Arabic Speaking Objects: A Collaborative Research-Creation Project Exploring Recent Immigrants' Narratives of Displacement and Settlement

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Abstract

Arabic Speaking Objects: A Collaborative Research-Creation Project Exploring Recent Immigrants' Narratives of Displacement and Settlement

Emma Harake

A collaborative creation project, this thesis uses research-creation and oral history to explore Arabic-speaking newcomers' experiences of displacement and settlement as told through personal objects. It is centered on the involvement of five participants, including myself, who guided the creation of a collaborative art exhibition that combined oral narratives in the form of sound recordings, photography, text, and artifacts.

Using the framework of cultural studies and critical pedagogies, *Arabic Speaking Objects* employed reflexive approaches and focused on fostering an ethical researcher-participant relationship based on compassion, empathy and agency to examine the pedagogical impact of collaborative art practices on new immigrants' sense of identity and belonging, with specific reference to Montreal's diverse Arabic-speaking communities.

Overall, the project resulted in engaging a myriad of discourses around the notion of objects as conceptual entities carrying with them the affective memory of the migration experience. These discourses were then re-constructed and disseminated through a collaborative process/exhibition that re-conceptualized conventional ideas of researcher/artist as main author.

A coffeepot, orthodox icon, identity card, rescue tools, spices, comic books, earring, family photographs, bracelet, Keffiyeh, clothes, soap bar, food and travel souvenirs became the plinths on which five participants shared their stories and journey from their homelands to Montreal.

Territorial Acknowledgement

I would like to begin by acknowledging that Concordia University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather today. Tiohtiá:ke/Montreal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community.

This territorial acknowledgement and resources were created by Concordia University's Indigenous Directions Leadership Group (2017).

Acknowledgements

I would first like to express my gratitude to the research participants. Thank you for agreeing to take part in this journey. I am forever grateful for the kindness and openness of each and every one of you.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Kathleen Vaughan, without whom I could not have produced this thesis. Thank you for your guidance, support, insightful questions, meticulous comments and for always reminding me to trust the process. I would like to also thank Dr. Lorrie Blair and Dr. Barbara Lorenzkowski, who have been with me along this journey. Thank you for your contributions and assistance, and for providing me with brilliant advice and feedback. Also, I would be remiss if I did not mention the undeniable impact of the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS) at Concordia on shaping this thesis.

I would like to extend a big thank you to my OCE colleagues, for your continuous encouragement, empowerment and motivation; and for giving me a great example of what community engagement really means. Additionally, I would like to thank my family and friends, who have been my support system throughout this journey. Lastly, to Maher: my best friend and companion, for your support, for the improvised walks along the canal, and for listening to me and being there along the way. شكرًا

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Arabic Speaking Objects

Foreword: Overview of the Exhibition

Figure 1. Emma Harake. *Exhibition overview.* 2018. Photo: Emma Harake.

A main component of this thesis was the curation of the exhibition *Arabic-Speaking Objects* | *Objets Arabophones* | أغراض ناطقة بالعربيّة (see Figure 1), a collaborative endeavor among four participants and myself which explored Arabic-speaking newcomers' experiences of displacement as told through their objects. Uniting artifact, oral narratives, text and photography, the exhibition addressed the following research questions: What is the relationship between personal objects and memory in the lives of recent immigrants? How do personal narratives associated with these objects help in the construction of the participants' diasporic

identities? And what are the pedagogical impacts of collaborative art practices on new immigrants' sense of identity and belonging?

Working with participants Wissam Assouad (Lebanon), Dunya Bilal [pseudonym] (Egypt), Béatrice Moukhaiber (Lebanon) and Farah Mustafa (Palestine), the art installation presented photographs, oral narratives, text, objects in addition to a short video created by one of them (see Figures 2-3). Each participant's image/object was paired with Arabic sound recordings up to five minutes sharing personal stories and memories related to this object. Gallery visitors accessed the audio clips with headphones positioned next to each photograph. Each photograph/object was accompanied by a wall text incorporating a written transcript of the audio and a title chosen by the participant. The content of the wall text was presented in three languages: Arabic, English and French.

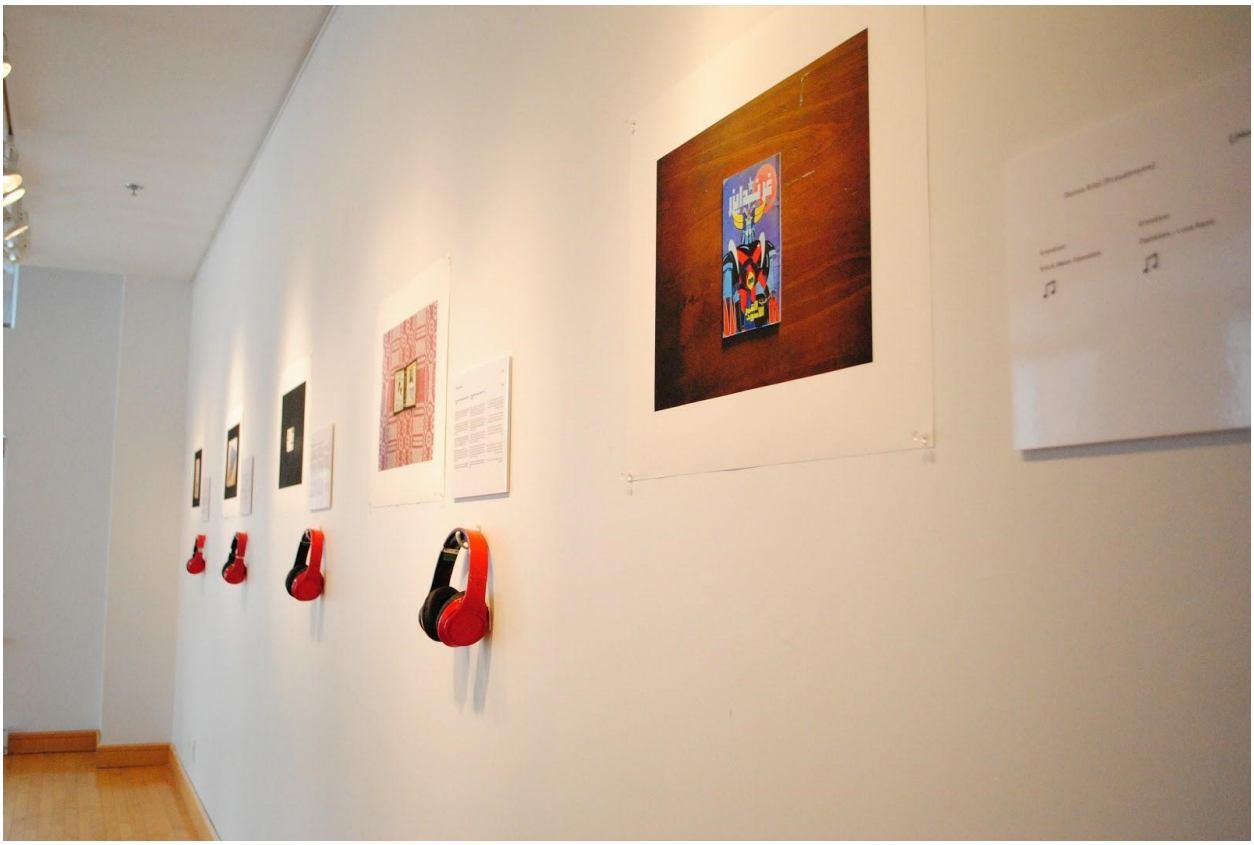

Figure 2. Emma Harake. *Exhibition overview.* 2018. Photo: Emma Harake.

The exhibition was on display at the Georges Vanier Cultural Center (CCGV) from March 7th to 14th, 2018. Located in the Southwest borough of Montreal, this non-profit center introduces arts into the community through regular exhibitions, events, arts classes and workshops. Georges Vanier Cultural Center functions as a space of encounter, exchange and creation (CCGV, 2018), providing a venue for emerging and established artists to exhibit at its bright and spacious gallery space on the ground floor. According to its website, the center situates its mission in relation to education, accessibility and community (CCGV, 2018) which had a bearing on my decision to contact them as a potential exhibition space for my thesis exhibition. The center shares a century-old building with Georges Vanier public library and its

mandate aligned with my decision to find an accessible exhibition space that isn't affiliated with my academic institution in order to share the work with broader audiences.

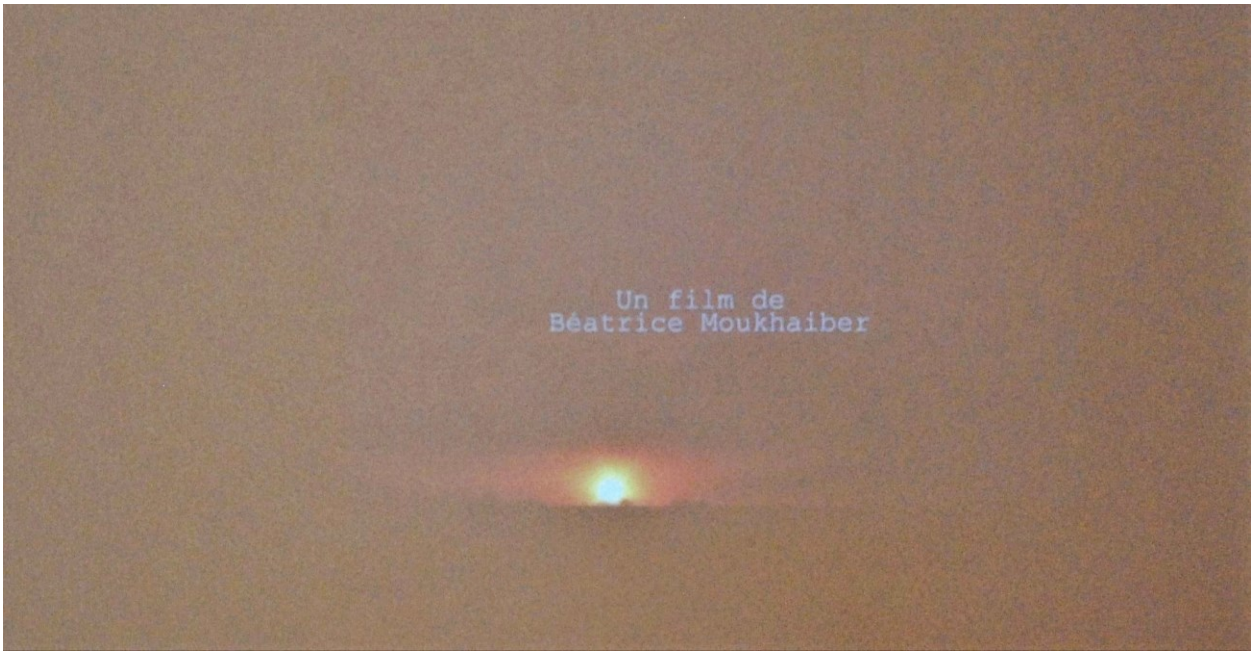

Figure 3. Béatrice Moukhaiber. *Beirut, Montréal* [Film still]. 2018. Photo: Emma Harake.

A collaborative process guided the creation of the art installation. Through a series of object-elicited interviews, each participant reflected on and shared some of the stories embedded in personal objects that each brought with them from their respective homelands. By having the participants choose their own objects, and later consulting with them on their choice of accompanying text and audio, I aimed to support the participants' sense of ownership. This enhanced their active engagement during the interviews and allowed them to critically reflect on their positionality, as research participants and as recent immigrants as well.

Chapter 1

Situating Myself: Point of Departure or نعيمًا | *Na'iiman*

This research started prior to my arrival to Canada. Before leaving Beirut in September 2014, I became highly preoccupied with the logistics of bringing random personal objects and heirlooms to my new 'home'. I had no doubt in my mind that I needed each and every one of them. After giving it some thought, I decided to bring the necessities. "Just the bare necessities," I would tell my partner, "that's all we need! How hard can it be?". Yet, there I was on that last day of August 2014, sitting in the middle of a room congested with boxes, struggling with my list of necessities, frantically opening one box and closing another. For the last month or so, I kept adding things to my list, crossing them off, then adding other items and crossing them off, too. Many ordinary objects, which I have inattentively accumulated over the years, suddenly became shrouded in multiple layers of significance because of my anticipated displacement. This has led me to consider how home and memories can be embodied in material objects. One such object is an ordinary pink comb (see Figure 4) that my mother used to untangle her curly hair. I vaguely remember throwing it in my suitcase because it was convenient.

نعيمًا *Na'iiman* is what people say after someone gets a new haircut or a clean shave or even takes a shower in Lebanon. The word is articulated with a celebratory tone and it is like you're blessing the person and saying "Congrats!". A new haircut is usually a happening, a celebration. My Canadian colleague had a new haircut after the holidays and I intensely felt the urge to utter a loud *Na'iiman*, but I politely complimented her looks instead.

نعيمًا Na'iiman, I close my eyes and the smell of shampoo and cologne enfolds me. Something erupts in language as I brush my hair with a pink comb.

نعيمًا *Na'iiman*, that's what language sounds like out of the mouth of a foreigner - whatever that means nowadays: blissfulness, festivities, and congratulations on a new haircut!

Figure 4. Emma Harake. *Pink Comb.* 2017. Photo: Emma Harake.

However, my thesis was also initiated with a more recent move in mind. In September 2016, I had to pack my belongings yet again because I had decided to move to a bigger apartment. Some of the objects that were necessary two years ago, seemed to have served their purpose as "familiar transitional objects" (Belk, 1990, p.670) – or objects that reduce separation anxiety and provide security through attaching one to the experiences of their past experiences – and came across as expendable. I felt completely astonished by this change of heart and I

immediately knew I wanted to respond to this experience in some creative way. Obviously, I became interested in how the memories and meanings are highly situational and were thus affected by our current vantage point (Kuhn, 2002; Richardson, 1944; Sinner, 2013) and how oral narratives and different forms of remembering and retelling help in the assertion of cultural identity (Sandino, 2013, p.10).

Situating the Research

Montreal. These are turbulent times. An unprecedented 68.5 million people around the world have been forced from home. Among them are nearly 25.4 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18. There are more refugees worldwide than at any time since the Second World War. There are also an estimated 10 million stateless people who have been denied a nationality and access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement (UNHCR, 2017a, 2017b). Images of enormous atrocities and forced displacements are circulating in our social media on daily basis; cultural differences are exaggerated and charged with danger, nations are disintegrating, and border walls are hailed as lines of defense against “foreigners”, “aliens”, and “strangers”. In a divided world, consumed by fear and single narratives, conditions of listening are impaired. And yet, many a time, someone asks: What did these people leave behind and what did they bring? Through a process pairing of objects with participants’ stories and memories, my collaborative research asks what these belongings say about their owners’ sense of identity as recent immigrants. Why, and for whom, are these accounts shared and narrated in Arabic in a public space?

Statistics Canada estimated in 2016 that numbers of Canadian residents born in an Arab country nearly doubled in the past decade to 523,235 and they are the second fastest-growing

racialized group in the country, with a large portion of them arriving to Canada as refugees (Statistics Canada 2016). According to the 2016 census, linguistic diversity is on the rise in Canada as more Canadians are reporting a mother tongue or language spoken at home other than English or French with Arabic as the main mother tongue among immigrants of all ages living in the Montréal census metropolitan area (Statistics Canada 2016).

Politics of language in Quebec must be approached vis-à-vis nationalism, belonging, and race. In his introduction to *Oral History on the Crossroads*, public historian Steven High (2014) argues how over the last years the "public attention shifted from the French language to race and religion" (p.11) by addressing the language/nation nexus in Canada and Quebec against the backdrop of transformative changes related to the politics of immigration and Quebec's commitment to being a francophone nation. Along similar lines, author and academic Eve Haque (2012) tackles the contention which informed the genesis of both Canadian bilingualism and multiculturalism. She claims that the recommendations by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism that took place across Canada in the 1960s, had excluded ethnic minorities and Indigenous groups from the decision-making process, despite being invited to participate in the discussion, which eventually led to the formulation of the Official Languages Act (1969) and to the formation of Canadian Multiculturalism policy (1976).

Based on these thoughts and concerns, and as a counterpoint to the representations of "foreigners" on media outlets and popular culture, I decided to draw on my professional histories as an artist and community and museum educator and develop a project that brings immigrant stories and dialects from the private sphere into the public realm. *Arabic-Speaking Objects* is, then, a shy attempt to interrupt our inner monologues, to foster connectedness and engagement,

and to truly open ourselves to being vulnerable and to the possibilities that arise from listening to the words of the other especially when they are spoken in Canada in neither English in French.

Arabic-Speaking countries. Even though all the participants come from Arabic speaking countries, this does in no way mean that they share one genuine cultural identity. Therefore, in the spirit of unpacking the prevalent image of a monolithic "Arab world," I tried to carefully and responsibly situate myself in relation to my research question, while looking past my personal experience - as a new immigrant myself - to acknowledge the diversity and richness of Montreal's Arabic-speaking immigrant communities. I intentionally use the term communities instead of community, owing to the fact that even though Arabic speaking countries are defined by a specific geographical area that spans over two continents (see Figure 5), the terms 'Arab World' or the 'Arab Identity' are highly contested because of the different ethnicities, cultures, ideologies, religions, dialects, languages and identities that are ever-changing and evolving (Deng, F. 1995; Palva & Vikør, 1992). Given multiculturalism's selective representation of immigrant communities that tends to fixate on some perceived practices as representing the whole (Desai, 2003), it was also equally important for me to situate the research in the here and now where the participants' sense of identity is being shaped by different cultural and political relations than those of the ones had they stayed in their respective homelands (Chalmers, 2002; Desai, 2003).

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Figure 5. Map of the Arab World currently consisting of the 22 Arab countries of the Arab League. *[online image]*. 2011. Retrieved on March 6, 2018 from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arab_world.svg

While sharing a written language (al-fusha or classical Arabic) allows people in distinct countries to read the same books and articles, it is the informal oral dialects used in most everyday situations that represent each area's particular culture. The linguistic nuances of the Arabic language broadened as I carried on with the research and informed exhibition decisions which I will explore at length in later chapters.

Research Questions

What is the relation between personal objects and memory in the lives of four recent immigrants? How do the personal narratives associated with these objects help in the construction of the participants' diasporic identities? And what are the pedagogical impacts of collaborative art practices on new immigrants' sense of identity and belonging?

As both a university researcher and member of the community being researched, I was acutely conscious that I am positioned in an unequal power relation with the participants despite my best intentions. Being aware of my position allowed me to explore what it is like to be simultaneously accountable for privilege, and also oppositional to it. Accordingly, it was important for me to foster a collaborative partnership with the participants, and to craft research questions that were of interest to the participants to engage with in meaningful ways, to spark good conversations, to allow them to speak to their life experiences, and to develop an understanding of themselves as knowledge producers.

Theoretical Framework

The overall theoretical framework for this study draws on two main bodies of scholarship: cultural studies and critical pedagogy.

Cultural Studies. Cultural studies is an "interdisciplinary field concerned with the role of social institutions in the shaping of culture. Cultural studies emerged in Britain in the late 1950s and subsequently spread internationally, [...] to later bec[o]me a well-established field in many academic institutions, and it has since had broad influence in sociology, anthropology, historiography, literary criticism, philosophy, and art criticism. Among its central concerns are the place of race or ethnicity, class, and gender in the production of cultural knowledge"

(Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018). The concept of the politics of representation, as developed by cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall (1997), highlights the unbalanced relationship between those with power and the marginalized 'other' and the implications this has on power hierarchy and discourses in society. As of late, cultural studies has become somewhat superseded by de-colonizing and post-colonial theory. While the field continues to be confronted by challenging doubts and concerns questioning its relevance and contribution to contemporary times, professor and president of the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia Andrew Hickey (2016) suggests that in our contemporary fixation on the 'usefulness' of cultural studies, the critical edge of the discipline fell through the cracks. As a result, cultural studies runs the risk of missing out on its "emancipatory possibilities" (p. 209) and its productive role in promoting social justice issues. Over the last years, many scholars have made convincing arguments for cultural studies' revitalization and called for a renewed and critical investment in the innovative, radical, irreverent, and engaged spirit which animated the field in the past and generated its founding premises: self-reflexivity, refusal of theoretical or empirical complacency, the ways of dealing with the Other, with meaning, with language, with representation, with ideas, with knowledge and with power (G. Hall & Birchall 2006; Hickey, 2016; Rodman, 2015; Satchel, 2016).

An acknowledged leader in the field of cultural studies, Stuart Hall (1997) argues that we cannot talk about cultural studies without engaging with critical questions of meaning, language and politics of representation. In the introduction to *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, he writes:

> We give things meanings by how we represent them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate

with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them. (1997, p.3)

Indeed, things, in themselves, don't have a fixed meaning. Their meanings are in continuous reconfiguration because they are highly dependent on our current vantage point and cultural constructs (S. Hall, 1997; Pahl, 2012). Throughout my thesis research, my conversations with my participants made clear that objects held different meanings, meanings of which varied with time and place, even shaped by the interview process itself. However, meaning, Hall (1992) argues, is an exchange that is never equal because "meaning floats" and it is the dominant culture that eventually 'fixes' the meaning (p.228). Hence, other cultures' existence is flattened and the people belonging to these cultures end up being represented, discussed, reduced, problematized, stereotyped, and analyzed without their input or their historical and cultural complexities. This struggle over meaning was extremely important in the context of recent displacement of the participants. Meaning - and creating - is crucial in the formation of one's cultural identity and sense of belonging within and beyond home (S. Hall, 1997, Hickey, 2016; Said, 1994; Turney, 2013) especially in those first years of transition when identity is 'challenged' (Belk, 1990).

In the latter half of the 20th century, Hall (1997) and other theorists (including Belk, 1990; Benjamin 2005; Foucault, 1969; Said, 1994, 1978) proposed that subjective stories could be a form of knowledge resistant to traditional grand narratives and dominant forms of representation. This idea was further explored in literary critic Edward Said's seminal research in *Orientalism* (1978) where he questions the prejudices of the colonial gaze and challenges the

notion of identity as static. Said (1994) states that "Stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history" (p.xiii). Hence, migrants' personal narratives and memories become counter narratives that open up possibilities for different encounters with each other beyond the limitations of manufactured western representations of other cultures.

In our complex and nuanced times, this critical interrogation of the politics of representation calls not only for political engagement – which is cultural studies' mobilizing concept (S. Hall, 1997) – but also for creativity to seek "an open and imaginative encounter with the world" (Satchel, 2016, p.204). In *Why cultural studies?*, scholar and researcher Rodman (2015) makes claim that cultural studies "nowadays, [..] needs to become more open, more flexible, and more expansive" (p.2) to engage academics and non-academics alike. Therefore, academics have the responsibility to bridge the gap between theory and a "culture of practice" (S. Hall, 1997, p.18), through adopting a "bricolage" (Satchel, 2016, p.209) of approaches and methods to approach their topics and to disseminate knowledge and make it accessible to a wider public.

In *Arabic Speaking Objects*, I aimed to bring recent immigrants' personal experiences and stories into a shared public domain through a written thesis and a collaborative art exhibition. During my research process, I committed to developing a collaborative partnership with the participants, where they were not only expected to share their individual stories, but they had agency over what and how they were represented by engaging in the production and circulation of meaning. Through the process of choosing the objects to talk about, images to

exhibit, and texts to accompany their images, and the arrangement of these in an aesthetic and meaningful display, the participants engaged in self-reflection and shared narratives with gallery visitors and each other. This opened up possibilities for critical engagement with "dominant modes of representation which produce and perpetuate stereotypes" (Desai, 2000, p.116) thus intervening in the public discourse around immigrants and immigration.

Critical Pedagogy. Equally imperative throughout this study was the need to consider questions of ethics, entitlement and agency, which I have addressed in light of the work of Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire, and some of the many critical educators that followed him. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970)*, his most famous work on critical education, Freire rejects the neutrality of knowledge and views education as an inherently political and ethical act. He argues that teachers must be critical of the curriculum (1998) and create conditions that allow students to become aware of their own agency, as members of a community and as creators of their own reality. From this point of view, I adopted a collaborative approach where participants brought their own knowledge and experience into the process and created and shared their own realities. By engaging the participants in the decision-making process throughout the research and encouraging them to situate themselves in relation to their cultural frames of reference, the participants claimed the role of being "authors of their own learning" (Abd Elkader, 2016, p.3). And while my own perspective and lived experience provided for an enriched conversation, since I belong to the same "cultural circuit" (S. Hall, 1997, p.10) as the participants, I was aware that my research didn't speak for the participant's entire communities, but to their individual experiences and wisdom within their cultural framework of reference.

Equally important, art educator Graeme Chalmers (2002) highlighted that adopting a critical lens to pedagogy offers alternative and inclusive modes of education (p.302). However, this complicates pedagogy because educators have to focus on creating collaborative spaces where students engage with pertinent political issues - even if they are in opposition to the objectives of the curriculum - instead of teaching them the reductive and safe multicultural program. Educators, therefore, should be prepared to unpack the claims that various institutions, particularly educational, are capable of accurately representing the complex historical and political realities of racial and cultural groups (Chalmers, 2002; Desai, 2003; S. Hall, 1997).

As such, in my pursuit of gathering diverse reflections and discourses on recent immigrants' experiences, in addition to my personal experience, I did not speak 'for' or 'about' others, but rather, let the participants lay claim to their narratives and express themselves through visual and verbal means.

Literature and Resource Review

By choosing to investigate objects that have travelled with recent immigrants from their respective homelands, I recognize that these objects are infused with physical, cultural, and historical meanings that lend the memories and stories associated with them their credibility. This literature review is intended to establish some of the themes that situate my current research-creation project within broader scholarship and the work of artists, educators, and researchers who mirrored my research goals. Given that my thesis privileges my participants' experiences, ideas and representations, I have chosen to write this review in a way that links external resources to their contributions.

Figure 6. Coffee Pot as displayed in the exhibition, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Emma Haraké.

Instead of my asking the participants direct questions about the nature of their experiences as new immigrants, between us we used objects as "prompts for storytelling" (Willig, 2017, p. 220). This is why I draw from the extensive literature on biographical objects which examines objects' ability to hold multiple meanings and to perform personal and cultural functions (Nathan, 2012, p. 544). In her book *Biographical Objects*, Janet Hoskins (1998) explores how identities and biographies are formed around objects and how objects provide a distance from the stories and become a tool of reflexivity and introspection. She argues that "people and their things they valued were so complexly intertwined they could not be disentangled" (1998, p.2). Like Hoskins, I could not separate the objects' biographies from the

stories told about them as they become imbued with experiences of their current and previous owners. When asked questions about an object's history, participants often responded with more personal accounts of certain experiences. For instance, as one of the participants recounted the history of a coffee pot (see Figure 6), she interweaved her own history with it, together with the stories of her mother who has given it to her: "To this day, I *see* my mom in it and I recall beautiful memories. […] I remember when she used to sit with her friends and listen to Oum Kalthoum. […] I'd watch them fascinated. I loved to sit under the table, listen and smell the coffee" (Dunya, Personal communication, December 15, 2017).

It can be argued that our histories and identities are embedded in the things that we hold on to because their personal significance transcends their materiality (Wilton, 2008; Nathan, 2012). The fact that these objects were associated with participants' experiences of displacement connected them not just in time but to a different place as well and, through the collaborative exhibition, to one another. Indeed, throughout this project, each participant's objects performed personal and cultural functions and reflected their identity as a collective and as individuals and held various meanings which were sometimes even shaped by the interview process itself (May & Muir, 2015; May, 2013; Nathan, 2012). Also, while the objects situated us in the here and now, they acted as silent (yet concrete) witnesses to the participants' past lived experiences (Hryniewicz-Yarbrough, 2011; Reiger, 2016). Hence my decision to privilege the depth of the participants' stories and conduct two (sometimes three) in-depth interviews, thus allowing them the time to expand into detail.

Given the importance of the memories and lived experiences associated with objects that have travelled, I explored the idea of privileging personal memories over historical narratives

and that memories have roots in places and objects, in relation to historian Pierre Nora's (1989) work on '*lieux de Mémoire*' [Sites of Memory] and literary theorist Roland Barthes's (1981) notion of 'indexicality'. Pierre Nora associates "the moment of *lieux de Mémoire* with the disappearance of an immense and intimate fund of memory" (pp.10-11) and equates memory with its traces. The notion of the 'disappearance' of memory helped shape my understanding of how memories that are dislocated from their specific places and landscapes (because of immigration) are imbued with a sense of loss, and how traces - objects in this case - can preserve and archive this absence. As such, my personal belongings and those of the participants speak to histories of loss and open a space in the present for looking, and reflecting on notions of 'home', identity and belonging. When Farah decided to pack Algerian novelist Ahlam Mosteghanemi's book *Memory of The Flesh* (1993) (see Figure 7) in her suitcase, she didn't know then that the novel centers upon one man's memories and relationship with his homeland. She talked about the book by reflecting on her relationship to literature over the years. She focused on who she is and what she has lost, explaining how the book acted as a way to reactivate the lived experiences associated with her recent move into her new home (F. Mustafa, personal communication, November 11, 2017).

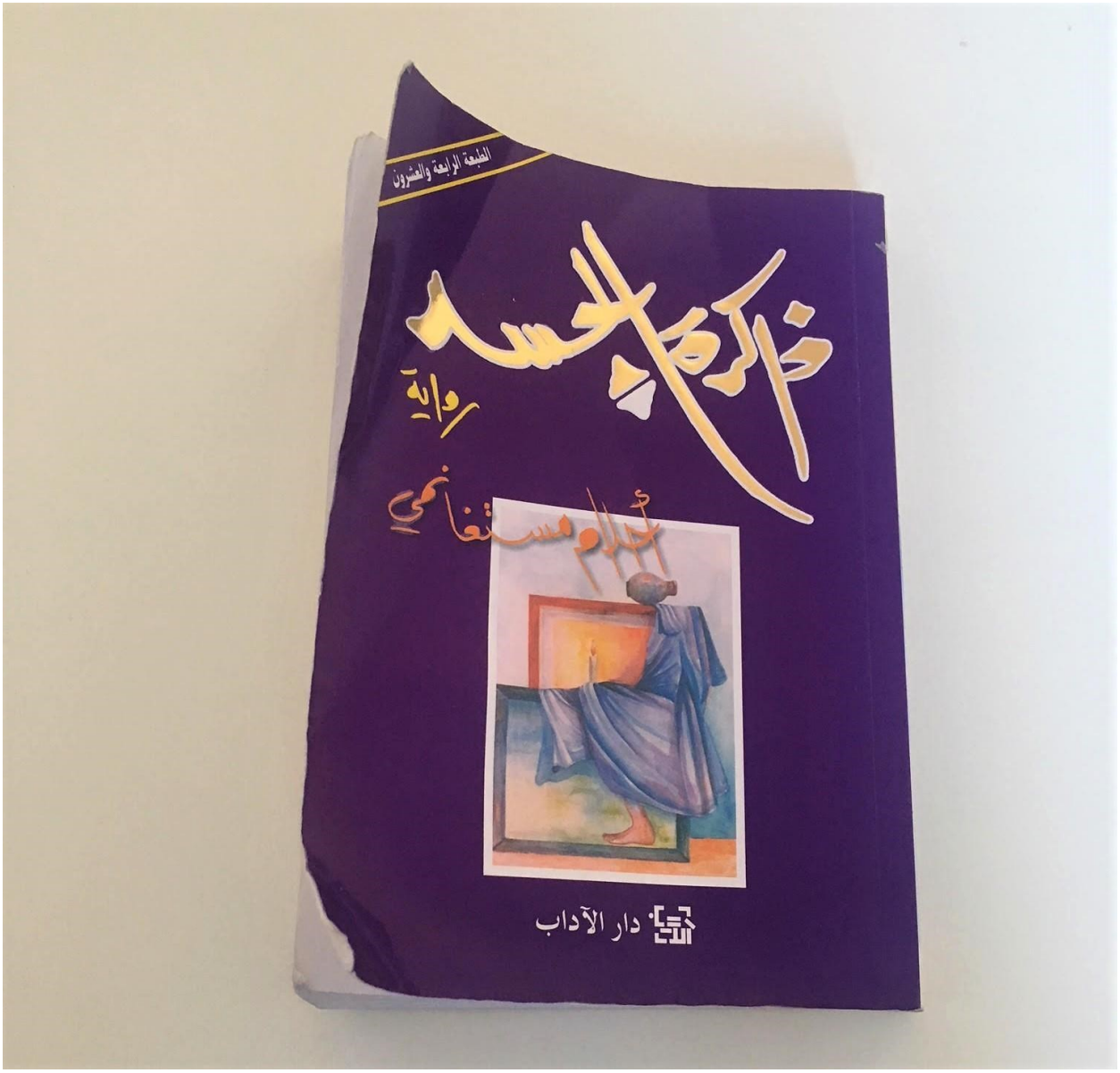

Figure 7. Farah Mustafa. *Memory of the Flesh.* 2018. Photo: Farah Mustafa.

Along these lines, in his renowned study of the meanings and impacts of photographs, *Camera Lucida*, Barthes (1981) argues that a photograph is "a superimposition here: of reality, and of the past" (p.76) and acts like an 'index' to previous life experiences and memories of which we don't have access. He writes about the death of his mother and how the one

photograph that captures her essence is a manifestation of grief and absence. And yet, he deliberately doesn't include this image in his book, since it couldn't possibly reveal to others the kind of 'essential' aspects of his mother that he saw in it. Similarly, in my thesis research I found that the family photographs chosen by Dunya and myself (see Figure 8) depicted people and places that held great meaning for us, and exhibited a relationship to loss, passage and absence as they connected us to lost family members and experiences.

Figure 8. Emma Haraké. *Family photograph: My father and I.* 2017. Photo: Emma Haraké.

With all this in mind, I want to address the delicate path between the private and the public and how the act of sharing affects personal meaning. The images of personal belongings did not always represent the materiality of objects but, rather, the traces of a participant's 'home' and memories. For instance, while Farah considered the keffiyeh (see Figure 9) to be her most

valuable possession during our first interview, she also mentioned that any other keffiyeh would hold the same significance because it is a symbol of her homeland (F. Mustafa, Personal communication, November 11, 2017). Photography was thus used as a medium of remembrance, and in so doing the images of personal belongings become an index to layered personal and cultural meanings, some of which are inaccessible to viewers. Moreover, the memories and meanings embedded in these objects function to assert cultural identity (S. Hall, 1997; Said, 1994) and situate the participants in a new world where 'home' can be found in a box of personal objects (Rosello, 2001).

Figure 9. Farah Mustafa. *Keffiyeh.* 2018. Photo: Farah Mustafa.

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While I meant to approach participants' objects as traces or archives of a lived reality, I was also interested in their social ability to stage and generate stories through the act of telling and sharing. In collaboration, my participants and I created a suggestive play of personal meaning through juxtapositions of objects, text and audio on gallery walls. The staging and telling of stories relate directly to my use of oral history and art practices to understand life experiences, which is why I investigated readings that explore different ways in which objects were used to 'speak' symbolically for the places and histories to which they once belonged to. In *A Number of Things (*Urquhart & Mckowen, 2016), renowned novelist Jane Urquhart explores Canadian history through 50 objects, each beautifully illustrated by artist Scott Mckowen. The book itself is divided into 50 chapters, one for each object, and is a good example of how much we can learn by turning our critical attention to the materiality of the objects and their biographies. As Urquhart holds, "it becomes impossible to think deeply about, for example, a beaver hat without investigating attitudes to animal life, colonization, imperialism, the use and misuse of natural resources, and on and on" (Urquhart & Mckowen, 2016, p.xii). Urquhart's exploration of the objects' potential to generate stories while remaining critical of the historical narratives in which they are embedded, relates directly to my inquiry into the memories and stories associated with personal objects in relation to their physical, cultural, and historical realities. Through personal objects, I approached recent immigrants' life stories and experiences, as a relational and relatable method of engagement, putting memory and identity at the core of my rendering investigation.

In considering the ways we can use objects to reconstruct memories of past experiences and then share and open up these reconstructions of memory to new interpretations, I found

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Orhan Pamuk's novel and museum, *The Museum of Innocence* (2010), to be helpful. Pamuk's protagonist Kemal is Turkish man from a bourgeois Istanbul family who falls for a poorer distant relative, Fusoon. Throughout the pages of the novel, Kemal is portrayed as a desperate and kleptomaniac lover. After an impossible love affair, he finds solace in the obsessive act of collecting and stealing objects - traces of his lover to find consolation. This work of fiction is based on real objects that Pamuk began collecting long before he started writing the novel, and to blur the boundaries even more, Pamuk created a museum in the city of Istanbul which houses a fascinating world of the objects lovingly described in his novel. I visited the museum in 2014 after having read the novel, because I was captivated by its presence "as a parallel telling of the novel's story" (Hanely, 2013) and I stood in awe facing the meticulously catalogued 4,213 cigarette butts smoked by Kemal's lover, or so the story goes:

> At one moment I picked it up, breathing in its scent of smoke and ash, and placing it between my lips. I was about to light it (imagining perhaps for a moment that by loving her so, I had become her), but I realized that if I did so there would be nothing left of the relic. Instead I picked it up and rubbed the end that had once touched her lips against my cheeks, my forehead, my neck, and the recesses under my eyes, as gently and kindly as a nurse salving a wound. (Pamuk, 2010, p. 156)

Clearly, I am interested in Pamuk's use of objects to negotiate the relationship with loss (be it the loss of a lover, homeland or past life), however, from an artistic and curatorial view, and given my interest in documenting immigrants' experiences through an art exhibition as well, it is the creation of this museum that was integral to my inquiry into making the research

accessible to the public through numerous variations that are consistent as an academic and creative endeavour.

To expand on the exhibition's role as an artistic representation of recent immigrants' experiences, I relied on artistic projects that juxtapose text and image to provide insights on how to approach my research through creative art practices. Sophie Calle is an artist who "conduct[s] research as part of the process for creating art" (Blaikie, 2013, p.59) and emphasizes the absences and the "unfillable voids and yearnings" (Wachtel, 2015, p.9), which resonates with my research interests in objects as metaphors for a homeland that is out of reach. In *L'hôtel* (1999), Calle investigated the private lives of hotel guests through their personal belongings and the traces of how they used their hotel rooms. In the final exhibition, Calle approached her exploration of the hotel rooms by combining documentation - in the form of photographs, notes, and texts - as well as her personal interpretations and speculations about the guests' lives (Calle, 1998). Calle's approach poses many ethical concerns related to consent and privacy, which was not the case in *Arabic Speaking Objects*, where informed consent was required to embark on a collaborative research relationship with the participants. Relevant to my inquiry, nonetheless, is how Calle interpreted her forensic exploration in the exhibition space through written and visual material that wove her research into a narrative.

The placement of the participants' (and my) personal images and objects within a public gallery space raised questions about how the different forms and strategies of representation test the limit of the personal, and how these can be used to embed objects in their larger cultural contexts. To elaborate on the implications of converting personal objects and narratives into 'artworks' in the sanitized atmosphere of a gallery, I turned to artist Moyra Davey whose still-

life photography "centres on the representation of objects, […] that resonates with larger cultural and historical meanings" (Blessing, Thompson, Deutsche bank KunstHalle, & Solomo, 2015). Davey usually works with photography, film, and text to depict the tension between sharing and privacy. Most of her work is done at home, her images include "dust under the bed, spines of old books, coffee cups, the corners of rooms, an open medicine cabinet, her dog taking a dump, herself in downward-facing dog pose – the entropy of domestic disorder" (Gregory, 2015). These personal objects reveal much about Davey's private life and daily habits, yet, displayed on exhibition walls, they are transformed into traces which tell us less about real events and more about layered meanings to which we do not have access.

The act of publicly sharing personal narratives and objects on exhibition walls, as well as the choice of accompanying content, is central to an exploration of how the meanings of these personal objects are shaped by every new encounter with gallery visitors (Sandino, 2013, p.11; Rose, 2016, p.335). As a cultural text, the final art exhibition seeks to make an intervention in the ongoing discussions of immigration in Canadian context by bringing new immigrants' experiences and stories out of the private and into the public domain thus challenging the dominant representations of new arrivals.

This study focuses on how doing research collaboratively might generate different ways of knowing. For example, in her PhD thesis*, The Threads, Trends and Threats of the Wedding Dress* (2016), Maria Ezcurra Lucotti collaborates with 19 women who transformed their wedding dresses to create a collaborative studio-based project of research-creation. One issue that is examined in her thesis is how the collaborative partnership with her participants provided a context for personal and social growth. She found that working in collaboration with others

made the experience much more enjoyable, significant and representative by allowing space for compassion, awareness and empathy. Her approach served as a concrete example of how to adopt an ethics of care and remain reflexive throughout the process. More specifically, I used the thoughtful survey she created to collect participants' feedback after the exhibition as a template to develop the feedback survey questions for this research (Sample Questionnaire provided in Appendix C).

In terms of developing an ethical artistic collaboration with the participants, I also explored the practice of photographer and community educator Wendy Ewald, who develops long-term collaborative art projects to gain insights on how the participants can contribute meaningfully to the process of research. In *American Alphabet* (2005), Ewald worked in collaboration with four different groups of children to research the ability of language to create barriers or alliances between groups. The result was a photography project that joins the educator/artist and children/students together to create photographs of objects they chose to represent each letter of their alphabets. When asked about her collaborative practices, Wendy Ewald responded that "what's interesting is that I can work with anyone, and they can show me what they're seeing" (Esther, 2016). Like Ewald, I am not interested in conventional ideas of the researcher/artist as main author, rather I am invested in what the participants want to show me through their lenses and ultimately in the telling of the story. Moreover, I drew on Ewald's approach to credit the participants and acknowledge their voice by putting their names on their work and asking them to choose titles for their images. Through object-centered interviews, personal objects provided each participant with their own visual and material referent as a starting point for our conversations. From the perspective of artistic practice, my own approach

to community-engaged art has grown out of a desire to question the conceptions and limitations of art and artists and a need to inform my understanding through participants' perspectives.

Issues of displacement and identity are in the heart of my inquiry as the participants' recent dislocation from their homeland affected the staging and telling of their stories and how they wished to be identified. These concepts are related to Lebanese author Amin Maalouf's (2001) notion of complex identities. Maalouf writes that in today's disordered world, there is a tendency to compartmentalize and reduce our identities into choosing one fundamental allegiance to associate with, thus we often end up choosing the part we feel is being challenged the most. In his book, *In The Name of Identity: Violence and The Need To Belong*, Maalouf (2001) claims that the negotiation of migrant identity has more to do with connectedness and membership, and less with exclusivity and fear:

> What makes me myself rather than anyone else is the very fact that I am poised between two countries, two or three languages, and several cultural traditions. It is precisely this that defines my identity. Would I exist more authentically if I cut off a part of myself? (p.1)

By approaching the participant's stories through their personal objects, I invited the participants to engage critically with their choice of objects and stories, and with the meaning of the appropriation of these objects in the context of their recent displacement, which put the construction of migrant identity at the core of our conversations. I also engaged as an artist in conceptualizing a project that creates the conditions for alliances, for solidarity, and compassion.

Chapter Two

Methodology and Practices

As a visual artist and researcher, I was obviously interested in research methods that "provide a broader view of creative practice which includes not only the artwork but also the surrounding theorization and documentation" (Smith & Dean, 2009, p.5). Additionally, when working *with* the participants (Freire, 1970; High, 2009, Leavy, 2015), I also needed a research method that privileges a qualitative open-ended approach when conducting interviews: I wanted to share authority. The term 'shared authority' was popularized by Michael Frisch in his 1990 book *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History.* It refers to removing the hierarchy commonly practiced within cultural institutions and redefining the processes of engagement, thus foregrounding the relationship between historian and source in a collaborative practice centered on dialogue and participatory engagement.

Hence, this thesis employs oral history and research-creation (SSHRC, 2016) as dual research methods, and consists of a written component that contextualizes and situates my research and collaborative research-creation process within broader scholarship, as well as an art installation that incorporates oral narratives, photography, text and artifact.

My Art as Research

At the heart of this research has been the desire to bridge the gap between my practice as an artist and as an educator, which have up to now been separate. At the time I started my MA at Concordia University, I was a practicing artist for eight years and a community educator for six years. As an educator, I have always enjoyed developing and facilitating participatory projects which invited dialogue, collaboration and engagement. As an artist, on the other hand, my

creative processes stem from my personal experiences and have a strong studio component which involves storytelling, archiving and experimentation. This allows me to perceive my work as a form of inquiry and opens my artistic practice to a diverse range of personal, social and cultural issues.

Despite the fact that I am writing this thesis as an educator, I conceptualized this collaborative project as an artist. In this way, *Arabic-Speaking Objects* was initiated out of a "creative impulse" (Sullivan, 2010, p.62) to reflect on my personal experience of immigration. This gradually evolved into a collaborative project involving how I approached my artistic creation in addition to engaging other participants in a creative practice to explore our experiences of displacement and settlement. And while each participant's work stands on its own, the resulting series of objects, photographs and audio can be seen as belonging to a larger discourse on immigration that must be read as a whole to be fully understood.

As such, when referring to research-creation I allude to: firstly, the conceptualization of the project; secondly, my personal artwork in the exhibition; and finally, the collaborative curation of the exhibition and audio clips.

Research-Creation

As our society has become more visual, researchers have created various methods that juxtapose ideas and images to incorporate creative arts in their research to "extend theoretical and philosophical paradigms" (Barrett & Bolt, 2007, p.7) and to "offer unique insight into the human knowing and understanding" (Sullivan, 2010, p.xvii). The arts are used to expand subjective narratives and offer important insights into human knowledge, which is difficult to

study by merely using traditional research methods (Irwin, 2003; Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2014; Sullivan, 2006; Leavy, 2015).

Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) defines research-creation as:

> An approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation. The creation process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of media (art forms). Research-creation cannot be limited to the interpretation or analysis of a creator's work, conventional works of technological development, or work that focuses on the creation of curricula. (SSHRC, 2018)

Adopting research-creation – a hyphenated term where research unfolds as creation and vice versa – as one of my proposed methodologies offered an experimental and innovative way (Barrett & Bolt, 2007) to use my own artistic practice as a collaborative research tool and as a product, while also engaging with theory. This methodology came with its set of challenges and required creativity, experimentation and adjustments which was pivotal to eventually produce meaningful creative work in conjunction with academic research (Barrett & Bolt, 2007; Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012)

Additionally, research-creation allowed me to consider dissemination possibilities and modalities and enabled the engagement with questions about the accessibility of academic research to public, politics of representation and grand narratives during the various stages of my inquiry, which in turn generated provoking discussions with the participants before, during and

after the exhibition. In addition to research-creation, I integrated an oral history process as a way of exploring and producing knowledge in cooperation with participants.

Oral History

> Oral history is a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events. Oral history is both the oldest type of historical inquiry, predating the written word, and one of the most modern, initiated with tape recorders in the 1940s and now using 21st-century digital technologies. (Oral History Association, 2018)

In *A Dialogical Relationship: An Approach to Oral History*, Alessandro Portelli (2005) writes about the active role of oral historians and their work in co-creating meaning with their interviewees in a way that is particularly relevant to my own process. He explains, "Oral sources are generated in a dialogic exchange – an interview -- literally a looking at each other, an exchange of gazes. In this exchange questions and answers do not necessarily go in one direction only" (Portelli, para. 3). Increasingly, oral and public historians are looking to alternative forms of representation – such as creative practice and research-creation – to provide complementary methods and modes of dissemination thus extending its "interpretive capacity" (Sandino, 2013, p.5). Alongside challenging conventional autonomous production, this interest in extending the interpretive capacity of oral history through the arts provides an excellent vantage point for seeing the shared potential of art-making and oral history.

The Oral History Association distinguishes oral history "from other forms of interviews by its content and extent. Oral history interviews seek an in-depth account of personal experience and reflections, with sufficient time allowed for the narrators to give their story the

fullness they desire" (2009, p.3). However, it is worth mentioning that oral history is not necessarily 'life history' in that people are not necessarily narrating a biographical tale of their entire life, but can rather focus on specific issues or elements in a manner that allows content to be co-created with the interviewer and authority over the trajectory of discussion to be shared.

Public historian Steven High (2009) askes the following questions:

> Who speaks on behalf of community and why? Can we assume that the people with whom we are negotiating are of one mind? If community is multiple, contingent, and contested, how might we usefully think of "community" in the context of collaborative processes? How do you develop partnerships in a divided community? What is the research relationship? Consent—what is it? Who is the author? Where is our authority coming from? In embracing community-university collaborative projects, do academics set themselves up to speak with a dual authority—experiential and expert? (p.14)

These questions examine the collaborative relationship between researchers, participants and community and "force us to think about how we may make oral history a more democratic cultural practice" (Zembrzycki, 2009, p.219). These collaborations are even more pertinent when oral history is situated in relation to an artistic context, because they reveal the "social, relational, and ethical" aspect of such practices (Sandino, 2013, p.11). Relatedly, the authors of *The Post Colonial Museum* argue that the neutrality of the museums needs to be interrogated (Chambers, Orabona, Quadraro, De Angelis, & Ianniciello, 2014). They recognize the power relationships that have informed European museums and cultural institutions practices and construction of cultural meanings and values. Oral history in visual arts can engage people in a dialogue around issues of concern in their lives. Through the creation of collaborative

engagements based on respect and trust, museums should "forge in our public a sense of their cultural identity. Oral history can assume a far more important and, indeed primary role in bringing museums and people together" (Davies, 1994, P.5). So asserted scholar Stuart Davies and I agree.

While my project attempts to offer insights into memories and lived experiences harbored in personal objects from the vantage point of recent immigrants, I was acutely conscious both of my status as a recent resident myself and the multiplicity of Montreal's migrant communities, and of my role as an artist and a university researcher, which affects the power dynamics and sharing of authority while conducting my research. With these concerns in mind, I embraced the "collaborative nature" of oral history (Zembrzycki, 2009, p.219) because it is through collaboration that the participants and I were able to "discover together against the diversity of our backgrounds, write together, draw upon each other's existential realities" (Greene, 2000, p. 119). I approached my project with the notion of "dual authority" (High, 2009, p.13) and a commitment to cultivate trust and remain self-reflexive throughout the research process, in the hope of producing scholarship that privileges the diverse voices, cultures and lived experiences of recent immigrants. There were many instances when my plans were adjusted because participants embraced the collaborative nature of my approach. For instance, in our preliminary interview, Farah expressed her dissatisfaction with my thesis title and suggested I change it from 'Foreign-Speaking Objects' to 'Multicultural Speaking Objects'. Farah's concerns caught me off-guard and confronted me with the implications of claims to sharing authority for academic social responsibility. We then engaged in active dialogue for a few minutes before coming up with the title 'Arabic-Speaking Objects' – a more objectively accurate title. This exchange

actualized my commitment to the collaborative dimension of my research from the outset and ultimately informed my practice of sharing authority in the steps that followed. In addition to changing my thesis/exhibition title, I ended up conducting object-elicited interviews instead of the planned photo-elicited interviews (Harper, 2002) because none of the participants brought images of objects to our interviews. Moreover, when one of the participants asked to screen a short movie she created instead of objects, I had to respect her vision of how she wanted to be represented. These shifts in the oral history interviews provided a reflective framework for the research-creation process and informed the exhibition decisions which expanded to include objects in addition to, and sometimes instead of, images.

With the exception of one instance where the participant didn't bring any objects to the interview, I conducted object-elicited interviews which were subsequently adapted and presented as artworks. It was important for me to foster a collaborative, flexible and respectful relationships that enabled the participants to be active contributors to their own learning. By having the participants choose their own objects, and later consulting with them on their choice of text and audio, the participants' sense of ownership enhanced their active engagement during the interviews and allowed them to critically reflect on their positionality, as recent research participants and as recent immigrants as well.

The Other Four Participants

In order to carry out this project, I engaged with four research participants who arrived in Montreal as permanent residents during the last five years and whose ages ranged from the mid-twenties to the late thirties. [1] From the six participants who contacted me, two did not continue for different reasons: One (Syrian/Armenian) had to leave Montreal for a family funeral after we conducted the first interview and the second one (Algerian) landed a job in Toronto. The remaining four collaborators are from Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine. I asked each participant how they wanted to be identified. Of the four people who participated in the exhibition, one requested that her identity remain confidential and chose a pseudonym to be known by. I recruited a friend from the same country to audio record the spoken text the participant wanted to be paired with her objects, eliminating any possibility of voice recognition.

Paradoxically, while this project aims to explore Arabic-speaking individuals' lived experiences as recent immigrants, identifying as an Arab was not a limiting condition to collaborate as this project wanted to bring to the front different voices. One potential participant identified as Armenian/Syrian and not as an Arab. It is also important to note that the absence of collaborators from countries other than Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine in this research-creation is not representative of a personal stance, but rather a lack of time and interested candidates at the time.

[1] Ethical approval was granted by the College of Ethics reviewers (CER) (Certificate Number: 30008331) see Appendix E.

Table 1

Participants' General Information

Participant	Age	From	Occupation	Years in Montreal	Objects
Wissam Assouad	32	Lebanon	Student	3.5	Icon, red cross card, rescue tool, headlight, CPR mask
Dunya Bilal [pseudonym]	39	Egypt	Doctor	4	Coffee pot, comic book, earrings, bracelet, family photographs.
Emma Harake	34	Lebanon	Artist/Educator	3	Soap bar, 1001 book, family photograph, fresh thyme
Béatrice Moukhaiber	29	Lebanon	Artist	5	Flavors (spices and food), digital photos/video.
Farah Mustafa	25	Palestine/ Lebanon	Journalist	3	Keffiyeh, novel, Three towers (souvenirs).

Procedures

For each participant, this project involved choosing up to five objects, participating in an initial interview, listening to audio clips selected by me and participating in a second (sometimes third) interview, choosing two objects for the exhibition, photographing them and coming up with titles, participating in an art exhibition, attending the opening reception (with the exception of the participant who wished to remain anonymous), and finally providing feedback about the whole process. I initially contacted secondary sources (French language and integration agencies that provide counsel for new immigrants) to recruit participants, but after three weeks with no results I then recruited research participants through on-line advertising (Facebook groups, etc.), as well as by word of mouth where I shared my email, personal website, and a brief description of the project along these lines (the email text is italicized to differentiate it from the rest of the written work):

> *For my MA thesis, I am developing a collaborative exhibition which will use photography and storytelling to explore Arabic-speaking newcomers' experiences, memories, and sense of identity and belonging as told through personal objects which they have brought with them to their new 'home'. If you (or someone you know) have arrived to Montreal in the last five years and are willing to learn more about this project, please feel free to get in touch with me. You don't need to be an artist to do this! Participants of all professional backgrounds are welcome.*

People who were interested contacted me by email. After explaining the project and its procedures, initial statement of interest, provided verbally, was a means that the participants could begin the process of giving consent to participate, when we were speaking by phone or in

person. Subsequently, I met with the participants individually and worked through the written consent form and ensured their written consent by informing them about the details of the project and its goals, the time commitment, the option of confidentiality, and opting out of the research. Following this, I asked each participant to choose up to five objects and have them ready for our first interview. I initially planned to ask the participants to take photos of their chosen objects prior to our first interview. However, since none did, I eventually abandoned this option.

There were striking differences in the telling of a story and how participants engaged with the invitation to select and talk about objects and I had to adjust my questions accordingly. Some participants brought a variety of objects, others brought none. And while Farah, for example, hid the objects in a bag and produced them one by one, Wissam, on the other hand, laid them on the table. Some participants grouped two or three objects together and talked about them as a single entity (see Figure 10). Dunya even surprised me as we were drinking coffee by saying that the coffee pot was her chosen object. Irrespective of how participants staged our interviews, the 'telling' of their stories was very much a joint activity to which we both contributed.

Figure 10. Wissam Assouad, *Three Objects. 2018. Photo:* Wissam Assouad.

Most of the exchanges with the participants took place at their homes, sharing tea or coffee at a nearby café, which helped keep our conversation relaxed and eventually generated more open and intimate accounts. Each interview lasted around two hours and was audio recorded. Before the start of the interview, participants were reminded to give responses that they are comfortable with. I took field notes during and after the interviews and kept journal entries to reflect on and to document this collaborative process.

During the first interview, participants were asked general questions to gain insights into their background and life stories. Additional interview questions focused on procuring information about each of the objects/artefacts depicted in the photographs and other objects that they couldn't bring with them, in the hope that the participants would share their stories and the meanings associated with each object (Biggs, 2002) (Sample Questionnaire provided in Appendix A). I found out that looking and touching the objects grounded us in the present and eventually generated less rehearsed accounts of participants' experiences. By contrast, it is interesting to note that the one participant who did not bring any object was acutely aware of the presence of the audio recorder and started the interview with accounts of her experience of immigration and instability, thus producing more established stories than those who did bring objects. This participant was also the most critical of her answers saying that she didn't sound "authentic" (personal communication, February 23, 2018), therefore, we had to go over some of the questions again. This shared endeavor framed the meaning-making activity in the steps that followed.

After the first interview, I asked the participants to reflect on our conversation and the different ways in which they wanted to recreate the absent objects, and whether there were

additional texts, songs or literary references that they want depicted next to their objects and/or images of objects. Meanwhile, I transcribed the interviews and reflected on the stories and memories before me and I shared these reflections and thoughts, as well as audio selections from the interview, with each of the participants during our second interview.

The second interview allowed me to follow up on some of the participants' accounts and to make collaborative decisions about which images, and objects if any, the participants wanted to exhibit. The participants were asked to share their chosen titles and we listened to the audio clips from their first interview. This collaborative effort drew on a series of questions that were intended to stimulate and guide the dialogue such as: What do you think people will see in this object? Listening to these audio files, do you think this image/object says things that you didn't expect it to? (Sample discussion questions in Appendix B). Depending on each participant's preference, some of the audio clips were altered or re-recorded. By the end of the second interview, two of the participants needed more time to reflect and we scheduled another one-hour interview to make concluding decisions about the final presentation of their work. Some participants lent objects of their choice to be in the gallery space for the duration of the exhibition.

After the participants made their final selections, they emailed their images to me. I printed the chosen photographs, at no cost for the participants, on fine art paper (at a size of 12 x 16 in) at the Milieux, Institute for Arts, Culture and Technologie*s* at Concordia University[2]. Participants used different photographic devices (digital camera or mobile phones) which

[2] The Milieux is an interdisciplinary graduate research institute for new media arts, digital culture and information technology at Concordia University in downtown Montreal https://milieux.concordia.ca

rendered images with different resolutions which presented some challenges because I wanted to have some conformity in the exhibition. One participant provided me with poorer resolution images than the others and when I recommended using my camera, she politely declined. Therefore, with her blessing, I digitally manipulated the images to add a dark contour around them before printing. This effect allowed me to render her images at a similar scale to the other participants' images without compromising the print quality (see Figure 11).

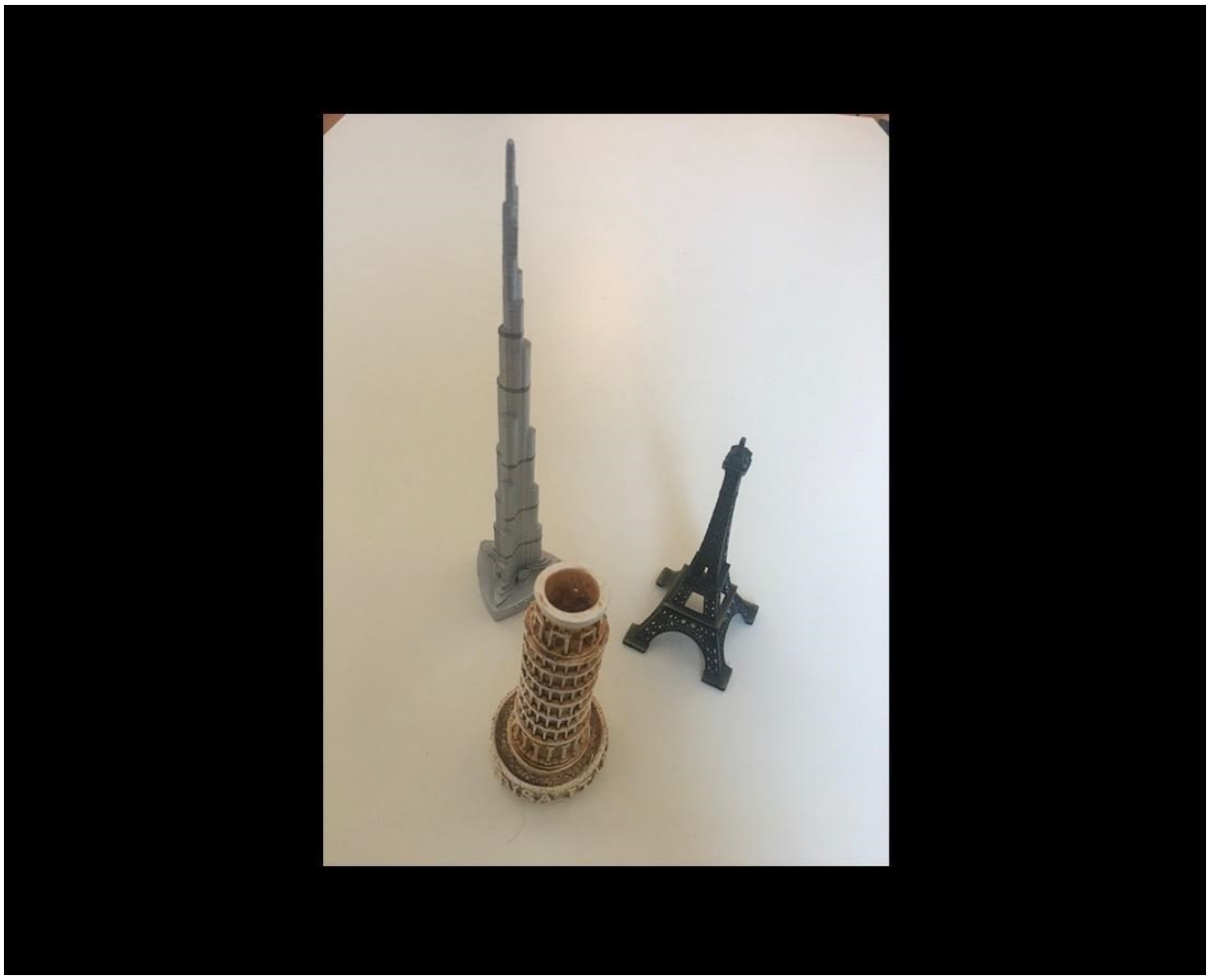

Figure 11. Farah Mustafa. *Three Tours with black background.* 2018. Photo: Farah Mustafa [digitally manipulated by Emma Harake]

One participant wanted to screen a short movie she had created instead of referencing objects. The movie was a compilation of images she captured during her last days in Lebanon and first days in Montreal. Because of my commitment to fostering a collaborative relationship, I respected the participant's choice in how she wanted to be represented. I managed to borrow a projector, a laptop and speakers from Concordia's Centre for Digital Arts equipment depot to screen the video (see Figure 12). For playing the accompanying audio clips for the rest of images/objects, the Center for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS) at Concordia lent me wireless headphones for the duration of the exhibition.

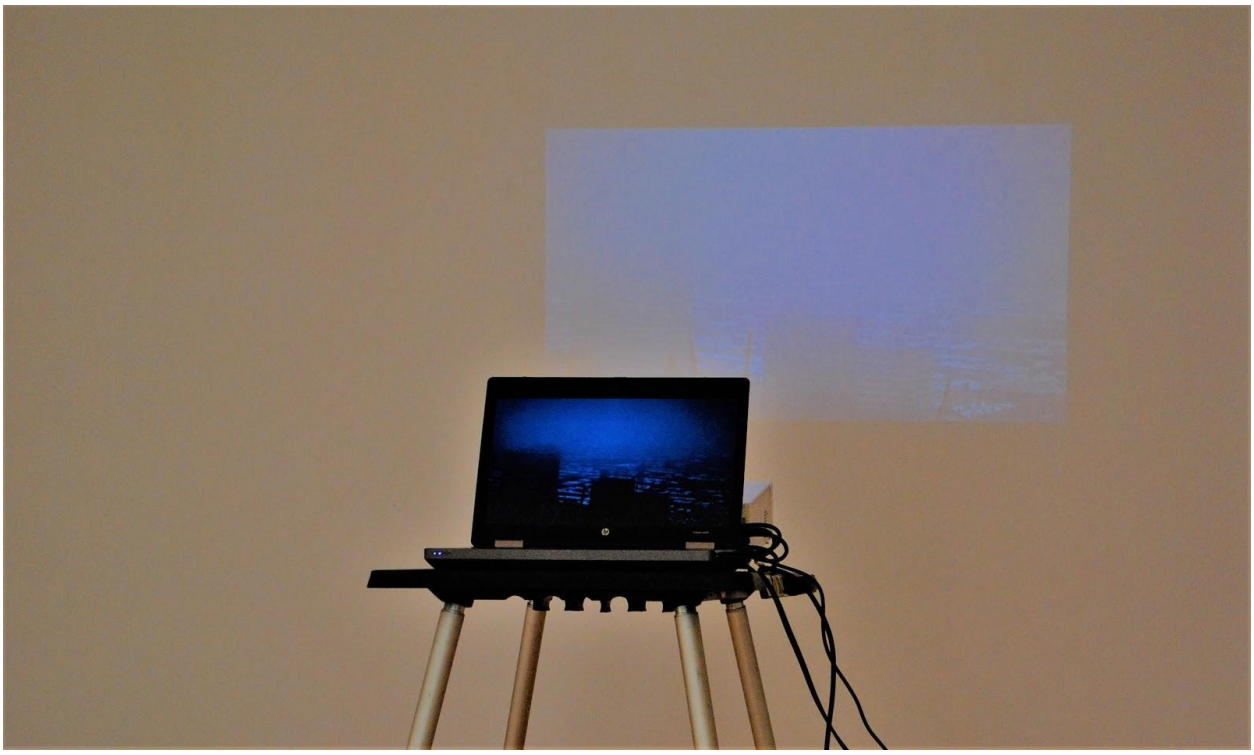

Figure 12. Béatrice Moukhaiber. *Installation view of: Beirut, Montréal.* 2018. Photo: Emma Haraké.

ARABIC SPEAKING OBJECTS

I translated the audio content from Arabic to English myself. Given that my French is not perfect, I did an initial French translation which was later revised by a francophone friend. Remarkably, it was the Arabic language transcripts which challenged me the most. In Arabic we have what people refer to as al-fusha (Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, Literary Arabic) which is based on a standard a few centuries old used mainly in writing, news, formal speeches, and other similar situations, and while al-fusha is taught in schools, and is understood by every Arabic speaking person, it is the informal spoken dialects that are used in everyday situations. These dialects diverged over time and were heavily influenced by the languages which existed prior to Islamic conquest in each country. All of the interviews were understandably conducted in the spoken dialects so I transcribed them accordingly. Initially, I envisioned the text next to each object in the exhibition to be written in standard Arabic, however when I attempted to "translate" the spoken dialect into al-fusha, the words lost their spontaneity and even some of their significance. The spoken dialects differ vastly from one country - even area - into another and a close examination can often tell about the socio-cultural history of the area and can even offer valuable insights into an individual's background. I shared some of the Arabic to Arabic "translations" with the participants and asked for their input. All of them agreed that they preferred the informal dialect to al-fusha.

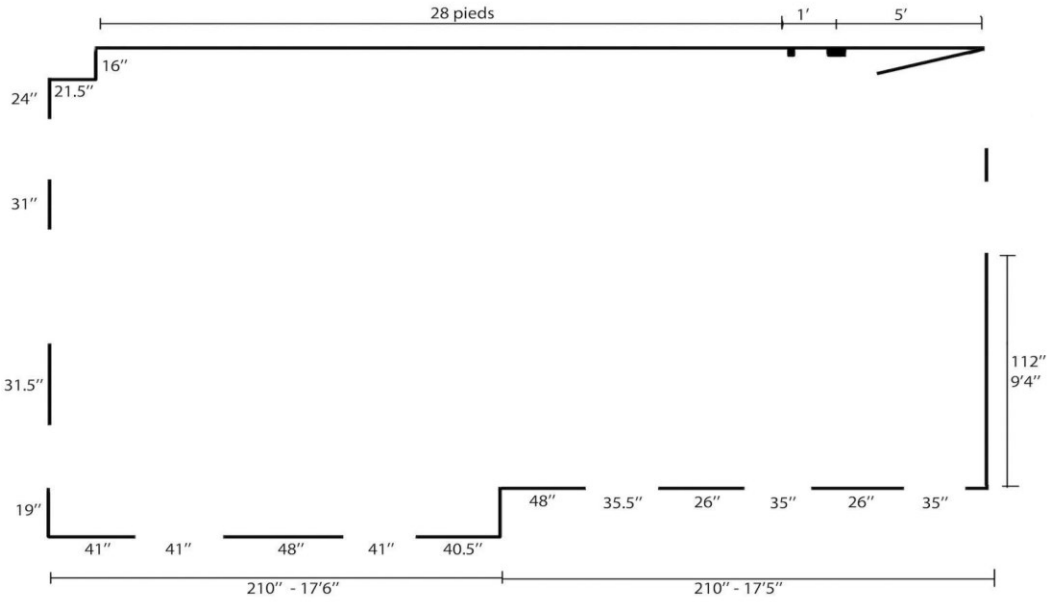

Figure 13. CCGV. *Exhibition floor plan.* 2018. *[Digital image]*

The exhibition took place during March 2018 at the gallery space on the ground floor of Georges Vanier Cultural Center (see Figure 13), where I asked the participants to join me for an all-participant installation meeting. Only three were able to make it at different times of the day: Béatrice who helped with setting her artworks, Dunya who visited with a friend and Wissam who passed by in the afternoon and checked the artworks on display. I invited all participants to the vernissage and encouraged them to invite their friends and family as well, if they wish. After the exhibition, I shared the photographs taken during the exhibition, as well as scanned copies of the guest book with the participants. Likewise, I asked each of them to answer a questionnaire reflecting on the whole process, answering questions such as: Do you feel represented by your final artwork? Why or why not? Can you identify with the photographs and texts of other participants? Do you think that your objects' meaning changed by being part of a collective art

project that involves other people's ideas? Can you elaborate? (Sample Questionnaire provided in Appendix C).

During this process, I tried to follow the same procedures as the participants (when possible) to the best of my ability. I was also mindful that I was not only one of the participants but also the initiator of this project which is why I tried to be as supportive and mindful as possible without imposing my ideas on the other participants. Before I met any of the participants, I set about choosing which objects I wanted to photograph and gave the same set of questions (Sample interview questions in Appendix A) to a friend who interviewed me once. Evidently, this interview was different from the ones I conducted with other participants because my friend didn't deviate from the set of questions I provided her with. This obliged me to be more resourceful in my answers and to use humor which helped minimize the formality of our two-hour interview so that it felt more like a conversation during the last 40 minutes. Subsequently, I transcribed the interview and highlighted the parts I wanted to share. This process consisted of a reflective practice by using a daily journal. The journal included notes and comments on any form of literature (books, articles), stories, or conversations I encountered. Journal keeping also served to document the overall transformation or changes that emerged during the collaborative artistic process with the other participants as well as my personal direction with regards to my personal work itself. I began the research by reflecting on four objects: an olive soap bar, a family photograph, a handful of thyme and a book (*One and Thousand Nights*, n.d.). I was extremely conflicted about which two objects to choose for the exhibition and ended up selecting the olive soap bar and a handful of thyme. I later swapped the handful of thyme for *One and Thousand Nights* after conversing with Béatrice, one of the

participants, who also wanted to have flavors and spices from Lebanon on display. After I decided on my choice of objects, I proceeded to edit my interview audio clip using Audacity, a free and open-source editing software.

When choosing excerpts from my interview to be part of the exhibition, I didn't consult with anyone, which was in stark contrast with the collaborative endeavors that underpinned the transformation of participants interviews. This brings me to one of the biggest procedural and ethical challenges I encountered which was condensing the two-hour participant interviews into 10 to 20 minutes excerpts. I then shared these selections with each of the participants, in addition to a written transcript, to collaboratively come up with a final selection of 5 to 7 minutes excerpts for the exhibition. After multiple listenings, meaning was constructed and deconstructed by me and the participants. Consequently, the task of coming up with a final audio selection to be exhibited next to the respective image or object was not neutral. The process was selective, biased and tinted with deletions, background noises, interruptions by me which I erased, alteration of speech sequence by myself and by the participants, embellishments, re-recording, and even voice over as in the case of Dunya, the participant who didn't want to be identified. There was a lot of negotiation to produce a coherent and favorite version of the story to be listened to and read by gallery visitors. And yet, once on public display in a gallery space, the meaning which we worked so hard on was open to multiple interpretations, as I will elaborate in the fourth chapter where I examine the participants' contributions in relation to the research questions and to the social and cultural context in which those contributions were produced. The following chapter offers some insight into the exhibition space and provides visual

documentation of the vernissage and days that followed. It also comprises each participant's objects and texts as displayed in the exhibition.

Chapter Three

Arabic-Speaking Objects: The Exhibition

Exhibitory practices have predominantly prioritized sight over other senses; therefore, as the objects transitioned from the private into the public realm, it was the accompanying stories that provided a framework for interpretation (Rose, 2016, p.335) and connected them to their previous meanings, which were surely personal, practical and familial, rather than aesthetic. While it is true that curating an exhibition allows more access to these stories, the transformation of these personal objects into an image, a commodity to be admired from a distance in a sanitized gallery space, was problematic. It troubled me that the same objects encountered during the interviews through touch, sound, smell, and evocative images would be reduced in a gallery space into an 'artwork' intended to achieve visual impact. This is why gallery visitors were encouraged to experience some of the objects through direct contact rather than observe them from a distance. For example, visitors repeatedly smelled Dunya's coffee beans, my olive soap bars and Béatrice's spices and herbs (see Figure 14-15).

Figure 14. Visitors interacting with artworks, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: *[Photograph courtesy of Maher Kouraytem]*

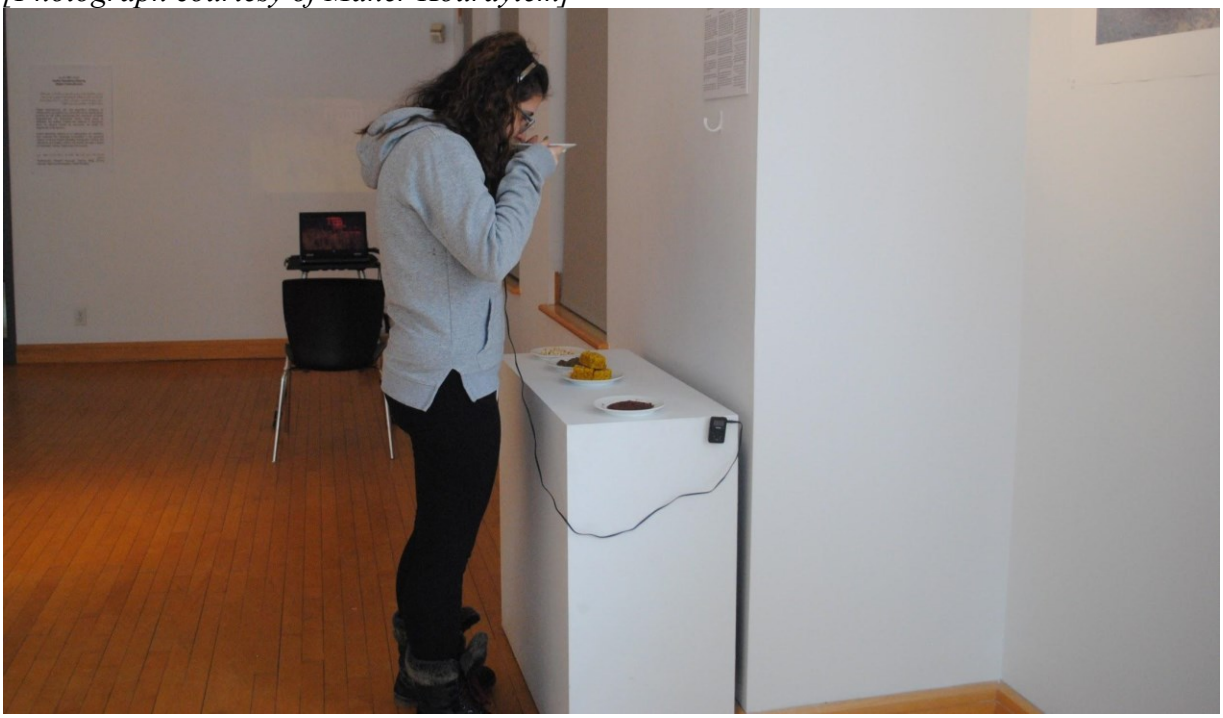

Figure 15. Gallery visitor smelling spices, CCGV, Montreal. March 2018. Photo: Emma Harake.

ARABIC SPEAKING OBJECTS

Logistics

I believe that in any discussion of participatory art projects, it is important to address issues of representation and power hierarchies in institutional structures – whether universities, museums, or galleries – that decide what is art and who is an artist. This is why for the purpose of this thesis, I wanted to secure an external and accessible (both physically and culturally) exhibition space for the collaborative art installation. However, by the time I found participants and started my interviews, most exhibition spaces had planned their programming for the next year. I drafted an exhibition proposal and attached visual documentation using one of my own images (see Figure 16) rather than a participant's because of concerns they might decide to pull out before the exhibition. Fortunately, the programming coordinator at CCGV liked my exhibition proposal and accepted to host it from March 7 to 14, 2018 between two previously scheduled exhibitions. Worth noting is the fact that the CCGV is within the culturally diverse Sud Ouest borough of Montreal, and specifically in the community known as Little Burgundy, where over 83 different ethnicities are represented making it one of the most ethnically diverse communities on the Island of Montreal. However, the neighborhood is becoming increasingly gentrified thus displacing many longtime residents who get pushed out by higher rents and development (Jakubovits, Gonzalez, Perez, & Richard, 2014). Oriented to cultural diversity, my proposed exhibition aligned well with the CCGV's own guiding thematic of "vivre ensemble," or living together.

Figure 16. Emma Harake. Installation *Template*. 2018. *[Digital Image]*

After we agreed on the dates, I drafted an event description in three languages (Arabic, English and French) ensuring that the participants' names were mentioned as artists. Georges Vanier Cultural Center then proceeded to create a Facebook event for the exhibition. Three of the participants shared the event via social media and one of them promoted it on a radio show that she hosts. I also printed posters (see Figure 17) and asked local grocery stores and coffee shops to hang them in a prominent place. One of the participants asked to take few copies to place on a bulletin board at work.

Figure 17. Emma Harake. *Exhibition Poster*. 2018. *[Digital Image]*

In the following section, I present documentation of the installation as it existed, with links to audio excerpts held on SoundCloud.

Arabic-Speaking Objects: One Story at a Time

This section is divided by participants' contributions. Each image has an accompanying text that has been reproduced in keeping with the participant's choice for its initial in-gallery presentation. Sample audio clips can be retrieved on soundcloud (https://soundcloud.com/user-627030112/sets/arabic-speaking-objects/s-HLO3N).

Wissam Assouad.

الأيقونة

The icon: Hope and support, family away from home

Figure 18. Icon: Hope and Support, family away from home. 2017. Photo: Wissam Assouad.

Icon: Hope and Support, family away from home

When I began searching for stuff that I brought from Lebanon — and I didn't bring plenty, I believe this is one of two items that have personal value. I am looking at it, and it is not made of gold and silver, it's quite ordinary. I don't like religious items to be made of gold and silver. The more you spend money on making them, they lose their value. […] My brother gave it to me and said: "Keep it with you". When he came to Canada more than ten years ago, he brought it with him, and he gave it to me — he handed it over. […]. My brother and I are very close. […] After I arrived, and with all the changes I lived through, he was my support. I mean I would tell him so and so is happening with me and he would say: "Yes, me too". And I began to understand — understand why he gave it to me, because it helped him here.

Icône : Espoir et soutien, famille loin de la maison

Quand j'ai commencé à chercher les trucs que j'avais rapportés du Liban – et je n'en ai pas apporté beaucoup – je crois que ceci est un des deux objets à avoir une valeur personnelle.

Je le regarde, et ce n'est fait ni en or, ni en argent, c'est tout à fait ordinaire. Je n'aime pas les objets religieux faits en or ou en argent. Plus on dépense de l'argent à les produire, plus ils perdent de la valeur.

[...] Mon frère me l'a donné et m'a dit: "Conserve-le avec toi". Quand il est arrivé au Canada, il y a plus de dix ans, il l'a rapporté avec lui et me l'a donné – il me l'a transmis. [...]

Mon frère et moi sommes très proches. [...] Après mon arrivée et avec tous les changements que j'ai vécus, il a été un soutien pour moi. Je veux dire, je lui disait ce qui se passait avec moi et il me disait: "Oui, moi aussi". Et j'ai commencé à comprendre, à comprendre pourquoi il me l'a donné, parce que ceci l'avait aidé ici.

الأيقونة

لما بلّشت نبّش على قصص جبتن معي من لبنان ، وهني منن قصص كتار يعني، قصص أكتر practical، يمكن هيدي الشغلة الوحيدة من شغلتين اللي جبتهن معي، اللي في الهن قيمة مش عملية، في الهن قيمة شخصية.

عم اتطلّع فيها، انه مش معمولة من ذهب وفضة وتقيلة، معمولة عادي. وما بحب القصص الدينية تكون كتير معمولة ذهب وفضة يعني. بتفقد معناها بالمصاري المحطوطين فيها. بصراحة الأيقونة يمكن فاتحها مرتين من لما جيت على كندا.

بس خيي أعطاني ياها وقلّي: "خليها معك". هو لما إجا على كندا من شي أكتر من عشر سنين جابها معه وأعطاني ياها، سلّمها.

أنا وخيي قراب. [...] قبل ما اجي ع كندا يمكن ما كنت هل قد قريب من خيي بس بعد ما جيت، وكل التغييرات اللي عشتن، كان هوي الدعمة. يعني كنت أوصل عند خيي قله هيك هيك عم يصير، يقلي: "ايه، أنا كمان". وصرت إفهم - إفهم ليه أعطاني اياها، لأنو هي بالنسبة له ساعدته هون.

ARABIC SPEAKING OBJECTS

بطاقة الصليب الأحمر

Red Cross Card: Humanity, life changing volunteering experience

Figure 19. Wissam Assouad. *Red Cross Card: Humanity Life Changing Volunteer Experience*. 2017. Photo: Wissam Assouad.

ARABIC SPEAKING OBJECTS

Red Cross Card: Humanity, life changing volunteering experience

[Car explosion] First thing they tell you in the Red Cross is to protect yourself […]. And yet, when there is an explosion, and you see someone leaving their house and heading towards the [red cross] center while everyone else is returning to their houses, you'd say: "This is a crazy person". True! I mean there is some craziness to it. But we were people who just wanted to give. I volunteered more than three years with the Lebanese Red Cross and we lived through a lot. Till now, I still consider that I have a second family. […] When you go to help someone, you cannot be biased because of their religion, gender or ideas. No! […] A human is in need, and you are going to help […] and that's it. I mean, you give from your heart. It becomes part of your life. […] Other than that, it's a team life. […] There will always be beautiful memories […].

When I arrived at Montreal, things changed a lot. Back there, I always had something to do. Here, I arrived, and I had no one. I didn't have the red cross. You feel as if your life is suddenly emptied. It's so different. […] Every Wednesday someone was responsible for cooking. They either bring food from their house or they cook. And I loved to cook. I used to cook for them in the center, so I started to cook more and more. We clean, tidy up, fix the broken doors… I mean it's so much more than just volunteering…

Carte Croix-Rouge: Humanité, expérience de bénévolat qui change la vie

[Explosion de voiture] La première chose qu'ils te disent à la Croix-Rouge c'est de te protéger [...]. Mais quand même, lorsqu'il y a une explosion et que tu vois quelqu'un quitter sa maison et se diriger vers le centre [de la Croix-Rouge] alors que tous les autres rentrent chez eux, tu pourrais te dire: "Cet individu est fou". C'est vrai! Il y a de la folie là-dedans. Mais nous étions des gens qui voulions donner de nous-mêmes.

J'ai fait du bénévolat pendant plus de trois ans auprès de la Croix-Rouge libanaise et nous avons survécu à beaucoup de choses. A ce jour, je considère encore avoir une deuxième famille. [...] Quand tu vas aider quelqu'un, tu ne peux pas prendre parti *(ou* être influencé*)* par rapport à sa religion, son sexe ou ses idées. Non! [...] Un humain est dans le besoin et tu vas l'aider [...] et c'est tout. Je veux dire, ça vient du cœur. Ça fait partie de ta vie.

[...] En plus de ça, ça se vit en équipe. [...] Il y aura toujours de beaux souvenirs. Et même maintenant, si nous avons besoin les uns des autres, on se texte. J'ai l'impression que les gens qui font du bénévolat à la Croix-Rouge ont grand cœur et y consacrent beaucoup de leur temps.

Quand je suis arrivé à Montréal, les choses ont beaucoup changé. Là-bas, j'avais toujours quelque chose à faire. Ici, je suis arrivé *(c'est bien un gars?, sinon* arrivée*)* et je n'avais personne. Je n'avais pas la Croix-Rouge. Soudainement, tu as l'impression que ta vie est vide, c'est tellement différent.

[...] Chaque mercredi, quelqu'un était responsable de faire la cuisine. Ils apportaient de la nourriture de leur maison ou cuisinaient. Et j'adorais cuisiner. Je cuisinais pour les gens du centre, donc je me suis mis à cuisinier de plus en plus. On nettoie, on range, on répare des portes cassées... Je veux dire, c'est beaucoup plus que juste du bénévolat...

بطاقة الصليب الأحمر

[صوت إنفجار سيّارة] أوّل شغلة بالصليب الأحمر بيقولولك ياها انه تحمي حالك [...] مع هيدا كلو لما يصير انفجار، وبتشوفي حدا بيضهر من البيت بيروح على المركز وكل العالم عم تتضبضب، بيقولو: "هيدا واحد مجنون:. مظبوط! إنه فيها شوية جنون. يعني نحن كنا عالم خلص بدنا نعطي.

تطوّعت أكتر من ثلاث سنين بالصليب الأحمر وعشنا أوقات يعني. بعدني لهلق بعتبر ان بالنسبة إلي عندي عيلة ثانية. [...] لمّا تروحي تساعدي حدا، مش انه غير ديانة أو غير جنس أو غير عقليّة ما بتساعديه. لأ! الإنسان إنسان. إنسان عنده حاجة وأنت رايحة تساعديه [...] وخلص، انه بتعطيها من قلبك. بيتصير جزء من الحياة يعني.

[...] وغير هيك انه حياة équipe بيضلّ في ذكريات حلوة. وحتى هلق، منضلنا انه إذا عزنا بعض، منحكي. والعالم اللي بتعطي بالصليب الأحمر في عندها قلب كبير بحس انه قدرت تعطي هل الوقت.

وقت جيت على مونتريال كتير تغيّرت عليّ. هونيك على طول كان عندي شي أعمله. هون وصلت ما عندي حدا. ما عندي صليب أحمر. بتحسّي هيك، فضيت الحياة. غير كتير.

[...] بتصدقي كنّا كل نهار أربعاء في حدا بيطبخ. يا أما بيجيب الأكل من بيته أو يطبخ. وأنا كنت حبّ أطبخ. كنت اطبخلن تحت بالمركز. فتعلمت الطبخ أكتر وأكتر. ننضف، نضبضب، نصلح، نظبط الباب اللي انكسر... فيعني مش انه بس تطوّعت يعني...

ARABIC SPEAKING OBJECTS

Dunya Bilal [Pseudonym].

الكنكة

The coffee pot

Figure 20. Dunya Bilal [Pseudonym]. *The Coffee Pot*. 2017. Photo: Dunya Bilal.

ARABIC SPEAKING OBJECTS

The Coffee Pot

My relation to things is that of love**…** **Do you like the coffee?** This coffee pot belonged to my mother, without it the visit is incomplete. Whenever I see it, I remember the beautiful times together. To this day, I **see** my mom in it and I recall beautiful memories. My mom was my role model. […] She was a strong lady, but she was kind and witty, and she absolutely loved the music. I remember when she used to sit with her friends and listen to Oum Kalthoum. […] I'd watch them **fascinated.** I loved to sit under the table, listen and smell the coffee.

I am sitting with you here but I have paid dearly for my freedom. After he said that I must terminate my pregnancy whether I liked it or not, I lost my daughter– my daughter, or my son- I cannot even begin to describe how much I was hurt… These were dark days and I didn't have any close friends back then. I went to my room and I started crying. My mom -god bless her soul- was listening and came into the room. I was ashamed, but I told her- I told her everything. She said: "Come [Dunya], my love. Come, let's drink coffee on the balcony".

We drank coffee together and I looked as people paced back and forth. That day, was the first time I told anyone…

Cafetière

Ma relation aux objets en est une d'amour… **Aimes-tu le café ?** Cette cafetière appartenait à ma mère, sans elle la visite est incomplète. Chaque fois que je la vois, je me souviens des beaux moments passés ensemble. À ce jour, je **revois** ma mère quand je la vois et ça me rappelle de beaux souvenirs. Ma mère était mon modèle. [...] Elle était une femme forte, mais elle était gentille et pleine d'esprit et elle aimait énormément la musique. Je me souviens quand elle s'assoyais avec ses amies et écoutait Oum Kalthoum. […] Je les regardais, **fascinée**. J'adorais m'asseoir sous la table, les écouter et sentir le café.

[…] Après qu'il m'ait dit que je devais mettre fin à ma grossesse que cela me plaise ou non, j'ai perdu ma fille - ma fille ou mon fils. Je ne peux même pas commencer à décrire combien j'ai eu de la peine... C'était une période sombre et je n'avais pas d'amis proches à cette époque. Je suis allée dans ma chambre et j'ai commencé à pleurer. Ma mère – que Dieu bénisse son âme – a entendu et elle est venue dans ma chambre. J'avais honte, mais je lui ai dit... Je lui ai tout dit. Elle m'a dit : "Viens [Dunya], mon amour. Viens avec moi boire du café sur le balcon".

Nous avons bu du café ensemble et je regardais des gens faire les cent pas. Ce jour-là était la première fois que j'en parlais à quelqu'un.

الكنكة

علاقتي بالحاجات هي علاقة حب… عجباكي القهوة؟ الكنكة دي كانت لمامتي، من غيرها ما تكملش الزيارة ولا حتى تتحسب. كل ما اشوفها، بتذكرني بالأوقات الجميلة معاها. لحد النهار دا، بفصل شايفة فيها مامتي وبقدر أطلّع منها ذكريات حلوة خالص. مامتي هي رول موديل بتاعتي، لا يمكن أتحرك خطوة من غير مباركتها. كانت معوّدانا ان إحنا نبقى مسؤولين مسؤولية كاملة عن قراراتنا. كانت ست قويّة ما بتسمحش لحد يرفع صوته عليها، لكن طيبة وعندها خفة دم وبتحب المزيكا... بتذكّر لما كانت تقعد وصاحباتها يسمعوا أم كلثوم. وأنا كنت صغيّرة أوي. يعني أنا لسا مش عارفة أتكلّم. وأنا كنت أقف ايه؟ أتفرج عليهم مبهورة. كنت أحب أوي أقعد تحت التربيزة، أسمع وأشم ريحة القهوة.

أنا قاعدة معاكِ في كندا، لكن أنا دفعت تمن حريتي بالكامل. بعد ما قاللي خلاص حتنزلي غصب عنك مش برضاكي... نزلّت بنتي – بنتي، أو إبني – مش قادرة أوصفلك، بقيت متأذية نفسياً... الواحد يبقى وكأنو في عالم تاني. كانت أيام سودة وأنا ما عنديش أصحاب قريبين خالص. دخلت اوضتي وبديت اعيط. دخلت مامتي - الله يرحمها، أتاريها كانت واقفة بتسمع. كنتِ مكسوفة لكن قلتلها، قلتلها كل حاجة. قالتلي: "تعالي يا دنيا يا حبيبتي، تعالي نشرب قهوة عل البلكونة".

قعدت أشرب قهوة معاها وأشوف العالم رايحة وجاية. النهار ده، دي أوّل مرة أقول لحد...

ARABIC SPEAKING OBJECTS

غرندايزر: حلقة القمر الأسود

Grendizer: Black moon operation

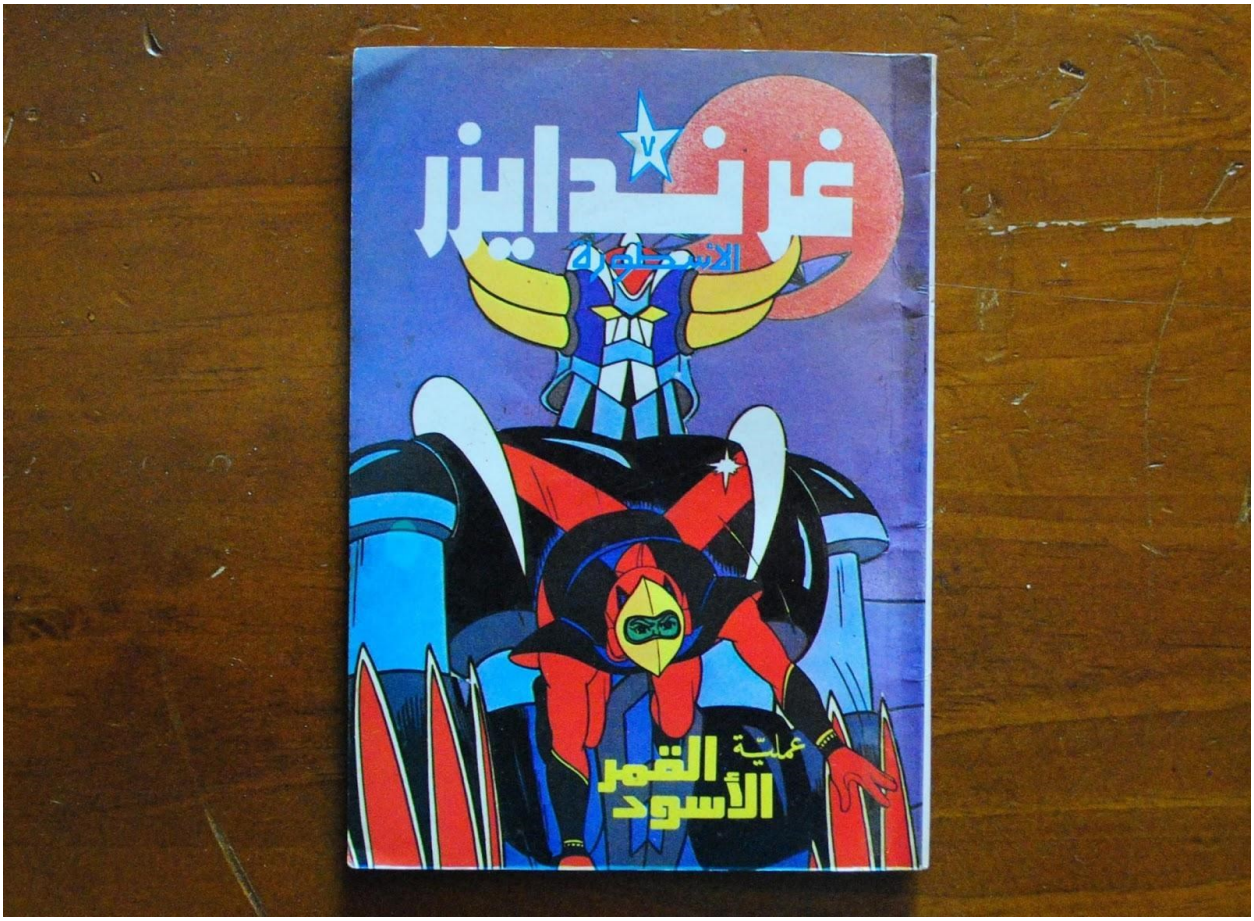

Figure 21. Dunya [Pseudonym]. *Grendizer*. 2017. Photo: Dunya Bilal.

ARABIC SPEAKING OBJECTS

Grendizer
Black Moon Operation

Grendizer
Opération - Lune Noire

غرندايزر [3]
حلقة القمر الأسود

[3] The very first Japanese anime dubbed in Arabic were released in the late 1970s after GCC Joint Production Program Institution, set up in 1976 to make television programs for the [Gulf] region (Ghazal, 2016). These Arabic-dubbed anime became popular across the Arabic-speaking world with Lebanese crooner Sammy Clark still remembered as the musical voice behind many of the Arabic versions of the theme songs including that of the cult hit *Grendizer (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39cU7I3HZgw).*

Farah Mustafa.

ثلاثة أبراج

Three towers

Figure 22. Farah Mustafa. *Three Towers.* 2018. Photo: Farah Mustafa.

ARABIC SPEAKING OBJECTS

Three Towers

I am the kind of person that likes to keep stuff, even my mom would say: “Farah, what is this?” […] I mean [I keep] everything, every **memory**.

[…]

Unfortunately, there were countries I couldn’t take a souvenir from, a memory. […] I love Dubai a lot because my family lived there, and whenever I see the tower [Burj Khalifa], I remember the times we used to spend there with them. I also visited Paris and fell in love with the city, so I fetched this [Eiffel Tower] from there. This [the Leaning Tower of Pisa], I didn’t buy myself, but was given to me by my best friend […] so it’s a memory from him, it reminds me of him.

And yes, I look at them and I remember. […] Too bad I couldn’t bring anything that reminds me of Tyre [Lebanese coastal city], because it is also one of my favorite cities… I mean whenever I watch a video for Tyre’s beach, oh my heart… you know what I mean?

Les Trois Tours

Je suis le genre de personne qui aime conserver des trucs, même ma mère me disait: "Farah, qu'est-ce que c'est ça?" [...] Je veux dire [je garde] tout, tout **souvenir**.

[…]

Malheureusement, il y a eu des pays desquels je n’ai pas pu conserver de souvenir, de réminescence. [...] J'aime beaucoup Dubaï parce que ma famille y vivait et, à chaque fois que je vois la tour [Burj Khalifa], je me souviens du temps que nous avons passé là-bas avec eux. J'ai aussi visité Paris et je suis tombée amoureuse de la ville, alors j'ai pris cela [une Tour Eiffel] de là-bas. Ceci [une tour de Pise] n’a pas acheté par moi-même, mais m'a été donné par mon meilleur ami [...] donc c'est un souvenir de lui, ça me le rappelle.

Et oui, je les regarde et je me souviens. [...] *Too bad* que je n’aie pas pu apporter quelque chose qui me rappelle Tyr [ville côtière libanaise], parce que c'est aussi l'une de mes villes préférées... Je veux dire, à chaque fois que je regarde une vidéo de la plage de Tyr, oh mon cœur... Tu vois ce que je veux dire?

ثلاثة أبراج

أنا من النوع اللي كتير بحب أحتفظ بأغراض. حتى يعني ماما بتقول لي: "فرح، شو هيدا؟" [...] يعني أي شي... أي ذكرى.

[...]

لسوء الحظ في بلدان ما قدرت آخذ منها، memory. بس هيدول بقيوا وحبيت جيبهم معي. دبي كتير بحبها لأن فيها عيلتي. وكل ما شوف هيدا البرج بتذكر كل الأوقات اللي كنا نقضيها بدبي. وكمان زرت باريس وحبيتها كتير، فجبت هيدي [برج أيفل] من باريس. هيدي [برج بيزا] ما أنا جبتها. هيدي my best friend جابها من إيطاليا. كان على طول، كل ما يسافر يجيب لي شيء، فحبّ يجيب لي برج بيزا. فهيدي ذكرى منه، بتذكرني فيه.

وإيه، بحطهن قدامي على طول، بحس أنه ذكريات. [...]Too bad انه ما قدرت جيب شي يذكرني بصور لأن هي كمان واحدة من مدني المفضلة... يعني هيك لما شوف فيديو لبحر صور قلبي...

عرفتي؟؟

الكوفيّة

Keffiyeh

Figure 23. Farah Mustafa. *Keffiyeh.* 2018. Photo: Farah Mustafa.

ARABIC SPEAKING OBJECTS

Keffiyeh

I didn't want to leave Lebanon without taking something that reminds me of Palestine. […] I feel as if it represents me and my identity.

But if someone asks for it, for the love of Palestine, I would give it instantly because I want them to **feel […]**

Many people ask: "How do you love a country that you do not know?" You know what I mean?

Since I was born, I have been **listening** to my grandparents' stories. I mean, now I feel as if I know the place where they lived, because of how much they told me about it: How was their home, where they lived, what kinds of animals they raised, I know what it **means** […].

I have an affection for a country I have never visited, I never saw, but I was raised to love and to recognize its cause. I feel it is so difficult to talk about **her** [Palestine]…

No matter how much I speak, I always feel short […]

Keffiyeh

Je ne voulais pas quitter le Liban sans prendre quelque chose qui me rappelle la Palestine. [...] J'ai l'impression que cela me représente et représente mon identité.

Mais si quelqu'un d'autre me la demandait par amour pour la Palestine, je lui donnerais immédiatement parce que je veux qu'ils le **ressentent** [...].

Beaucoup de gens demandent: "Comment aimez un pays que l'on ne connait pas?" Vous savez ce que je veux dire?

Depuis je suis née, j'ai **écouté** les histoires de mes grands-parents. Je veux dire, maintenant j'ai l'impression de connaître l'endroit où ils vivaient, parce qu'ils m'ont tellement raconté comment étaient leur maison, où ils vivaient, quels sortes d'animaux ils élevaient, je sais ce que cela **signifie**.

J'ai de l'affection pour un pays que je n'ai jamais visité, que je n'ai jamais vu, mais que j'ai été élevé à aimer et pour lequel on m'a appris à prendre le parti. Je pense qu'il est si difficile de parler **d'elle** [la Palestine] ...

Peu importe combien j'en parle, j'ai toujours l'impressions que c'est trop peu. [...]

الكوفيّة

ما كنت حابة أطلع من لبنان وما آخذ معي شي يذكرني بفلسطين، مع انو هي بالقلب على طول. بلبلسها وبحبها، بحسها هيك انو بتعبر عني وعن هويتي.

بس اذا حدا طلبها مني، محبّة بفلسطين، أنا بعطيه اياها. لأن أنا بدي اياه يحس هيك، يحس بالمعاناة اللي عم تصير معهن، يحس انو شو الحق.

يعني انه في كتير ناس بيسألوني: "أنتِ كيف بتحبي بلد ما بتعرفيه؟ " عرفتي؟

أنا من لمّا خلقت وأنا اسمع جدّي وستّي يحكولي. يعني أنا هلق بحس حالي بعرف المكان اللي هني عايشين فيه على قد ما حكيولي عنه. يعني كيف كان البيت، وين عاشوا، شو كانوا يربوا برّا حيوانات، شو يعني. بعرف كل التفاصيل وكتير على بالي زورها.

وعندي تعلّق بوطن أنا ما زرته، وما شفته، بس كتير تربيت على حبه، تربيت على انه قضية يعني. بحس صعب إحكي عنها..

قد ما احكي، بحس حالي مقصّرة عن جد. بس مرّات بكون مبسوطة، انه يمكن قدرت أعمل شي لو صغير...

Emma Haraké.

صابونة غار

Olive soap

Figure 24. Emma Harake. *Olive Soap.* 2017. Photo: Emma Haraké.

ARABIC SPEAKING OBJECTS

Olive Soap

When I was packing my suitcase, my mom insisted I place olive soap bars between my clothes. […]

I hated these soap bars growing up, I thought they looked ugly and preferred the scented smooth looking new ones. But I kept them in the bag anyway. When I arrived here [Montreal], I kept the soap bars between my summer clothes and forgot about them.

[…] At the beginning of summer, I opened the drawer and ouf!! The scent!

Happiness! The scent of my childhood overwhelmed me.

[…] Lot's of my memories are related to smell. I remember when my mom used to distill roses and I'd watch the karaki [distilling vessel] as the rose water is extracted one drop at a time. After filling bottles, my mom would add water to the residue and bathe us in it. It was so magical!

Savon à l'olive

Quand j'ai fait ma valise, ma mère a insisté pour que je mette des barres de savon d'huile d'olive entre mes vêtements. […]

Je détestais ces barres de savon en grandissant, je pensais qu'elles étaient moches et je préférais les nouveaux savons lisses et parfumés. Quand je suis arrivéé ici [Montréal], je les ai gardés entre mes vêtements d'été et je les ai oubliés.

[...] Au début de l'été 2015, j'ai ouvert le tiroir et ouf !! L'odeur! Le bonheur! Ce parfum familier de mon enfance m'a submergé. […] Plusieurs de mes souvenirs sont reliés à l'odorat. Je me souviens quand ma mère distillait des roses et que je regardais le *karaki* [un récipient de distillation] avec l'eau de rose qui s'extrayait en goutte-à-goutte. Après le remplissage des bouteilles, ma mère ajoutait de l'eau au résidu et nous faisait prendre un bain dedans. C'était tellement magique.

صابونة غار

لما كنت عم ضب شنطتي، ماما أصرّت انه حط صابونة غار بين ثيابي.

كنت كتير أكره صابون الغار أنا وصغيرة، انه بشعين، عتاق. ما بعرف. كنت فضّل الصابون اللي منشتريه من السوبر ماركت انه ريحته حلوة، شكله حلو،texture ناعم . بس حتى ما زعّل الماما، خلّيت الصابون بالشنطة وهيك. لمّا وصلت على مونتريال حطيتهن ونسيتهن بين ثياب الصيف.

[...] هلق لما إجت الصيفية بعد كم شهر فتحت الجارور اووف انه طلعت الريحة! وما معقول، انبسطت! كتير ذكرتني الريحة بطفولتي، لما كنت صغيرة. [...] كتير كتير من ذكرياتي أنا وصغيرة مربوطة بالروايح... يعني بتذكر الماما لما كانت تقطّر ماء ورد عالبلكون. كان غرامي أقعد وراقب الكركة هو والورد عم يتقطّر، هيك نقطة نقطة عم ينزلوا. بعد ما تخلص، كانت تعبي ماء الورد بقناني قزاز وتزيد ماء على اللي بيبقوا وتحممنا فيهن. ما بعرف شي magical متل السحر يعني.

ARABIC SPEAKING OBJECTS

ألف ليلة وليلة

One Thousand and One Nights

Figure 25. Emma Harake. *A Thousand and One Nights*. 2017. Photo: Emma Haraké.

ARABIC SPEAKING OBJECTS

A Thousand and One Nights

This is the second volume of A Thousand and One Nights. When I was a child, […] I used to read a lot because I was shy, and introvert and reading would help me escape. […] It's in a very bad shape, it's torn and some of its papers are lost. But it is torn because I used to read it a lot! Of course, I didn't understand all the stories I was reading. As a kid, reading 1001 nights was like reading superman or any other children's books.

[…] No, there isn't any one story that holds a special meaning. When I look at the book, I think it reminds me of how much I used to love stories: reading them but also listening to them. One of my fondest memories of my mom is that of her telling us bedtime stories. If I was naughty, I'd be forbidden from listening to the story, so I would stand outside and eavesdrop…

Les mille et une nuits

Ceci est le deuxième volume des Mille et Une Nuits. Quand j'étais enfant, je lisais beaucoup parce que j'étais timide et introvertie et la lecture m'aidait à m'évader. […] Il est en très mauvais état, déchiré ; quelques pages sont perdues. Mais il est déchiré parce que je le lisais beaucoup ! Évidemment, je ne comprenais pas toutes les histoires que je lisais. Comme j'étais enfant, lire Les Mille et Une Nuits était pour moi comme lire Superman ou n'importe quel autre livre pour enfants.

[…] Non, il n'y a pas une histoire en particulier qui ait une signification particulière pour moi. Quand je regarde le livre, je pense que cela me rappelle à quel point j'aimais les histoires: en lire, mais aussi en écouter. Un de mes plus précieux souvenirs est celui de ma mère nous racontant des histoires au moment de se coucher. Si j'avais été désobéissante, on m'interdisait d'écouter l'histoire, alors je restais dehors et je tendais l'oreille.

ألف ليلة وليلة

هيدا الكتاب هو الجزء الثاني من ألف ليلة وليلة. أنا وصغيرة كنت كتير حبّ أقرأ. كنت اقرا كل شيء بمكتبة أهلي. كنت أقرأ لأنه بستحي يعني وintrovert والقراءة كانت تساعدني انه أهرب [...] هلق عم اتطلع فيه، انه حالته حالة يعني، مخزّق وضايع منه أوراق. بس أنه مخزّق من كتر الإستعمال، قد ما كان اقراه يعني. هلق في كتير أشياء ما كنت افهمها، كنت اقراها وما افهمها.. لأنه يعني لإلي أنا وصغيرة إذا عم اقرأ ألف ليلة وليلة متل كأن عم اقرأ سوبرمان أو مجلات للأولاد أووو..

[...] لأ، ما في قصة معينة بتعنيلي، يعني محددة إلها معنى بالكتاب [...] لأ! هلق لما عم اتطلع فيه، ما بعرف يمكن بيذكرني من أنا صغيرة قديه كنت حب القصص، غير انه اقرأ قصص، كمان كنت حب اسمعها...

وحدة من القصص اللي بتذكرها بكتير حب هي الماما لما كانت تخبرنا قصص قبل النوم. وبتذكر كان القصاص انه إذا تشيطنت ممنوع إسمع القصة اليوم. فبتخبرها لأختي ولأخي وأنا بنام بلا ما أسمع القصة. بس- هلق ما كنت كتير شيطانة، بس انه إذا تشيطنت، بتذكر كنت أوقف على الباب وهيك جرّب اسمع شو القصة. فما بعرف...

Béatrice Mokhaiber.

نكهات من المشرق

Flavors of the orient

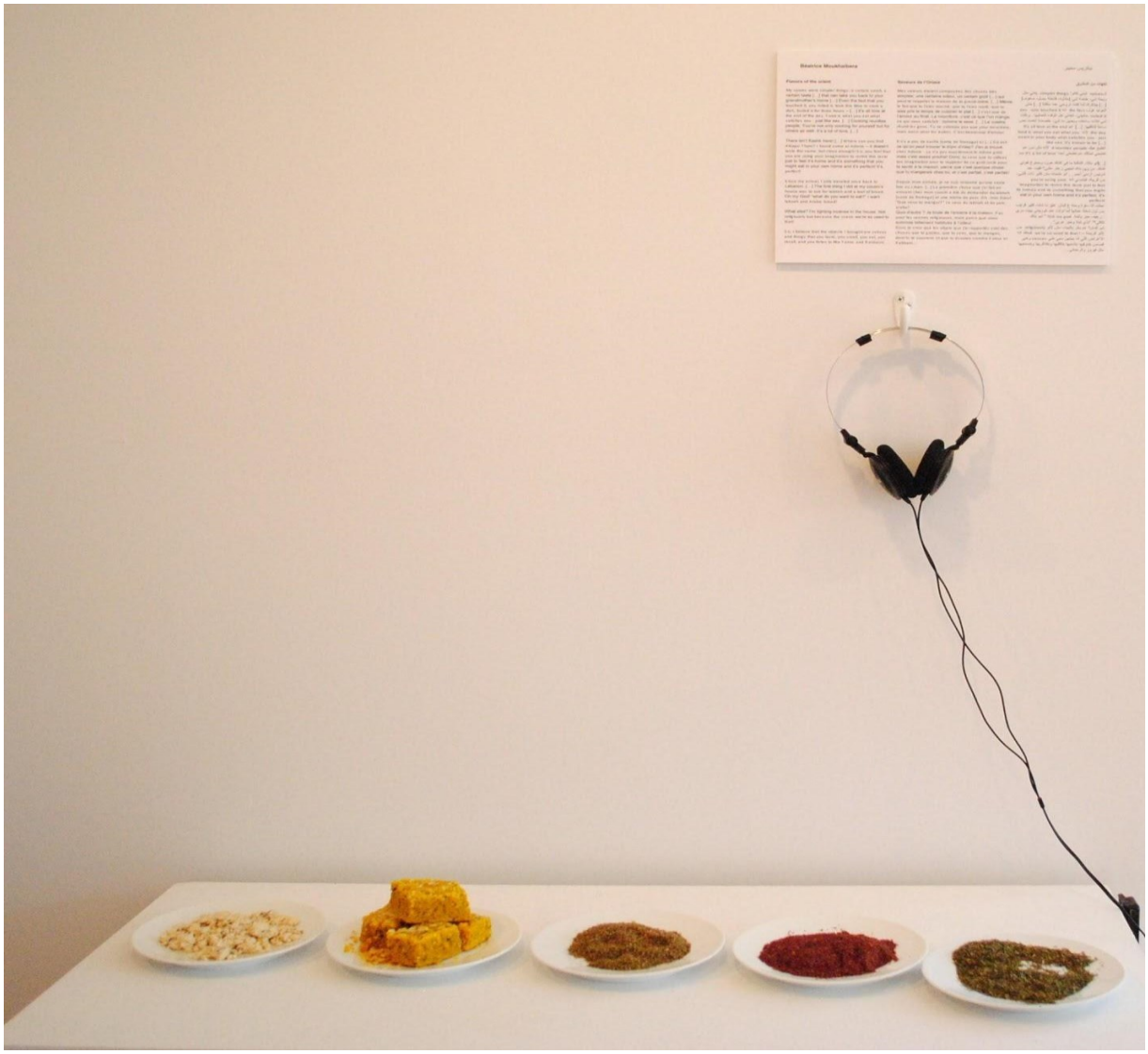

Figure 26. Béatrice Moukhaiber. *Saveurs de l'Orient installation view*. 2018. Photo: Emma Haraké.

ARABIC SPEAKING OBJECTS

Flavors of the orient

My values were simpler things: a certain smell, a certain taste […] that can take you back to your grandmother's home […] Even the fact that you touched it, you rolled it, took this time to cook a dish, boiled it for three hours – […] it's all love at the end of the day. Food is what you eat what satisfies you – just like sex. […] Cooking reunites people. You're not only cooking for yourself but for others as well. It's a lot of love. […]

There isn't Kashk here! […] Where can you find Aleppo Thym? I found some at Adonis – it doesn't taste the same, but close enough! So, you feel that you are using your imagination to revive this taste just to feel it's home and it's something that you might eat in your own home and it's perfect! It's perfect! Since my arrival, I only traveled once back to Lebanon. […] The first thing I did at my cousin's house was to ask for labneh and a loaf of bread. Oh my God! "what do you want to eat?" I want labneh and Arabic bread!

What else? I'm lighting incense in the house. Not religiously but because the scent- we're so used to that!

So, I believe that the objects I brought are senses and things that you taste, you smell, you eat, you recall, and you listen to like Fairuz and Rahbanis …

Saveurs de l'Orient

Mes valeurs étaient composées des choses très simples: une certaine odeur, un certain goût […] qui peut te rappeler la maison de ta grand-mère. […] Même le fait que tu l'aies touché, que tu l'aies roulé, que tu aies pris le temps de cuisiner le plat […] c'est que de l'amour au final. La nourriture, c'est ce que l'on mange, ce qui nous satisfait - comme le sexe. […] La cuisine réunit les gens. Tu ne cuisines pas que pour toi-même, mais aussi pour les autres. C'est beaucoup d'amour.

Il n'y a pas de kashk [sorte de fromage] ici [...] Où est-ce qu'on peut trouver le thym d'Alep? J'en ai trouvé chez Adonis - ça n'a pas exactement le même goût mais c'est assez proche! Donc, tu sens que tu utilises ton imagination pour te rappeler de ce goût juste pour te sentir à la maison, parce que c'est quelque chose que tu mangerais chez toi, et c'est parfait, c'est parfait! Depuis mon arrivée, je ne suis retourné qu'une seule fois au Liban. [...] La première chose que j'ai fait en arrivant chez mon cousin a été de demander du labneh [sorte de fromage] et une miche de pain. Oh, mon Dieu! "Que veux-tu manger?" Je veux du labneh et du pain arabe!

Quoi d'autre ? Je brûle de l'encens à la maison. Pas pour les raisons religieuses, mais parce que nous sommes tellement habitués à l'odeur. Donc je crois que les objets que j'ai rapportés sont des choses que tu goûtes, que tu sens, que tu manges, dont tu te souviens et que tu écoutes comme Fairuz et Rahbani

نكهات من المشرق

الvalues تبعي كانوا simpler things.
يعني متل ريحة شي، طعمة شي [حلاوة، قشطة بعسل، صفوف] [...] بيذكرك لما كنت تروحي عند ستّك! [...] حتى العوايد هول، the fact انه you touched it، you rolled it حشيتي، أخذتي هل الوقت لتعمليها.. وغلت شي تلات ساعات وبعدين ما شيّ، خلصت! أخدت نص ساعة لتاكليها. [...] It's all love at the end of the day. لأنه food is what you eat what you insert in your body what satisfies you - just like sex. […] It's known to be الطبخ هيك it reunites people. لأنه مش بس عم تطبخي لحالك عم تطبخي لحدا so it's a lot of love.
[...]أنو مثلا، كشك! ما في كشك هون، وممنوع تفوتي كشك. من وين بدك تجيبي زعتر حلبي؟ لقيت عند أدونيس أردني أحمر... انو طعمته مش كتير ذات الشي، بس قريبة، فبتحسّي انه you're using your imagination to revive this taste just to feel its homey and it's something that you might eat in your own home and it's perfect, it's perfect!
عملت أنا سفرة وحدة ع لبنان. هلق ما شفت كتير قرايب بس أول شغلة عملتها لما نزلت عند كوزينتي ببيت مري : رغيف خبز ولبنة. Oh my god! " شو بدك تاكلي؟" "بدّي لبنة وخبز عربي" .
شو كمان؟ عم بخّر بالبيت، مش لأنو religiously بس لأن الريحة – we're so used to that ! فبعتقد انه الأغراض اللي أنا جبتهن معي هني senses وهني قصص بتدوقيها بتشمّيها بتاكليها وبتتذكريها وبتسمعيها متل فيروز والرحباني…

بيروت – مونتريال_2012 – 2013

Beirut - Montréal_2012 - 2013

Figure 27. Béatrice Moukhaiber. *Beirut-Montreal* [Film Still]. 2018. Photo: Emma Haraké.

ARABIC SPEAKING OBJECTS

Beirut - Montréal_2012 - 2013

3/1/2018

Torn between the past and the present, a voyage for a better living. Last memories documented in Lebanon and first images filmed in Montréal.

*Used tools: Video camera, stop-motion pictures and time-lapse, Iphone & Gopro.

Beirut - Montréal_2012 - 2013

3/1/2018

Une déchirure entre le passé et le présent, un voyage pour une meilleure vie.

Derniers souvenirs documentés au Liban et premières images filmées à Montréal.

*Outils utilisés: Caméra vidéo, photos en stop-motion et time-lapse, Iphone et Gopro.

بيروت – مونتريال_2012 – 2013

3/1/2018

تمزّقٌ بين ماضٍ وحاضر، رحلة لحياةٍ أفضل. آخر الذكريات الموّثقة في لبنان وأوّل الصوَر المأخوذة في مونتريال.

Arabic-Speaking Objects: The Vernissage

In this section I provide visual documentation of the vernissage and the days that followed. As mentioned earlier, the exhibition was on display at Georges Vanier Cultural Center from March 7 to 14, 2018 with the reception on Friday March 9 from 10am to 3pm. All participants, except for Dunya who wished to remain anonymous, came to the vernissage and interacted with the visitors. Approximately 27 people showed up on March 9 with the majority of them being family and personal contacts (see Figure 28-41). A smaller number of visitors passed by because of the Facebook event. Additionally, the coordinator of family resources at Tyndale St-Georges Community Centre in Little Burgundy visited the exhibition twice accompanied by two different groups of migrants registered in an English conversation class (see Figure 31). During the vernissage, I ensured that participants were introduced to gallery visitors where they would engage in lively debates.

Figure 28. Exhibition vernissage, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Maher Kouraytem.

Figure 29. Vernissage, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Maher Kouraytem.

Figure 30. Gallery visitor listening, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Maher Kouraytem.

Figure 31. Visitors conversing with one of the participants, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Emma Haraké.

Figure 32. Visitors writing in the guest book, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Maher Kouraytem.

Figure 33. Gallery visitor, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Maher Kouraytem.

Figure 34. Gallery visitors, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Maher Kouraytem.

Figure 35. Gallery visitors, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Maher Kouraytem.

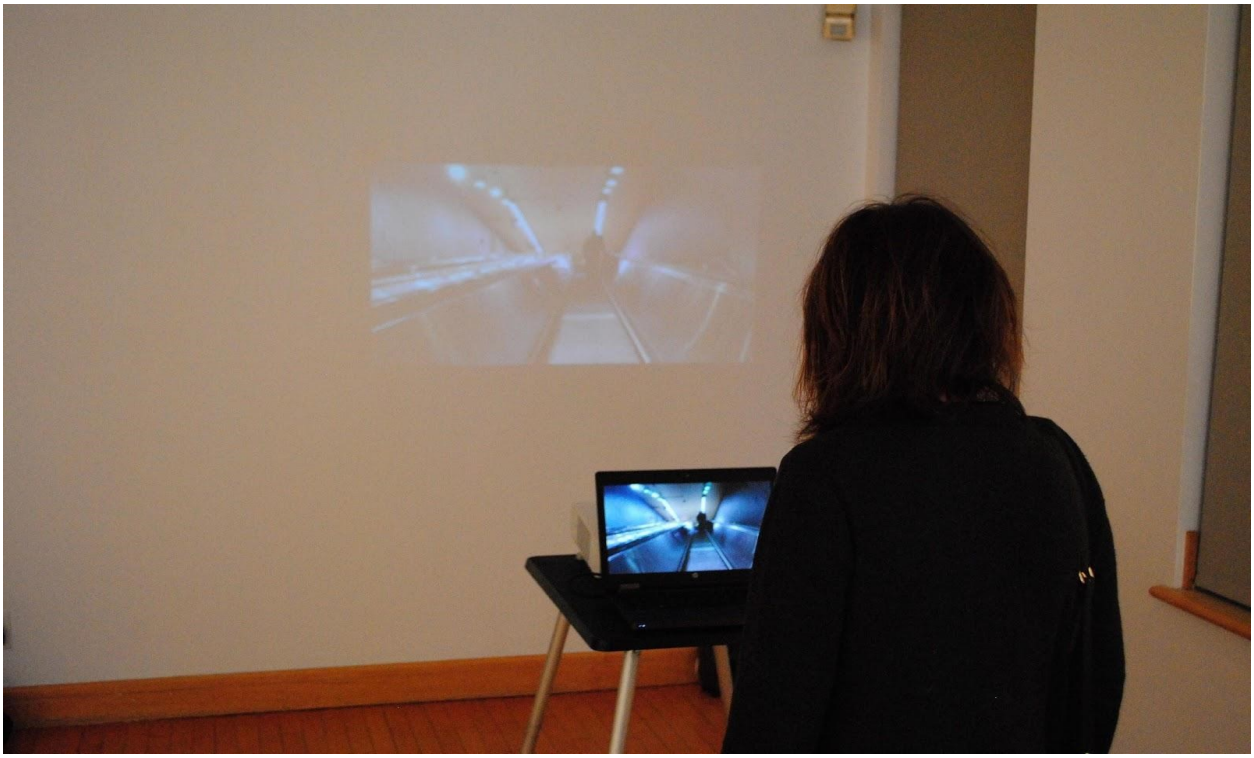

Figure 36. Gallery visitors, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Emma Haraké.

Figure 37. Gallery visitor, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Maher Kouraytem.

Figure 38. Gallery visitors, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Maher Kouraytem.

Figure 39. Gallery visitor, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Emma Harake.

Figure 40. Emma Harake. *Olive Soap* [Detail]. 2018. Photo: Emma Haraké.

Figure 41. Gallery visitor posing next to Farah's work, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Emma Haraké.

The Days That Followed

When the exhibition's coordinator at CCGV informed me that the center could host my thesis exhibition, she also mentioned that I'd be responsible for monitoring the gallery and equipment because they don't have insurance against theft. This constraint, which obliged me to be physically present during the opening hours, turned out to be a valuable learning experience as I had enriching exchanges with the majority of the 65 people who visited the exhibition from March 7 to March 14. Apart from personal contacts, many strangers started to drop by the exhibition because of social media and word of mouth, and since CCGV shares a building with Georges Vanier Public Library, it became normal to have library visitors drop by because they were intrigued by the exhibition. Some of them would return the next day with their spouses or

friends. Moreover, following the vernissage on March 9, many of the participants returned repeatedly to visit with family members and friends sharing via comments on the occasion how they felt real ownership of having created something together.

Figure 42. Visitors and family members at CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Emma Haraké.

Figure 43. Gallery visitor with her son, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Emma Haraké.

Figure 44. Gallery visitors, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Maher Kouraytem.

Chapter Four

Learning together

Data Collection and Analysis

Many scholars of arts-based and qualitative research encourage researchers to use reflective and responsive approaches throughout their data collection and analysis processes (Creswell, 2009; Leavy, 2015; Smith & Dean, 2009; Savin-Baden, Wimpenny, & SpringerLink, 2014). On that account, the relation between data collection, analysis, and creation in this study was a porous one that builds and thrives on the conversations and discussions with the participants.

Throughout my analysis, I was continuously reflecting on my subjectivity in this research project. Since the interviews constructed so much of my fieldwork and the entry point for the collaborative creation project, I will briefly elaborate how I examined them, taking into account that I shared my findings with the participants during our second and third (when applicable) interviews to reflect, identify and converse about the dominant and common themes and issues that emerged.

After transcribing the interviews, I listened to and read them multiple times. The objects themselves informed the coding of the transcripts, as the meanings associated with each object enabled me to look for recurrent themes or subthemes. My field notes and journal entries were used to come up with meaningful connections as I looked for narrative links between the past and the present as suggested by phenomenological researcher and scholar Van Manen, in his book *Researching Lived Experience* (1997).

My analysis drew on the conversations with the participants and on Leavy's (2015) four strategies to unpack the data in arts-based research: External dialogue (or gathering feedback

from participants at the end and beginning of every interview as well as via a feedback survey after the art exhibition), internal dialogue (or using journal entries as field notes to remain reflective on the process), the use of theory (or approaching the data from critical and cultural theoretical vantage points while reflecting on my and the participants' subjectivities, and vice versa), and the use of literature as data or to interpret, frame, and contextualize the data, in addition to bringing other voices into the work thus grounding the project. In the sections that follow, I will link the results to my research questions by examining how the creative and collaborative process generated new learning experiences and allowed the participants to reflect on their individual and collective experiences.

Research question #1 What is the relationship between personal objects and memory in the lives of four recent immigrants?

This research is about memories and about identity as revealed through personal objects that have travelled with immigrants to their new 'home'. My participants agreed that ordinary objects produced for mass consumption acted as a unique reservoir of memories or "living archives" (Dunya, personal communication, February 27, 2018) which helped them stay connected to people and distant countries despite the rupture between one's past and present. This links to French historian Pierre Nora's examination of memory and its traces, as the participants became especially conscious that the association between their objects and the memories they evoked no longer corresponds to their changed realities in a new country. Accordingly, I approached objects as conceptual entities carrying with them the affective memory of the migration experience, where the object's materiality converged with participants' experiences and memories as potential sites of intersubjectivity.

Figure 45. Dunya Bilal [pseudonym]. *Earrings.* 2017. Photo: Dunya Bilal.

The objects that the participants selected included religious relics, books, photographs, small household objects, items of clothing, items of sport, items of art, food, jewelry and travel souvenirs. Each of them acted as a reminder of a different place and gained some of its value from the stories and what scholar of anthropology Janet Hoskins refers to as the "subjective attributes" of objects' owners (1998, p.12). For instance, as Wissam recounted the biography of the religious icon, he entwined his own stories and challenges with it, together with the stories of his brother who has given it to him. The fact that this icon was associated with his brother's trajectory of immigration to Montreal a couple of years ago imbued it with the affective memory

of its previous owner's experience of displacement and the challenges he faced back then. Similarly, Dunya's earrings (see Figure 45) were a gift from her sister after she completed her medical studies in London. Today, the earrings bring her "courage and determination" as she draws connections between her life back then in London and her sister's recent maternity and graduation:

> My sister used to call me every weekend. Looking back at those lonely years, I still feel amazed that I managed to graduate while raising a child on my own [...]. By the way, my sister graduated with merit few months after having her first child. I am very proud of her and it breaks my heart that we are in two different countries. We talk and visit regularly. (personal communication, December 15, 2017)

Figure 46. Emma Harake. *Thyme.* 2017. Photo: Emma Haraké.

Sometimes the significance of objects resided in their materiality as mentioned by scholar and sociologist Kerreen Reiger (2016), for example, my handful of thyme (see Figure 46) and olive soap bars, Béatrice's flavors (see Figure 47) and even Dunya's coffee pot enabled us to maintain a sensorial and nostalgic connection with family and with a birthplace. However, without storytelling, objects remain silent witnesses to one's life. The participants' stories proposed another way of creating meaning informed by the social connections and memories formed in specific time and place (Hoskins, 1998; Hryniewicz-Yarbrough, 2011; Reiger, K. 2016). Wissam's Red Cross card for example, on its own, doesn't convey the countless hours of volunteering, the drive to help others, sacrifice, teamwork and collective effort. Similarly, it is the stories and memories that connect Farah's mass-produced tourist souvenirs to her friends and extended family in Dubai, Paris and Italy. In this regard, it is worth reflecting on Farah's choice of words whenever she referred to her chosen objects as "this memory" or "that memory" creating a web of metaphors which shattered the binaries between the material and imaginary dimensions of her experiences. It is this convergence, in particular, that accentuates the question of memory and brings to mind Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk's *Museum of Innocence* (2010) where objects on display are both imagined and real.

Figure 47. Béatrice Moukhaiber. *Saveurs de l'orient* [Detail]. 2018. Photo: Emma Haraké.

The whole time, memory was presented as personal narratives and objects were agents which activated these stories (Hoskins, 1998; Willig, 2017). However, I agree with anthropologist and scholar Janet Hoskins that the telling of the stories is "never innocent" (1998, p.4). Aside from giving the participants a sense of ownership and control over the interviews, asking them to choose their objects in advance allowed our conversations to become an expression of pre-reflective stories and experiences. In a way, the narratives shared with me, and later with a wider audience, were the edited and preferred versions of a story. Nonetheless, our conversations encouraged in-the-moment reflections around some of the objects as participants

were confronted with aspects of their experience which they may not have previously considered. When explaining the reason behind his choice to bring the Red Cross Card to Montreal, Wissam stated that the card is proof of his first aid and CPR training which "might come handy in case of an outdoor accident" (personal communications, October 23, 2017) but when asked right at the end of the same interview where he keeps the card, Wissam contemplated for a second before answering that it remains locked at home. We then engaged in a mutual reflection on the importance of this card and its connection to the complex network of social relations which sustained – and are still sustaining – him in Canada. In an email exchange he mentioned how this process was helping him to "reflect on the meaning behind some of the stuff I carry around with me from Lebanon" (personal communication, December 11, 2017). Along the same vein, Dunya initially mentioned that she chose to bring a family photograph of her sisters and mother because it reminded her of her childhood. She talked about her mother's affection and described at length how happy she is whenever she talks with her sisters now. When asked about the person behind the camera, Dunya talked about her father and the way in which his absence saddened her as a child. As she described her parents' relationship, and the events following her father's absence, Dunya uncovered a relationship between her feelings of hurt and avoidance to speak about her father. Dunya later mentioned that she never planned to talk about her father and shared in our feedback interview that she found our conversations to be a source of understanding and comfort. This sentiment was echoed by most participants through the different stages of the research. For example, Wissam mentioned that the whole process was

beneficial (W. Assouad, personal communication, March 16, 2018) and Béatrice suggested that taking part in this research felt similar to "therapy" (B. Moukhaiber, personal communication, March 20, 2018). However, it is important to note that I am not making mental health claims about the project or equating our conversations with therapy. Some of the participants' feelings of comfort might be attributed to the fact that our conversations encouraged the same kind of reflective, constructive thinking that I imagine counseling sessions would also be oriented to. Besides, run-of-the-mill daily conversations do not necessarily allow participants the opportunity to speak at length about the feelings associated with migration and displacement as embodied in a particular object or artifact.

A coffeepot, an orthodox icon, identity card, rescue tools, books, earrings, family photographs, clothes, soap bar, food, travel souvenirs hold their value because of the stories and experiences attached to them. To their owners, these chosen objects represent memories, ideas, relationships, accomplishments, feelings, values and, as one participant mentioned, a way to center himself and to reflect on his sense of self in response to a changing social and geographical landscape overflowing with uncertainty (W. Assouad, personal communication, December 10, 2017).

Research Question #2 How do the personal narratives associated with these objects help in the construction of the participants' diasporic identities?

Scholar and professor Russell Belk observes, "we tend to be especially concerned with having a past when our current identity has been challenged" (1990, p.669). Indeed, the fact that

participants' objects are associated with their experiences of displacement allowed them to act as "rich repository of [the] past" (Belk, 1990, p.674) that trigger emotions, nostalgia, and memories. The dislocation of memory is important in the construction of diasporic identity, which is not a neutral process. During our third interview, Dunya alluded to how her personal objects, the coffee pot in particular (see Figure 48), act as cultural and familial links that are crucial to managing personal trauma and the violent experience of immigration. She also drew on generational narratives of resilience that ground her identity and help sustain her:

> Sometimes when I'm overwhelmed by the number of unfamiliar things [here], I panic, and I walk to the marché […] nearby to buy some coffee beans. I grind them myself using a hand grinder I bought on Amazon. Then, I brew the coffee in my mother's coffee pot […] This ritual of the old and the new connects me to a birthplace, it reminds me how my mom and grandmother persevered and how I was able to overcome my personal trauma, […] I mean it's ridiculous when you think of it; that this banal coffee pot helps me navigate how I'm changing in my new home […] the new me (Dunya, personal communication, December 19, 2018)

Figure 48. Dunya Bilal [pseudonym]. *Coffee Pot as displayed in the exhibition,* CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Emma Haraké.

This sentiment of forging a new identity, a new 'self,' was echoed by Béatrice who mentioned how her dislocation and isolation during the first years of immigration allowed her to reflect and "discover" who she is: "No one knows you here, you can recreate yourself in a way, it's amazing" (B. Moukhaiber, personal communication, February 5, 2018). Further, in her account, Béatrice also recounts how the threads shaping her identity criss-cross multiple homes they as a family moved between, in ways over which she rarely had much control. Her emerging form of identity is inextricably linked with those of previous generations and often materializes in a variety of ways, from making a garden look like that of grandparents, to sentimental attachment to certain values, dishes, flavors or significant places. Being given the opportunity to

reflect on their choice of objects and stories they want to share, allowed the participants to construct themselves, at least retrospectively during our interviews, while alluding to their immigration experiences. For Wissam, reflecting on his objects allowed him to appreciate who he truly is and where he comes from (W. Assouad, personal communication, March 16, 2018). Familial and social networks as well as generational narratives provided a sense of belonging for him and an indication to the values that enrich his sense of self.

While participants' objects connected them to a specific location, Farah's Keffiyeh (see Figure 49) linked her to an imagined "unreachable" homeland as a Palestinian refugee, but attainable with a Canadian passport. She gave vivid descriptions of her grandparents' home and daily life back in Palestine before their displacement to Lebanon. This receiving and re-telling of her grandparents' memories reflects who she is, both as individual and as a collective. And while the Keffiyeh acted as a material evidence during our interviews, Farah mentioned that "if someone asks for it, for the love of Palestine, [she] would give it instantly" (F. Mustafa, personal communication, November 11, 2017). Interestingly, by the time I asked Farah to take an image of the Keffiyeh and share it with me, she admitted that she has given it to a Canadian friend who wanted to learn more about Palestine. She took an image of a different Keffiyeh to be displayed at the exhibition. For Farah, it is no longer a special piece of fabric, but a symbol of a larger historical significance and, therefore she no longer keeps it to herself. In this way, the keffiyeh illuminated how family stories are maintained in personal and cultural identity as it described the

trajectory of her family's displacement and in doing so, shedding light on the identity negotiation of Palestinians in the diaspora.

Figure 49. Farah posing next to her images. 2018. Photo: Maher Kouraytem.

The objects' meanings were in constant flux as the accompanying stories shifted from the emotional and individual to the political. The in-depth interviews provided rich ground for exploring narratives through which participants make sense of themselves and their identities. The focus on questions of personal and collective identity intensified in the context of each participant's recent immigration. When asked to elaborate on her interpretation of her "new self," Dunya related how she never consciously identified as an "Arab" or a "Middle Eastern"

back in Egypt, but this identification seems to be imposed on her here as "people ask for [her] expert opinion on everything Arab", "and I am still learning to embrace this 'exotic' identity… and it is not an easy thing to negotiate" she continued (Dunya, February 27, 2018). Dunya's remarks raise the question of agency, or more broadly, the nature and construction of migrant identity. As remnants of remote overseas and experiences of such places, these objects provide a fertile ground for the investigation of issues concerning identity, agency, and the politics of representation.

Research Question #3 What are the pedagogical impacts of collaborative art practices on new immigrants' sense of identity and belonging?

Arabic-Speaking Objects involves collaborative strategies intended to generate creative ways of knowing and modes of engaging. It is based on the engagement and feedback of the participants who reflected on their daily lives and alluded to their immigration experience through personal objects. Collaborative art practices are sites in which the participants (and researchers) perform their social identity by, in part, making and sharing a particular version of themselves with the others. Indeed, in many cases, immigrants may be wary of the commodification of their stories and experiences for the benefit of various audiences. For instance, Farah stated that she was happy to share components of her culture and history that may be unknown to Montrealers (F. Mustafa, personal communication, March 15, 2018).

From a critical pedagogy perspective, this project was underpinned by emancipatory theories, associated with Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire (1970, 1973). Freire argues

that education is never neutral, it either oppresses or empowers (1970). Through the act of engaging in collaborative art practices, participants not only shared their individual stories, but they had agency over what and how they wanted to be represented, in keeping with the transformative focus of critical pedagogy. This opened up compelling possibilities for critical engagement with what has been magnified, commodified, left out, interpreted, or instrumentalized in public discourse around immigrants and immigration.

This is why I committed to developing a collaborative partnership with the participants based on trust and confidence, where they engaged in the production and circulation of meaning. When asked whether they felt represented by their chosen artwork/images all participants responded affirmatively:

> *YES*! (W. Assouad, personal communication, March 16, 2018)
>
> The reason I was excited to participate is that I chose the objects which represent me and represent the way I evaluate objects that I have, specially that I had the chance to choose objects, speak with my voice and capture the objects the way I like […] I am satisfied with it, I felt I delivered the message I wanted to show, I am happy that people were touched by my words and they stopped by my objects, my aim was to to give a true image about my homeland that a lot of people might not know. (F. Mustafa, personal communication, March 15, 2018)
>
> After meeting up a few times with Emma, and recording the audio interviews with her guiding questions, I feel that the content represented at the exposition, really represents

> me and the ideas that we shared during our previous meetups […] Reflecting, thinking and preparing for the audio interviews. Finding these objects and what really matters, it's kind of a therapy where you go soul searching for yourself. (B. Moukhaiber, personal communication, March 20, 2018)
>
> Yes, I felt represented because I was able to choose my objects and even edit my [accompanying] text and preserve my anonymity. I'm usually reluctant to narrate my story because I am tired of the demand to represent my culture and I am also wary of the potential misuse of my experiences. I appreciated how Emma consulted with me at every step. I know how much effort this takes. (Dunya, personal communication, March 21 2018)

As oral historian Michael Frisch has suggested, sharing authority in scholarly research can often produce a more intricate or multifaceted result (1990, p.xxiv). Looking at the responses, it seems that the participants' reflections point to the importance of representation, as well as the importance of laying claim to their narratives. This relates directly to sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall's exploration of the binary and reductive forms of representation when it comes to the people outside the dominant culture. By using open-ended and collaborative processes (Bishop, 2011; Lind, 2009, p. 54), the resulting artworks highlighted what was important for each of the participants individually, illuminated cultural aspects of their lives as recent immigrants and raised questions about ethics, authorship and collectivity in general. Moreover, when displayed in the same space, participants' objects/narratives created imaginings and associations that overlaid and conversed with one another, providing a context

for social and personal learning as the participants explored common threads and "mutual meanings" (Farah, March 15, 2018):

> I am not alone! we all share the same things/thoughts but in a different way, the stories we lived, the memories we shared should be shared […] (Béatrice Moukhaiber, personal communication, March 20, 2018).
>
> [T]he nostalgia, the love, the memories, family… that made me feel that I wasn't the only one who brought stuff to Canada, I wasn't the only one who had these feelings, but it is common by all immigrants leaving their hometown. (F. Mustafa, personal communication, March 15, 2018)
>
> I guess we all live different lives and this exhibition gave us a small view into seeing things from the other person's shoes. (W. Assouad, personal communication, March 16, 2018)
>
> True! We all lead different lives but we are all similar! I got a lot of relief from being part of this exhibition, a lot of relief […]. For me, pleasure comes from sharing events that seem significant to me, and from connecting to other people's stories; and that keeps me going. (Dunya, personal communication, March 21, 2018).

The theme of establishing connections and sharing memories resonates throughout the participants' responses, and it is evoked in their reflections on the gallery visitors' feedback to their personal objects/stories which I will discuss in the part which follows. Relevant to art education, adopting a collaborative and critical lens to pedagogy can address the problem of the

hegemony of the instructor's voice in multicultural societies (Abd Elkader, 2016, p.3; Grant, 2016). Likewise, critical and collaborative art practices may also provide, as literature suggests, tools for exploring the social realities of individual people, and the implications for the negotiation of power dynamics and "politics of representation" (Chalmers, 2002; Freire, 1970; Hall, 1997) inherent to the process of using words and images to represent others.

Collaborative Practices: The Exhibition as A Cultural Text. Doubtlessly, there is a hierarchy in the way we think about exhibitions as the ultimate outcome (product) of any creative process. In her book *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Methods*, British scholar Gillian Rose (2016) states that participatory research projects which disseminate the results through exhibitions reach more audiences and empower participants as well (p.331-332). Arguably, the exhibition was an important step to validate the participants' experiences, but it equally acted as site of encounter to discuss and solicit further participation as gallery visitors assumed a variety of positions and laid claim to their narratives. In this sense, collaborative practices were not limited to how I engaged with participants through the process (Rose, 2016, p.310), but also involved how I engaged with members of the general public.

As mentioned earlier, to safeguard technology, I had to be present at the uninsured gallery space of CCGV for the duration of the exhibition. This constraint turned out to be decisive in advancing my reflection on the collaborative and pedagogical dimensions of this research. As gallery visitors dropped in, I was able to strike up conversations with each one of them as they reinterpreted and challenged the art installations, actively involved in a shared

process of ownership. Additionally, many of them would end up seated on chairs exchanging stories and memories with each other (see Figures 50-51). Had the visitors been alone when viewing the exhibition, it is possible that they still would have been able to reflect on their experience in the space, but my presence externalized the dialogue and made possible the subsequent acts of connecting participants, visitors and community actors. As such, instead of simply engaging in the exhibition space from my pre-established position as an artist/researcher/participant, I experimented with different modes of engagement as a mediator of relationships among different parties.

Figure 50. Harake, E. (2018) Gallery visitors, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Emma Haraké.

Figure 51. Harake, E. (2018) Gallery visitors, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. Photo: Emma Haraké.

I initially anticipated that the visitors would be limited to family members and friends of participants, yet the number of Arabic-speaking visitors rapidly increased once the exhibition was underway. Strangers who heard about the exhibition from social media or word of mouth, began inviting their friends and contacts; one visitor created an event on *meetup*, a website allowing its users to schedule events using a common platform, and came with a group of people, another returned with five of her students – a cheerful, rowdy crowd of children who asked lot of questions. An elderly Iraqi Jew was extremely emotional and teared up as he told me about his family's forced departure from Iraq many years ago. He came back with his wife and two children two days later and shared more stories with me. Such actions and interactions anchored the experience in a sense of community. We are now witnessing the highest levels of

displacement on record since World War II (UNHCR, 2017b) with many human beings experiencing a restriction on their right to move. This is particularly evident for migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and those looking for a better life. Whether escaping from turmoil or migrating by 'choice', there are common threads and sentiments in the stories of migration that run through these narratives transposing us into an unexpected recognition of shared experience and connecting many of us together.

As an object, the guest book provided a blank surface onto which the visitors and participants were able to project their thoughts and refer to their collective identities (see figures 52-53). Some guests wrote in their native languages and others signed with their countries' names: "Fille d'Alep", "Qais the Jordanian", "Armenian Syrian woman" (see Figures 54-58). Amazingly, nearly every Arabic-speaking visitor to the exhibition expressed a desire for collaboration should the project grow bigger. By asking, even blaming me in some instances, for not including their countries, gallery visitors actively demanded to join in this "collective authorship" of their stories (Clements, 2011).

Figure 52. Visitor writing in the guest book, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. *[Photograph courtesy of Maher Kouraytem]*

Figure 53. Visitors writing in the guest book, CCGV, Montreal, QC. March 2018. *[Photograph courtesy of Maher Kouraytem]*

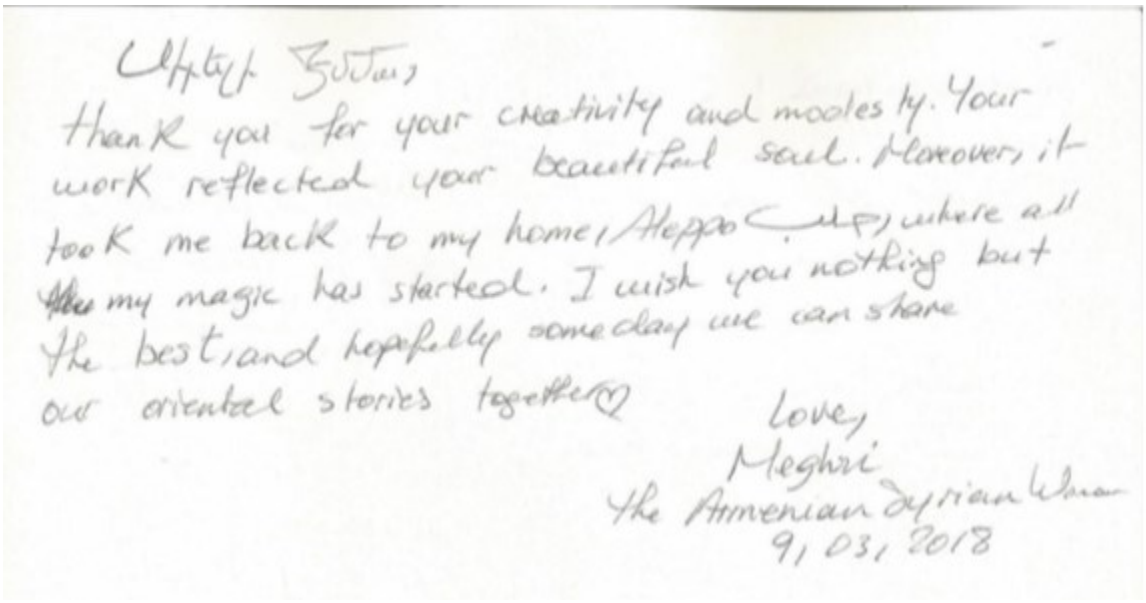

Figure 54. Emma Harake. *Guest Book.* 2018.

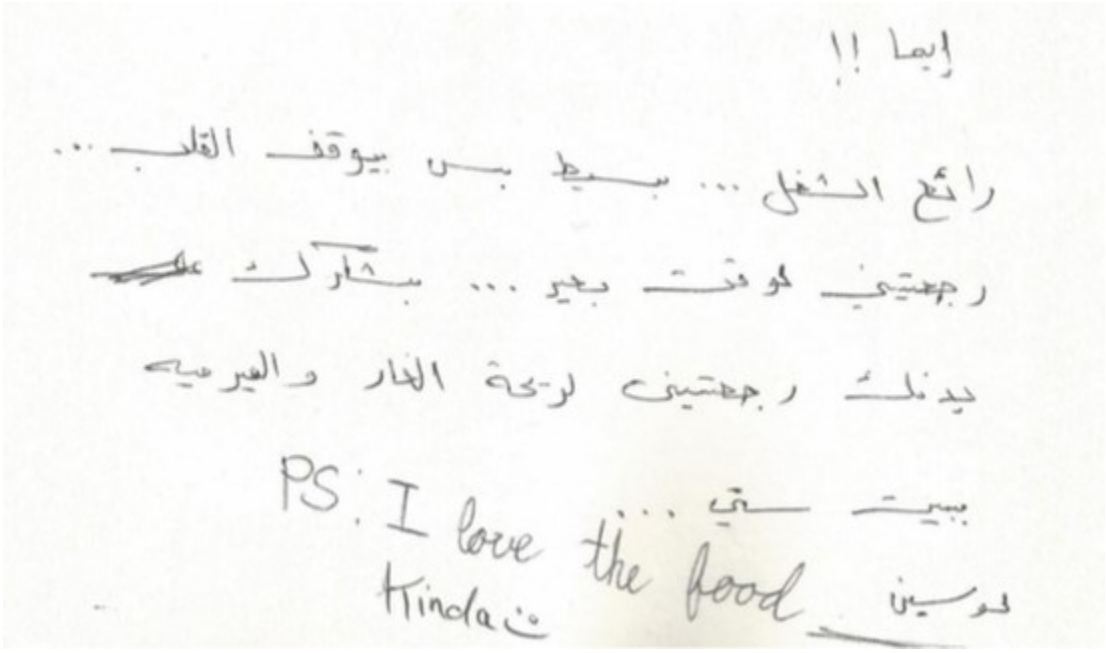

Figure 55. Emma Harake. *Guest Book.* 2018. [Emma!! The work is amazing.. Simple but breathtaking... You took me back to old days.. Thank you for returning me to the smell of sage and bay leaves in my grandmother's home. Lucine]. [Author's translation]

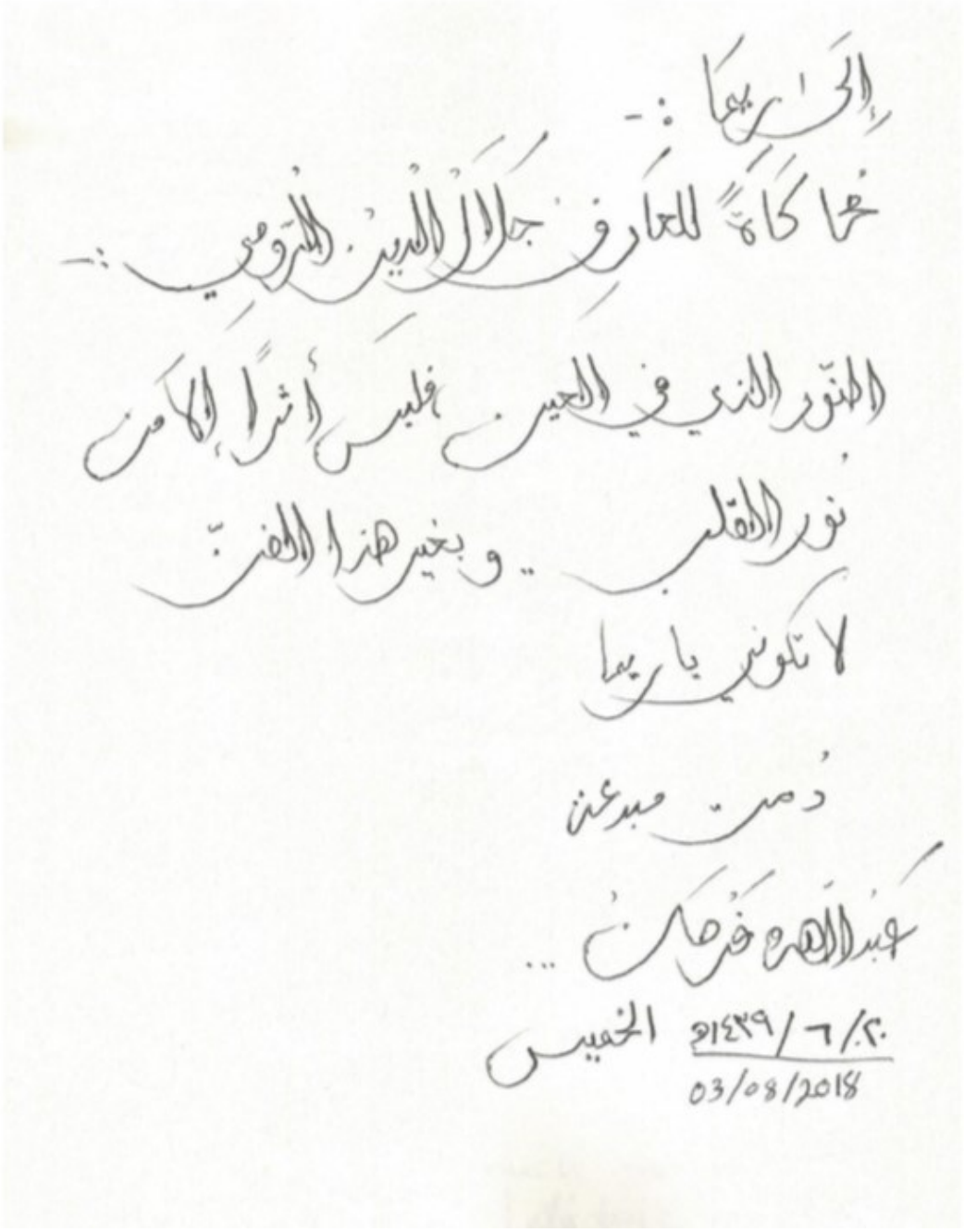

Figure 56. Emma Harake. *Guest Book.* 2018. [Inspired by Jalāl ad-Dīn al-Rūmī: The light in the eyes is but a trace of the heart's light. Keep creating... Abdalla Farhat]. [author's translation]

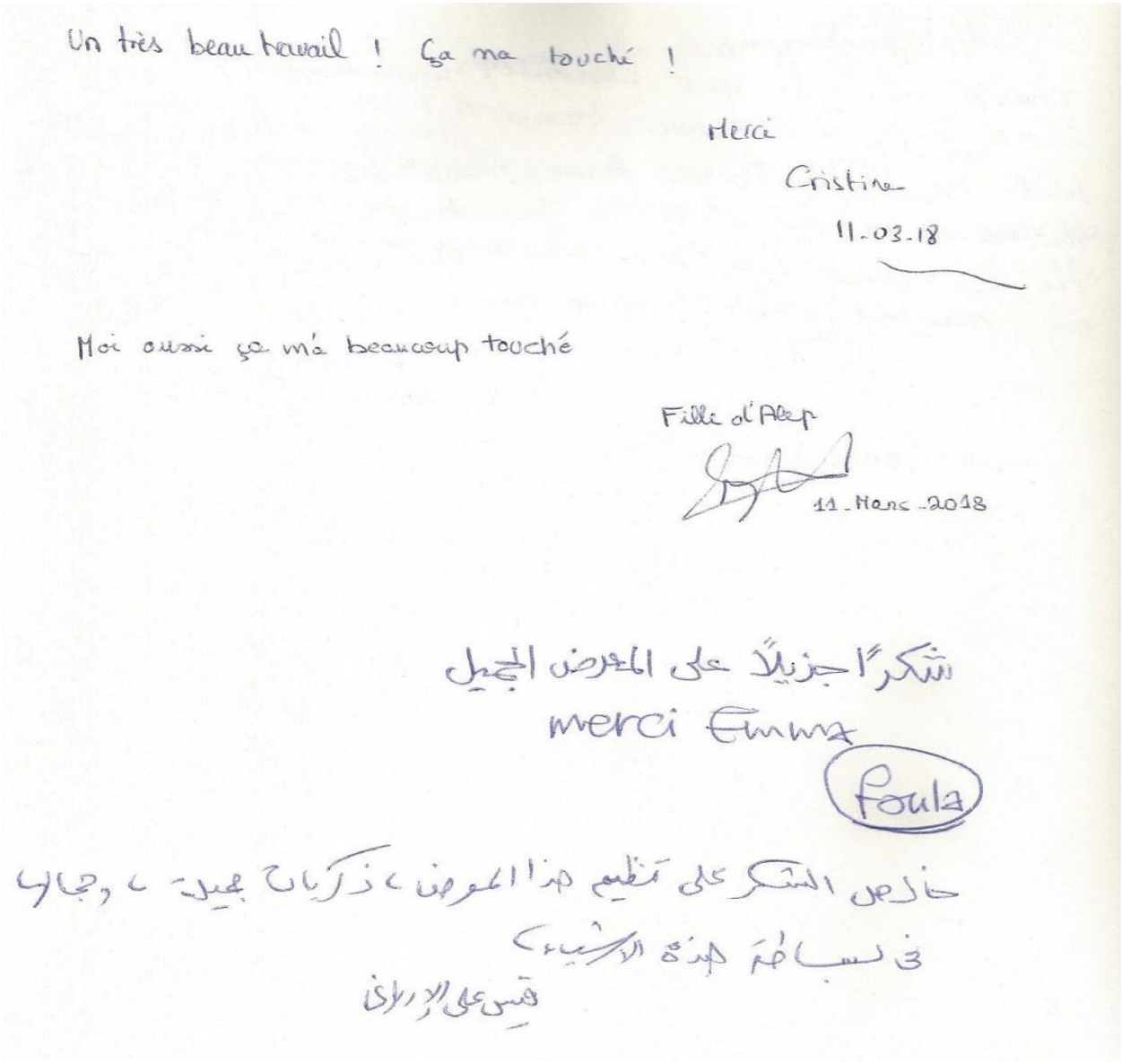

Figure 57. Emma Harake. *Guest Book.* 2018. [Thank you for organizing this exhibition. Beautiful memories, and their beauty resides in the simplicity of these objects, Qais the Jordanian]. *[Author's translation]*

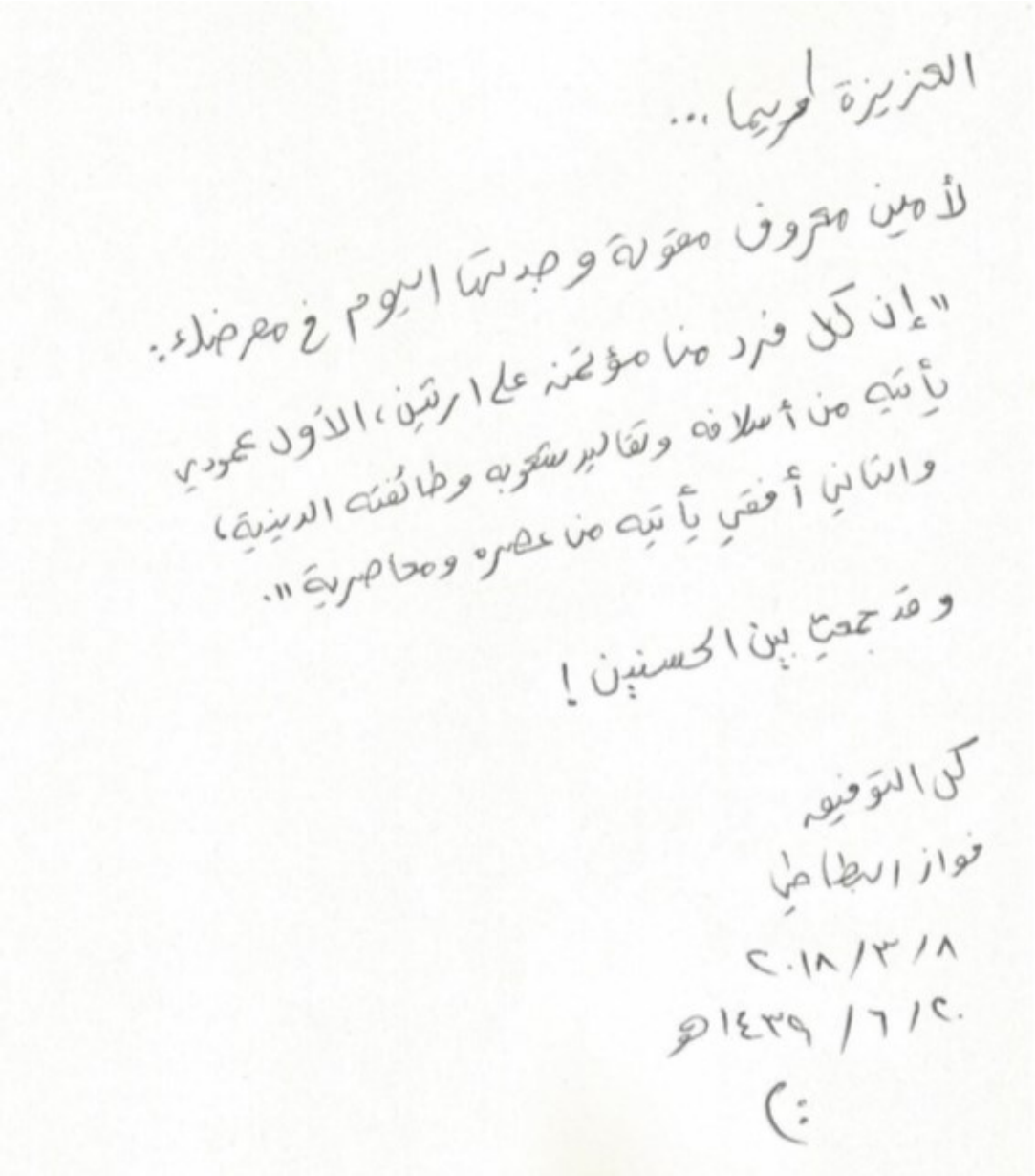

Figure 58. Emma Harake. *Guest Book.* 2018. [Dear Emma, Amin Maalouf says: "Each of us has two heritages, a "vertical" one that comes to us from our ancestors, our religious community and our popular traditions, and a "horizontal" one transmitted to us by our contemporaries and by the age we live in". You have bridged both! All best, Fawaz]. [Author's translation]

As an intervention in the discourse around immigration, *Arabic-Speaking Objects* creatively reinterpreted and challenged popular images of immigrants. Nevertheless, I believe exhibitions should always involve an encounter between people from diverse backgrounds in which the artists/participants don't claim a monopoly over meaning. So, while this collaborative endeavor served in part to demystify the experiences and feelings of these newcomers for longtime Canadiens, there were some instances where some visitors' preconceived ideas and beliefs were challenged. One visitor was baffled by Wissam's orthodox icon, insisting it cannot be an 'Arabic'-speaking object, because "Arabs are all Muslims". Another visitor argued that Palestinians never existed as 'real' people. Such interactions foregrounded the exhibition's role as a complex space of connection and conflict similar to any truly shared social space. To reduce this complexity to ignorance, as implied by a friend who was present at the gallery in one of the previously mentioned incidents, is not only simplistic, but problematic because it reproduces the inherently faulted dichotomy that literary and cultural theorist Edward Said questioned in *Orientalism* (1978). I am always wary when art exhibitions imply one cohesive and shared vision; and if this exhibition is any indicator, it describes a way of engaging with each other without homogenizing or aiming to create a stream of representation crystallizing the migrant identity as collective.

With this in mind, over the exhibition period I have also met with several Arabic-speaking visitors who disagreed with the use of spoken Arabic dialects in the accompanying wall texts, for example, an Algerian visitor expressed discord by saying: "This is not Arabic, I had to read the French translation to understand" (personal communication, March 8, 2018). It is

through such collisions that political classifications are questioned, and new meanings are constructed. The exhibition thus becomes a site of personalized authorship as both, participants and visitors, engage in acts of social agency.

Chapter Five:

Relevance/Implications for Art Education

For my thesis, I chose to work with a community with whom I identify in one way or another. This identification however is not to be undertaken in a reductive manner. Whereas, a blend of notions of memory, culture, language, belonging, displacement, community, along with individual personal experiences construct our migrant identities, each alone is not representative of the whole. By seeking personal narratives through objects, I invited the participants to consider their stories and identities from a critical position and consequently to pass them on, to bring notice to the impossibility of telling a single story of immigration and integration. I am hoping that my research-creation project will help in the emergence of a social space to engage audience beyond the academy with the narratives of recent immigrants.

By inviting new arrivals to express their identities in a new world through memories and stories harbored in personal objects, *Arabic Speaking Objects* is an attempt to redeem these memories and to create an account of the immigration experience which is more inclusive and diverse. Specific to the field of art education, I am interested in the pedagogical benefits to be gleaned from this research and whether there are any "social, personal, or moral purposes that are served by enabling students to become involved in such experiences" (Efland, 2004, p. 235). Though limited in scope, I am hoping that narratives shared by the participants might give researchers and educators a sense of how memory can be stimulated and used to promote the creative process of students (Darts, 2006, p.7). I believe that my entry point to creatively explore the memories and experiences of new immigrants may provide guidelines for teachers, as they engage with students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, by exploring

different ways of engaging with collaborative strategies and platforms, I am hoping to enable reflection on new types of relationships between academia and the public.

By engaging with the participants in a collaborative partnership, I am hoping to explore the "transformative potential" (O'Neil, 2008, p.18) of creative research methods. It is through meaningful conversations that we can critically engage, reinterpret, and share our individual stories. This is imperative to move towards truly inclusive and critical pedagogical practices, that allow people to be the producers, not consumers, of their own images and identities.

Limitations

Since the research involved a fairly small sample of recent immigrants in Montreal who come from Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt, it cannot be representative of a broader population, which is why in my choice of methodology I decided to privilege the depth of the participants' stories over including more voices, all the while supporting the research with the use of theory and literature (Leavy, 2015). This limitation also prevented me from addressing the intersectionality of politics of belonging or exploring the gendered and class dynamics of storytelling which could have generated more nuanced insights.

And even though the collaborative aspect of my project carried greater chances of social inclusion and engagement, it brought its own set of complications regarding the ethical dimension and notions of authorship and collectivity. It also exposed me for a range of different challenges as I had to repeatedly adjust my plans while engaging with issues of authorship, usefulness, uncertainty, aesthetics, time management and conflict resolution.

Finally, even though the exhibition experience yielded some positive surprises, given its short duration, its impact was limited to the number of people who walked through the door, supplemented, I hope, by those who might read about it in this thesis text.

Conclusions

Closing Thoughts and Future Actions

Using the framework of cultural studies and critical pedagogies, *Arabic Speaking Objects* used personal belongings of five recent immigrants as both a lens and an apparatus through which to converse about and make sense of the immigration experiences. Overall, the project resulted in engaging a myriad of discourses around the notion of objects as conceptual entities carrying with them the affective memory of the migration experience. The process highlighted the relational complexities of engaging in collaborative art making as well as the political implications of being our own producers of knowledge. Throughout the research, I engaged in re-thinking of conventional ideas of researcher/artist as main author and was invested in what and how the participants wanted to share their stories. I focused on fostering an ethical researcher-participant relationship based on compassion, empathy and shared authority (Frisch, 1990) to investigate the pedagogical impact of collaborative art practices on new immigrants' sense of identity and belonging, with specific reference to Montreal's diverse Arabic-speaking communities.

Reflecting on the spectrum of connections and the interest of many gallery visitors to be part of future iterations, I am ready to move on to the next phase of this ongoing collaborative endeavor. I want to invite participants with different class, regional origins and cultural backgrounds in Montreal to engage in this project, continuing and expanding its manifold forms of collaboration. I envision *Arabic-Speaking Objects* as growing into an on-going creative educational initiative with an emphasis on process: the act of description and recollection, the work of transcription and translation, the exhibition as a site to meet, discuss and solicit further

participation, the resulting images, texts and recordings as a resource to spur for reflection and analysis. Moving forward in collaboration with galleries and community centers, this initiative will have three components: series of public workshops, exhibition(s) in cultural centers across the city, and on-line dissemination presence accessible to the public. I look forward to next steps, building on what I've learned through the process so far.

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Appendix A

Sample Questionnaire – First Interview

Identification:

Where are you from? What is your age? What is your profession? When did you arrive to Montreal? How long have you been here? What are you doing now?

Background Questions:

What would you like me to know about your life in your country? Why did you decide to immigrate to Montreal? What would you like me to know about your life in Montreal?

Object/Artefact:

What is the object in the photograph? How would you describe it? Why did you choose to bring it with you to Montreal? Did you hesitate back in your country, when you were packing, before bringing it? Why is it important to you?

Can you tell me more about it? What is the story of this object? (When did you acquire it? Is it a gift? Did you buy it?... etc.). Looking at this photograph, what memories come to your mind? Where do you keep this object? (on display, in a drawer, box, ... etc.) How do you use it? Is it decorative? Functional? Is there any connection between this object and another one that you have chosen?

Which artefact/object is the one you prefer the most? Was there an additional artefact/object that you would have liked to include as part of this interview? Was there any artefact/object that you wanted to bring with you to Montreal but couldn't? (If yes, what? And why didn't you bring it?)

Did you consult anyone else (a family member or friend) in your choice of objects/artefacts?

Appendix B

Sample Questionnaire – Second Interview

The questions are based on the themes and issues that emerged from the first interview, as well as the visual qualities of the photographs:

Which objects do you think should be part of the exhibition? Why?

What is the picture about? What does it represent to you?

Listening to these audio files, do you think this image/object says things that you didn't expect it to?

What is the title of this photograph?

Have you thought about any text that should accompany this image?

What do you think people will see in this picture?

How do you suggest we communicate your meanings to the viewer (choice of text, audio, etc.)?

Appendix C

Sample Questionnaire – Feedback Questionnaire

If possible, explain your original idea and the process of pairing the text and image/object.

Do you feel represented by your final artwork? Why or why not?

Do you feel represented by your chosen object/photograph/text/audio?

Can you identify with the photographs and texts of other participants?

Do you think that your objects' meaning changes by being part of a collective art project that involves other people's ideas?

Do you think that your participation in this collaborative art project helped you to develop a better understanding of your own self-identity as a new immigrant? Can you elaborate?

Do you think that you learned something by participating in this collaborative art- making project? What makes you say that?

What was the most meaningful part of this process to you? Why?

Appendix D

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM
Study Title: *Foreign Speaking Objects*: A Collaborative Research-Creation Project Exploring Recent Immigrants' Narratives of Displacement and Settlement
Researcher: Emma Harake, Master's student in Art Education
Researcher's Contact Information: emmaharake@gmail.com
Faculty Supervisor: Kathleen Vaughan, Associate Professor, Department of Art Education
Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information: Kathleen.Vaughan@concordia.ca - (514) 848-2424 ext. 4677
Source of funding for the study: Not Applicable

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE
The purpose of the research is to explore the relationship between memories and personal objects of recent immigrants, using storytelling and photography.
This research will consist of a collaborative art installation that combines oral narratives in the form of audio recordings, photography, text and artifact, with findings discussed in a written scholarly text.

B. PROCEDURES
If you participate, you will be asked to:
1. Meet with the researcher for a preliminary meeting to talk about the project and to be informed about any other concerns about the study.
2. Take photographs: You will be asked to take photographs of up to five personal objects/artefacts of their choice that they have brought with you from your native homeland.
3. Keep a Journal: You will be asked to keep a journal in which you will write down your thoughts and ideas. If you are comfortable with it, you will be encouraged to share your reflections with the researcher during your upcoming interviews.
4. Participate in two interviews: The interviews will be audio recorded and will last for a minimum of one hour and a maximum of two hours. The researcher will end the interview immediately upon your request. Both interviews will be conducted at a location that the researcher and yourself agree on.

- In the first interview, you will be asked general question about your background and reasons for immigration, as well as stories or information about the objects/artefacts depicted in the photographs.
- In the second interview, the researcher will share short audio selections from the previous interview about each of the pictures. You will choose titles for your images and consult with the

researcher to produce a final selection of photographs and text/audio to be presented in a group exhibition.

5. Participate in a potential third interview: If by the end of the second interview, you still need time to reflect or reconsider your collaborative decision, you can schedule another interview with the researcher that will last for one-hour to share your reflections and make the concluding decisions about the collaborative art project.
6. Participate in an all-participant installation meeting: You will be invited to meet the other participants at the exhibition space to collaborate on the installation of the exhibition, taking each other's images and texts into consideration and contributing to the final decisions. You will also be invited to the vernissage, and are encouraged to invite your friends and family to the event as well, if you wish.
7. Answer a short feedback survey: After the art exhibition, you will be asked to answer a short questionnaire to reflect on their experience of the whole process
8. You will own the copyrights of all the photographs you take and your images and texts will be returned to you after the exhibition.
9. The researcher will write up the final research report and submit it as part of her Masters thesis, which will be available through Concordia's open source SPECTRUM website, as well as made public through conference presentations, exhibitions and articles. You will receive a copy of this document once it is complete.

In total, participating in this study will take approximately 5 hours of your time, spread out over the next six months, leading up to an exhibition in Winter 2018.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

You might face certain risks by participating in this research. These risks include: a chance that you may become upset during the discussion of your reasons for emigrating from your homeland or the current state of conflict in it or nearby nations. However, you have full authority over which questions to answer and whether you need a break or wish to end the interview.

Potential benefits include: the overall pleasure and learning of engaging in an art project; receiving digital copies of all your photographs and printed copies of your photographs that are chosen for the final presentation of the work; and potentially sharing your experience and creations with friends and family at the installation, if you wish to do so.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will gather the following information as part of this research:

1- Background information including your real name or a pseudonym.

- I want my identity to be shown _____ or concealed _____.
- If concealed, I choose that my identity be known by this pseudonym _____.

2- Photographs of your objects

3- Audio recordings of interviews.
4- Written transcripts of the interviews.
5- Journal entries that you wish to share with the researcher.
6- Feedback survey answers.
7- Selected sketches, images, texts, and audio clips that are part of the art installation
- For the purposes of the art installation, II want my audio recording to be used as is _____or have my voice altered to anonymize me _____

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

Within the researcher's data bank, the information gathered will be identifiable. That means it will have your name directly on it. However, no one other than the research team will access the information.

We will protect the information by: storing the data on the password protected hard drive of the researcher's computer. All information stored on paper will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home office. No one other than the researcher will have access to the data during post-production. Upon completion, images of your photographs and the audio files that are part of the art installation will be archived and made publicly accessible on SPECTRUM, as part of the researcher's MA thesis, as per university procedures.

We intend to publish the results of this research. Please indicate below whether you accept to be identified in the publications:
[ ] I accept that my name and the information I provide appear in publications of the results of the research.
[ ] Please do not publish my name as part of the results of the research. We will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher before [one month of the final art installation, in which case the data will be discarded].

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION
I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print) _____
SIGNATURE _____
DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.s

Appendix E

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant:	Emma Harake
Department:	Faculty of Fine Arts\Art Education
Agency:	N/A
Title of Project:	Foreign Speaking Objects: A Collaborative Research-Creation Project Exploring Recent Immigrants' Narratives of Displacement and Settlement
Certification Number:	30008331

Valid From: September 19, 2018 To: September 18, 2019

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee