utilize solar energy for evaporation, a method commonly used for salt and mineral farming.

The Dead Sea Works, officially established in 1953, has since become the most profitable factory in Israel. Its sister factory, Arab Potash on the Jordanian side has risen to a comparable status. According to Becker et al.: “the chemicals in the Dead Sea support both large mineral extraction industries, which supply fertilizer, agricultural and industrial processes, and a cosmetic and health aids industry.” (Becker et al. 2004, 11)

A tunnel with two pumping stations divides the Northern Sea and the Southern evaporation pools. The shallow evaporation pools measuring 1-2m deep on average are replenished through the mineral rich water of the Dead Sea, which continues to decline at an increasing rate of deterioration. Eighty percent of this decline has occurred since the 1970's and Jordanian journalist Fathi Hewaymil predicts that the Southern Sea could disappear by 2050, leaving mud flats in a massive dust bowl. The Dead Sea's fate is often compared to the tragic one of the Aral sea in Kazakstan and Uzbekistan that has been in rapid decline since the 1960's and has shrunk to less than 10% of its original size by the 2000's. Moreover, the receding shoreline has caused over 1000 sinkholes to form in the North Western and South Eastern sections of the Dead Sea, and many public beaches have shut down over the past three years

due to collapsed infrastructure. The sinkholes can measure up to 20m deep and 3km wide. Becker and Katz (2004, 1) point out: “the most fundamental cause of degradation: poor governance structures, including a lack of communication and cooperation both within and between governments and a lack of a common forum for bringing together multiple stakeholder groups.”

The sinkhole problem began in the 1970's and continues to escalate to this day. However, “the optimism that accompanied the Arab-Israeli peace process of the early 1990s helped bring about a new canal proposal, one that linked the interests of Israel and Jordan.” (Sharp 2008, 4), namely, the Peace Conduit, or Red-Sea Dead-Sea Canal (RSDS conduit). The Peace Conduit, which has been in various stages of assessment and pre-development since the 1980's, is a joint project between Israel and Jordan which proposes to utilize the elevation drops in order to raise the water level through a desalination plant and provide energy and water to the region. In a detailed overview on the “Peace Canal”, Sharp (2008) outlines the proposed Red Sea-Dead Sea Conduit and its subsequent effects of this intervention on the unique and fragile ecology of the Dead Sea Basin. Sharp points to a “concern that without an Israeli-Palestinian settlement that addresses the Dead Sea border and water rights, Israel and Jordan, which concluded a bilateral peace treaty in 1994, will disproportionately benefit from the canal at the expense of the Palestinians.” (2) While desalinated water could provide energy and water to the region, it will be sold at a higher rate to Palestinians who have a legal right to a share of the Jordan River water.

Moreover, some of the ecological consequences of the RSDS conduit are related to the introduction of a different water to the unique ecology of the Dead Sea which may cause discolouration, a change in salinity and a reduction of mineral concentration. Lastly, the Dead

Sea lies on a fault-line that is prone to earthquakes occurring as commonly as regional conflicts (Hofstetter et al. 2014). Sharp concludes:

Some experts note that even if the canal is never built, it has already brought Israel and Jordan closer on issues related to water conservation and environmental restoration. Whether governments go even further in addressing regional water shortages and the deterioration of the Dead Sea depends on political will, external support, and the ability to withstand political pressures emanating from the expected continuation of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. (Sharp, 6)

Plans for the Peace Conduit have been put on hold after Israeli-Jordanian relations have been undermined due to a shooting of Jordanian civilians in Amman by Israeli armed guard Ziv Moyal in 2017.

## Repose

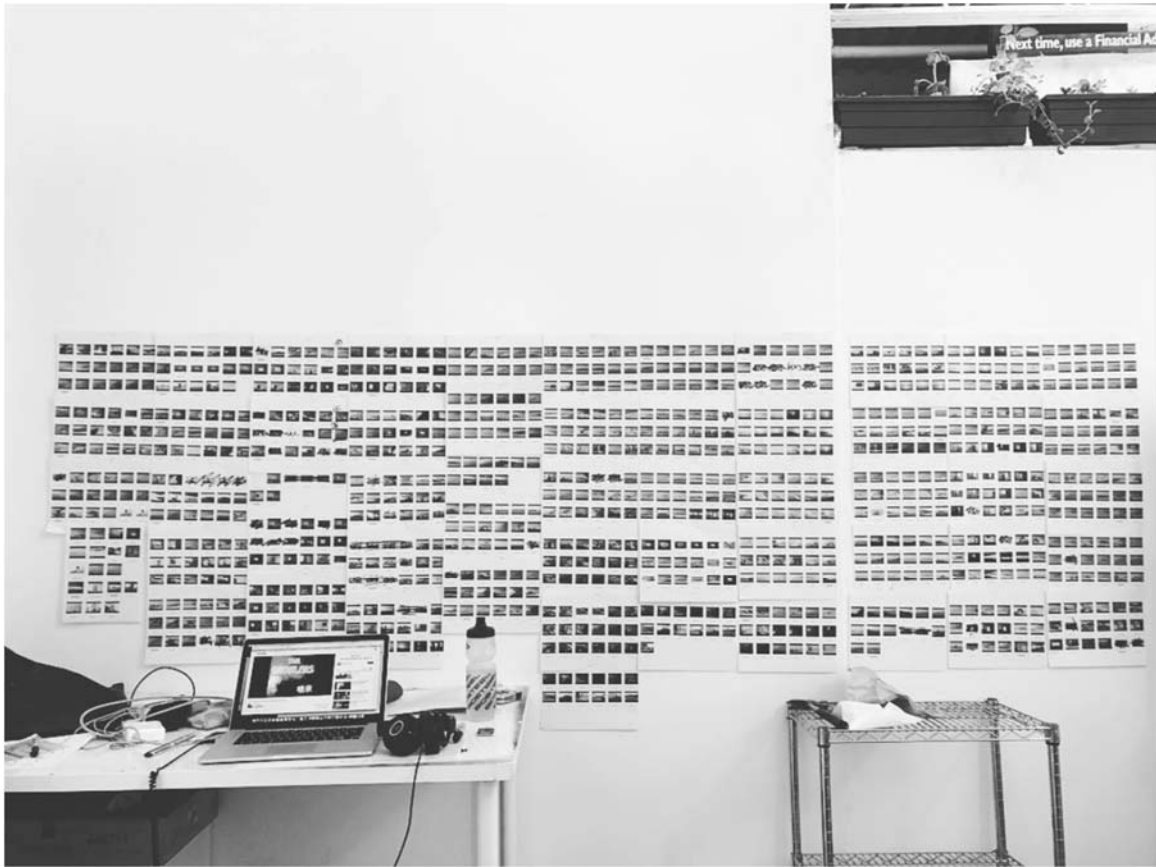
My main position in this project is to look at the Dead Sea through the lens of transnationalism and a wider framework of ecology in order to create a feasible economic, cultural and social argument for cooperation in the region. Taking into account the state of the West Bank and the people of Palestine, Jordanian farmers who have lost their lands and factories to sinkholes, and Israelis who battle beach closures due to sinkholes within an economy that constitutes as a core cause for the Dead Sea's rapid decline, the film attempts to unify voices and views from various national groups who share the shores of the Dead Sea. Alternative proposals to Conduit entail restoring the natural flow of the Jordan River. This restoration needs to occur on the levels of policy, sustainability and economic incentives which factor the needs and right of all the regional inhabitants. *REPOSE* argues for the further cooperation between the nations surrounding the Dead Sea through a multiplicity of voices. Refuting the Red-Sea Dead-Sea Conduit as the preferred solution, Eshak Al-Guza'a suggests a restoration of the Jordan River flow to replenish the Dead Sea as an alternative.

In a study conducted by Becker et al. (2004) which measured Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian WTP (Willingness To Pay) for the conservation of the Dead Sea, they found that all three populations showed a WTP relative to their income. Becker et al. note that while:

Palestinians do not have control over tourist facilities along the Dead Sea itself, nor do they have freedom of movement to travel to the Dead Sea region (24)...the importance of conservation is especially obvious in the case of the Palestinians who are under extreme economic pressures, yet still state their willingness to contribute to an annual fund.” (21)

These findings demonstrate a cultural and personal value assessment that is not solely dependent on economic production and revenue. The Dead Sea constitutes a sacred and culturally

significant place for all three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. It continues to draw tourists from across the globe who visit the Dead Sea for its unique healing properties. In the article “Water and Peace,” Gidon Bromberg (2004) reminds us of the primary inhabitants of the Dead Sea, whose “shores are dotted with springs and oases, which provide water for 90 species of birds, 25 species of reptiles and amphibians, and 24 species of mammals, as well as more than 400 species of plants” (24-25). Cultural identities are often informed by the very nature which sustains them. There cannot be cultural preservation without an ecological conservation seeing as those are mutually inter-dependent.



*Image 2: Studio, 2017.*

*This body  
Is a no man's land  
Geography is conquered by those who seek to settle  
For less  
Than infinity*

*Raise your flag  
Mark your territory*

*And I will crumble beneath  
Your feet*

*- P. Teif*

## Form

A eulogy is a celebratory speech recited at a funeral celebrating the life and death of a loved one. It signals the looming death of the Dead Sea, geologically, visually or perhaps the end of the Dead Sea as we know it regionally or politically. While the film outlines the visible effects of ecological changes, the lake continues to be a vibrant place busy with wildlife and visitors. These two dichotomies that exist around the Dead Sea are in an ongoing interplay, but the undercurrent that signals the fragility of its ecology is ever present. The film was originally titled *Eulogy for a Dying Sea*, however, after screening an excerpt at *Muddied Waters - Decomposing the Anthropocene*, an interdisciplinary colloquium which took place at York University in 2017, some viewers were unclear about which body of water I am referring to in the film. Following the advice of Akash Bansal who pointed that it would be wise to include the name of the lake in the title, the title was changed to *Eulogy for the Dead Sea*.

*Eulogy* was inspired by stoic philosophy as an exercise in imagining one's death as a means to come to terms with it and live life more fully and mindfully, which is a practice also common in Buddhist traditions. Although the Dead Sea is at a rapid decline and its surface has been visibly altered, my position is not to solely highlight its inevitable end but to point out the notion that although the timeline for any restorative actions is largely unknown, the Dead Sea is still a salvageable but will require cooperation and will on part of many.

I wanted the viewer to approach the film with this awareness when faced with images and sounds of the personified nature and destruction of the Dead Sea so we could understand its mortality as we do our own.

The film opens with journalist Fathi Hewaymil's voice imposed over an image of an outdoor plastic chair overgrown with salt crystals, situated in the shallow Southern part of the

Dead Sea declaring “Now it is suffering and in the future it will die.” Faith’s statement acts as the official summary and announcement of the current state of the Dead Sea.

In a land ravaged by the Other, loss is commonplace. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict operated on grounds of nationalism. *Eulogy* is a meditation on ecological grief, one that impacts and transcends said borders. Attempting to create a space for empathy for the very land that saw much bloodshed through the many attempts over its ownership.

Building on Bill Nichols’ (1991) definitions in ‘Documentary Modes of Representation’, the poetic modes employed in this film include a combination of observational and expository modes. Nichols notes that “the observational mode stresses the nonintervention of the filmmaker...observational films rely on editing to enhance the impression of lived or real time.” (Nichols, 38) This mode is heavily employed in the film, presenting life as it is really observed. However, *Eulogy* is not observational in its purest form as the film utilizes music, rather than purely location sound to enhance the mood of the scenes, as can be observed in the segment that explores abandoned Jordanian military base in the West Bank which is accompanied by Dana Sipos’ song *Fullmoon Sinners*. The sound provides its own commentary on the otherwise observational footage. However, the film does rely heavily on editing in order to create a sense of narrative. In addition, it also utilizes the expository mode where “the voices of others are woven into a textual logic that subsumes and orchestrates them. They retain little responsibility for making the argument, but are used to support it or provide evidence or substantiation for what the commentary addresses.” (Nichols, 1991, 37) By combining interviews and imposing those on landscapes around the Dead Sea, the story of the Dead Sea is told through the combined views and insights of many.



## Sound Treatment

Bad Religion's 2004 album *The Empire Strikes First* opens with a track titled *Overture*. A largely political punk record, I was inspired to open *Eulogy* with its own overture. We are introduced to the landscape with the first hints of sunrise, couples and individuals strolling on the evaporation pool dividers, their scale minuscule in comparison to the desert landscape. Bathers float in the sea, as the sun continues to rise and reveal tones of blue. The initial sounds we hear are ones of birds chirping followed by a gentle violin sound that gradually builds as the segment progresses creating a contrast between the scenic landscape and macro shots of salt covered branches and the tension of the violin. This violin composition was composed and performed by talented violinist Leslie Townsend, and recorded at the York foley studio with the audio engineering skills of Kieran Maraj. Leslie Townsend spoke of the violin as being the closest sound in frequency and range to the human voice and I feel *Overture* is the musical embodiment of a voice which gradually becomes an alarming wail.

Location sound was recorded with a Zoom H1 and a pair of Sennheiser headphones. In earlier renditions of the projects I've been using a simple chord progression which I recorded a few years ago. Through the process of making of the film, I had a chance to rework that melody with the production guidance of Tan Sierra and Evan Vincent, two local music producers who added percussive tracks, processed the melody through tape delays.

In addition to original compositions, I have been in contact with Oren Ambrachi and Dana Sipos regarding licensing songs for the film. Namely, *Fullmoon Sinners* by Dana Sipos that accompanies the footage of the Jordanian military base and war torn buildings in the West Bank. Oren Ambrachi's track titled *Salt* is an eerie and nostalgic song which accompanies the closing chapter of the abandoned waterpark in the West Bank which I had visited as a child.



*Image 3: Kieran Maraj and Leslie Townsend at York Foley Studio scoring Eulogy.*

## Visual Approach

*Eulogy* constitutes my first substantial linear-narrative documentary film project. My background before enrolling at York University was primarily contemporary art and experimental video-making practices. I have transitioned into moving image from a primarily photographic background which continues to deeply inform my practice. My visual approach for *Eulogy* and much of my visual compositions continue to be inspired by the prolific Canadian female photographer Lynne Cohen. Cohen's large format photographs of empty interiors are potent with narrative. Desolate spaces that are sometimes clear in their intended use and at times splendidly ambiguous, her photographs tell the stories of the comings and goings of people. Chairs are a reoccurring motif in Cohen's work and are the primary inspiration for the structural approach of situating speakers in empty chair scenes in *Eulogy*.

Another source of inspiration came from *Koyaanisqatsi: Life Out of Balance* (1982) by Director Godfrey Reggio which is a collection of urban and natural landscape scenes filmed by Ron Fricke, flowing sequentially into one another with an instrumental soundtrack composed by Phillip Glass. *Koyaanisqatsi* is observational, its tension is informed by the combination and contrasts of sound and image and time. The film creates a sense of a grand picture of our world through a compilation of details and elements. Primarily, it acts as an equalizer between human and nature that we often speak of as binary opposites. It does not prioritize one over the other but integrates the two formally through editing. This is an element which I wanted to implement in *Eulogy* to enforce the notion that while some of the causes affecting the Dead Sea are man-made, others are natural phenomenon, they cannot be separated because they continuously inform and define one another through their relationship.

Moving from experimental works into a linear documentary form, I struggled with structuring the narrative of the film. I worked with filmmaker and editor Igal Hecht to assist me in structuring the narrative of the film. I saw the Dead Sea's water decline is an amalgamation of various causes, namely geological, ecological political and economic. Each one intertwined with the other, I struggled to create a linear sense of progression. After viewing the footage and creating a rough cut from my assembly, Igal pointed out that he saw three distinct causes or chapters - the Jordan River's water diversion, sinkholes and the effects of manufacturing, and potential implementation of the RSDS conduit.

Breaking the film into three main chapters was further informed by Brett Story's *Prison in Twelve Landscapes*. From a structural perspective, all twelve segments in the film effectively speak to the various economies and practices that exist around the prison system in the US, unified through the overall structure of the film. I used this film as a cognitive reference to the three main chapters that later became *RIFT*, *EXHAUSTION* and *REPOSE*.

The observational view of *Eulogy* comes as a stark contrast to Emad Burnat's personal account of the wall being constructed in his home village in Bil'in in his film *Five Broken Cameras*. His film chronicles peaceful demonstrations and how those escalate to violent death of his close friend and Burnat's own injury by the IDF. Films such as *5 Broken Cameras* (2011) and *Promises* (2001) exemplify through lived experience the stark contrast between the Palestinian and Israeli experience.



*Image 4: Work in progress in studio, 2017.*

## Epilogue

In April 2018, Yaser Murtaja a 30 year old photographer and video journalist was killed in the Gaza border protests. A simple google search reveals contradictory information. Jewish media channels hint at political affiliations with Hamas, while an article in Aljazeera speaks of Yaser's dreams of travelling from a state which has no airport. I was able to travel on highways, pass through IDF checkpoints and patrols solely based on my national affiliation as a citizen of the occupying state.

The compulsion to witness through a lens allowed me to complete a film, and cost Yaser Murtaja his life. As a fellow photographer I can't help but question the grounds on which the freedom I was privileged with to move about in the West Bank while filming *Eulogy* compares to Palestinian filmmakers and citizen who can hardly access the shores of the Dead Sea. This continues to be a painful reminder of the ongoing and violent silencing of Palestinians under the Israeli occupation. *Eulogy* is telling a story about a land on which I was not born, nor claim, but washed onto by tides of global political shifts.

## Conclusion

The Dead Sea is not the only victim of neglect due to conflicting governance, misuse of policy or lack thereof. Nature recognizes no such borders but to imply that assumed or established borders and policies do not impact nature is a mistake. It is often the land which suffers the consequences of war and conflict. It is the land which absorbs the toxins and pollutants which are the byproduct of manufacturing, mistakenly seen as a resource to be consumed rather than the very ground which sustains life.

*Eulogy for the Dead Sea* is a film which, through poetic and aesthetic modes, attempts to unify and facilitate a dialogue in an otherwise incongruous political climate. The film acts as a unit which exemplifies how otherwise seemingly divergent views based on grounds of nationalism, can coexist as a platform for cooperation and active dialogue through its very making. Factoring the needs and views of its various inhabitants, both human and wildlife, the film personifies the landscape on which these cultures and lifeforms depend on. Prioritizing the wider ecological lens over the one of nationalism, whilst still celebrating cultural differences and honouring histories through storytelling, *Eulogy* offers a diversity of images and languages that advocate for the urgent conservation of the Dead Sea for future generations.

## Works Cited

- Becker, Nir, David Katz, Violet Qumsieh, Munqeth Mehyar, Fida Hajeer, and Hagit Salinger. "An Economic Analysis of Different Water Uses Affecting the Dead Sea Basin." *Advancing Conservation and Sustainable Development of the Dead Sea Basin- Broadening the Debate on Economic and Management Issues*, FoEME, 2004.
- Bromberg, Gidon. "Views on Saving the Dead Sea." *Proceedings of The Dead Sea – Between Life and Death Learning from Other Lakes Proceedings of Two Parallel Conferences: Ein Bokek, Israel and Amman, Jordan*. 2003.
- Bromberg, Gidon. "Water and Peace." For clues to resolving the Middle East conflict, consider the case of the embattled Dead Sea. World Watch Institute, 2004.
- Carter, Vernon Gill., and Tom Dale. *Topsoil and Civilization*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974, 6.
- Daibes-Murad, Fadia, "A Palestinian Socio-Legal Perspective on Water Management in the Jordan River—Dead Sea Basin", East Jerusalem: DanChurchAid-Palestine, Sheikh Jarrah, 2009.
- "Dead Sea – Israel, Jordan, Palestine." *Living Lakes*. Accessed May 24, 2018.  
<https://www.globalnature.org/35439/Living-Lakes/Asia/The-Dead-Sea/resindex.aspx>.
- Hofstetter, Abraham, Catherine Dorbath, and Louis Dorbath. "Instrumental Data on the Seismic Activity Along the Dead Sea Transform." *Modern Approaches in Solid Earth Sciences Dead Sea Transform Fault System: Reviews*, 2014, 263-78.
- Nichols, Bill. *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- Parikka, Jussi. *A Geology of Media*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.
- Sharp, Jeremy M. *The "Red-Dead" Canal: Israeli-Arab Efforts to Restore the Dead Sea*. United States Congressional Research Service, 2008.



## Bibliography

Becker, Nir; Katz, David. *Economic valuation of resuscitating the Dead Sea*. London: IWA Publishing, 2006.

Becker, Nir, David Katz, Violet Qumsieh, Munqeth Mehyar, Fida Hajeer, and Hagit Salinger. "An Economic Analysis of Different Water Uses Affecting the Dead Sea Basin." *Advancing Conservation and Sustainable Development of the Dead Sea Basin- Broadening the Debate on Economic and Management Issues*, FoEME, 2004.

Bronstein Aparicio, Eitan. "Colonialism in Destru(a)ction." *De-Colonizer*. Accessed July 20, 2018. <https://www.de-colonizer.org/map>.

Cushman, Emily; Lipchin, Clive ; Sandler Deborah, eds, *The Jordan River and Dead Sea Basin: cooperation amid conflict*. Netherlands: Springer, 2009.

Daibes-Murad, Fadia, "A Palestinian Socio-Legal Perspective on Water Management in the Jordan River—Dead Sea Basin", East Jerusalem: DanChurchAid-Palestine, Sheikh Jarrah, 2009.

*Desert*. The Anarchist Library, 2011. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/anonymous-desert>.

Garfunkel, Zvi ; Ben-Avraham, Zvi ; Kagan, Elisa, *Dead Sea Transform fault system : reviews*, 2014.

Geological Survey (U.S.) and Uri ten Brink. *Gravity Maps of the Dead Sea Basin*. Reston, VA: The Survey, 1994.

Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

Kreiger, Barbara, *The dead sea: myth, history, and politics*, Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997.

Kreiger, Barbara. *The Dead Sea and the Jordan River*. Indiana University Press, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/stable/j.ctt19qghg4>.

Kurlansky, Mark, *Salt : a world history*, Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2002.

Lovejoy, Paul E. *Salt of the Desert Sun*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Nichols, Bill. *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Parikka, Jussi. *A Geology of Media*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Renov, Michael. *Theorizing Documentary*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Sharp, Jeremy M. *The "Red-Dead" Canal: Israeli-Arab Efforts to Restore the Dead Sea*. United States Congressional Research Service, 2008.

## Filmography

*5 Broken Cameras*. Emad Burnat & Guy Davidi, Kino Lorbel, 2011. Film.

*At Sea*. Peter Hutton. Canyon Cinema, 2007. Film.

*Iron Wall, The*. Mohammed Alatar. 2007. Film

*Koyaanisqatsi: Life Out of Balance*, Dir. Godfrey Reggio. 1982. DVD.

*Lessons of Darkness*. Werner Herzog. Shout! Factory, 1992. Film.

*Manufactured Landscapes*. Jennifer Baichwal & Edward Burtynsky. Zeitgeist Films, 2006. Film.

*Prison in Twelve Landscapes*. Brett Story. 2016. Film.

*Promises*. Shapiro, Justine, B. Z. Goldberg & Carlos Bolado. Berkeley, CA: Promises Film Project. 2001. Film.

*Topophilia*. Peter Bo Rappmund. Torch Films, 2015. Film.

*Voyage of Time*. Terrence Malick. Broad Green Pictures, 2016. Film.

*Watermark*. Jennifer Baichwal & Edward Burtynsky. Mongrel Media, 2013. Film.