

***In-Between: An Autoethnographic Inquiry into the Notion of Home***  
**amongst Palestinians living in the Diaspora**

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## ABSTRACT

### ***In-Between: An Autoethnographic Inquiry into the Notion of Home amongst Palestinians living in the Diaspora***

Lucine Serhan

This thesis uses research-creation, autoethnography and collaborative research-for-creation to explore the notion of home amongst Palestinians living in the diaspora. It is centered on the involvement of five participants, including myself, who guided the creation of an art installation combining participants' videos, accompanying text, postcards and oranges scattered on the floor of the gallery. This project allowed participants to use research-creation to conceptualize and represent their experiences through video and storytelling.

Using the framework of diaspora studies and identity, *In-Between* employed creative practices, self-reflective texts, collaborative exchanges with participants, and academic writing, to explore the way Palestinians use their memories and imagination to make sense of their personal and collective identities. Throughout the process I focused on fostering a collaborative and caring researcher-participant relationship to examine the pedagogical implications art practices have on art education.

The value of this research lies in grounding our lived experiences as Palestinians in creation and in theory. In relation to art education, this study shows educators how memory and imagination can be used to foster students' collaborative processes. It is my hope that this thesis would inform Autoethnographic researchers of Palestinian communities in exile in the future and encourage art students to use their respective socio-political location as an advantageous position for their research.

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- - - to *teta* and *jeddo*, you are my inspiration. This is dedicated to you!

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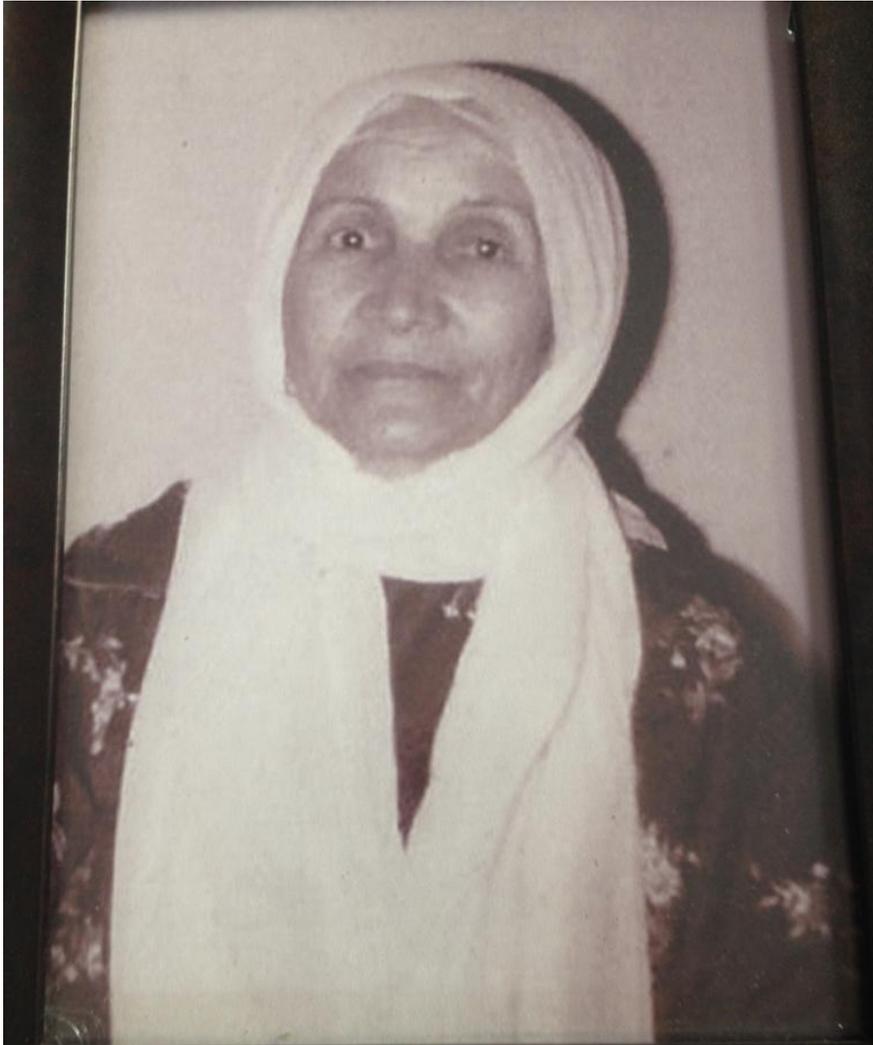
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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Positioning



**Figure 1.** Serhan, L., (2022). *Teta Aisha*. [personal photo].

June 2022 - It's pretty late. Like 11 pm. I am editing the first draft of this document. The screen lights up and I hear the notification sound of my phone. I got a message. I look at it and it's from my father. I unlock my phone and go straight to it. He sent a message to the family

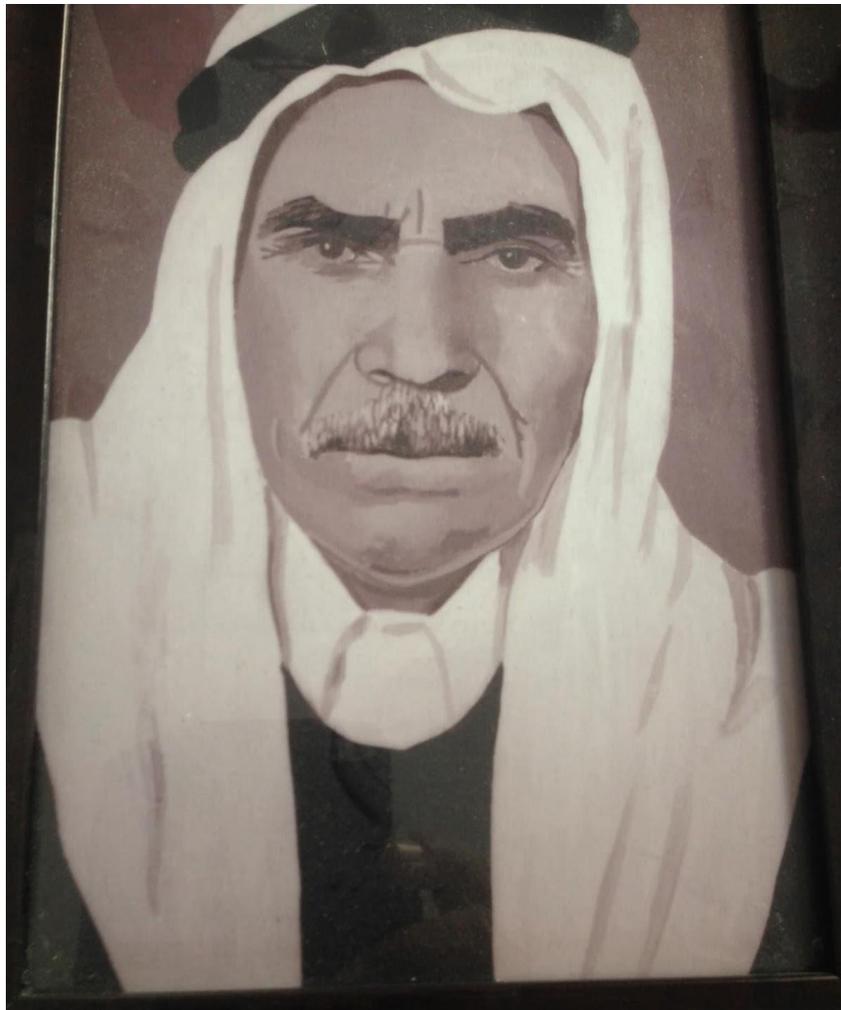
group on Whatsapp reminding us that it is the eighth year anniversary of my grandmother's death, Teta Aisha. I write back in Arabic:

Each time it rains, I remember my Teta in the house. The door is slightly open and she is boiling the tea. She puts olives with olive oil for Jeddo, and boils the tea with sage. She puts some yellow cheese and if someone is craving Fatteh, she would make some. All of us gather around the food. My relationship to Teta is built on memories, on fragrances: The scent of mattresses and the house, the scent of sage and her clothes. I remember how she used to sing while braiding her white hair in front of the house gate. She would contemplate, cry, wipe her tears and then laugh. I miss her so much, so much.

كل ما تشتي الدنيا بتذكر تيتا بالبيت وهي فاتحه شوي الباب وعم تغلي الشاي. بتحط الزيتون مع الزيت لجدو، وبتغلي الشاي مع مريميه وبتحط جنبه صفرا واذا حدا بدو فته بتعملوا بالصحن... ونقعد كلنا حولين السدر... علاقتي بتيتا مبنيه ع ذكريات الا كتير علاقة بالروايح. ريحة الفرش، ريحة الميرميه، ريحة باطون البيت وريحة تيابها. لما تقعد تغني وتجدل شعراتها البيض قدام البوابه... وتسرح وتبكي وترجع تمسح دموعها وتضحك... اشتقتلها كتير كتير.

My teta (grandmother in Arabic) comes back to me in a series of scents: Sage, Jasmine trees, bay leaves, freshly squeezed lemon and rose water. Memories imbued with scents tend to carry us back in time and space. These scents would carry me to her lap, as I am sure they carried her back to Palestine. Each night she would climb the ladder to the attic and start taking the mattresses down. She would usually start with mine because it is the smallest. My mattress was tiny and green and had white dots. Mayssa's mattress was orange and embellished with fruits. Zaher's mattress was dark blue with no embellishment. And by the time she got to Nizar's

mattress: “Ya Salam!”. Each segment of the mattress was different: Colors, flowers, threads and buttons. It was a huge mattress and the most comfortable one. Nizar was the first grandson and deserves a good night's sleep. After teta finished setting the mattresses, she would start telling us stories of accurately described places, inhabited by family members and nosy neighbors, scents, and tastes. My teta was the first storyteller in my life. Her stories carried me to a homeland I could only imagine, but one I knew was a real place because she was born and raised there. A place where she got married to jeddo (grandfather in Arabic) and had her first child.



**Figure 2.** Serhan, L., (2022). *Jeddo Raja*. [personal photo].

June 1982 - I was sitting on my grandfather's shoulders as he headed towards the beach. Seated upon these shoulders was my most favorite place in the whole world to be. He would smile and I would feel protected and strong. I was scared that day though. Israeli forces had launched a three-pronged invasion of southern Lebanon, and their mission was to destroy three refugee camps. I was scared because we had to leave our camp, "our corner of the world" (Bachelard, 1997, p.82). My grandfather must have sensed my fear. My grandfather told me that he was carrying me like he carried my father when they had to leave Palestine in 1948. He said that things will be Ok as long as future generations keep hope to return to our ancestral homes. I looked back and watched as the camp got further away. Living in a refugee camp complicated the question of home. I rested my hands atop his head and felt the soothing breeze. The Mediterranean seemed so vast, so endless. My legs could not touch the ground, but I felt as if I could touch the sky.

Isobel Blomfield, a Sydney-based lawyer working for the rights of asylum seekers and Caroline Lenette, a researcher of Refugee Studies, speak of how the views of refugees are not restricted to the experiences in their homeland but encompass their journeys and life in host communities that do not often treat them as equals (Blomfield and Lenette, 2018). Even as a child, I felt the tension between the desire to return to the land of my ancestors and the sense of belonging to the refugee camp in Lebanon. Before moving to Canada in 2009 I always felt that I had two homes: Palestine, my ancestral homeland and Lebanon, where I was born and raised. However, after becoming a Canadian citizen in 2014 something shifted in my notion of home. I felt as if my connection to Palestine became clearer while my sense of belonging to Lebanon as a country became more confused. Palestinians in Lebanon are barred from naturalization, retaining stateless refugee status. Most Palestinians in Lebanon do not have Lebanese citizenship and

therefore do not have work permits or Lebanese identity cards, which would entitle them to government services, such as health and education. They are also legally barred from owning property or entering a list of desirable occupations (El Hachem, 2020). Did I ever really belong there? Or was my sense of belonging limited to the life and culture in the refugee camp?

### **Palestinians in Diaspora**

When an eight-year-old Palestinian child living as a refugee in a small camp in Lebanon was asked to draw a picture of his home, he drew an aquarium. I was working with a group of children in the camp at the Ghassan Kanafani Cultural Foundation (GKCF) center. This little child wished for a mobile home that he could carry to wherever he would go in the future. I, like many others in GKCF at that moment, responded with silence. Our silence gave him the space to create the home of his imagination. And, what he made spoke volumes of what it means to have a home amongst Palestinian refugees.

This child and I lived through the same consequences of being a refugee in a foreign land. We inhabited a small space within a camp—a small area of tangled compact rooms, routes and houses. Houses, unlike most others, were stacked upright on top of each other to compensate for the lack of horizontal space, and devoid of any color. Narrow alleys that did not accommodate more than two people shoulder to shoulder, filled with the aroma of our food, running sewage water, occasionally interjected with intermittent cries of the children. Electric cables tangled up. Tiny coops, with no possibility for expansion, surrounded by walls so high that they almost reached the sky and swallowed the sun, the moon and all the stars. Ein El Hilweh – the beautiful eye – is a small country within a big country made of concentric circles of a deceitful game we had to play and over which we had no control. Thus, a home inside a home became the point of departure for my work.

Stories often brought colors to the drabness of our camp life. As a Palestinian refugee born in Lebanon, these stories are the foundation of what I came to understand of Palestine before we were forced to flee from our homeland. My life is marked by those stories; stories I have inherited and shared with others, imagined stories and true stories, stories that witness, and stories that are lived and embodied. I have used storytelling in my work, activism and personal life to bridge distances and to build relationships with others. I have always used storytelling to make sense of my identity and the world around me. On the one hand, the lack of amenities in the camp informed my idea of what a home must not be like, and on the other hand, the imagination that these stories elicited influenced my notion of home.

A Palestinian refugee living in Lebanon might learn a lot about their culture through their interaction with these stories from the past. However, storytellers have to recall some essential details about the stories they tell to be effective in their artistry. Refugees often have to creatively construct these elements from imagination to portray the memories of their homeland. It is the core foundation of one's individual identity and a collective identity that is different from the culture of the land of exile.

Based on all these thoughts and concerns, I wanted to explore the meaning of home and decided to develop a thesis project that brings together other refugee stories. Together, my four participants and I reflected on our own realities and conditions as Palestinians living in different countries, investigating our memories and imagination to reflect on the meaning of belonging, and conjure images of an imagined home through short videos.

My practice as an artist, an educator and facilitator, stretches over almost twenty years now, and involves working with Palestinian refugees living in camps and non-profit organisations. I have worked extensively with children, youth and women in trauma care and

collaboratively created theater performances and artworks that dealt with identity and belonging. This study is informed by both my lived experience and my work as an artist. To cultivate the scope for a rich interaction between art and the academy, I employed a combination of Research-creation and Autoethnography as my methodology. To that objective, I reviewed scholarly works on Diaspora Studies, Memory and Storytelling, and a selection of artwork by artists with a similar background and work history. The dissemination of the knowledge acquired by this study was accomplished through a collaborative art installation.

My thesis, *In-Between: An Autoethnographic Inquiry into the Notion of Home amongst Palestinians living in the Diaspora*, uses creative practices, self-reflective texts, collaborative exchanges with participants, and academic writing, to explore the way Palestinians use their memories and imagination to make sense of their personal and collective identities.

### **Research questions**

The questions that I pose for this research are:

- How can imagination and memory through storytelling and other art practices provide the foundation for the reclamation of personal and collective identities for people in the diaspora?
- How can the absence (or loss) of a homeland be apprehended, understood and preserved through art practices?
- What pedagogical implications might such art practices have on art education?

## **The Pandemic as my context**

The current circumstances of a global pandemic that brought the first wave of the virus to Canada in March 2020 require a special note.

I started my studies at the Art Education department in Fall 2019 and I was happy to pursue my graduate studies in a department that allowed me to engage in critical and meaningful conversations with other students and professors. By March, the Covid-19 pandemic had disrupted the world as we know it. Universities, schools, restaurants, cultural centers, etc. had closed. The present study was conducted during a time of unpredictability and uncertainty. In-person contact was restricted due to social distancing measures which brought up questions about the positive and negative aspects of the virtual world and remote communication. And while remote communication has always been part of the lives of refugee and immigrant communities who wish to stay connected with their families elsewhere, these technologies shifted from a chosen means of communication to a necessary one. Moreover, the uncertainty of the situation posed various challenges on how to proceed with my research. As schools, universities, restaurants, stores, cultural venues, travel, and more were forced to shut down, it became increasingly difficult to envision how the creative aspect of this work would be shared with the public. I will address some of these challenges and how they impacted my research in the upcoming chapters.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Theoretical Perspectives

My theoretical framework is based on two significant bodies of research: Diaspora studies and Identity. First, I introduce the concepts, then elaborate on key concepts. Then I provide a brief review of artworks by Palestinian artists.

### *Diaspora Studies and Identity*

Diaspora is often used to refer to the state of being away from one's ancestral land. According to Edward Said, the famed theorist of diaspora and orientalism, exile is not a choice. It is either something you are born into or something that happens to you and makes it an *alternative* (p.184); "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between self and its true home" (Said, 2000, p.173). As Palestinians born and raised in the diaspora, the longing for a homeland, the maintenance of collective ethnic identity and the feeling of belonging to one another are intense. For someone who never lived in their homeland, imagination is more an appropriate determinant of their narrative of home than their memory.

There are many debates around what can and cannot be considered a diaspora. In her article *Challenging the Theory of Diaspora from the Field*, young Berlin-based researcher of Diaspora, Migration, Cultural Diversity and Identity Anna Harutyunyan (2012) describes the most common attributes of diaspora:

- traumatic dispersal
- belonging to and longing for an ancestral homeland
- the wish to return to ancestral lands
- the collective knowledge of the ethnic identity

These indicate the critical role memory plays in preserving and sustaining this ethnic identity. There is also an undying hope for being reunited with their native land. Nevertheless, the question I cannot help but ruminate over here is: what if there is no way to return?

Kathleen Vaughan, the Research Chair in Art + Education for Sustainable and Just Futures, and a professor of Art Education at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada, asserts individuals may creatively develop a feeling of home through interdisciplinary means (Vaughan, 2009). She also notes that creating artwork in a new environment and context leads to creating artwork different from conventional works (2016). This assertion denotes that the notion of home does not have to be a static idea but an experience that can be creatively cultivated. Art plays a vital role in society as a memory preservation tool. It can preserve some of the fragmented memories and pass them across generations. These memories are not static recollections but ever-changing interpretations of past events. Creativity and art are crucial in preserving and passing on memories of homeland in the diaspora, especially for generations with the minimal recollection of their homeland. However, the feeling of belonging to and longing for one's homeland makes diaspora theory important in understanding the members of these groups' personal and collective identities and their interaction with art.

### **Key Concepts and Resources Review**

In this section I discuss some of the key concepts that inform my project and place it within broader scholarship and the work of researchers and artists whose interests are aligned with mine.

## *Nakba*

"The contemporary history of the Palestinians turns on a key date: 1948. That year, a country and its people disappeared from maps and dictionaries... 'The Palestinian people don't exist', said the new masters and henceforth the Palestinians would be referred to by general, conveniently vague terms, as either "refugee" or in the case of a small minority that had managed to escape the generalized expulsion, "Israeli Arabs." A long absence was beginning." (Sandbar 2001, p87).

Nakba translates to Catastrophe in English. According to multiple Palestinian historians and researchers (Hadawi, 1967; Abu-Lughod, 1971; Khalidi, 1971), in 1948, Palestine and its people were shattered; over 500 villages and cities were destroyed. The 1948 war resulted in the establishment of Israel and the catalyst for Palestinian society's repression. More than 77 percent of Palestinians living in the central part of Palestine on which Israel was established became refugees. The Palestinians who stayed behind, estimated to be between 60,000 and 156,000, were nominal residents of the new Jewish state. Palestinians in the West Bank came under Jordanian control, while those in the Gaza Strip, which borders Egypt, came under Egyptian administration. In 1967, Israel imposed military occupation on both regions (Sa'di and Abu-Lughod 2007).

## *Remembrance of Homeland*

Over the decades, Nakba has emerged as what Pierre Nora (1989) refers to as a "site of memory (Lieux de Memoire)" for the Palestinians, a site that is marked with traumatic dispossession of their homes. An overall cultural and geo-political erasure followed this

dispossession. The question that arises then is how does a community forge a sense of collective identity in such a situation?

A collective identity is formed by stories they have inherited from their kin for those born in the diaspora. My lived experience, as mentioned in the introductory section, vouches for the same. I am a Palestinian refugee. I was born in the diaspora and have never been to Palestine. My identity as a Palestinian developed entirely from my grandparent's and my father's stories – the little that he could remember, and from the camp – my tiny world where I lived for the first ten years of my life.

Paul Gilroy (1993), a historian, writer, and academic, argues that people living in a diaspora can maintain a sense of collective identity and culture in a transnational mind despite living in another country for decades. Therefore, recollecting memories is just as important as creativity and imagination in developing relationships between people in exile and their lands.

### *Storytelling: Inherited Memories and A Rite of Passage*

Storytelling has been an essential aspect of human cultures for centuries. A study by Ash Değirmenci, professor of English Literature and a researcher of collective memory and social identity in Hacettepe University Turkey, revealed that storytelling is an effective tool for passing on information about a particular culture and its traditions from one generation to the other (Değirmenci, 2018). The study also shows that most cultures depend on storytelling precisely because of that reason.

Storytelling is also a fundamentally collective exercise. It is not an individualistic undertaking. When I think of the stories that I grew up with, I am constantly reminded of others. Children gathered in an intimate setting – as much as a refugee camp afforded – witnessing. Stories about food, names, lullabies, poetry, art and so on. The big picture of occupation is hardly

in those stories. As opposed to a static recollection of the occupation, bits and pieces of fragmented memories gave way to a continuously evolving interpretation of the past events. Laila Colomer (2013), a senior interdisciplinary researcher researching the role of cultural heritage in remembering, meaning-making and construction of identity, asserts that refugees in exile often have to balance living in a new reality whereby they are immigrants in a host society remaining attached to their homeland. Storytelling aided this process for us.

There is also a typical way of naming the children. Bisan, Jaffa, Majdal, for example, are the names of thousands of Palestinians who carry the memory of their occupied cities and villages safely tucked into their names. Mahmoud Darwish, whose palpable description of the anguish of exile in his poetry has brought him the status of Palestine's National Poet, points out, "إننا كفلسطينيين نرى بلادنا ومدننا التي هجرنا منها سنة ١٩٤٨ بعيون اطفالنا لذلك نسمي بناتنا بأسماء مدنها". (Darwish as quoted in Rahman, 2021) which translates to "We Palestinians scour our home and cities, from which we were displaced in 1948, with the eyes of our children, this is why we call our daughters the names of their cities". Thus, in this context, storytelling becomes an act of active collective recollection and contemporary interpretation at the same time.

### ***Identity: Spaces Collectively Inhabited***

Dan P. McAdams, who formulated the idea of the life story model of identity, argues that identity refers to the internalized yet ever-evolving story of how people have become what they are at a given point in time (McAdams, 2019). The cultural heritage and the collective identity of any cultural group result from centuries of existence and experiences. They are often passed down to future generations using various forms of art. In the context of constructing memory for future generations, Hans DK Codée and Ewoud Verhoef's work becomes necessary to mention. These two used art to witness the decay of radioactive waste in the Netherlands, and argued that

such depiction can add value to something as redundant as waste and keep its associated memory alive (Codée and Verhoef, 2015). From their work, I gathered that storytelling is not the only form of art apt for preserving a cultural group's memory. Their work aims to preserve social memory for over 100 years. Art leaves much scope for interpretation, paving the way for imagination in understanding. Cultural groups have collectivized identities because they have a common source of influence. This factor contributes to the passage of memory and the approaches used to achieve such a feat.

Therefore, the development of identity through art, which can work as a counter-narrative to mainstream ideas, might result from the interaction between memory and creativity. Artists can create narratives through their work about cultural identities in different ways because of imagination and consideration of contextual factors. So, it becomes imperative to look at both the current context of art creation and the role memories of the past plays in it.

### *A brief review of Artworks by Palestinian Artists*

Palestinian artists living in exile have always used art as an expression of freedom, and at the same time, a quest for belonging. I have drawn inspiration from two artists' selection of relevant work for this research-creation:

- Mona Hatoum  
(<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/mona-hatoum-2365/who-is-mona-hatoum>)
- Emily Jacir (<https://universes.art/en/nafas/articles/2003/emily-jacir>)

Home and homeland are recurring themes in Mona Hatoum's work, especially since the 1980's. Her artwork uses both the materials and the space to represent her experience of displacement. In some of her well-received works, *Remains to be Seen* (Hatoum, 2019) and *Hot*

*Spot* (Hatoum, 2013), she uses a network of wires, metal rods and concrete chunks to depict devastations well contained in geometric structures. They resemble skeletal remains of the body after the flesh has been violently purged from it and, alternatively, a demolished structure after the house has been bombarded. Created in a more personal spirit, her work *Grater Divide* (Hatoum, 2002) uses a six-foot-long cheese grater to depict the destructive potential of blowing everyday household objects out of proportion. As a migrant artist, the notion of home is weighted, and a concrete identity is often lacking. It is not easy to find a linear understanding of the present in relationship with the past and finding a sense of belonging within it is even more difficult.

Moreover, Hatoum employs a subjective and intuitive approach to create art that captures her own experiences with displacement, while implicating the viewer with the essence of her estrangement. Her work is deeply personal, and at the same time, it oozes out a universal epiphany. Like Hatoum, I wanted to visually bring the other to a physical encounter with the core of the subject matter and thereby explore the possibility of building an intimate space.

Emily Jacir is another Palestinian artist whose work focuses on displacement and identity. Her artistic practice is invested in silenced historical narratives and ways to resist and transform them by investigating the personal and collective movement across public spaces.

In her installation titled *Where we come from* (Jacir, 2001-2003), Jacir attempts to provide an answer to the question of belonging. A Palestinian refugee is often asked where they come from, and the answer is never short. It is a long story with complicated loops; it is about people and places that no longer exist in reality but only in memory and the imagination. In her process, Jacir began with a simple question: "If I could do anything for you in Palestine, what would it be?". She received a list of wishes from Palestinians in exile – "Go to the Israeli post office in

Jerusalem and pay my phone bill." or "Drink the water in my parents' village." She eventually fulfilled the wishes in their homeland. Thus, her work became a collaboration of many little moments to tell one story. Like Jacir, I also wanted to pose a hypothetical question that encouraged the participants to use their imagination and to think of answers that are concrete, feasible and intimate.

Our memory may be altered and exaggerated to become the root of the imagination and creativity on which we count. It is not a particularly bad thing. Ellyn Lyle, an academic researcher of critical pedagogies, lived experience and identity, believes that artwork can formulate counter-narratives for renegotiations of individual and collective identities. Beliefs and assumptions can influence the perception of individuals on factors that matter such as their heritage and cultural backgrounds (Lyle, 2016). However, it is only through imagination that assumption on cultural factors is possible.

### **Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology**

I approached this research through creative art practices. It resonates with the subject of my research; a homeland long gone out of reach and hence cannot fully be known. German artist Ines Seidel says, "The line between the speakable and the nameless calls to be explored with all the senses." (Seidel, 2018) Therefore, this study was conducted using two primary research methods: Research-creation and Autoethnography.

#### **Research-creation**

"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 various 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, 2020).

Research-creation entails a critical intersection between art practice, research, and theoretical concepts. It is an unpredictable experimental endeavor. It does not begin with a determined hypothesis but an inquiry that takes the research process into previously unexplored territories paving the way for gaining "unique insight into the human knowing and understanding" (Sullivan, 2005, p. xvii). As I have already discussed, creative imagination compensates for the lack of primary data in developing the notion of homeland amongst Palestinian refugees. The inclusion of art in the project expanded the subjective narrative and

created a unique yet relevant insight into human knowledge compared to conventional research. (Loveless, 2015).

Erin Manning, research-creation practitioner, artist and professor at Concordia University, Montreal, Canada, states that research-creation is an effective tool for creating experiences. It makes a new form of knowledge that does not have to rely upon scholarly records. On the one hand, Palestine's history becomes the mainstream narrative contingent on various external political factors. So, no data can be reliable enough to provide a legitimate ground for a critically informed artwork that aspires to portray the profoundly personal and collective notion around the refugees' home. On the other hand, Research-creation made it possible for art to be used creatively to include a practical expansion on the little secondary information available. Research-creation turned the project into an experience because it entailed more than collecting data and making sense of it in abstraction devoid of emotional engagement. Research-creation created an opportunity to use creativity to depict their homes, whatever it means for them today.

### **Autoethnography**

"Stories are the way humans make sense of their worlds" (Ellis, 2004, p. 32). We tell stories to get a deeper understanding of ourselves. According to Adams, Jones and Ellis (2014), stories allow us to have a more contemplative and meaningful conversation. Autoethnography uses one's own stories and experiences to interpret oneself and others, cultures and politics in social research. Autoethnography is a form of storytelling that helps the researcher "better understand the relation to others in culture" and create a link between oneself and the other (Spry, 2011, p. 51).

Diana Taylor, a prominent scholar of Performance Studies, in her ground-breaking work *The Archive and The Repertoire*, argues the repertoire of embodied practice is a system of

knowing and transmitting knowledge. The formulation of embodied practice as a knowledge-generating process requires us to devise different strategies to gather information and analyze that information. (Taylor, 2003, P. 26) For something to be known, it needs to be framed as an object of knowledge. This formulation demands a re-alignment in the relationship between the researcher and the researched subject. Autoethnography provides "(1) analytic reflexivity, (2) a visible and active researcher, (3) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (4) commitment to a theoretical agenda of understanding lived experience" (Crawley, 2012, pp.153).

Critics have described Autoethnography as a "self-indulgent" (Sparkes, 2002), "heartfelt" (Ellis, 1999), and "evocative or emotional" (Sparkes, 2002) process. They are precisely the components of which traditional ethnographic research is devoid. It "acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than avoiding or assuming these issues do not exist" (Ellis et al., 2010, p. 275). It makes the researcher visible and works towards a non-hierarchical relation between the researcher and the researched subjects. It makes the process collaborative. Thus, autoethnographers "research themselves in relation to others" (Boylorn and Orbe, 2014, p.17). It is a "research, writing, story, and method that connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political" (Ellis, 2004: xix). These considerations made autoethnography a viable choice for me for this study.

### **Collaborative Research-for-Creation**

Over the last twenty years, I have developed a series of art performances and storytelling workshops to explore issues of identity and belonging. As an art educator, I use my experiences as a performer and storyteller to explore with my students and collaborators the ways our perceptions of identity and belonging affect the way we see ourselves and relate to the other.

The entry point of the study is the big question all refugees often face: what is the notion of home? This question gives way to the immediate next one: what does it mean to belong to that home? Defining the word home is always a struggle for me and most people with a similar background. My grandmother's memories about our village in northern Palestine have been imbued in me. My stories about my homeland accompany me from place to place as if I carried home in my suitcase – complete with photos, herbs, stories, and objects. I wanted to include other voices in the telling of my story.

In the diaspora, we make sense of our world together through shared stories and conversations. Collaboration is the very fabric of that process of making sense of our reality. Moreover, artist Emily Jacir's approach of engaging with others to make meaning of her own experiences has influenced my decision to include other voices.

The creative aspect of the study was a video installation with four other Palestinians who have always lived in the diaspora. A collaborative research-for-creation process allowed me to gather relevant information which in turn informed my creation and opened up an artistic process and an outcome. According to Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, professors of Communication Studies in Concordia University, Quebec, Canada, this gathering of information that is geared towards revealing the future is as much research as is collating information from journal articles (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2012, p.15).

## **Participants**

In order to carry out the collaborative research-for-creation aspect of this project, I reached out to five Palestinians who are currently living in different countries, including myself.

I recruited the other four participants through secondary sources. I started by reaching out to people and organizations that I have worked with previously to help me find participants.

First, I reached out to Hicham Kayed, Deputy General Coordinator of the Arab Resource Centre for Popular Arts generally referred to as JANA. Al-JANA works with communities that face marginalization and with Palestinians inside and outside the refugee camps in Lebanon. I shared the project description with Hicham and asked for his help to find two participants. After exactly two days, Hicham informs me that two people are interested in participating: Fadia Khorbity and Dareen Miliji, Hicham's wife. He said that Dareen felt the project was special and wanted to be involved as much as possible. I communicated with Fadia and Dareen through Whatsapp.

A few days later, Hicham informed me that another Palestinian guy was interested to participate. His name was Ahmed Alaydi and he currently lives in Norway. We communicated through Facebook messenger.

In addition to Hicham, I reached out to Moataz Dajani, one of the founders of Al-JANA who was currently living in Jordan. Through Moataz, I met the Palestinian/Jordanian activist who then withdrew his participation.

Hicham then put me in touch with one of their collaborators in Jordan. He said that this person could help with recruiting other participants. I shared the recruitment information with Yemen who after a few days informed me that two people were interested to participate. I contacted one of them. Her name was Rahma Mughrabi and she was curious to talk with me and learn more about the project after having received the initial recruitment info.

After the initial conversation, I shared the written consent form (see Appendix A) with the participants and went through the document with each of them to ensure obtaining informed consent. All participants signed the form informing them about the details of the project and its goals with the provision that they are free to withdraw their participation up until thirty days after they share their recording. All of them wanted to have their identity known

The participant ages ranged from 30 to 58. All participants are adults who have never visited Palestine. I decided to reach out to participants who have never visited Palestine because I wanted to explore the role of imagination and memory in recreating their notion of home. Of the five participants who contacted me, one of them (Palestinian/Jordanian) did not continue because he had concerns about maintaining his confidentiality. He was an activist and community organizer who told me about a previous experience when a journalist promised him confidentiality but ended up using his name which caused him legal problems. We went through the consent form together and discussed his options regarding confidentiality. When I noticed he still had hesitations, I told him to take some time to think about his participation and informed him that he was under no obligation to participate. After one week, he let me know that he couldn't participate because he had other projects to work on.

At the time of the research, I lived in Montreal. Two of the four other participants lived in Lebanon, one lived in Jordan, and one in Norway. I asked each participant to share a short bio to introduce themselves. And while this project aims to collect experiences of Palestinians living in diaspora, having another citizenship or legal status was not a limiting condition. Some of them still live as refugees in the countries where they were born while others currently reside and work in different countries and hold other nationalities. After the first occurrence, I refer to the participants by their first name throughout this text.

Participant's General Information

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Place of Birth</b>	<b>Place of Residence</b>	<b>Legal Status</b>
Ahmed Alaydi	34	Architect and Urban Planner	Kuwait	Norway	Norwegian Citizen
Fadia Khorbity	58	Worker in the educational and community refugee sector	Lebanon	Refugee Camp, Lebanon	Palestinian Refugee
Dareen Miliji	36	Program Coordinator	Libya	Beirut, Lebanon	Palestinian Refugee
Rahma Mughrabi	30	Project Coordinator	Jordan	Jordan	Jordanian Citizen
Lucine Serhan	46	Artist/educator	Lebanon	Montreal, Canada	Canadian Citizen

Table 1

## Procedures

After having obtained their informed consent, I asked each participant to record a video, no longer than five minutes, in which they shared their answers to the following proposed questions encouraging them to reflect on their interpretation of home.

- What is the sense of home? What constitutes a home for you?
- If you could visit Palestine for only one day, what would you do?

They recorded the videos using their smartphones or a video camera, if they had access to one. Each participant had a one-month time frame to record their video before sharing it with me. I encouraged the participants to keep a journal and to contact me should they have any questions and wish to converse. While some of the participants needed little guidance in the creation of their artwork, others required a lot of mentoring. In addition to being part of the final installation, the other four participants' videos helped me create my own video and accompanying artworks as they allowed me to delve deeper into the personal and collective memories that have kept the past alive. All the videos were part of the final installation which included, in addition to the videos, a series of drawings representing my artistic interpretation of the notion of home which I printed as postcards. I will talk more about this and about the pedagogical and collaborative aspect in the “Working Process” section.

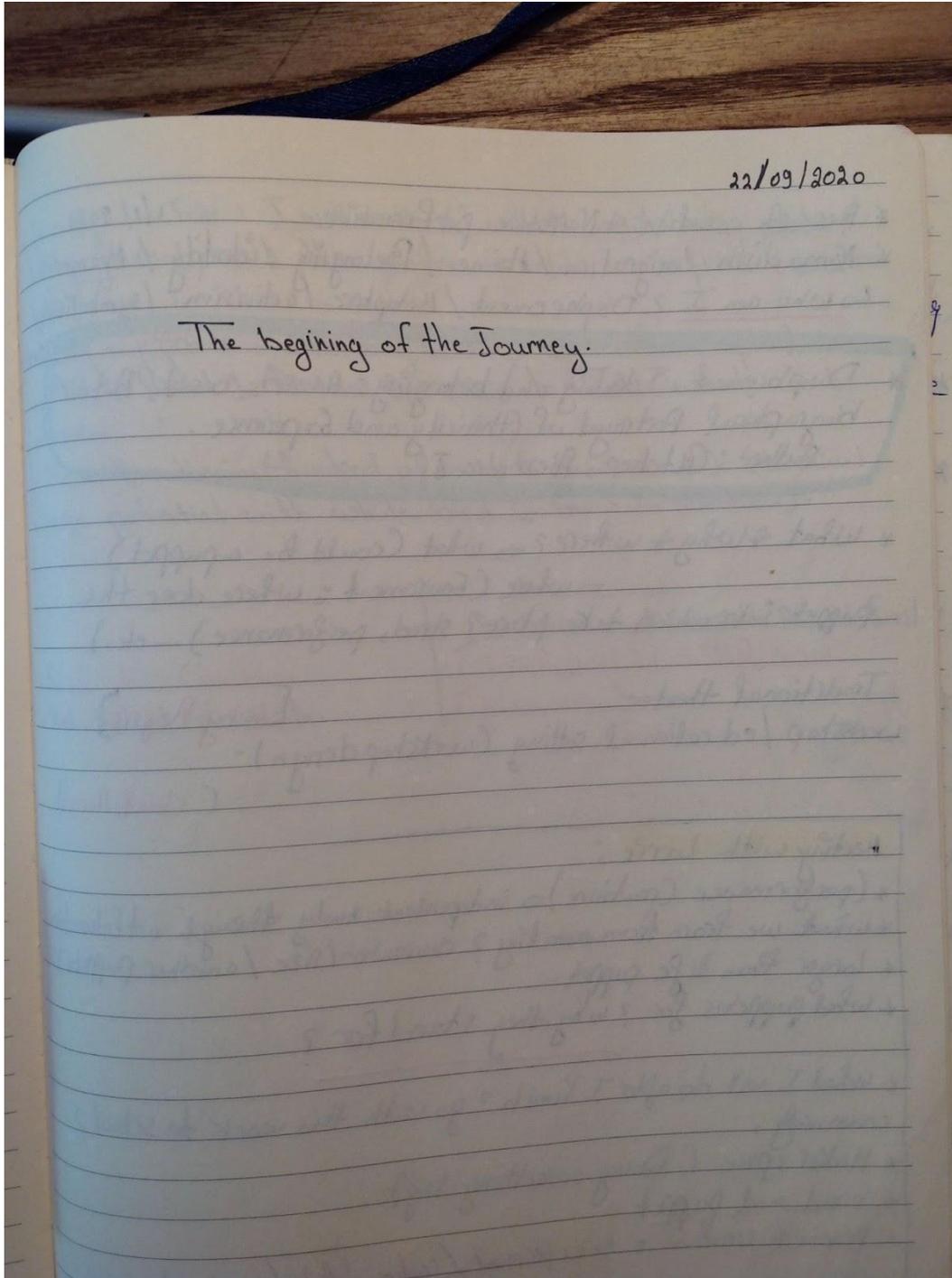
One of the main sources of data collection in autoethnographic research is the experience of the researcher. Moreover, research-creation allows us to do away with writing and reflection as a complimentary separate body of work. My collaborative endeavors with participants, my critical engagement and reflections on available literature had a reciprocal relationship with the final artwork. I captured my experiences and reflections using a daily journal, visual diary entries, and personal photographs. My data also included the stories and videos collected from

participants, arts-based materials and personal communication. Since research-creation does not follow an already determined trajectory, journaling as process documentation helped me retrospectively look at the multiple points of departures that were emergent during the process. This documentation enabled me to visualize the art-making processes and document all the steps taken in the creative aspect of the study.

Creativity, for my part, entailed merging the information collected from the participants and my experiences to create an installation on the experience of home in Palestine. There are cultural aspects of the lives of the Palestinian refugees that informed this study on how a Palestinian community would look back in Palestine.

### **Working Process**

Since memory is unreliable, I rely heavily on my research notes and on the voice notes and texts and videos exchanged with the participants as my source material for writing this section. To me, these conversation logs are important, intimate and truthful documents of the working process of this project and of the trust cultivated between me and the participants. As mentioned above, the project involved, personal artmaking process for all of the participants, collaborative explorations and informal pedagogical processes.



**Figure 3.** Serhan, L., (2022). *Notebook*. [personal photo].

What is the sense of home? What constitutes a home for you? And if you could visit Palestine for only one day, what would you do? For each participant the project involved

reflecting on these questions, coming up with personal answers, and finally creating a short video. This work started with initial conversations that gradually became meaningful and significant. All of these conversations took place virtually as we were living in different places. And even though the conversation took place through WhatsApp or other video-conferencing platforms, this did not prevent us from developing an intimate and warm relationship. I believe that part of this has to do with the fact that all of us have family elsewhere and we use these means of communication regularly to connect with them. I wanted the participants to feel comfortable and at ease with the whole process, especially those who were not artists or who have not worked with video or editing software before. During our initial phone call, Fadia was very warm and she wanted to know from which city in Palestine I come from - a question which comes up whenever two Palestinians encounter each other for the first time. We also found out that she knew my mom because they used to work together - a fact neither of us knew before that conversation. Dareen was also very excited but it took more time to schedule a time to speak. She is a mother of three and works a full-time job. She assured me that she was excited to participate and had no hesitations. I respected her time limitations and gave her more space to participate on her own terms. The initial conversation with Ahmed lasted for 45 minutes. He asked for more information about the project and shared information about his life in Norway. Likewise Rahma shared her excitement to participate and details about her personal life during our initial conversation.

After the initial conversation, I asked each of them to think about the questions and to send me a proposal if they felt they wanted someone to consult with. I suggested that their answers should be based on personal memories and on their own lived experiences in the countries where they are residing. I gave them complete freedom to create their own videos. I

initially planned to edit the videos adding a title slide to make them consistent. But I discarded this option after I started receiving the videos and as the final scheme of the installation became clearer and clearer with time.

In the month that followed, I made myself available to all of them. I communicated with most of them on a weekly basis, and with some, on a daily basis. I tried to be as present and supportive as possible without imposing my vision on them. I realized that some of them were eager to help and finished quickly because this was my masters project. Therefore, I decided to take the time to develop a trustful and meaningful relationship with each of them, encouraging them to slow down, to experiment, and to find their own voice. I wanted them to feel confident to come up with their own ideas and answers to the questions asked.

Some of them started with writing the text while others started filming before finalizing their texts. Some struggled and had questions about the content, while others, like Daren posed more technical questions about filming techniques. Daren informed me when she was filming and sent me her finished video first. The video was beautifully captured and edited so I did not suggest any changes. And even though I suggested the 5 minutes format, I thought it might be too long. Around the same time, Rahma shared her initial text with me. The text was long and had many biographical details at the start making it sound more like a journalistic interview. During our conversations, I encouraged Rahma to try and forget that she was being filmed and to focus on her personal experiences. Rahma also confided that she added the biographical details at the beginning because she wanted to lengthen her video to make it the 5 minutes limit I asked of them before. So I told the rest of the participants that they did not have to stick to the five minutes format. Rahma asked for an extension because of life and work responsibilities. When she sent me her final video, I was extremely satisfied. In addition to the thoughtful text and

visuals, she used original music for her video after taking permission from the musician to use it. The piece is titled “If only time was” by Ashraf ElZiftawi. I realized that working and collaborating with other participants meant being flexible and allowing my collaborators the time to develop truthful and meaningful creations.

Ahmed also needed additional time to work on his video. He wanted to capture new footage and to gather images from his previous travels to incorporate into one video. After he shared the new footage with me, he had to travel for personal reasons. He promised to edit the video and add the audio after his return to Norway. Ahmed later called to ask whether I could wait a little bit. He was going to the United States and he wanted to ask a friend to interview him there. I really liked this idea because I felt his video would be more personal and therefore Ahmed’s voice might be stronger.

Fadia was very motivated and she was the participant I worked closely with the most. We communicated on a daily basis exchanging voice notes, texts and videos. In total, Fadia shared 34 short videos with me - some of them footage of shops and vendors and the streets and alleyways of the Borj-Al-Barajneh Refugee Camp. Fadia dressed in her traditional Palestinian thobe (dress) three times a week and went out asking her daughter to film her walking in the alleyways of the camp. For Fadia, who is the only participant living in a refugee camp, images from the past were present in the first few clips she shared with me, a past that was preserved as idyllic and safe in a country that was her homeland. The initial videos were also more general where Fadia talked more about the idea of Palestine while reciting poems by Palestinian poets. I urged her to reflect on the present and her lived experiences in the camp. I encouraged her not to fill all silences in the video and asked about what she was hoping to convey. Fadia wanted the video to be a reflection of her daily life in the camp (personal communication, November 7,

2021), so I suggested she think less about the filming process and only film activities that are part of her daily routine.

I was careful not to be too demanding because of the challenges living in a refugee camp with electricity cuts and precarious living conditions, but at the same time, I wanted Fadia to dig deep and come up with personal answers to the questions asked. A large body of Palestinian literature and art emphasize the small picture; the personal and the subjective instead of the big picture. One of Vaughan's (2016) creative works, "imagining a textile work that superimposes a version of the country and this small town (Reykjavik)," speaks of the small scenery in the big picture. I did not want Fadia to be content with the generic or more general answers. Every time she would send me new footage, we would discuss the process and content. After a few conversations, I realized that the questions were too general and that Fadia needed more guidance. I asked if it was okay to send her additional questions prompting her to reflect more concretely about her lived experiences as a Palestinian woman in the camp. I chose the following question carefully based on the previous content she shared with me, while respecting her previous proposals:

- Let's start from your name. Your name is Fadia but everyone is calling you Um-Bissan. Who is Bissan? Why is she named Bissan?
- Does the name change its meaning when connected to the earth?
- Where were you raised? What does the camp mean for you?
- What do you feel having lived all these years in this camp?
- Is it a place that makes you feel a sense of belonging? What about the people, the objects, the alleyways, etc.

- What is a homeland for you? Try to think of what is home beyond being a place? What role does being in camp play in your understanding of the notions of home and belonging?
- How do you feel that you are not living in Palestine?
- If the borders were open for only one day to visit Palestine and you knew that you had to leave in exactly 24 hours, where would you head and what would you do first, second, third? Try to envision that you are really spending one day there, what would you do? How would you feel? What questions would you have?

Fadia was very generous with her time and throughout our conversation we made formal, visual and textual decisions in relation to her vision.

Throughout the whole process, I spent a good deal of time reflecting on what I would or would not do. As I consulted and conversed with the participants helping them to find their voices, I struggled a lot with finding mine. Autoethnography involves a continuous process of self-reflectivity, “a back-and-forth movement between experiencing and examining a vulnerable self and observing and revealing the broader context of that experience” (Ellis, 2007, p. 14). To that extent, I kept a daily journal that documented the changes that occurred in the course of my research. The journal also chronicled my feelings and thoughts throughout the process. I also kept a visual diary of simple black and white drawings. Later, I introduced color to this series. The more I drew, the more the drawings started to come together. I decided to use some of these drawings as part of the final installation in the form of postcards (see figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Serhan, L., (2022). *Postcards*. [View from installation]. Photo: Lucine Serhan

I kept journaling in Arabic and English, cycling between the autoethnography, literature, my extensive notes, and my multiple conversations with participants. It was then that the image of the orange first emerged as a symbol of home and the land left behind. However, and contrary to what I envisioned, I found it extremely challenging to figure out what I wanted to create - besides the idea of oranges. I felt that my work had to be creative, imaginative, and educational while being intimate and authentic. Moreover, I did not want my work to overshadow theirs, but at the same time I wanted to acknowledge the complexity of my position as a Palestinian refugee and as a researcher who gets to make the final decisions about the installation. Initially, I came

up with the idea of creating a number of miniature houses that would be suspended from the ceiling, to represent the notion of a ‘home in between’ which neither touches the ground nor the sky. Later, I thought about using small birdhouses to create one big home. I was thinking about how the birds migrate from one place to another, but they always have a home to return to. It wasn’t till I started receiving the videos from the participants that I felt the urge to add my voice to theirs. I wanted to tell my story in my own words. In that sense, it was the conversations I had with them that allowed me to find my voice. To that end, I thought about creating a performance where I would perform behind a screen, while the four videos would be shared on four different screens. The limitations and uncertainty imposed by the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic had an impact on my decision to move away from the idea of a live performance.

When I received the ethics approval in August 2021<sup>1</sup>, the idea of hosting an in-person installation or performance seemed extremely challenging and unreliable because of the restriction of the COVID 19 pandemic. The uncertainty of the situation posed various challenges on how to envision the final installation: Would I have access to a venue to host the event in person? Can I plan a performance? Or will my research findings be shared with the public through an online screening?

Moreover, as I received more and more videos, I was also warming up to the idea that I wanted to create a video following the same parameters I asked of my participants. Hence, I decided to film a video to reflect and come up with answers to the questions I asked of them. With my video I wanted to represent my identity as a refugee through the context of my lived experiences in Lebanon and here in Montreal. The following chapter offers some insight into the

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<sup>1</sup> Ethical approval was granted by the College of Ethics Reviewers (CER) (Certification Number: 30015392) See Appendix B.

making of the installation space and provides visual documentation of the installation. It also comprises participants' videos and stories that were shared with the public.

## Chapter 4: In between: Stories and the Art installation



**Figure 5.** Serhan, L., (2022). *In between*. [View from installation ].



**Figure 6.** Serhan, L., (2022). *Visitor*. [Digital photograph]. Photo: Emma Harake

A main component of this thesis was the curation of the installation/exhibition *in-between: Stories of home and land* | ما بين بين: قصص عن الوطن والارض. The art installation represented my imagination of a homeland that exists, and simultaneously, does not exist. It included five videos playing one after another on different monitors, accompanying text, postcards in addition to oranges scattered on the floor (see Figures 5-7). The videos of the four participants were displayed on human-scale monitors. My video was projected on a large piece of white cloth. The audio was diffused from speakers on the ceiling. All the videos were narrated in Arabic and subtitled in English. Each video had a title chosen by the participant. The installation was accompanied by a leaflet incorporating a written transcript of the audio and participants' bios as shared by them.

## **Logistics**

I wanted the installation to be a shared experience allowing viewers to step into a different atmosphere. This is why I thought of reaching out to the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS) at Concordia University asking them to put me in touch with the Acts of Listening Lab (ALLab) team based there. The ALLab is a black box performance space that can be reserved by COHDS and ALLab affiliates. It is a hub for research-creation on the transformative power of listening. According to its website, the lab “brings together artists-researchers, communities, and activists from across disciplines and cultures interested in exploring alternative and creative ways of making life stories matter in the public sphere” (ALLab, 2022). Worth noting is the fact that the ALLab is based within COHDS which is home to a very diverse and active community of more than 250 affiliates. Oriented towards collaborative and community-based research and creation that respond to living memory and oral testimony (COHDS, 2022), my proposed installation aligned well with the COHDS/ALLab mission.



**Figure 7.** Serhan, L., (2022). *Visitors*. [Digital photograph]. Photo: Emma Harake

I reserved the ALLab for two days: April 7 from 16h00-20h00 and April 8 from 10h00-20h00. After we agreed on the dates, I drafted an event description in Arabic and English ensuring that the participants' names were mentioned as participants. The Center of Oral History and Digital Storytelling created an event for the exhibition on their website and Facebook page. I chose an image from my video to accompany the event description (see Figure 8).

## In Between: Stories of home and land | ما بين بين: قصص عن الوطن والارض

[Please note this is a two day event. It will be happening on April 7 from 16h00-20h00 and on April 8 from 10h00-20h00. You can visit the installation at any of those times.]

### DESCRIPTION

Four participants and I, Palestinians living in diaspora: Lebanon, Jordan, Norway and Canada... Why and how? Each one of us has a story to tell based on: diaspora and identity... belonging and attachment... Land and belief... The starting point for this collective endeavor is our feelings of nostalgia, chaos, and a collage of images from memory, the memories of our grandparents and parents, as well as our imagined individual and collective memories. Hence the question stretching from memory to imagination:  
What does homeland mean to you?  
If there were no borders and you were able to visit Palestine for only one day, where would you go and what would you do?

This collaborative installation is the result of the research-creation process of Lucine Serhan's work as part of her MA thesis in Art Education at Concordia University. All the videos are in the Arabic language with English subtitles.  
With the participation of: Ahmed Alaydi, Fadia Khorbity, Dareen Miliji and Rahma Mughrabi.

...اربع مشاركين وأنا.... من فلسطين، نعيش في الشتات، في لبنان، الأردن، الدروج وكندا لماذا وكيف؟  
لدى كل واحد منا حكاية يرويها حول الترحال والهوية، الانتماء والتعلق، الأرض والفكره ينطلق هذا العمل الجماعي مما نشعر به من حنين وفوضى وصور مركبة من الذاكرة، ذاكرة الاجداد والآباء وتلك المخيلة الفردية والجماعية فجاء السؤال يمتد من الذاكرة الي الخيال:  
ماذا يعني لك المكان أو الوطن؟  
ولو لم تكن هناك حدود واستلمت أن تذهب الي فلسطين ليوم واحد فقط، أين ستذهب وماذا ستفعل؟  
يأتي هذا المعرض الجماعي نتيجة البحث الذي تنفذه لوسين سرحان كجزء من مشروع أطروحتها في ماجستير التعلم من خلال الفنون في جامعة كونكورديا. كل الفيديوهات التي تُعرض خلاله هي باللغة العربية مع ترجمة بالانكليزي  
المشاركين: أحمد العائدي، فادية خربيطي، دارين ميليجي، رحمة مغربي

### THE PRESENTER

**Lucine Serhan** is a Palestinian, Lebanon-born artist, researcher and community art educator with a background in theater, film, and television production. She has collaborated on multiple creative oral history and storytelling projects with women refugees and youth. Lucine uses puppetry and storytelling as a social means of action to address identity, displacement, belonging, and memory. She is a founder of *beit byout*, a cultural organization that integrates art with storytelling to explore the Arabic language and culture.

COHDS/ALLAB are grateful to be able to offer our programming on unceded Kanien'kehá:ka territory, in Tiohtiá:ke/Montreal.



April 7 @ 4:00 pm – 8:00 pm

### DETAILS

In English and Arabic

In Person

With Lucine Serhan

### LOCATION

Acts of Listening Lab

Concordia University

Library Building, 10th Floor, Room LB-1042.02

1400 de Maisonneuve Blvd W.

Montreal, QC, Canada

### MORE INFORMATION

If you have any questions, contact us at [acts.listeninglab@concordia.ca](mailto:acts.listeninglab@concordia.ca).

**Figure 8.** Serhan, L., (2022). *Event Description*. [Screenshot from COHDS website].

I worked with the ALLab technicians who were of great help in facilitating my artistic vision. I wanted the ALLab to be dark when people stepped into the space. I wanted them to hear the sound of the sea in complete darkness. The sound of the sea would be followed by the first video screened on one of the monitors. When the first video ended, the second video would start on another screen and so on. Viewers would have to move from one place into another to see all the videos. The last video was projected on a large sheet of cloth. I envisioned this as a

continuous loop. Once all the videos were screened the ALLab went back to full darkness, the sound of the sea and the first video started again.

I managed to borrow a projector and a laptop to screen the first video, plus four huge monitors with stands from Concordia's Centre for Digital Arts (CDA) equipment depot to screen the videos. For playing the accompanying audio, we used the speakers situated on the ceiling in the ALLab. The ALLab technical team helped with the lighting and setting up the videos and audio and synchronization of the monitors. They also helped with the video documentation of the event.

In addition to the videos, I set up a table with a bowl of oranges, postcards illustrating my drawings, leaflets incorporating a written description of the event, audio transcripts, and participants' bios as shared by them (see Figure 9). I also scattered some oranges on the floor under my video which was screened on a piece of fabric. I captured people's reflections in a guest book placed on a table outside the room.

In the following section, I present documentation of the installation as it existed, with links to videos held on Vimeo. I end this chapter with a brief documentation of my creative process while reflecting on my subjectivity in this research project.



Figure 9. Serhan, L., (2022). *View from installation*. Photo: Lucine Serhan

## In between: Stories of home and land: Event Description

I start this action with the description I drafted and used to create the event. This text was part of the leaflet I printed and made available to the visitors. In addition to the text, the leaflet had the participants' bios and written transcripts of their videos. In what follows, I share stills from participants' videos. Each still is accompanied by a transcript of their videos in Arabic and English.

### In between: Stories of home and land

Four participants and I, Palestinians living in diaspora: Lebanon, Jordan, Norway and Canada... Why and how?

Each one of us has a story to tell based on: diaspora and identity... belonging and attachment... Land and belief... The starting point for this collective endeavor is our feelings of nostalgia, chaos, and a collage of images from memory, the memories of our grandparents and parents, as well as our imagined individual and collective memories. Hence the question stretching from memory to imagination: What does homeland mean to you?

### ما بين بين: قصص عن الوطن والارض

أربع مشاركين وانا.... من فلسطين، نعيش في الشتات، في لبنان، الأردن، النرويج وكندا... لماذا وكيف؟

لدى كل واحد منا حكاية يرويها حول الترحال والهوية، الانتماء والتعلق، الأرض والفكره...

ينطلق هذا العمل الجماعي مما نشعر به من حنين وفوضى وصور مركبة من الذاكرة، ذاكرة الأجداد والآباء وتلك المتخيلة الفردية والجماعية. فجاء السؤال يمتد من الذاكرة الي الخيال:

ماذا يعني لك المكان او الوطن؟

ولو لم تكن هناك حدود واستطعت أن تذهب إلى فلسطين ليوم واحد فقط، أين ستذهب وماذا ستفعل؟

يأتي هذا المعرض الجماعي نتيجة البحث الذي تنفذه

If there were no borders and you were able to visit Palestine for only one day, where would you go and what would you do?

This collaborative installation is the result of the research-creation process of Lucine Serhan's work as part of her MA thesis in Art Education at Concordia University. All the videos are in the Arabic language with English subtitles.

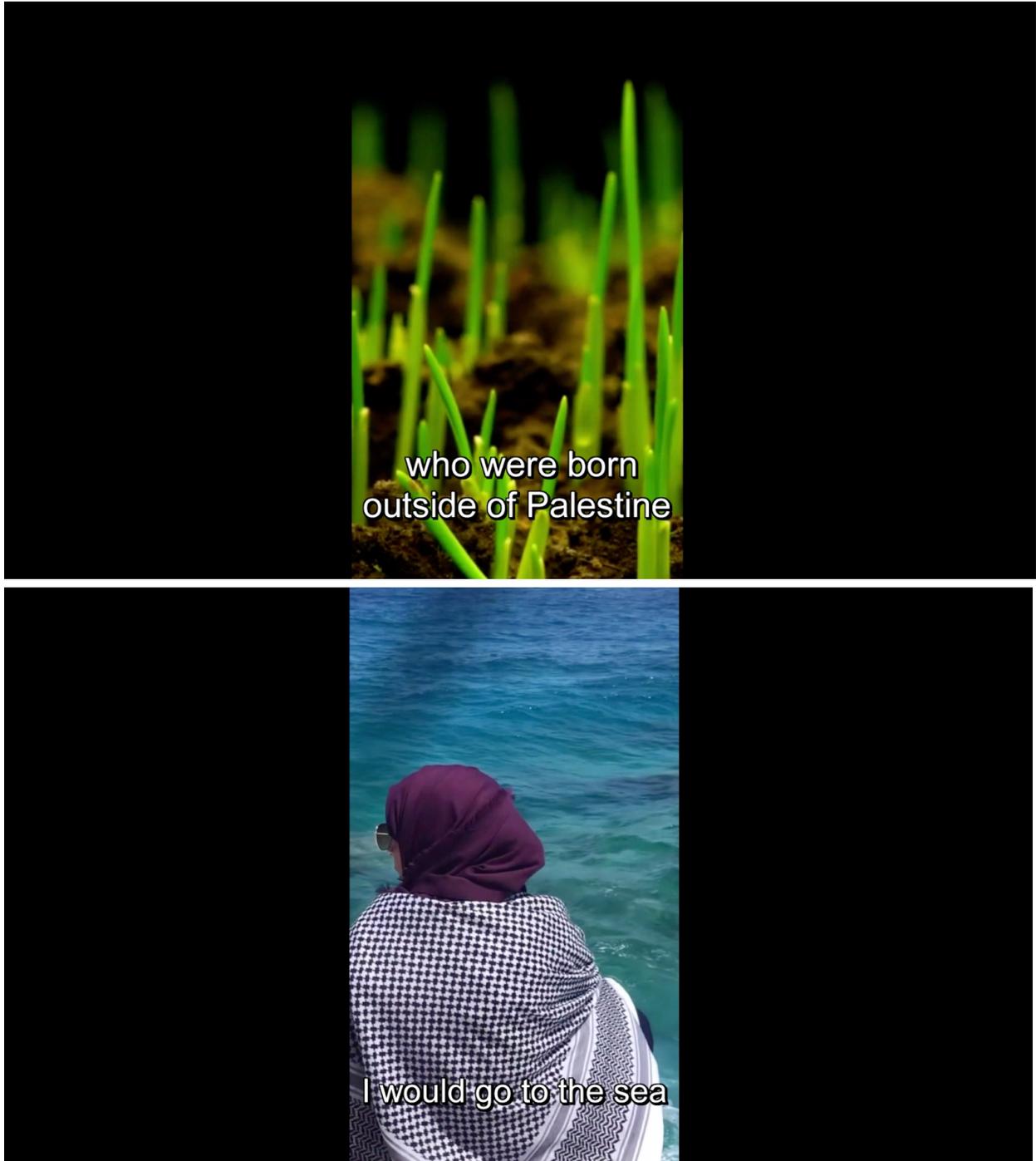
With the participation of: Ahmed Alaydi, Fadia Khorbity, Daren Miliji and Rahma Mughrabi.

لوسين سرحان كجزء من مشروع أطروحتها في ماجستير التعلّم من خلال الفنون في جامعة كونكورديا. كل الفيديوهات التي تُعرض خلاله هي باللغة العربية مع ترجمة بالانجليزي

المشاركين: أحمد العايدى، فاديه خربيطي، دارين ميليجي، رحمة مغربي

**In between: Stories of home and land: Participants' Stories**

Rahma Mughrabi <https://vimeo.com/735369526>



**Figure 10&11.** Mughrabi, R., (2021). *Searching for answers*. [video stills].

Sometimes, it's the little questions that lead to bigger questioning, such as the question: "What is the homeland?" To be honest, I have no answer yet. Sometimes home is my mother, sometimes it's my backpack, and many times home is the pair of shoes that accompany me everywhere. Sometimes home is Amman, other times it's my bedroom, or my bed. Nothing is stable. The first time I found it hard to answer the question "Where are you from?", was when I was visiting Tunis. It was the first place I traveled to outside of Jordan. I was trying to answer the salesman in the old city and I got very confused. Do I tell him I am Palestinian, or Jordanian, or Jordanian of Palestinian origins? Or a Palestinian resident in Jordan, or a Jordanian with a Palestinian father? Or Ammaniyya? Or Yafawiyya who has never seen Yafa? Or just a plain Palestinian? Or simply "from Palestine"? In the end, I chose to tell him that I was Palestinian, maybe because I felt that it

أحياناً أسئله كثيره بتفتح علينا أبواب كبيره من الاسئله والتساؤلات مثل سؤال: شو هو الوطن؟ وصراحه لهلق ما عندي أي إجابة... لأنوا أحياناً بكون إمي وأحياناً بكون شنطتي وأحياناً كثير بتكون كندرتي (حذائي) يلي بترافقني وين ما رحنت... أحياناً بتكون عمان، وأحياناً بتكون غرفتي، وأحياناً بكون تختي... وما في شي ثابت.

أول مرة واجهت صعوبه بإجابة سؤال إنتي من وين، لما كنت في زيارة لتونس، وهاي كانت أول مكان بكون فيه خارج الأردن. وقتها كثير إحترت شو أرد على البياع في البلدة القديمة. هل أحكيلوا إنو فلسطينيه؟ ولا أردنية؟ ولا أردنية من أصل فلسطيني؟ ولا فلسطينية مقيمة في الأردن؟ ولا أردنية لأب فلسطيني؟ ولا عمانية؟ ولا يافاوية عمرها ما شافت يافا، أو حتى فلسطينية حاف، أو بس من فلسطين... بالآخر إخترت إنو أحكيلو إني فلسطينية ... يمكن لإنو شعرت في وقتها إنو يمكن تكون هاي الفرصة الوحيدة إنو

might be my one and only chance to say it, and to celebrate my background without exposing myself to racism.

Maybe those of us with Palestinian origins who were born outside of Palestine are lucky, because we are always adaptable and we can renew our understanding of the homeland. We have the capacity to find the homeland in each piece of land, in each person, and even in the inanimate. To me, the homeland is a mental and intangible notion. My idea of Palestine was formed through television, social media, the news, novels, and all the oral stories that were ever told to me by my grandmother and each Palestinian I met on the street. Unfortunately, I don't know what it means to be born in one's homeland, in the homeland of one's ancestors, and to grow up in it. This is why I sometimes envy those who were born in their own homelands without having to make any effort. Those people know the answer to the question from the very first moment. Their thoughts and understanding of the homeland

ممكن أقول فيها إني أنا فلسطينية، محتفلة بجزئي الفلسطيني من دون ما أتعرض لأي موقف عنصري.

يمكن نحن اللي أصولنا فلسطينية ويلي خلقنا برا فلسطين محظوظين لأنو دائماً عنا القدرة على التكيف وتجديد مفهوم الوطن بحيث إحنا منقدر نلاقى بكل أرض منملكها أو شخص أو حتى جماد فكرة الوطن.

الوطن بالنسبة إلي هو شي معنوي غير محسوس وفكرة عن فلسطين كلها تكونت من التلفزيون والسوشيال ميديا والأخبار والكتب والروايات وكل القصص المحكية يلي حكولي ياها ستي وكل واحد فلسطيني قابلتو بالطريق. للأسف ما بعرف شو يعني الواحد يخلق بأرضه وأرض أجداده ويكبر فيها، عشان هيك أحياناً بحسد الناس يلي اتولدوا هيك بوطنهم من دون بذل أي مجهود. هدول الناس من أول لحظة عارفين الجواب على السؤال وتفكيرهم بمفهوم الوطن

constitute a mental privilege, not a problem of finding identity, like the rest of us.

The idea of visiting Palestine feels like a revolutionary state of being, similar to those who know how to start a revolution but not how to complete it. Nor do they know what they'll do afterwards. I am exactly the same, I'm always thinking of ways to go to Palestine, without having to normalize. But in reality, I don't know what I would do, nor where I would go.

If I really did have the chance to go to Palestine, I would go to the sea, and observe the way it behaves in Yafa. Is it calm, or agitated? I would be soaring with joy, of course. I would finally dip my foot in the water, knowing that the waves touching me are on Palestinian land. Not like when I go to the Mediterranean and wonder: "Is this wave coming from Palestine?", imagining its trajectory and its story. And since I would indeed be in Yafa, I would ask around and find my grandparents' house that they had to leave.

مجرد رفاهية فكرية مش مشكلة إيجاد هوية متلنا كلنا.

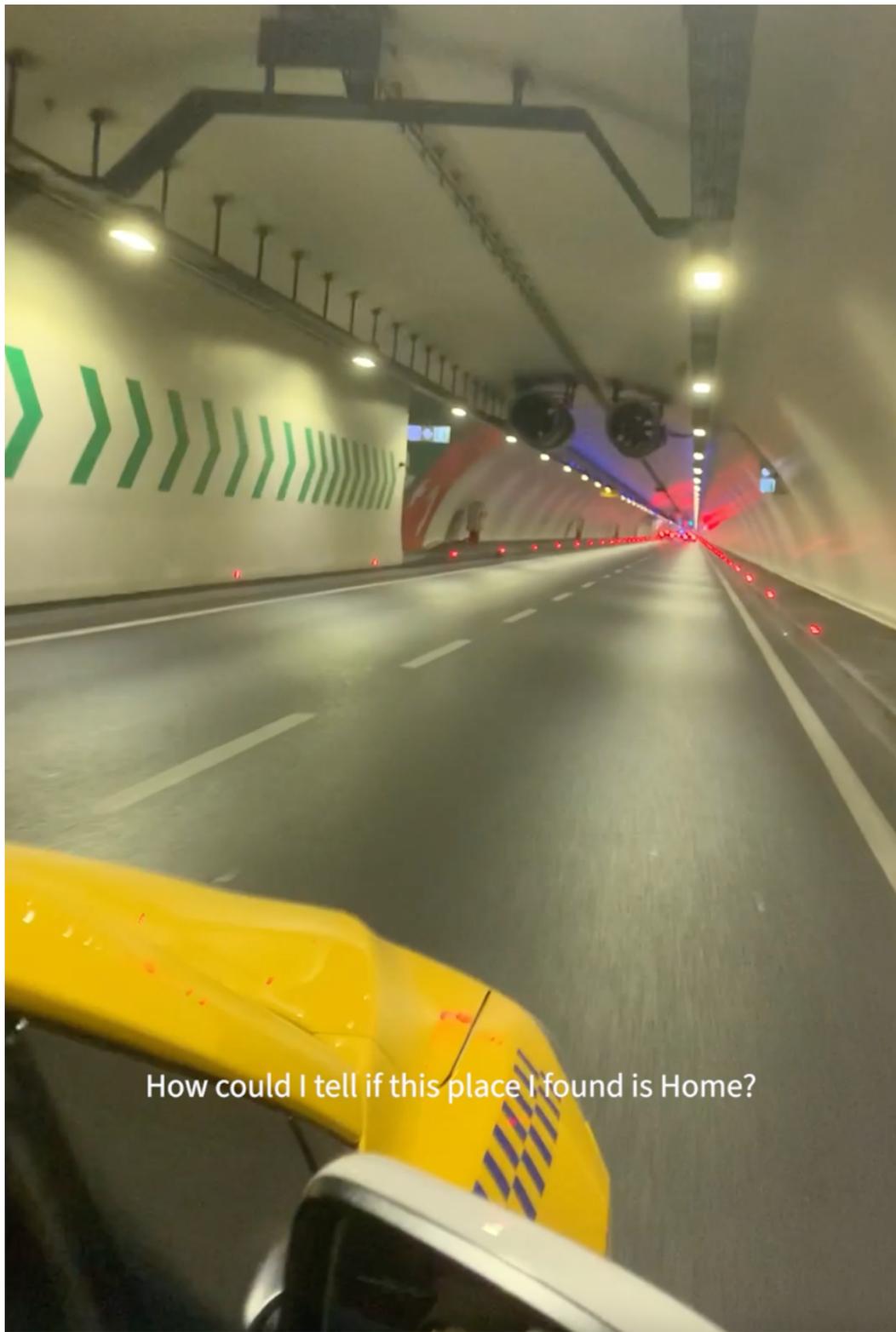
فكرة زيارتي لفلسطين بتشبه حالة الثورية يلي بيعرفوا يعملوا ثورة بس ما بيعرفوا يكملوها ولا راح يعرفوا شو راح يعملوا بعدها. وأنا هيك دائماً بفكر بطرق أروح فيها ع فلسطين دون ما أطبع. بس فعلياً ما بعرف شو راح أعمل ولا وين راح أروح.

بس لو كان عندي الفرصة أروح فلسطين، راح أروح البحر وأشوف كيف بتصرف البحر ب يافا. هل هو هادي أو عصبي؟ طبعاً راح أكون طايره من الفرحة لإنو أخيراً راح أحط رجلي في مية البحر وأنا عارفه إنو الموج والمي يلي عم يضرب فيه هو على أرض فلسطينية مش مثل كل مره بنزل فيها البحر الأبيض وبقعد أفكر إنو يمكن هاي الموجة جاي من فلسطين وأقعد أتخيل رحلة الموجة وقصتها.

وبما إنو صرت ب يافا راح أبلش أسأل وأ سنكشف وين هو بيت ستي وجدي يلي طلوعوا

Unfortunately, I have no idea where the house is, I don't even have a picture of it, nor any proof that it still exists, except for its keys. And of course, all the locks were changed after that time.

منو. للأسف انا ما عندي أي فكره وين البيت أو أي صوره لإلوا، ولا حتى أي دليل إنو هو أصلاً موجود غير مفاتيحوا، وأكيد كل المفاتيح تغيرت بعد هاد العمر.



**Figure 12.** Alaydi, A., (2021). *It won't be-long.* [video still].

## It won't be-long

I was born in Kuwait. And I was a little baby when my parents escaped out of the country because of the war. Then we had to live in so many different places. I have always felt that I am a stranger in every place I have lived in, even in Lebanon. We have moved from one place to another and never felt that we belong to any place there. It was because of a feeling that I was different. Not only different by the identity, traditions and background but also by the legal status. This difficult situation forced us to look for a place to settle in and to feel safe. I have always asked myself the same question: What is belonging? And to be part of a community or a country. However, the answer to this question was a more challenging idea.

How could I tell if this place I found is Home? Since I have never experienced such a feeling, I was born as a refugee, with no homeland. At some moments Life's pace had calmed down

## مش مطولة

أنا مواليد الكويت وكنت كثير صغير لما أهلي هربوا من الكويت بسبب الحرب. اضطرينا نعيش بأماكن كثيره. دائماً كنت إنسان غريب عن المكان يلي انا فيه حتى في لبنان. كنا ننتقل من مكان لمكان ولا مره كنا يعني ننتمي لمكان معين، نحس حالنا جزء منو لأسباب ... الإحساس فيه بمكان، الهوية، العادات والتقاليد وكمان الإثني يلي هو مدني إلي هو الأوراق الثبوتية. بسبب هاي الظروف الصعبة دائماً نبحت عن مكان تستقر فيه، نحس حالنا فيه آمين لذلك كان دائماً يراودني هادا السؤال براسي... شو يعني أنتمي؟ شو يعني اكون جزء من مكان معين جغرافي او شعب او ناس؟ بس الإجابة عن هاد السؤال أصعب بكثير من السؤال بحد ذاته...

لإني كنت أفكر كيف أنا بدي أعرف لما الاقي المكان المناسب يلي بد أسميه وطن او home أو بيت. كيف ممكن أعرفه لأنه أنا بحياتي ما حسيته، ما خلقت معه. أما اماكن معينة كانت تستقر الحياة ويصير عنا مثلاً علاقات حلوة، أصحاب وأصدقاء ولكن كنت أكتشف هاي مرحلة مؤقتة بسيطة من الهدوء قبل

and we settled somehow. I had a social network and friends, but unfortunately, I discovered every time that it was a temporary status of stability just before the displacement resumed. I discovered that displacement is the only stable status of my life. Belonging is something in my thinking and imagination. It is a romantic image in my head that was built up through the stories...

Stories that I heard from my mom about her childhood in Tobas in the west bank before she was uprooted in 1967. She told me how beautiful and green her homeland is, about the tomatoes and cucumbers they used to grow there and their aroma- that used to grow there and their aroma, and that's what Palestine is to me.

In addition to what my father used to tell me about Yafa, a city with a beautiful seafront, about the farms, oranges and lemons, he says there are no oranges like the ones in Yafa. All these romantic pictures that I drew in my

الترحال من أول وجديد. الإشي الثابت في حياتي... الإشي المستقر في حياتي هو الترحال... الإنتماء بالنسبة إلي أكثر هو إشي في خيالي، في راسي، في بالي. هبي حاله رومانسيه في عقلي بنيتها عن طريق حكايات سمعتها من إمي، عن طوباس بلدها في فلسطين بالصفه. إمي طلعت طفله من الصفه قبل النكسه، وبتوصف اديش حلوه طوباس، اديش خضراء، اديش فيها خضره، اديش فيه خيار وبندوره. فبالنسبه إلي هاي فلسطين.

بالإضافة إلي حكايا بابا عن يافا، مدينه فيها بحر حتى المزارع القريبه من يافا، الليمون والبردقان، الروايح يلي بحكي عنها. فش بردقان زي يلي بيافا... هاي كلها صور رومانسيه رسمتها براسي ولونها كمان لاجئين آخرين إستمعت لقصصهم وحكاياتهم عن فلسطين.

كنت أحس حالي غريب عن كوكب كامل. كان هاد الوطن يلي في راسي بنيتوا، هو المكان، هو الوطن، هو الانتماء ولليوم هيك بحس.

بس بحس إذا قدرت أروح ع فلسطين مش راح أروح ع مدن، مش راح أروح ع مكان فيه بشر، فيه ناس

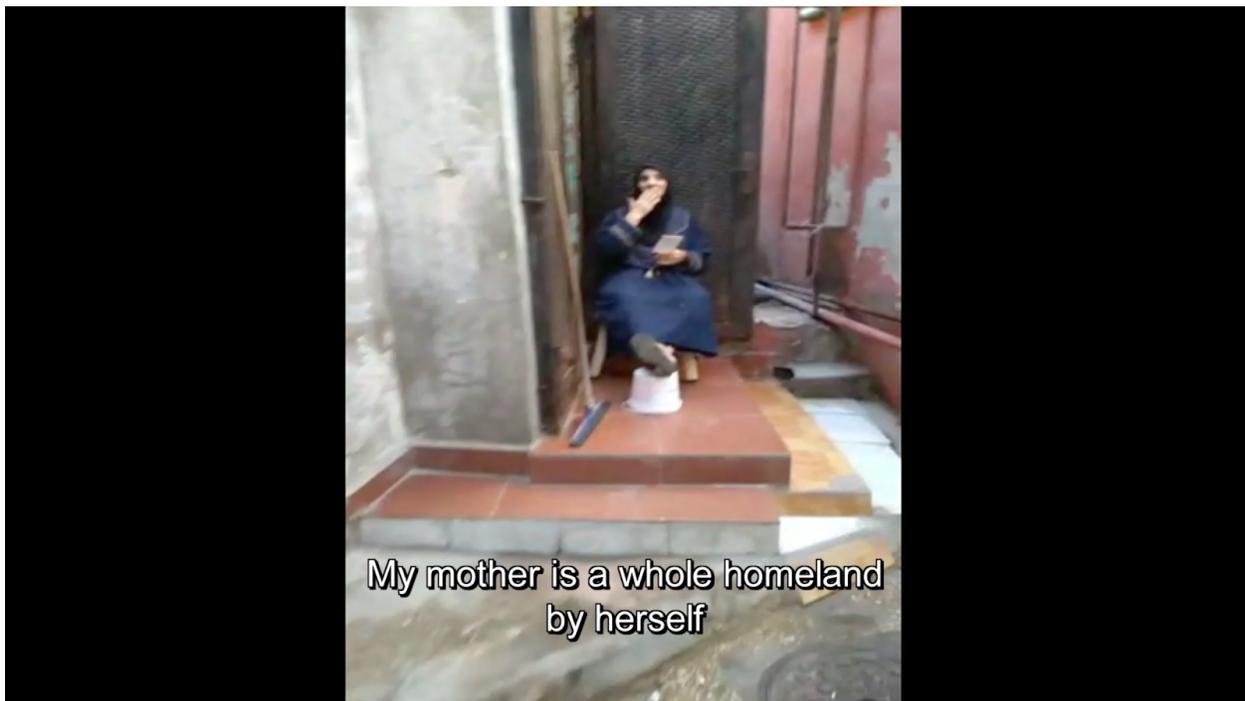
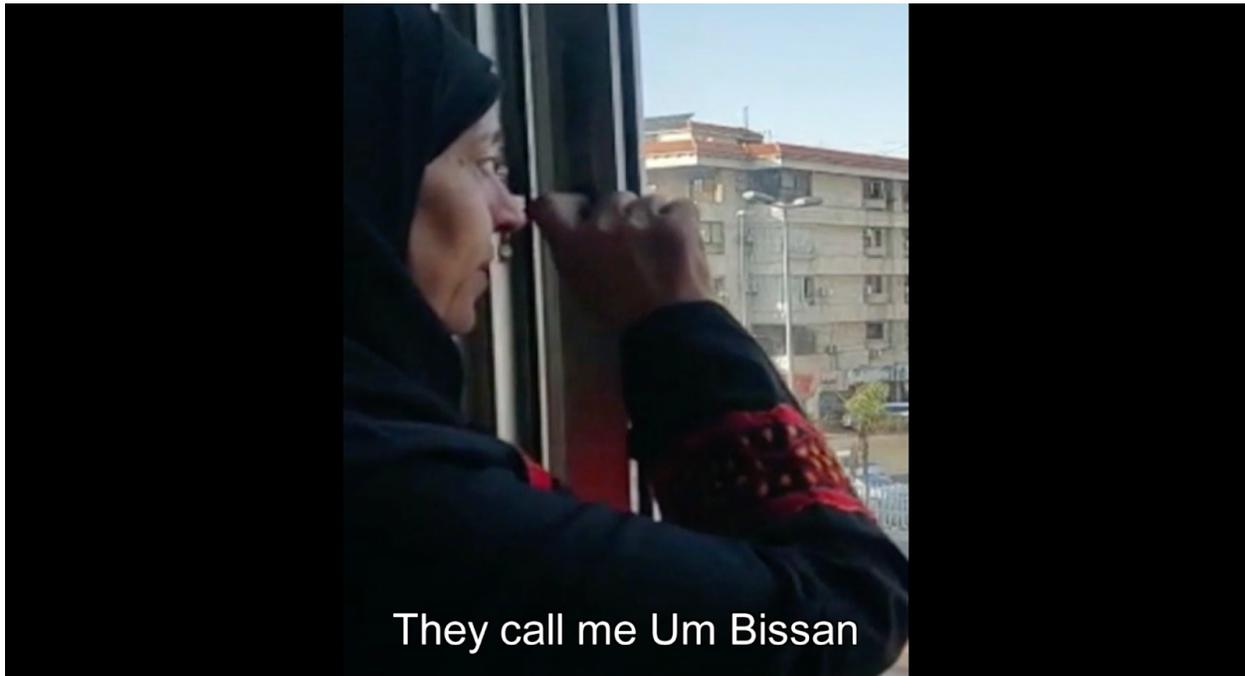
memory were given more color by the stories I heard from the other refugees I met through my long journey of exile.

I used to feel that I am a stranger in this entire world, and that homeland in my mind is my only shelter, country and belonging

If I could go to Palestine, I wouldn't go to a crowded place. I would probably go to the forest or nature, a place where I find the smell of orange trees. Maybe if I am forced to go there for only one day, I would go to Yafa, sit on the beach and drink a cup of tea with Miramiyeh (sage) and stay there until sunset, when the sun dives into the sea. And that's it all.

كثير. ممكن أروح عالغابه او عالطبيعه، في محل أقدر  
أشم فيه ريحة بردقان. فإذا ممكن جبرتوني أروح  
one day بروح على يافا، بروح عالشط، بجيب  
كاسة شاي مع ميراميه وبضل قاعد بستتي غروب  
الشمس لحتى تنزل الشمس بالبحر وهاد كل إثني  
بعملوا بفلسطين...

Fadia Khorbity <https://vimeo.com/735370983>



**Figure 13&14.** Khorbity, F., (2021). *Homeland is in my heart.* [video stills].

## Homeland is in my heart

My name is Fadia Khorbaty. They call me "Um Bissan". I was born at Bourj aL-Barajneh Camp. Grew up and lived there all my life.

The Camp represents our dream for our beloved country and resistance. It's our second homeland that gathers what is left in us. It is hope, although I feel sad being excluded from my homeland. I feel nostalgic watching people in the narrow streets living the same agony. We all have the same dream to return to Palestine.

My god, how deep is your question! but very harsh as well... if borders were open to receive us for only one day, What am I going to do?

Even if it's just 24 hours, I will breathe Palestine's air. A strange blissful feeling touches my heart and runs in my veins as I

## قلب اللاجئ وطن

إسمي فاديا الخربيطي والكل بيناديني إم بيسان. أنا خلقت بمخيم برج البراجنه وعشت فيه كل هاي السنين من عمري.

المخيم عنوان العودة ورمز الصمود. هو بمثابة وطن تاني بيجمع شتات القلب والروح. هو طاقة أمل وبنفس الوقت كمان عندي إحساس بالقهر إنو أنا بعيدة عن وطني، بس بيعنيلي وأنا ماشيه بالطريق، أشوف الناس قاعده بين الزواريب، زواريب البيوت، عايشين نفس القهر. كلنا عنا هدف إنو نرجع ع فلسطين.

يا الله شو هالسؤال! كثير حلو بس كثير صعب. إنوا اليوم إذا فتحت الحدود بس ليوم واحد،

لو أربع وعشرين ساعه أتتنفس فيهن من هوا فلسطين ما راح أقصر، راح أروح ع فلسطين. راح يرافقتي إحساس حيكون ممزوج بالم، كل مفاصلي راح تهتز. راح أقطع الحدود وأدخل ع بلدي. راح أنزل عالارض وأبوس التراب. قريتي " إم الفرج " أرض أجدادي وأنا نفسي كمان أشوف هاي الأرض يلي كان عليها جدي وستي وعمي وأبوي، مثل ما كان يحكيها عنها؟

walk the streets of Palestine, mixed with pain and gratitude. I will cross the borders and kneel to kiss the soil of my beloved homeland "Um Al Faraj", my village where my ancestors lived.

Excited to see the land where my grandma and grandpa lived. Dad used to tell me stories about how much love is there. I loved it without seeing it. In my imagination, it lived for years. Also, I wish to visit "Al Mghamseye", my mother's village. It's very near to "UM Al FARAJ". My mother is a whole homeland by herself. She taught me how to love my country.

A never-ending love bond. Years pass by. My parents were exiled from Palestine in 1948. But they kept dreaming of their return, And we carried on the same dream.

I am a refugee but one day we will return

Our land is our virtue.

مثل ما كان هو يحبها أنا حبيتها بدون ما أشوفها  
بخيالي مزروعه كثير. كمان بتمنى أروح  
"عالباسية"، إمي من الغابسية وهي كثير قريبه ع إم  
الفرج لإنو إمي هيى دنيا بحالها... هيى وطن... إمي  
علمتني كيف أحب فلسطين، كيف أعشقها لإنو هيى  
حنين ما بينتهي.

سنين عم تمرق من العمر. يعني أهلنا تهجروا سنة  
١٩٤٨ من فلسطين وعندهم حلم وأمل إنو بدن يرجعوا  
ونحن حملنا هادا الحلم.  
أنا لاجئه وبدي أعود،  
أرضنا عزنا.

Dareen Miliji <https://vimeo.com/735374551>

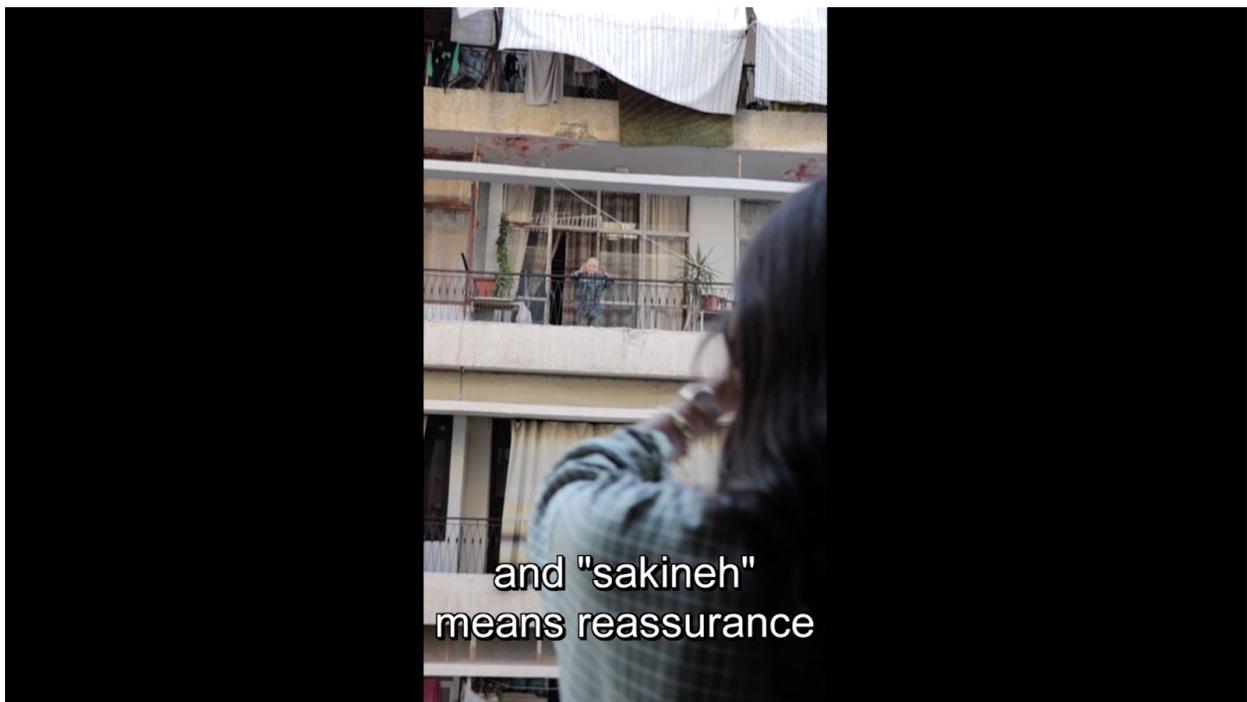


Figure 15&16. Miliji, D., (2021). *My imagined journey to Palestine*. [video stills].

## My imagined journey to Palestine

What is home to me? I find this question deceptively simple. In simple terms, home to me is my son, my daughter, my husband... It's my family, it's my cocoon... It's me, it's my little world. On a deeper level, as a Palestinian refugee in Lebanon, this entire theme of residence does not apply to me, or rather, I don't allow myself to think of it too much. Because the word "sakan" (residence) comes from the word "sakineh", and "sakineh" means reassurance, which is not something that a Palestinian refugee ever feels.

"Sakineh" is an attribute that describes those who are stable, and this is something we never feel at all, because a refugee is always facing instability. Whether he's living inside the refugee camp, or outside of it, doesn't matter, because "home" is always linked to another idea, which is the temporary. And the temporary is the refugee's curse.

## رحلتي المتخيلة إلى فلسطين

شو بيعنيلي البيت؟ هيدا السؤال فيني قول عنو السهل الممتنع... بالمعنى المبسط، البيت لآلي هو إبنني، هو بنتني، هو زوجي، عائلتي، هو الكنكون تبعي... هو أنا... هو الوطن الصغير تبعي.

اما بالمعنى الشوي عميق والمعنى البعيد، كوني لاجئة فلسطينية بلبنان، مفهوم السكن كلوا منو وارد أو ما بسمح لحالي إنو افكر فيه بعمق، عشان السكن هو مشتق من السكينة والسكينة يعني الطمأنينة وهيدا ما بيشرع فيه ابدأ اللاجيء الفلسطيني.

السكينة هي صفة خاصة بالمستقرين وهيدا نحن ابدأ ما منحس فيه عشان اللاجيء هو دائماً معرض للا إستقرار. يلي فيني احكيه كمان انو البيت باللجوء بغض النظر إن كنت ساكن بالمخيم ولا برات المخيم، كمان مرتبط بتعبير ثاني إلي هو المؤقت والمؤقت هي لعنة اللاجيء.

يمكن هيدا ببعض الاحيان بيفسرلنا الهجرة، هجرة اللاجيء لبلاد الغرب بدون أدنى تفكير بمصيروا، وبمصير ولادوا عشان هو بيكون بهيدا الوقت عم بفكر بالأمان، عم بفتش عالإستقرار وعم يهرب من كلمة

Maybe this explains why some refugees immigrate to western countries without thinking twice about their fate or their children's fate, because all they can think of at that moment is safety, all they're searching for is stability, and they're running away from the word "temporary". And this will never end, until we return to our land of course, Palestine, the land of our ancestors and our parents. I feel that Palestine is the only place where the attribute of refugee will finally leave us alone, and the curse of the temporary will lift off our backs.

If I went there for 24 hours, which would never be enough, what would I do? First, I imagine I'll definitely walk barefoot, because I will want to feel the land. I will pray a special prayer for every patch of land I'll stand on. I will meditate on its skies. I will look at its sun, which I always say is different from any other. I will serenade its moon. I will drink water from the first spring I see. I will

المؤقت. وهيدا الشئ ما راح ينتهي لريثما نعود اكيذ  
لأرضنا وأرض جدودنا وأرض آباءنا فلسطين، هناك  
هو المكان الوحيد ل بحس انو صفة الاجيء راح تبعد  
عننا وبنفس الوقت راح تنزل عن ضميرنا لعنة  
المؤقت.

إنوا اذا بروح اربع وعشرين ساعه يلي هني ابدأ ما  
راح يكونوا كافيين شو ممكن أعمل؟ أول شئ بتخيلوا  
إنوا راح أمشي حافية القدمين عشان بدى أحس  
بالأرض. بدى أصلي صلاتي الخاصة على أي بقعة  
أرض بوقف عليها. بحس إنى بدى أتمعن بسماها، بدى  
أطلع بشمسها لي أنا دايماً بقول إنو هبي مختلفة، بدى  
أتغزل بقمرها... بدى أشرب مي من أول نبع بشوفوا.  
بحس بدى أبوس كبيرها وصغيرها، أطفالها وشيوخها.  
بحس بزور الأقصى، بزور القدس. بحاول أشم شجر  
البردقان عشان بحس انو هو راح يكون الغذاء الروحي  
لإلي لما يرجعوا يظهروني منها. بحس أول ما أدخل  
ع قريتي إلي هبي "الكابري" قضاء عكا، انو الأرض  
هيك راح تعرف مسامي، من مسام جدي وستي. بدى  
أحط ذاتي على شجرة الزيتون ومأكدة انو هيدي  
الشجرة راح أسمع يمكن أصوات جدودنا، أصواتن لما

kiss its biggest and its littlest, its children and its elders. I will visit al-Aqsa, I will visit al-Quds. I will inhale the smell of the orange tree because I know it will be my only soul food, once they make me leave. I have a feeling that once I enter my village of al-Kabri, in the district of Akka, that the land will recognize my pores, through the pores of my grandfather and my grandmother. I will place my ear on the olive tree, and I know that I'll hear our ancestors' voices speaking through this tree. Their voices while talking, while dreaming, and maybe even the moment they married my father to my mother. The voices of their wishes, that imagined the names of their grandchildren. I feel that this olive tree will know that I am Darin, daughter of Oussama, and granddaughter of Muhammad, because ultimately, this tree will be reality for us, and we will be its reality.

كانوا يحكوا، لما كانوا يحلموا... يمكن لما كانوا عم  
يزوجوا أبوي من إمي، لما كانوا عم يتمنوا او يفكروا  
شو راح يكون أسماء أحفادن.

بحس إنوا هيدي الشجرة راح تعرف إنو انا دارين،  
بننوا لأسامه وجدي محمد عشان بالنهاية هاي الشجرة  
هيي راح تكون حقيقتنا ونحن راح نكون حقيقتها.



**Figure 17&18.** Serhan, L., (2022). *In- between*. [video stills].

## In-between

On the ground, looking around, I see the planet beside me... We are the inhabitants today... We are living on a land that has its people and history. Our presence nowadays is an extension of their presence and spirits that fought... and are still fighting.

This planet is for those who take care of the custody entrusted to them wherever they are... Those who respect the trees, the rocks, the snow, the plants, the animals, and of course humans... from mountain highs to the sea... from snow to oranges... spirits of those who passed before...

... But when I arrive, “where are you from?” is the first question people ask of me. However, “who are you?” is what the question feels like. Who Am I? I ponder, silently... a breath! I return to the origin of the

## ما بين بين

واقفه عالأرض، بطلع حولي، بشوف الكوكب حدي... نحن السكان اليوم... نحن بأرض إلها أهلها وتاريخها. وأهمية وجودنا اليوم هو إمتداد لوجودهم وروحهم اللي ناضلت وبعدها عم تناضل.

هالكوكب للإنسان يلي بحافظ عالأمانة وين ما نوجد... بيحترم الشجر والصخر والتلج والنبات والحيوان وطبعاً الإنسان.

من الجبال للبحر... من التلج لليمون... أرواح من مروا قبلنا...

... بس لما أوصل، أول سؤال بيسألوني ياه الناس، انتي من وين، بحس دغري كانه السؤال الاساسي... إنت مين؟

انا مين؟ بسرد، بسكت، باخد نفس، برجع لأصل الصورة... اصل الحكايه بحسها كذبه اوقات او خرافه.

بفتش عالطعم، عالريحة، عالألوان بلكي بلاقي جواب سريع طبيعي، واضح وبيمرق بلمح البصر

photograph... the origin of the story.  
Sometimes I think that it is a lie or a fairytale.  
I search for taste, for smell. Maybe I can find  
a fast and natural answer, a clear answer, clear  
and instant.

I am Lucine. I was born and raised in a  
Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. Home  
and belonging were as small as the camp's  
perimeter. Everything beyond is void...  
clouded... a grey area that neither resembles  
me nor I it... But here I am engulfed in its  
centre.

I grew up in this stretch, and my belonging to  
Palestine was within the confines of the camp,  
after one crossed the Lebanese army  
checkpoint. This is where my Palestine  
starts... my tiny homeland... narrow streets,  
tiny shops, houses stacked on top of each  
other, a Souk, martyrs' photographs, flags, and  
old people dozing in the sun... waiting... for  
what? We do not know...

انا لوسين خلقت وريبت بمخيم للاجئين الفلسطينيين  
بلبنان. فكرة الوطن والانتماء كانت صغيره بصغر  
المخيم وحدوده.

وكل شي برات هاي الحدود هو فراغ... مش واضح...  
هو مساحة رمادية ما بتشبهني ولا انا بشيها... بس انا  
فيها.

دائرة صغيرة بقلب دائره كبيره...

كبرت وريبت بهاي المساحة، وانتمائي لفلسطين كان  
هو انتماء لبعده باب المخيم، لبعده ما تقطع حاجز الجيش  
اللبناني، وقتها بتبلش فلسطين، ببلش الوطن الزغير...  
شوارع ضيقة ودكاكين وبيوت فوق بعضها وسوق  
وصور شهدا واعلام وختايرة نايمين بالشمسات  
وقاعدين ناظرين ما منعرف شو...

فكرة الوطن كبرت بمخيلتي الصغيرة وامتدت وما عاد  
الها حدود...

شو هو الوطن بالنسبة الي؟

هو ريحة الزعتر... هو كمشة ميراميه بابريق شاي عم  
يغلي

The idea of a homeland sprouted in my tiny imagination and grew beyond any boundaries... What is homeland for me? It is the smell of Zaatar... a handful of sage simmering in a teapot... the jasmine tree in front of my grandmother's house. Homeland is my grandmother, my grandfather, and a laundry line in the colors of Palestine. A story I heard and repeated less I forget. Drawings by children yearning to grow without being asked “what is home?”

A refugee in exile. It is a camp where each alley is named after a Palestinian village. It is numbers conjured in history. It is borders and checkpoints. Keys with no doors. All the lost places and the memory chiseling in stone less it fades.

It is us, those outside or inside... and those inside within. A thought I carry within, clear and cloudy. A long story that never ends. An aromatic orange field... oranges on the trees,

هو الياسمينه قدام بيت ستي

هو جدي وستي وحبل غسل بالوان فلسطين

هو حكاية سمعتها وبخاف انساها وبضل ارددها، هو

رسومات ولاد بدها تكبر بلا ما تنسأل شو هو الوطن؟

هو لاجيء بأرض الشتات، هو مخيم كل حي فيه اسمه

ع اسم قري فلسطين، هو ارقام انحفظت بالتاريخ، هو

الحدود والحواجز، هو مفاتيح ناظره بلا بواب، هو

الاماكن الضايعة والذاكرة يلي عم تنحت بالصخر لا ما

تختفي،

هو نحن برا او جوا... وجوا داخل جو

هو فكره بحملها معي... واضحة وضبابية

هو القصة الطويلة يلي ما بتخلص

هو سهل ليمنون ريحتوا مفحفه... معلق عالشجر وحر.

هو بحر بلا حدود. هو كل شي وهو ولا شي... هو ما

بين بين مثلي انا تماماً...

خييط طويل.....

اذا بروج ع فلسطين ليوم واحد... بدي افوت ع اول

قرية او مدينه او حي وبغير الاسماء.

completely free. An infinite sea. It is everything and nothing... it is in between, exactly like me,  
A long thread....

If I visit Palestine for one day, I will walk into the first village or city or neighborhood I see and I will change the names, I will restore the names, I will cross the letters that do not resemble the alphabet... I will start with my own village Sepphoris not Tzipori, Haifa not Xefa, Tiberias not Teverya...One day may not be long enough to change all the names, but I will try.

I want to visit an orange field and pick some fruits... I will eat one orange and take the rest. On my way out, on the borders, with no hesitation and no fear, I will tell the first checkpoint I encounter that I am from here... that these oranges are from here... just like me.

يعني برجع الاسماء.... بشطب الحروف يلي ما بتشبه الحروف... راح ابلش بقريتي صفوريه يلي ما اسمها تسيبوري، ، حيفا مش خيفا ، طيريا مش تفريا. يمكن نهار واحد مش كافي لأغير أسماء المدن كلها بس راح اجرب.

بدي افوت ع اول سهل ليمون واقطف كم حبه... اكل وحده واخذ الباقي... وعالحدود وانا ضاهرة بدي اخبر اول حاجز من دون خوف وتردد انا من هون... وهاد الليمون من هون متلي تماماً.

In addition to the videos, I printed my drawing on postcards which were placed on a table inside the ALLab. The Following text was printed on the postcards in Arabic, English and French:

The orange tree whispered to me: let us draw a homeland and carry it on our postcards; let us paint it in the taste and colour of our ancestors' oranges...

L'oranger m'a murmuré : dessinons une patrie et portons-la sur nos cartes postales ; peignons-la dans le goût et la couleur des oranges de nos ancêtres...

همست لي البرتقالة: سنرسم وطناً ونحمله على بطاقتنا البريدية، نرسمه بطعم ولون برتقال اجدادنا إروي قصصنا، ارويها حتى تصلي الى البحر، تابعي روايتها كي لا تصبح ملكاً لغيرنا

Go tell our stories, tell them until you reach the sea, and keep telling them so that they never belong to any other.

Raconte nos histoires, raconte-les jusqu'à atteindre la mer, et continue à les raconter pour que personne ne les vole... Pour qu'elles n'appartiennent à personne d'autre.

سيكون طعمي مالحاً كقطع الموج المرتطم على شاطئ عكا... وعذباً كسمائها

أنا برتقالة هذه الأرض

My taste will be as salty as the crashing waves on the beach of Acre... As fresh as its sky...

Mon goût sera aussi salé que les vagues qui s'écrasent sur la plage d'Acre... Aussi doux que son ciel...

انا البحر في برتقالة عرفتم من انا؟

I am the orange tree of this land

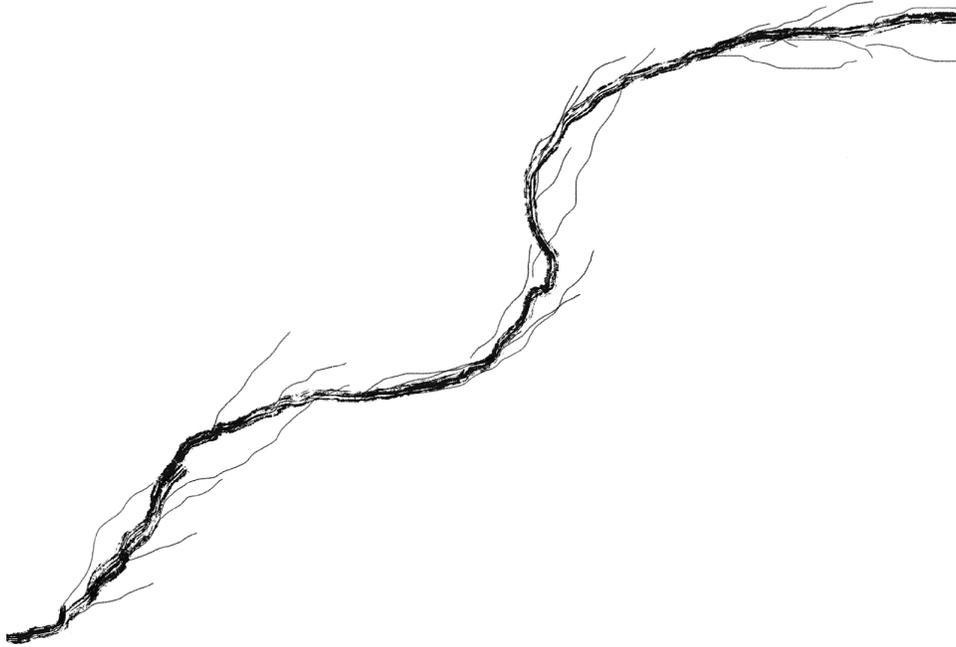
Je suis l'oranger de cette terre

Je suis la mer dans une orange...

I am the sea inside an orange

Do you know who I am ?

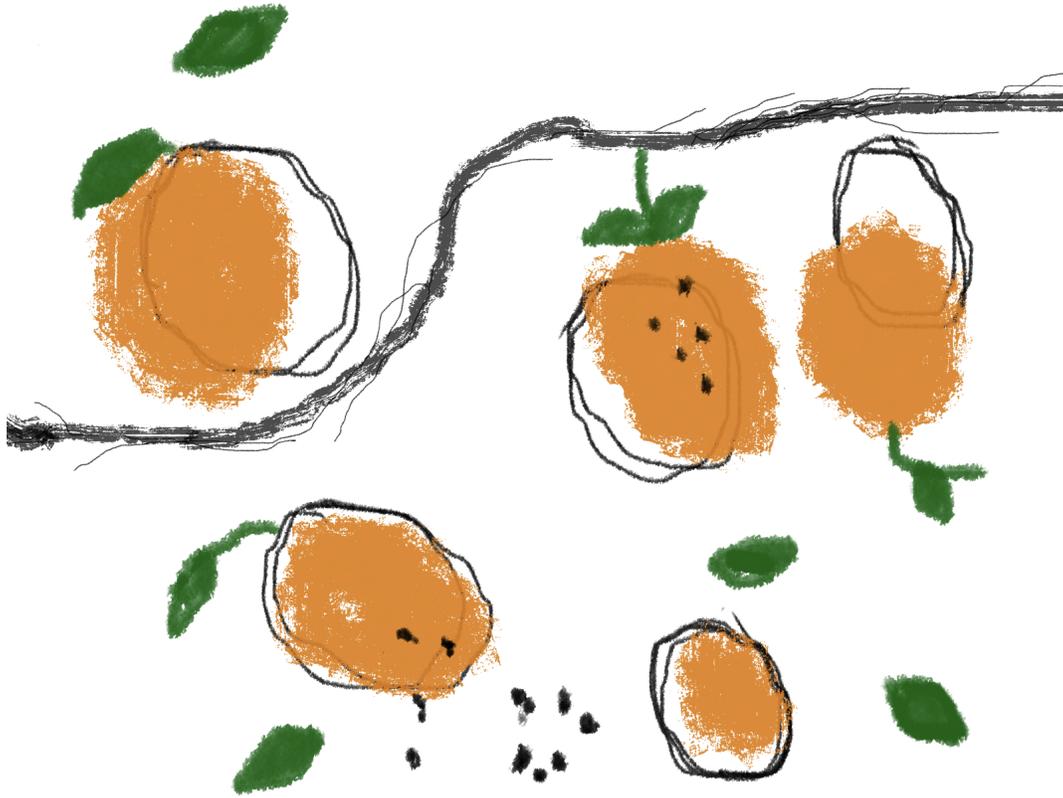
Sais-tu qui je suis ?



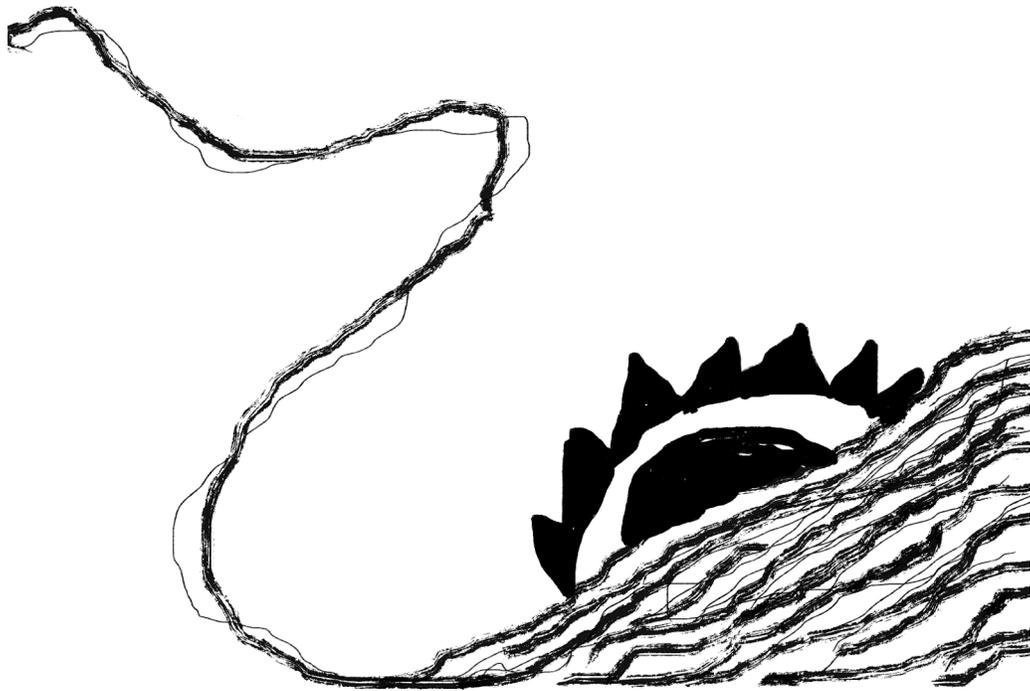
**Figure19.** Serhan, L., (2021). *Postcard 1.* [digital drawing].



**Figure20.** Serhan, L., (2021). *Postcard 2.* [digital drawing].



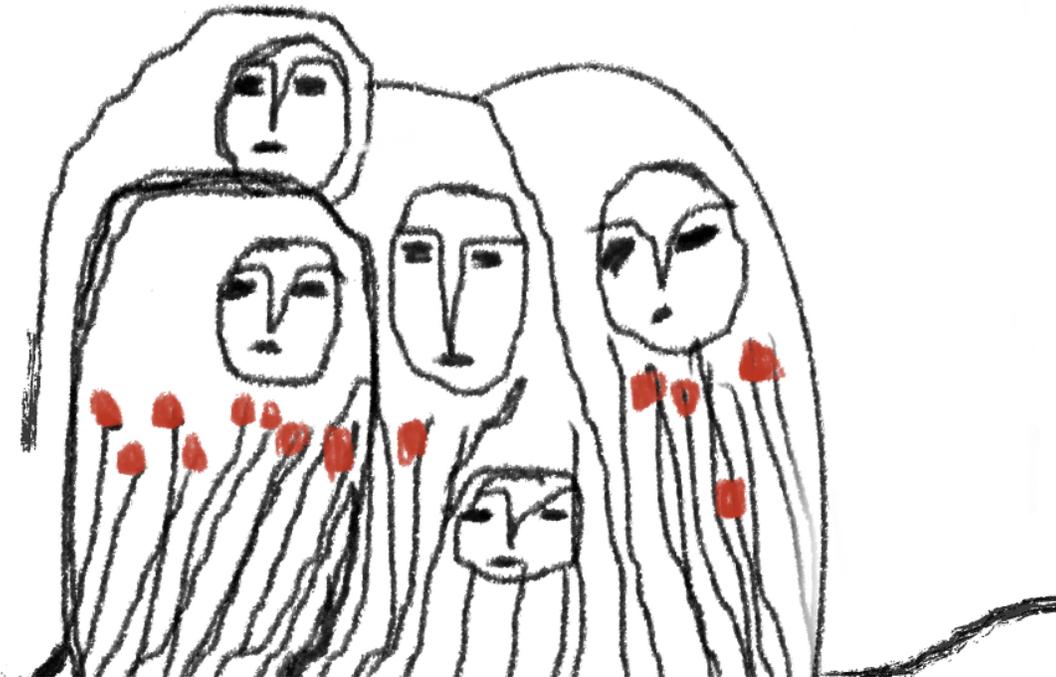
**Figure 21.** Serhan, L., (2021). *Postcard 3*. [digital drawing].



**Figure 22.** Serhan, L., (2021). *Postcard 4*. [digital drawing].



**Figure 23.** Serhan, L., (2022). *Postcard 5*. [digital drawing].



**Figure 24.** Serhan, L., (2022). *Postcard 6*. [digital drawing].



Figure 25. Serhan, L., (2022). *Postcard 7*. [digital drawing].

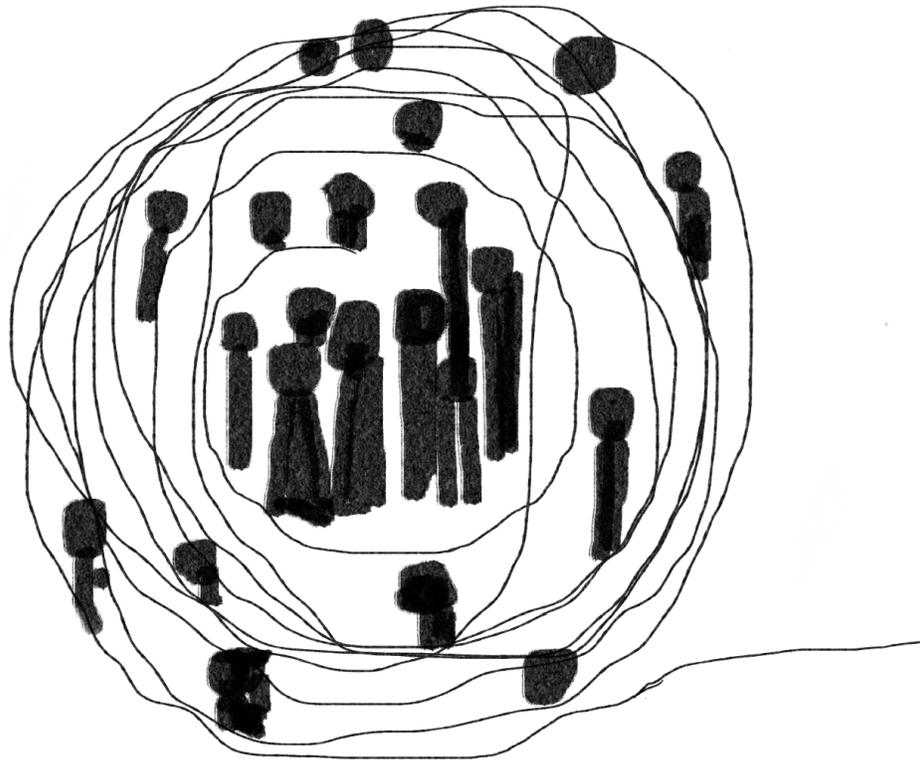


Figure 26. Serhan, L., (2022) *Orange*. [digital drawing].



**Figure 27.** Serhan, L., (2022) *Orange*. [digital drawing].

**In between: Stories of home and land: Documentation of my creative process**

My journey to create my artwork and the final installation generated many learnings along the way. The text I wrote and the video I created for this project represented the complexities inherent in being an artist, an educator, a mother and a Palestinian refugee pursuing masters studies in a foreign country, and in a language that is not my own. I believe that this journey became my way of creatively dealing with all these conflicts and challenges.

### *Text and sketches*

For as long as I remember, I have always kept a personal diary in Arabic. This is why keeping a research journal seemed like a natural decision where I could keep track of my thought process and reflections. However, it wasn't till the beginning of the COVID 19 pandemic that I started sketching daily. Reflecting on my research interests, these sketches quickly became a visual diary where I was able to express my thoughts creatively. The first sketches were black and white and highly symbolic. I only drew birds. I was preoccupied with the birds' free movement, migratory trajectory and the fact that they always had a nest, a "home", to return to. After some time, I started introducing a third colour that facilitated narrating the story. This was when I started drafting the proposal for my thesis. Around the same time, news about what was happening in Sheikh Jarrah<sup>2</sup> in Palestine started flooding my news feed. I felt disoriented, lost, misplaced and stuck in between. *In between*. This was the beginning, the beginning of the thread.

Everything started to make sense then. A thread, an umbilical cord connecting me to my mother, connecting her to her mother, and so on. A bodily thread that gets disconnected, and a metaphorical one that connects me to an endless history and only gets stronger with time. This is when I started drawing the series of sketches depicted above. My ideas started developing as I continued to write and started incorporating other symbols into my story. Upon reflecting on the generational memories and stories that shaped my sense of belonging as a Palestinian refugee, many ideas started to come to mind. Oranges have been prevalent in my thoughts since the beginning though, oranges and the sea.

I wrote and drew a lot, and erased even more. The texts and sketches reflected my feelings and confusion as I was developing my research. After I started receiving the

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<sup>2</sup> Sheikh Jarrah is a neighborhood in East Jerusalem. In 2021, dozens of families in Sheikh Jarrah faced displacement from their homes in coordinated efforts by the Israeli government and Jewish settler groups (Aljazeera, 2022).

participants' videos it struck me how similar we all were: our love for a romanticized vision of Palestine, our fascination with our grandmothers, with oranges, sage and the beach, our struggle with the “temporary”, “exile’ and never ending quest for a home. It was as if this imaginary thread connected us to a lost homeland, but most importantly, it connected us all together. This is when I decided to incorporate the drawings I created as part of the final installation. I took the decision to print them as postcards because I hope that one day I can put a Palestinian stamp on one of them and send it to my loved ones. These postcards are a small gesture to show respect for the land I come from.

### *Video*

My video is divided into two sections: one shot in Canada and the other in Lebanon. I wanted to contrast the snow and cold of the winter here with the sun and warmth over there. To film the first section, I visited Westmount Park near my house four times before being content with the footage I took. I used a tripod to ensure that the video captured is still.

For the second part, I initially wanted to ask someone to film orange trees in Palestine, but the person I asked was busy and I realized that this would take a lot of coordination. Finally, I decided that since I have never been to Palestine, it didn't matter if the orange trees were there or not. I reached out to a close friend in Lebanon and asked her if she was willing to film some orange trees for me. She agreed enthusiastically since she had some orange trees planted in her garden. We spoke on the phone and I explained my vision for this section. I told her that I wanted the camera movement to be hand-held and slow filming as closely as possible to the orange tree. I wanted the camera to wander between the leaves, the sky, the sun-kissed oranges on the tree and the ones on the ground.

## *Installation*

This was the part I struggled with as there were several decisions that I had to make on my own which made this part of the process less collaborative. Moreover, and as mentioned earlier, the uncertainty the pandemic created made it extremely difficult to envision how, even if, the final artworks would be shared with the public. After it became clear that I would be able to curate an installation at the ALLab, I envisioned it to be an intimate experience where audio would flow from the ceiling and people would move together from one place into another. I wanted the participants' videos to be on big monitors as if they were present in the dark room. I wanted my artwork to evoke the feeling of being in a field of oranges with oranges scattered on the floor as an extension to the video.

## Chapter 5: Findings & Discussion

The overall purpose of this procedure was to facilitate collective memory, to condense and accumulate all these stories in order to create the foundation for this research-creation. Autoethnography was essential for this study because it promotes an understanding of how the self and others perceive past events personally. It also shows the myriad ways in which longing for a lost homeland spills over into our everyday exchanges and how those embodied memories and the lived belongingness affect a diaspora's cultural identity.

*In-Between: An Autoethnographic Inquiry into the Notion of Home amongst Palestinians living in the Diaspora*, provides a deep and thoughtful creative description of what home means for five Palestinians who have never visited Palestine and who are living in different countries. Through this project, we shared stories informed by our memories and imagination on what Palestine and the notion of home meant for each of us. This chapter attempts to find answers to my research questions. I start with a presentation of the data collection and analysis methods, followed by a discussion informed by my research questions. I end this chapter by reflecting on the study limitations and next steps.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Researchers have been increasingly exploring the role of the researcher in qualitative research methods. In autoethnography data analysis and data may take many forms, such as self-reflection, where the researcher is viewed as a viable source of data (Leavy, 2009, Ngunjiri et al., 2010). Here, data can be gathered from multiple sources which include journals, sketching, text messages, self-interviews, drawings, etc. (Stahlke Wall, 2016; Egeli, 2017).

Autoethnography is an essential aspect of this study because I sought to create a narrative on life

in a homeland that I have never been to; "the complex landscape of self-narratives" (Chang, 2016, p. 43). Autoethnography enabled me to collaborate and depend on other people's memories to create my own. As I wrote and sketched my stories, I would re-listen to our conversations and to the stories and testimonies of the other four participants. This generative process proved essential for reflecting on the common cultural themes and on the personal as well as the collaborative work that informed our creations.

My data in this research consisted of a journal of my reflections which I kept between September 2020 and May 2022. These included personal reflections based on the readings, conversations with participants and my thesis supervisor, as well as writings based on my daily experiences focusing on moments that evoked a sense of belonging. In addition, I resorted to WhatsApp mining as another source of data. This included Voice notes, texts and videos exchanged with the other participants throughout the creation process. I also kept a visual diary of sketches which evolved and became part of the final installation in the form of postcards. The videos and stories themselves also enabled me to look for common themes. In the sections that follow, I will link the results to my research questions. After I state each question, I will share a personal narrative that connects my lived experiences and memories to the questions asked before unpacking the questions. The purpose of the overarching emphasis of storytelling in this process is to bring out its effectiveness as a tool for preserving memory. Furthermore, it informs the art pedagogy relevant to the concerned group and others in general. The narrative text will be italicized to distinguish it from the rest of the written text.

**Research Question 1: How can imagination and memory through storytelling and other art practices provide the foundation for the reclamation of personal and collective identities for people in the diaspora?**



**Figure 28.** Serhan, L., (2022). *In- between*. [video still].

*I am Lucine. Granddaughter of Aisha and Raja. Daughter of Abed and Iftikar. Mother of Kinda. A Palestinian refugee and a Canadian citizen. I am Lucine, a three years old child living surrounded by checkpoints in the Ein El-Hilweh Refugee Camp in Sidon, Lebanon.*

*I am Lucine, a 46 years old woman and a student at Concordia University on unceded lands.*

*I was around seven years old when I would race my friends to the rooftop of my grandmother's home - my head facing the sky, fascinated by the circular movement of pigeons initiated by one of the pigeon breeders from a faraway rooftop. The pigeons would leave their cages in a line that gradually transformed into a circle as if following a*

*perfect choreography. As the circle got bigger or smaller, the pigeons would ascend and descend transforming the sky into a sea of whiteness, immersing me into dreams of fluffiness and freshness. This daily ritual usually ended with a hand movement and a whistle from the pigeon fancier. Around the same time, I would proudly and joyfully march in the streets with other kids holding huge Palestinian flags which weighed us down. We would walk in monotonous footsteps, in stark contrast to the movement of the pigeons and the flags fluttering in the wind. The pigeons' instinctive movement and freedom made me aware of the limitations of my existence and how little freedom I had beyond the refugee camp walls. Each time we wanted to leave or enter the camp, we had to present our blue refugee ID at the checkpoints surrounding all the exits and entrances of the camp.*

*Back to the starting point, a seven years old child is racing her friends to the top of her grandmother's house fascinated by the white pigeons. Spectacular light is leaking through the rooftops. One story leads to another. The same little girl is running in a field wearing a white dress. Breathless, her cheeks red from the movement, her heart pounding vigorously. One story leads to another. The little girl is proudly holding a heavy flag. One story leads to another. I am typing these words on my laptop weighed down by memories and nostalgia; remembering not only as I was, but as I am now and all that is in-between.*

This study uses creative practices, self-reflective texts, collaborative exchanges with participants, and academic writing, to explore the way Palestinians use their memories and imagination to make sense of their personal and collective identities. My participants and I explored our understanding of home, and the resulting videos are reflective of our experiences

taking part in this project. The videos and stories created were intended to represent our unique experiences while attempting to answer two questions: What is the sense of home? What constitutes a home for you? And if you could visit Palestine for only one day, what would you do? Payel Pal (2021), researcher and assistant professor of English states the following:

“For Palestinian Arab refugees, psychological engagement with the notion of Palestine as “homeland” and the act of reconstructing it in the world of imagination have surfaced as an antidote to the trauma of exile and a pivotal means to a meaningful existence. In other words, Palestinian nostalgia is personal, collective, and political – encapsulating the core issue of the Palestinian nationalist movement: the hope, desire, and the right to return”  
(P.56)

Indeed, the videos each of us created give insight into the way we perceive our identities as Palestinians living in different cities. Our connection to Palestine through the cultural memories and imaginations is inevitable. The longing for a home and a feeling of stability is an integral part of our experiences. And, while for some, like Fadia, the loss of a homeland ties the dislocated Palestinians living in the refugee camp closer together. For others, like Ahmed, it resides as a source of perpetual search. In his video, Ahmed painstakingly searches for a place to call home, but he remains burdened by feelings of liminality, as if he belongs nowhere.

Interestingly, in our first conversation over the phone he told me that standing on a bridge in Sao Paulo, Brazil was the only place he felt at home. This feeling of being in-between is echoed in Rahma’s initial text when she talks about working in a border region between Palestine and Jordan. She also mentions her confusion because of her hyphenated Jordanian/Palestinian identity. In all our stories, the participants often felt burdened with an irreparable sense of exile and talked about the return to Palestine as the antidote to this perpetual feeling of unbelonging.

As Dareen aptly put it when she talked about the curse of the temporary, which is synonymous with being a refugee.

In her book, *Palestinians Born in Exile*, associate professor and Scholar of Islamic Studies at the University of North Carolina, Juliane Hammer states, “Exile and diaspora are the antithesis of home and homeland. The traumatic loss of the homeland strengthens the connection of refugees and exiles to the homeland, and it continues to play an important role in their individual and collective imagination constituting a central aspect of their self-definition” (2005, p. 50). Indeed, memory and imagination play a role in connecting Palestinians refugees suffering from feelings of rootlessness to a national identity that spans a diasporic community. Throughout the videos, the participants used memory (whether their own memories or generational memories transmitted through stories and popular culture) to learn from the past experiences and used their imagination to describe a future visit to an imagined homeland based on previously collected information based on memory. Storytelling was the vehicle they used to carry their memories and imaginings. As described in Chapter Two, storytelling is a fundamentally collective experience. By focusing on the intimate details of their respective experiences, the videos told the story of each participant along with the story of their family and community, bringing the issue of a collective Palestinian identity – as a whole – to the fore. These stories themselves are relational and allowed me to contextualize and expand on their notions of home and on how their memories and imagination played a role in their understanding of home and in reclaiming their personal and collective identities.

“Factors such as class, economics and legal status, and political affiliations influence every Palestinian’s identity” (Hammer, 2005, p. 3). My four participants and I live in different corners of the world and use different languages to navigate the value systems and beliefs of the

countries we live in. Some of us have legal status and carry other citizenships allowing us to travel freely, while others only have their refugee status. However, despite our differences, we have all attempted to create our Palestinian identity without having set foot in Palestine. Our sense of belonging to this imagined home is driven vis-à-vis the intergenerational stories and memories we have heard from our parents and grandparents. Ahmed, Rahma and Fadia mention how their image of Palestine and sense of belonging is also informed by the stories of others beyond family members - whether other refugees in the refugee camp where Fadia lives, or refugees that Ahmed and Rahma met elsewhere. For Fadia, who lives in a refugee camp, the collective memory of home is part of her identity that is shared by everyone who lives in the camp. But more than that, such collective stories within the unresolved conflict, become a claim to existence and belonging.

In this project, five Palestinians who were born and raised in exile imagined and shared stories describing their connection to Palestine. They are part of the larger Palestinian migration and have varied and individual diasporic experiences, yet there was an overwhelming sense of communal belonging in the videos created and stories shared.

**Research Question 2: How can the absence (or loss) of a homeland be apprehended, understood and preserved through art practices?**

***Land of Sun, Sea, Oranges and Olive trees***

*I am Lucine. Daughter of Abed and Iftikar. Granddaughter of Aisha and Raja. Mother of Kinda. A Palestinian refugee and a Canadian citizen. I am Lucine, a three years old child and a student in the Ghassan Kanafani Cultural Foundation (GKCF) in Ein El-Hilweh Refugee Camp in Sidon, Lebanon. I am Lucine, a 46 years old woman and a student at Concordia University on unceded lands.*

*My childhood story is entangled with that of the GKCF where I studied in Kindergarten. The story of GKCF starts with the life and death of Ghassan Kanafani. Ghassan Kanafani (1936-1972) was a renowned Palestinian journalist, literary critic, novelist and short story writer whose writings are deeply rooted in Palestine and Arab culture and politics. His work inspired generations during and after his lifetime. He was born in Acre in the North of Palestine and lived in Jaffa until May 1948 when he was forced to leave his homeland at the age of 12 with his family. He lived and worked in Damascus, Kuwait and then later in Beirut from 1960 onward. On the 8th of July 1972, he was killed by a car bomb in Beirut with his beloved young niece Lamis to whom he had written and illustrated many books as gifts for her birthdays including the children's story "The Little Lantern" (Kanafani, L. 2004). The books of Ghassan Kanafani, his life, and more his murder, shaped my perception of the land Palestine and the injustice and violence inflicted on my people.*

*"You will not be able to find the sun in a locked room (Kanafani, 2005, p:30)." This is what the young princess in "The Little Lantern" was told.*

*"Beloved Acre was already disappearing behind the bends in the road going up to Ras Naqoura. The groves of orange trees followed each other in succession along the side of the road [...]. In the afternoon, when we reached Sidon, we had become refugees" (Kanafani 1999, p. 75-76 76).*

In her book, *Palestinians Born in Exile*, Juliane Hammer talks about the notion of *ghurba* where the Palestinian is a stranger (Hammer, 2005, P. 61). The word *Ghurba* could be loosely translated to a state of estrangement or displacement and it usually refers to the state of being a foreigner in a land away from home. The artistic and literary descriptions of Palestine reflect the

experience of being uprooted and the years of disorientation, fragmentation, isolation and dispersal in different countries. They also form an antithesis to exile encompassing symbols that evoke safety, rootedness, peace and comfort and play a significant role in unifying a Palestinian identity (Abufarha, 2008; Hammer, 2005).

The four participants and I grew without our own memory of Palestine and its people, yet there are striking similarities between our stories and the symbols we used. In addition to the stories told by our family, art and literature had an influence on how we recreated our image of Palestine. Rahma even mentions that her “idea of Palestine was formed through television, social media, the news, novels, and all the oral stories that were ever told to me by my grandmother and each Palestinian I met on the street” (Rahma, 2021). Both she and Daren talk about how other people who have never experienced exile take the notion of home or belonging for granted. None of the participants consulted with each other during their creative processes, yet all of our videos conjured fragrances and images of keys, oranges, olive trees, and the seashore - all dominant Palestinian symbols that have entered the Palestinian cultural imaginations giving Palestinians “a stronger attachment to the land of Palestine in the absence of their physical access to most of it” (Abufarha, 2008, P. 366). Art practices thus become a medium to generate new and shared experiences and to engrave these symbols in the Palestinian cultural identity creating common experiences across time and space.

In the videos shared, we collectively recalled sights and smells. In her video, the camera follows Darine as she walks barefoot on the beach and imagines her trip to Palestine where the trees recognize her and recite the names of her ancestors. Sitting on a rock on the shore in Jordan, we see Rahma on the screen as she dips her feet in the sea and imagines visiting her grandparents’ home in Yafa. In my video, as the camera hovers over an orange tree with

sun-kissed oranges, I talk about the scents as a symbolic means to imagine Palestine. Similarly, Ahmed reminisces on the fragrances associated with his Palestine.

In the previous versions shared with me, Fadia filmed keys and various artifacts from Palestine. In the final video, we see her hands caressing an olive tree in the cemetery as she talks about her dada's stories. Around the end of her video, we see her sketching the map of Palestine, while talking about the refugees' right to return.

This collective conservation of the image of the homeland which is passed from the first generation to the descendants in exile is preserved through art practices and is a vital factor for a diasporic community to survive as a community. Each one of these videos is our individual way of connecting image and reality. It is our narrative about our image of Palestine as much as about our right to belong and return to our homeland, as the two are intertwined. In the absence of a homeland, art plays an important role in creating an image of the homeland and acts as a conduit between the diaspora and Palestine.

**Educational Significance or Research Question 3: What pedagogical implications might such art practices have on art education?**

*I am Lucine. Mother of Kinda. Daughter of Abed and Iftikar. Granddaughter of Aisha and Raja. A Palestinian refugee and a Canadian citizen. I am Lucine, a three years old child singing "ليمونة وزهرة ووردة جورية" in a refugee camp in Sidon, Lebanon. I am Lucine, a 46 years old woman writing a thesis in English at Concordia University on unceded lands.*

*Every morning for three years, I, and the rest of the children at the GKCF in the Ein El-Hilweh Refugee Camp, would sing the lyrics of "ليمونة وزهرة ووردة جورية" - An orange, a*

*flower, and a rose". The lyrics talk about Ghassan Kanafani's love for Palestine and commitment to the cause.*

*Shortly after I moved to Montreal, I enrolled my daughter in a kindergarten. She would come back home singing songs she learned during the day in English. As a mother and an educator, I was happy that my daughter was thriving, but I wanted her to love the language and culture she comes from as well. This is when I decided to found "beit byout: La maisonette de l'arts", an organization where children whose parents come from Arab countries can create and connect in Arabic through a series of drama, storytelling, puppetry and art workshops. The workshops I designed encouraged the children to explore their cultural identities and develop a sense of the self within an inclusive environment.*

In relation to art education, this project provides educators with a sense of how memory can be enhanced and used to encourage students' creative processes (Darts, 2006, p.7) as it presented me with a "potential space for transformative possibilities" (O'Neil, 2008, p.18). I strongly believe that as educators we should explore topics that motivate us in our teaching and research. My point of departure for this project has been my own lived experience as a Palestinian Refugee, an experience that is shared by many members of my community. Throughout this study, I have shared how the home has a symbolic presence in refugee life. A presence that is dynamic and lived in passing moments relying on collectively shared stories. I have also shared how a community could come together around this symbolic presence of the home. My inquiry into my research questions required a scholarly endeavor and space where such a notion is facilitated and lived. And while my experiences as a researcher and educator

informed this work, seeking personal narratives from fellow members of my community made the experience a collective one. Akin to how it is lived in reality.

*In-Between* creatively represents Palestinians' notions of home and belonging, which are told through their stories and presented as videos that have been shared in the art installation. The videos created for this project, enabled participants to reflect on their identities and to disseminate their knowledge in a creative and transformative way. When Fadia shared her final text with me, she sent the following text: "I hope I was able to convey my thoughts. You made me live my dream. You cannot believe... Neverending nostalgia, Palestine and Umm al Faraj... neverending nostalgia" (personal communication, November 29, 2021).

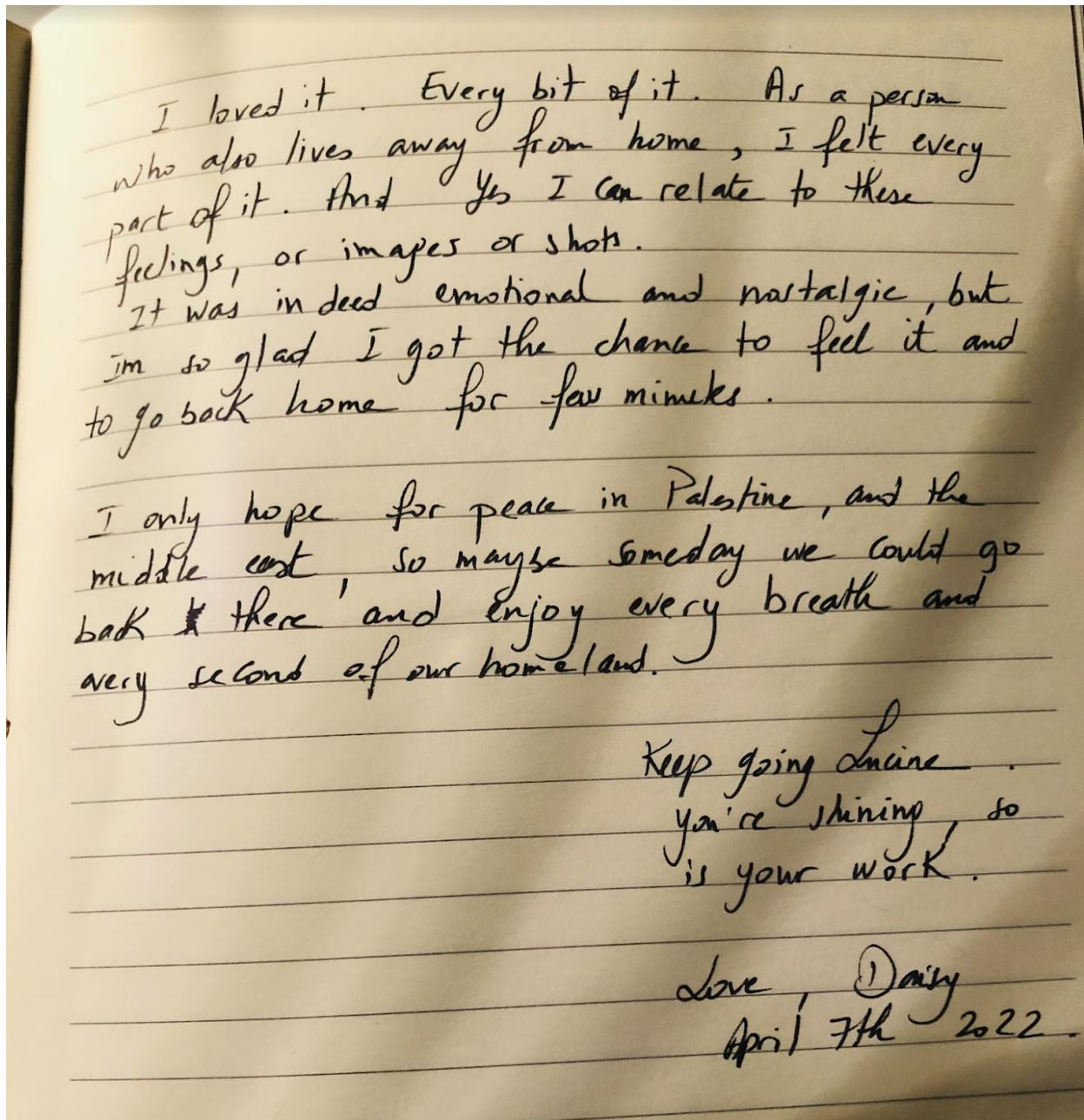
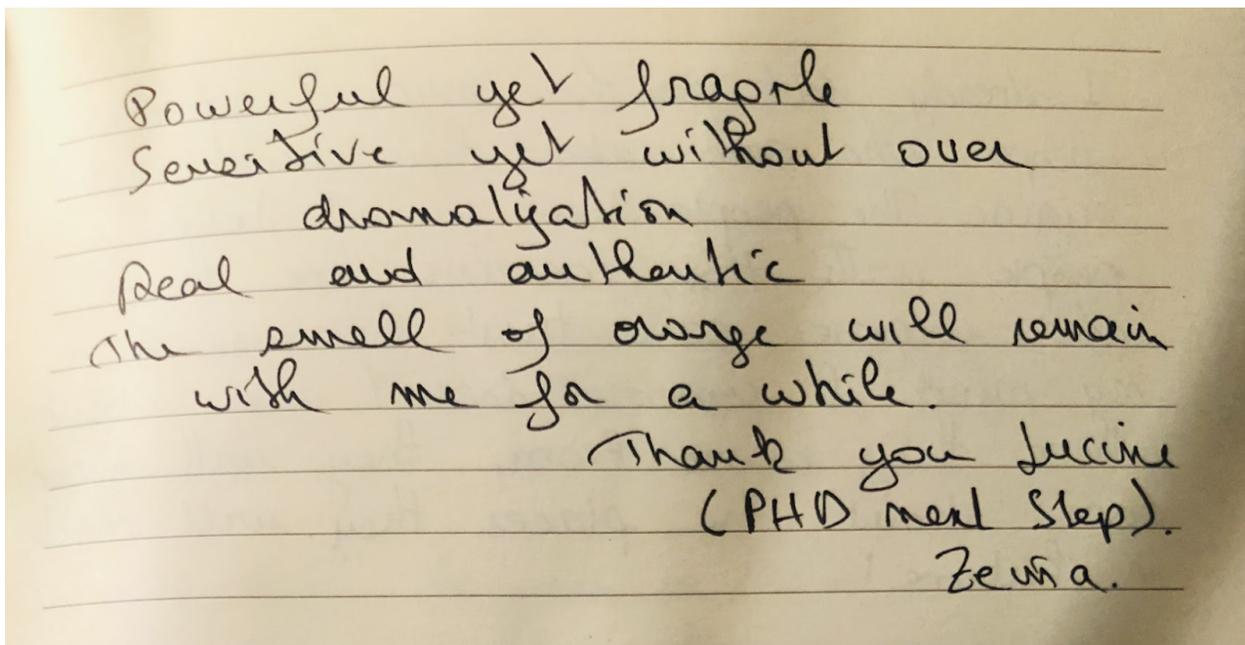


Figure 29. Serhan, L., (2022). *Guest book*. Photo: Lucine Serhan

By jointly exploring our experiences as Palestinians, we participated in this collective endeavor to construct a new understanding of the meaning of home and belonging. We learned from each other, and produced an experiential form of knowledge that is dependent on each participants' unique understandings and exchanges (Kester, 2011). In addition to encouraging the

participants to reflect and come up with their own answers to the questions asked, we engaged in a dialogical process which participated in the creation of new pedagogical practices. I had to find the balance between my tight deadline and structured research approach and the need to adapt and be flexible in relation to their individual needs and working process. This also meant sharing power while stepping in to help when I needed to guide them to find their voice through their creative process. The lengthy exchanges we had over multiple voice notes and long phone or video calls could be viewed “as creative praxis” (Kester, 2011, p. 28). Cultivating a respectful and trustful relationship with each of them, required a lot of listening from my end.



**Figure 30.** Serhan, L., (2022). *Guest book*. Photo: Lucine Serhan

Moreover, the final installation at the ALLab allowed viewers outside academia to be a part of the experience and relate to it. The installation opened up the artworks for various interpretations and expanded the possibilities for art practices within academic research (Clover, 2011; Rose, 2011). It also helped with creating empathy and generated awareness among visitors. As the first video ended and the second one started, visitors realised that they had to move

together from one corner of the black box into another to watch the upcoming videos and so on. They didn't know which screen would be turned on next. One visitor even mentioned to me that this feeling of disorientation and not knowing where to go next, reminded him of the refugee experience of displacement and uncertainty.

The memories and stories brought together in this project participated in building a place of individual and collective experience and belonging for participants and viewers who visited the installation at the ALLab too. Thus, while the collaborative aspects of this research journey brought new insights to the participants' ideas and creations, including mine, it was the final art installation that enabled us to share these insights and learnings with other people. It is my hope that the scholarly part of this project would inform Autoethnographic researchers of Palestinian communities in exile in the future and encourage art students to use their respective socio-political location as an advantageous position for their research.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

It is important to acknowledge this study's limitations. Centered on a fairly small sample of Palestinians living in different countries, this project could be enriched by including voices of more Palestinians living in different countries and from different backgrounds - maybe even Palestinians living in Palestine. However, having only four other participants allowed deep engagement and the telling and intricate stories.

And while I shared the installation documentation with participants during and after the vernissage at the ALLab, this is the first time I present the fruit of a collaborative project without any of the collaborators being present. I believe they would have felt more engaged in this aspect of the project had they been able to join us virtually through zoom during the vernissage.

Afforded the opportunity to stage the installation some other time, I would likely arrange to ensure all of them could attend.

## **Conclusion**

This study seeks to capture the notion of home within an individual and within the diaspora in general using a dual method approach – research-creation and autoethnography – to develop a text and a collaborative artwork that is reciprocal in nature and reflects the need to belong. It is about how stories create a sense of belonging and how it is lived and embodied.

In the context of this research, memory and imagination are more accurate measures to capture that notion because the idea is creatively woven. It is not a given reality. Similarly, the sense of belonging that comes with it is embodied and collectively lived on the blurry line between reality and fantasy. The memory of a place and time and all the imagination around it bears more possibilities than complex political history could ever offer. Yet memory and imagination are an influx of things, concepts, events, places, and people changing over time.

The significance of this study is backed by the importance of storytelling as a preservation tool of various cultural aspects. Like Emily Jacir, I believe that the story will be in our own voice, devoid of the influence of any mainstream narrative. Art enables people like me to express the knowledge they have about their cultural background. Creativity plays an essential role in my expression of my Palestinian cultural background because I have never been there. However, the interaction with people and the exchange of stories enabled me to build on the collective experience of home, to create the installation of an imagined homeland without ever being there.

This is not a typical scholarly research project. This aspires to have an audience beyond the academy. The anticipated transformational impact of this project goes beyond the acquisition

of data from multiple sources and using them to generate a conclusion. The project creates an experience whose impact will be on various parties to understand the association between diaspora, exile, memory, imagination, and storytelling.

I believe that the value of this research lies in grounding our lived experiences as Palestinians in creation and in theory. As an art educator, I hope to keep questioning the roots and beliefs that inform my actions and guide my pedagogical practice, and to continue using storytelling and creating projects that inspire dialogue around the notion of home, identity and belonging. So, in the spirit of telling stories, I finish this paper with the following story:

*Back to the starting point, a little girl is sitting in her grandmother's lap, the fragrance of sage in the teapot fills the entrance. A little girl is sitting on her grandfather's shoulders, the smell of saltwater fills the air as the camp is getting smaller and smaller. A little boy is seated on his desk - the smell of gouache colors fills the classroom as he draws an aquarium. One story leads to another. What is home for you? "Sometimes home is my mother, sometimes it's my backpack, and many times home is a pair of shoes", "an infinite sea", "it's an aquarium", "It's my family, it's my cocoon... It's me, it's my little world". No! "I was born as a refugee, with no homeland". "It's the camp, our second homeland that gathers what is left in us". "It is a camp where each alley is named after a Palestinian village". What is home for you? "Home is always linked to another idea, which is the temporary. And the temporary is the refugee's curse". No! "It is everything and nothing... it is in between".*

*Whose voice is it? Is it my voice? Is it my voice as a little girl or as a grown woman? Is it the little boy's voice? Is it the voice of the participants? Is it my grandmother's voice? My grandfather's? Is it my daughter's voice? Or is it the voice of all of us? The sound comes from far away: "Go tell your stories, tell them until you reach the sea, and keep telling them so that*

*they never belong to any other". Stories carry me/us to moments in the past, to a place we call home. They are unstoppable. In between the real and the imagined, they narrate our collective lives and memories. In between memories of the past and imagination of what the future could look like, they open up gateways for future generations to dream of a possible return. The sound comes from far away: How will the future generations take ownership of these stories and keep them alive?*

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## Appendix A: Information and Consent Form



### INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

**Study Title:** *In between: An Autoethnographic Inquiry into the Notion of Home amongst Palestinians living in the Diaspora*

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**Researcher's Contact Information:** [lucineserhan@gmail.com](mailto:lucineserhan@gmail.com). +1(514) 627-3650

**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Lorrie Blair

**Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information:** [lorrie.blair@concordia.ca](mailto:lorrie.blair@concordia.ca)

**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 investigate how imagination and memory provide the foundation for the reclamation of personal and collective identities for Palestinians in the diaspora. I am motivated by a desire to explore how the absence (or loss) of a homeland can be apprehended, understood and preserved through art practices. As part of this project, I will develop an art exhibition in Montreal that aims to explore how the absence (or loss) of a homeland can be apprehended, understood and preserved through art practices.

#### B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to share your personal story. Your participation would also entail you agreeing to:

1. Reflect on the following two questions:
  - What is the sense of home for you?
  - If you could visit Palestine for only one day, what would you do?

2. Record your thoughts and answers in Arabic using your smart phone or video camera (if available). You are encouraged to only share answers that you feel comfortable with, keeping in mind that these recordings will be shared with the public.
3. Share your video recordings with me.
4. Video editing (adding a title page, audio, credits, etc.), I will consult with you so that no changes will be made without your consent.

In total, participating in this study will take approximately 3 to 5 hours, spread out over a period of several months, and leading up to an exhibition in Winter 2022. After you share the video with me, you will have one month to withdraw your participation without negative consequences.

### **C. RISKS AND BENEFITS**

The risk is minimal, and it is up to the participants to decide what they want to share. There is a chance that some participants may become upset when responding to some of the questions, especially if the answers address their reasons for being away from visiting their homeland or the current state of conflict in that or nearby nations.

Potential benefits include the overall experience of collaborating on an art project and engaging with other Palestinians in the diaspora.

### **D. CONFIDENTIALITY**

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

- 1- Video recording
- 2- Background info 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:

If shown, the information gathered will be identifiable. That means it will have your name directly on it.

If concealed, the researcher may know your identity but will not disclose it or otherwise make it available to others; they will refer to you by a pseudonym. The researcher will have a list that links the pseudonym to your name. 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.

We will protect the information by storing it on the password protected hard drive of the researcher's computer. No one other than the researcher will have access to the data during post-production.

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 one month after you send them your recordings.

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 I. 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](mailto:oor.ethics@concordia.ca).

## Appendix B: Ethics Certificate



### CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

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Name of Applicant: Lucine Serhan  
Department: Faculty of Fine Arts\Art Education  
Agency: N/A  
Title of Project: In-Between: An Autoethnographic Inquiry into the  
Notion of Home amongst Palestinians living in the  
Diaspora.  
Certification Number: 30015392

Valid From: October 08, 2021 To: October 07, 2022

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.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard DeMont".

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Dr. Richard DeMont, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee