

**QUILTING THE MEMOIR:
CULTURAL IMAGINARIES OF EGYPTIAN JEWRY**

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Abstract

Quilting the Memoir: Cultural Imaginary of Egyptian Jewry

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This dissertation engages with the intricate life stories and experiences of the underrepresented and understudied Egyptian Jewish past through an engagement with the threads of memoirs, memories passed on through the generations *via* storytelling, family heirlooms and other memory objects.

Quilting the Memoir: The Cultural Imaginary of Egyptian Jewry engages with three central research issues. First, it explores the role of digital storytelling and memory in articulating the cultural heritage of Egyptian Jewry. Second, it examines the relationships between individual memories, cultural memories, and the cultural imaginary of Egyptian Jewry. Finally, it seeks to understand how personal memoirs and memory objects might find alternative forms of artistic expression in a time-based media installation.

Quilting the Memoir is a research-creation journey that spans a decade, resulting in three separate components – a written dissertation, a WordPress site <https://quiltingthememoir.wordpress.com/> and an exhibition of original digital artefacts. Focusing on the mid-20th century exodus of Jews from Egypt and turning to alternative and aesthetic sites of inquiry, this research-creation project aims to generate insight into the ways we remember and represent the past and imagine the future. As a research-creation thesis, *Quilting the Memoir* demonstrates the value of an engagement with public works, cultural imaginaries and modes of remembering that materialize in alternative research outcomes such as a time-based media installation comprised of digital memory quilts exhibited in a gallery.

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With immense gratitude, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the individuals that have contributed to the completion of my thesis, *Quilting the Memoir: The Cultural Imaginaries of Egyptian Jewry*. This work would not have been possible without the unwavering support, guidance, and encouragement of many.

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Finally, I extend my sincerest gratitude to the memoirs, life stories, personal anecdotes, individuals and stories that inspired *Quilting the Memoir*. There are too many to name, suffice it to say that each of their narratives and life experiences have deeply influenced this work, and I hope this thesis honors the richness and the complexity of their life stories.

Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to my dear mother, Greycy Ammar Rafla, whose strength, perseverance, grace, and creative spirit have been a constant source of inspiration. She continues to ignite the flame that drives me forward each day. I also dedicate this work to my father, Mounir Helmy Rafla whose spirit guides me in ways that words cannot fully capture. Together, they continue to profoundly influence my aesthetic sensibilities and the path I walk today.

For my parents

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Note to reader:

There are three distinct parts to *Quilting the Memoir*: a written dissertation, a WordPress website (<https://quiltingthememoir.wordpress.com/>) and a time-based media installation featuring the design and production of digital memory quilts. Each part may be read and viewed in any order, independently of one another, or may be experienced as a whole.

1: The written dissertation describes the journey of research-creation offering an in-depth discussion of the methodologies, research methods and conceptual and theoretical framework,

2: The production of digital quilt patterns are available *via* WordPress, a blog-building web platform (<https://wordpress.com/>). This research tool and presentation platform is the product of the memory work and research-creation which was performed in ongoing process of reading, writing and collecting data. You may access the website here:

<https://quiltingthememoir.wordpress.com/>

3: A time-based media installation and exhibition was another manifestation of the research. You may see sample work here: <https://produitrien.com/rafla/>

List of Media Works

All works listed below were created by Myriam Rafla and presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Social Sciences & Humanities) at Concordia University.

All works were produced between 2022 – 2023 and exhibited from October 26 – 29 2023 at Gallery Produit Rien, 6909 Marconi St., Montreal, Quebec.

2 x Video Wall:

Golden Circles, Global Diaspora: 2m30sec.

Mother, Mother: 1m52sec.

3 x 32” TV Monitors Vertical projection.

Tryptic:

Haute Couture. Video Loop. 1min.

Blue Pearl. Video Loop. 57sec.

Beige Dentelle. Video Loop. 50sec.

1 x 32” TV Monitor. Horizontal projection.

Kalthoum wa Mourad. Video Loop. 22sec.

Paper Quilt: 8 x 20”x20” Print. Cotton Paper. Woven by hand.

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Prologue: Stories of Longing, Spaces of Belonging

I grew up in a Middle Eastern community in Ville St-Laurent, Montreal, during the 1970s and 1980s. We didn't have a car when I was growing up and we often travelled through the city by bus, subway, and taxis. During those years, I witnessed many exchanges between my mother and the immigrant cab drivers who drove us home, usually helping to deliver our week's groceries. When they would inevitably engage her in conversation and ask where she was from, she always said proudly, with her distinct accent, "Je suis Juif d'Egypte" / "I am an Egyptian Jew".

When I was younger this was greeted by Middle Eastern cab drivers with charm and pleasant surprise. But as I grew older, and as hostilities and war in the Middle East escalated, especially between Egypt and Israel and Israelis and Palestinians, I witnessed a change in the Middle Eastern cab drivers' reactions and their attitudes to my mother's firm and proud claim to her Egyptian Jewish identity. The reactions were no longer expressions of charm and wonderment, but rather discomfort and at times disdain. And if my mother was met with silence or surprise, she would repeat herself, underlining the "Juif", unaware (I think) of the social cues, and the tensions she was generating. As I grew more aware of Middle Eastern politics, and as new waves of immigration continued to grow the foreign population in Montreal, I started to anticipate and fear the backlash when my mom would proclaim, "Je suis Juif d'Egypte!" My mother never disassociated the two identities. Consciously or not, she refused to go unheard.

Similarly, when I was asked as a child about my origins, I used to enthusiastically, (naively), and proudly proclaim that I was an Egyptian-Coptic-Jew from Montreal. This answer was often met with what seemed to me at the time a perplexing response from the adults who asked them - "Impossible!" Followed by an awkward pause. The question that followed next was

often about my religious orientation: “Well then does that make you Jewish or Christian?” And when I answered “both”, again the response was - “Impossible!”. And so, it would go - a series of questions, followed by a kind of shock and awe, as though what I was saying was utterly ludicrous, or “Impossible!”.

Once I detected a pattern, I learned to respond differently to the question of my origins. “Egyptian” is all I would offer. Leaving out the specifics led inquisitive people to assume that I was Muslim which, if I said that I wasn’t, caused even more confusion. As I grew older, my knowledge about my family history deepened and I was better able to defend my “impossible” identity. But I spent a good part of my life explaining and “justifying” my family origins, and in turn my cultural identity, to this day. In Quebec, where we have been mired in culture and language debates, the confusion about this hybrid identity seemed even more loaded.

Nationalism Across Borders

I had not realized until recently that my Jewish mother and Coptic father were displaced by three distinct nationalist movements: Arab nationalism, nationalist Zionism, and Quebec nationalism. They left Cairo in 1966, lived in London for less than a year and relocated to Montreal in 1967. In 1956 all Jewish Egyptians who did not hold an Egyptian passport or citizenship were expelled from the country as foreign subjects. Once my mother and father were married, and her civil status changed, she was able to retain civil status in Egypt as his wife and stayed even after her family had left. But it was not long before Egyptian Copts became marginalized as well and it was time for my parents to go. In 1967, they relocated to London, where my father was supposed to set up a new production office for the film company he operated with his father. But again, within months, the War of 1967 broke between Israel and Egypt, and all Egyptian funds were frozen, thereby making business between London and Cairo

impossible. This is when my parents decided to settle in Montreal, Quebec, where yet another fervent nationalist movement led by the Parti-Quebecois and their pursuit of sovereignty had my ‘immigrant’ father ousted out of his job as Director General of Ahunstic College. And so, the story goes.

These three anecdotes sum up the themes of this research journey. The story of how the attitude of taxi drivers changed while my mother’s story remained the same, illustrates how complicated questions of cultural identity, fixed notions of place, and our memory of them are interconnected. The second anecdote about my ‘impossible’ identity also informs this research. The sentiment that an Egyptian Jewish identity is impossible reflects a larger issue of negating this history due to ignorance, pre-conceptions of Middle Eastern histories, politics and popular culture. The sentiment also reflects our innate disbelief at what might appear to be oppositional in nature – Jewish and Arabic cultures – could co-exist in ways we may have never imagined.

Je me souviens, I remember ...

I continue to live in Montreal, Quebec, caught in the schism between the French and the English-speaking communities. My goal in writing this thesis and pursuing PhD research is to investigate the intriguing, paradoxical, rhizomatic quality and hybrid nature of Egyptian Jewish identities, through memoirs, life stories, and my own experience with mixed cultural heritage and exploratory visual media art practice that live in liminal spaces.

A growing body of research in the fields of Jewish and Middle Eastern studies, including the work of Deborah Starr (2019), Dario Miccoli (2015, 2022), Michèle Baussant (2019, 2022) and Najat Abdulhuq (2016), demonstrates a pressing need for new modes of research to challenge the fixed paradigms and framework of ethnonationalist, post-colonialist discourses within the academe. *Quilting the Memoir: Cultural Imaginaries of Egyptian Jewry* is a research project that

has given me the opportunity to engage deeply into a creative process that shaped the visual media content for this research in unexpected and surprising ways. The ongoing interplay between a creative practice, theoretical and cultural discourses and an engagement with memory-work and practice-led research rendered a rich weaving of visual materials in a new form, the digital media memory quilt.

The goal of this current research-creation is not to historicize the past lives of Jewish Egyptians as such, nor is it meant to essentialize a definition of a culture or identity, but rather to look at the relationship between personal experience, cultural memory and transmitted memories that span generations, and the ways in which we tell stories and represent diasporan through visual media. The impression this left me as a child was how impactful the effects of the larger global world affected how we were perceived and identified by others.

The memories my mother shared with me of her childhood and young adulthood were joyful ones. She remembered home as a place of comfort, emancipation, and cultural richness. Unlike some of her siblings, she did not carry embittered memories of loss or betrayal. For her, the loss of her homeland resonated as a profound sadness, but it never diminished her love for her Egyptian and Jewish cultural roots, which she celebrated through daily rituals and practices. These stories of my mother's life echo the memoirs written by others of her generation. They are not merely accounts of the past but offer a glimpse into a way of living – one marked by tolerance, openness, and an appreciation for the complex social and cultural mosaic of the time. While these narratives are shaped by the pain of exile, they are not solely about reclaiming identity or a sense of home. They also reflect a life that embraced coexistence, even within a framework fraught with colonial histories and the larger global and political realities that shaped

them. Most importantly, they are stories that convey empathy, wonderment and a will to accept difference, in oneself and in others.

This dissertation charts the milestones of my journey, with each chapter exploring key events and turning points. Chapter One examines the literary memoirs and historical narratives of Egyptian Jewry, providing a foundation for understanding this community's complex past. Chapter Two critically engages with the concepts of postmemory and the mediation of memory, reflecting on how memories are transmitted and reimagined across generations. Chapter Three introduces innovative methods in research and documentation, focusing on archiving family heritage through creative and scholarly practices. Chapter Four elaborates on the creation of digital artefacts that encapsulate the core aspects of this research-creation project, blending technology with memory work. Finally, Chapter Five reflects on the writing of this dissertation and the broader journey it represents—a journey that begins with my mother and the taxi rides taken with her many decades ago.

Introduction: Quilting the Memoir

Introduction: Thesis Overview

Quilting the Memoir: Cultural Imaginaries of Egyptian Jewry looks at personal life stories that span generations, through literary memoirs and other material memory objects including photographs, clothing and personal belongings. In examining the ways in which cultural histories are remembered and shared, the project offers a counter narrative to assumptions about Jewish-Egyptian identity, and an innovative research approach using visual media art, while working through the fragments and entanglements of transmitted memories and personal archives. Through the creation of original digital artefacts and a digital time-based media installation, the project investigates ways of remembering. In creating these artefacts, the project draws on interdisciplinary practice-based methods in research-creation (Carpentier & Sumiels, 2021; Chapman & Sawchuk, 2015; Poletti, 2020; Rossetto, 2017; Skains, 2018; Sullivan, 2010) and in digital storytelling (Bal, 2018; Barber, 2016; Klein, 1995). Inspired by Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory (1992, 2019, 2020), *Quilting the Memoir* explores both what is understood as the cultural imaginary of Egyptian Jewry, while offering a remediated version of how my family history intersects with these broader cultural imaginaries.

In their edited volume, *Storytelling and Ethics Literature, Visual Arts and the Power of Narrative*, Hanna Meretoja and Colin Davis (2018) invite scholars to reflect on the ethics of storytelling. Meretoja and Davis's work focuses on "how contemporary artistic storytelling practices address the imbrication of remembering and imagining as they engage with past worlds from the horizon of the present" (2018, p. 2). Through an innovative and iterative research approach, my study examines the role of cultural memory developed among the Egyptian Jewish

diaspora (Baussant, 2021; Miccoli, 2022; Starr, 2011). More precisely, the distinctive methods deployed in my study draw from concepts of postmemory and remediation (Bolter & Grusin, 2000; Erll, 2008; Hirsch, 2020; van Dijck, 2007) as well as informing and contributing to the documentation of underrepresented histories within world Jewry (Baussant, 2022; Levy, 2017; Miccoli, 2019, 2022).

Digital storytelling practices and strategies present ways of recounting underrepresented pasts by challenging conventional modes of expression, media representation and dissemination. According to Meretoja and Davis, “artistic storytelling practices have potential to enlarge our space of experience in the present by creating new possibilities of experience, thought and imagination: they can transform the ways in which we, through our understandings of the past, orient ourselves to the future and imagine the yet-to-be” (Meretoja & Davis, 2018, p. 2-3). In accordance with these insights, this thesis offers alternative ways of researching, presenting, and engaging with cultural memory and imaginaries for the ‘yet-to-be’. The creation of a digital memoir proposed here is a demonstration of how the digital quilts and time-based media exhibition offer underrepresented voices alternative modes of expression.

This chapter is the first stage in my journey. Here I introduce you to the study's background, problem statement, research questions, research design, and provide a preliminary overview of the literature, methodologies, and conceptual frameworks deployed. I return to each of these moments in more detail in specific chapters later. It also outlines the significance and context of the study, offering insights into the origins of Egyptian Jewry, the displacement of Egyptian Jewish communities, and the subsequent emergence of a global diasporic Egyptian Jewish community (Baussant, Miccoli, & Schely-Newman, 2019; Miccoli, 2022). Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the thesis structure and the dynamic journey that ensues.

Background to the Study: The Ambivalent Homeland

Many contemporary cultural histories demonstrate that Jewish Egyptians weren't merely tolerated in modern Egypt; they were deeply integrated into the nation's economy, politics, and cultural fabric (Beinin, 1998) as literary memoirs attest. However, with the conflation of fervent political movements of Arab nationalism and political Zionism, a rising sentiment of antisemitism began to develop among Arab nations, making the lives of Jews intolerable and dangerous. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and subsequent regional conflicts heightened tensions between Egyptian Jewish and Arab communities, and the Suez Crisis in 1956 proved pivotal, marking a turning point for Jewish communities in Egypt. Escalating tensions between Arabs and Jews resulted in anti-Jewish discrimination, forced expulsions, and property confiscations. Therefore, although “few Egyptian Jews identified as Zionists; the establishment of the state of Israel ultimately contributed to the dissolution of the Egyptian Jewish community” (Starr, 2019, p. 9). The majority of the Jewish population left Egypt during this tumultuous period, between 1948 and 1956, and the exodus continued over the years.

Today, the Jewish community in Egypt is virtually nonexistent. In Egypt, the heritage organization *Drop of Milk* diligently preserves Jewish sites, synagogues, and archives books and documents found on local sites and in their libraries. While largely invisible to broader global audiences, the survival of these material traces of the history of Jewish Egyptians stands as a testament to their enduring contributions to Egyptian society. While the history of modern Egypt, (punctuated by Gamal Abdel Nasser's military takeover) was being documented, the Jews of Egypt were progressively fading from the national portrait of their homeland (Starr, 2019). *Drop of Milk* has a Facebook Group page where they announce local events and maintain contact with a global network: <https://www.facebook.com/D.O.M.Egypt>.

Ongoing studies of material culture and public heritage sites shed light on the physical remains of Jewish presence in Egypt, including synagogues, cemeteries, and artefacts. Yoram Meital (2024), in his book, *Sacred Places Tell Tales: Jewish Life and Heritage in Modern Cairo* explores the history of Jewish communities in Cairo, focusing particularly on their synagogues and communal institutions. Meital discusses how synagogues were not just religious spaces but also centers for cultural and social activities, revealing the diverse ways in which Jewish identity was expressed. “Examining synagogues and their use in Egyptian historical and contemporary contexts offers a new perspective on the history of Egyptian Jews and their affinity with local society and culture” (Meital, 2024 p. 17). His insights reflect on the complex relationship between modern Egyptian society and its Jewish history.

Context for the Study: History of Jews in Egypt

The historical trajectory of Egyptian Jewry unfolds against a backdrop of diasporic migrations and significant political upheavals. Following the expulsion of Jews from Spain and Portugal in 1492, Jewish populations dispersed across the Ottoman Empire, the Mediterranean coastal regions, and North Africa. The late 19th century witnessed another wave of migration, as Jews from Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and North Africa sought refuge in Cairo and Alexandria, fostering a cosmopolitan bourgeoisie that flourished into the twentieth century (Gorman, 2003; Miccoli, 2015; Singerman & Amar, 2006; Starr, 2009). By the mid-twentieth century, Nasser's nationalization efforts affected not only Egyptian Jewish families but also targeted their homes, confiscating properties, seizing funds, nationalizing businesses, and imprisoning individuals (Aciman, 1989; Cohen, 1991; 2012; Laskier, 1997). The Jewish population of Egypt saw the largest exodus in 1956, when Nasser's decree expelled all foreign subjects but gave the Jewish population 48 hours to leave the country with no right of return,

forcing them to leave behind all properties, business and assets. For older generations, migration meant not just physical relocation, but also a disconnection from language, culture, nation, and their sole cultural heritage.

As burgeoning interests and collaborations in current scholarship on diasporic Jewish identities begin to explore Egyptian Jewish histories, a more coherent body of work and knowledge is evolving in the fields of Middle Eastern and Jewish Studies, more specifically Sephardic and Mizrahi studies. The “comparative analysis” of different Jewish histories and backgrounds “reveals the existence of interconnected memory rooted in feelings of diasporic belonging that bind together Jewish milieux dispersed across the Mediterranean, Israel and Europe, and even beyond those spaces” (Miccoli, 2022, p. 22). The complex histories that are recounted through these personal life stories reflect experiences beyond the Egyptian Jewish communities of the mid-twentieth century and shed light on the complexities and possibilities of co-existence between communities that are difficult to imagine in today’s tense political climate between Arabs and Jews.

Each chapter in this dissertation presents a distinct moment in my journey. When I began my thesis in 2013, the works of historians such as Yoram Meital (2024), Deborah Starr (2020), Dario Miccoli (2015, 2022), Michele Baussant (2019, 2022) and Najat Abdulhuq (2016) had not yet been published. The digital memory quilts would have developed differently without reference to these more recent scholarly works. The more recent historicization of Egyptian Jewry has served to address the gaps in the histories and nurture my own reflections and experiences as I engaged with life stories, the memoirs, and the digital artefacts.

Statement of the Problem

The narrative histories of Jews from the Middle East and North Africa vary from country to country, and from one perspective to another. Jewish histories in the Middle East and North Africa share some common ground, but for the most part is vastly divergent and often paradoxical. For many Arab Jews, their lives and status changed practically overnight as they departed from their homelands. For others, the demands of adjusting to a new language and cultural context in a new place led to a gradual dissolution of the Arabic-Jewish culture that absorbed their lives before now.

The absence of comprehensive historical accounts of Egyptian Jewish life in the 20th century, coupled with the dominance of colonial, nationalist, and imperialist perspectives in existing historical narratives (Azoulay, 2012, 2019; Abdulhaq, 2016; Beinin, 2005; Baussant, 2011; Gedi & Elam, 1996; Laskier, 1995) present a significant problem in the representation and historicization of Egyptian Jewry. As Miccoli notes, “even in the field of colonial studies, the history of the Jews has been difficult to handle since it complicates the opposition between colonizer and colonized and often disrupts any linear understanding of the relations between Europe and the Arab world” (Miccoli, 2022, p. 3). The dearth of Egyptian Jewish historiography mirrors the broader exclusion of the histories of Jews in the Middle East and North Africa prior to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. A pressing need to document this past has been undertaken globally by a growing number of organizations dedicated to addressing it.

Rationale for the Study

A noteworthy gap persists in the representation of Egyptian Jewish cultural histories, commemorations and documentation of the diverse lived experiences of contemporary Egyptian Jewry. Anthropologist and historian Michèle Baussant (2022) aptly observes that Egyptian Jews

have been rendered "invisible and/or absent from social spaces and official histories" (p.2), resulting in a lack of scholarly attention and historical recognition.

This dissertation addresses these lacunae by engaging with the intricate life stories and experiences of the underrepresented and understudied Egyptian Jewish past. My creative practice as a filmmaker and digital media artist set the foundation for exploring alternative means of cultural expression and storytelling to address the gaps in the untold histories that have been absent from the historicization of the Middle East and North Africa. The project emphasizes the critical need for dissolving binary forms of representation that offer limited perspectives and constructs, if any at all, of an underrepresented Egyptian Jewish history.

Artists and scholars have adopted the classical form of the literary memoir to explore ways of examining and recounting the past. Hanna Meretoja and Colin Davis note that "the storytelling practices of the arts ... have shown themselves capable of self-reflexivity and of establishing a critical distance from culturally dominant narrative practices" (Meretoja & Davis, 2018, p. 2-3). This self-reflexive journey explores the ways in which mediated memories shape the stories we tell. Our engagement and performative acts of memory through our sharing of cultural memories, storytelling practices, and materialities of the past, create potentialities for different ways of self-reflexive engagement and how we shape the stories we tell.

Using the literary memoir as a starting point to revisit a cultural time and space to explore how cultural memory shapes cultural imaginaries, *Quilting the Memoir* emerges from a commitment to evolving a critical and creative means of thinking through, performing and engaging with 'lost' histories, or postmemory through processes that subvert conventional means of narrativizing the past through exploratory methods in digital storytelling.

One person who has dealt extensively with ways of thinking about how to narrativize the past is the Dutch cultural theorist and narratologist, Mieke Bal. She writes in *Narratology Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (1997): “The readers, viewers, visitors to exhibitions and other addressees of artworks are in a position equivalent to the linguistic form, in Greek, of the ‘middle voice’” (39). *Quilting the Memoir* provides a space of expression, the ‘middle-voice’ of self-reflexivity, and engagement beyond the fixed and set historical narratives established through the largely binary histories of Arabs or Jews that have negated Egyptian Jewish histories and identities in the past. “This verb form [the middle-voice] is neither active nor passive but comes close to reflexive—which, in turn, is close to reflective” (Bal, p.39). *Quilting the Memoir* “opens the empty middle between the comfortable but false positions of either victim or perpetrator and makes room for an awareness of complicity and reflection on where to go from there: beyond yes or no” (p. 39). The media installation is a space of expression where binaries give way to more fluid, less constrictive ways of understanding and experiencing identity thereby subverting dominant histories that maintain conflicted and divisive narratives and worldviews.

‘Unofficial’ Stories

Memoirs and life stories have played an integral role in historicizing the experiences of Jews from Egypt (Baussant, 2021, 2022; Beinin, 1998; Miccoli, 2015, 2022). Historian Dario Miccoli argues that “literature and self-writing allow for a more imagining shared history of the Mediterranean and one that, following nuanced chronology of geographies traverses the early modern, colonial and postcolonial periods” (Miccoli, 2017, p. 52). Miccoli (2015) articulates his goal to explore the construction and imagination of “a group identity—and the numerous ways in which it has been and still is, being constructed and imagined ... but also contradictory and ambivalent depending on the different sociocultural, familial and political circumstances

(Miccoli, 2015, p. 193). He later writes in his second book, *A Sephardi at Sea: Jewish Memories across the Modern Mediterranean* (2022): “Literature ... functions as an individual and collective tool capable of filling the gaps of historiography, of maintaining imaginative links with the motherland, and transmitting identity and heritage from one generation to another” (p. 47). The “unofficial histories’ and life stories of Egyptian Jews often attest to a positive, convivial co-existence.

Personal memoirs, self-published books, and recorded oral histories across the Egyptian Jewish diaspora were propagating, reflecting their fragmented existence and the urgency to be heard (Bowell, 2019; Cicurel 2019; Miccoli, 2022). As historian Joseph Beinín (1998) an early scholar of Egyptian Jewish history, claims: “These contradictory representations of the identity and consequent obligations of Egyptian Jews are products of the national narratives of Israel and Egypt” (p. 1). Personal life stories have the potential to counterbalance these negative stereotypes and provide more nuanced histories. According to a number of contemporary scholars of Egyptian Jewry, Sephardi, Mizrahi, and Arab Jewish studies, the role of the memoir is surfacing as a portal not only into the past, but into the present as well (Miccoli, 2015, 2018, 2022; Baussant, 2017, 2022; Baussant, Miccoli & Schely-Newman, 2019; Levy, 2017).

Ways of Remembering

Memory transmissions are mediated and flow through a time-space continuum, between sentient and non-sentient entities. *Quilting the Memoir* navigates the flows and realms of memory through diverse media such as literature, materiality, and embodied intergenerational memory transmissions. “[V]ision is always-already steeped in memory, and that, conversely, memory relies on images to do its work (Bal, 2018, p. 41). Departing from conventional documentary and figurative forms of representation, the project scrutinizes the selection and

expression of memories, exploring alternative avenues for their portrayal (Nichols, 1998; Sturken, 1997). This exploration culminates in performative acts of memory (Bal, 1999; Hirsch, 2022; Huyssen, 2022).

In the context of *Quilting the Memoir*, the process of remembering involves an intricate entanglement of memories, and an engagement with life testimonies that diverge from traditional research methods and ways of presenting the outcomes of the research. Instead of relying on written transcripts or audiovisual recordings as the basis of cultural analysis, I immersed myself in Egyptian Jewish literary memoirs, and memory objects finding expression through an embodied experience and the creation of digital media memory quilts (Hirsch, 1992, 2019, 202; Khun 2002, 2007). Processes of remembering are an integral self-reflexive quality of the project.

Conceptual Framework – A Rhizomatic Paradigm

French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's ontology of relations, as articulated in their seminal work *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1994), offer an expansive framework which highlight the significance of relationships across diverse domains. At its core, relational theory posits that the very identities, behaviours, and meanings of entities are intricately woven into the fabric of their relationships. Egyptian Jewry is not an identity or history that should be examined or understood in isolation. The historicization of Egyptian Jewry implies a broader view and understanding of the social and cultural entanglements between divergent ethno-religious communities of the region, including Muslim, Coptic, Orthodox Greeks, and different factions within the Jewish community itself.

Metaphorically harnessed, the rhizome mirrors the complexity of a botanical root system. This network comprises a myriad of interconnected nodes fostering communication, growth, and evolution in diverse directions. A rhizomatic lens, drawing from Deleuze and Guattari's

philosophy, offers perspectives that are relational, dynamic, non-linear, and interconnected. This stands in contrast to more static, dualistic viewpoints and facilitates a more nuanced understanding of cultural differences. The rhizomatic nature of visual media and photography accentuates the interconnectedness of diverse trace elements, offering a different perspective on the stereotypical Arab and Jewish relations and histories. According to Michael Rothberg, “acts of memory are rhizomatic networks of polarity and cultural reference that exceed attempts at territorialization (whether at the local or national level) and identarian reduction” (Rothberg, 2010, 7). The non-linear nature of memory, the inherently fractured nature of Egyptian Jewry’s historicization as an integral, yet to be integrated, part of larger dominant histories of the Middle East as well as Jewish histories, globally, all factor into our understanding of this past. Exploring the ethics of storytelling, scholars have asked: “How do different modalities of storytelling enable diverse ways of addressing experiences of violence, trauma and political rupture?” (Meretoja & Davis, 2018, p. 2). *Quilting the Memoir* addresses this question using methodological approaches to digital storytelling that emphasize an attentiveness to the ethical retelling of stories of trauma and rupture.

Research-Creation and Methodology

My study draws from, and bridges methods in the fields of media, cultural memory studies, and digital storytelling. In their article, “Creation-as-research: Critical making in complex environments”, scholars Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk (2015) illuminate their experiences and critical insights into research-creation processes, inviting us to contemplate the diverse modalities inherent in exploratory and speculative research methods. “The methods, practices, and outcomes generated from research-creation projects ... are far from uniform and involve the incorporation of new and old methods, technologies, practices, and tools. They are never entirely

new” (p. 50). This iterative process is an integral aspect of the creative practices I deploy through various mediated modalities for sharing memory-images: for example, via videos and printed patterns displayed in an exhibition or via digital photographs on a blog.

In *Quilting the Memoir*, these modalities serve as pathways for navigating the intricate interplay between research and creation, offering nuanced perspectives and avenues for exploration in the ways in which I have approached the research. The journey unfolds in several phases, from collecting materials and data to methods in archiving, to the use of creative media practices that are deployed in the development and production phases of the digital quilt making process, invoking processes of mediation and remediation.

In considering these flows and entanglements of memory-images, Maria Sturken’s (1997) *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam war, the AIDS epidemic, and the politics of remembering*, elaborates on the kind of ways cultural memories are produced “through objects, images, and representations. These are technologies of memory, not vessels of memory in which memory passively resides” (Sturken, 1997, p.9). The creative reproduction, and remediation, of these engagements is the means “through which memories are shared, produced, and given meaning” (Sturken, 1997, p.9). In *Quilting the Memoir*, the research process deploys technologies of memory-production that invite us to think about memory as a kind of making through different processes of mediation and remediation. The digital memory quilts are not containers of memory, but rather *become so* through a creative journey, an iterative process of untangling, re-tangling and then untangling again. This thesis describes this journey into my research-creation process to address the complicated memories of my Egyptian Jewish family’s past, a decade long journey of discovery.

Research Questions

The work of *Quilting the Memoir* revolves around three central research questions. First, how might digital memory quilts both perform and express the complexities of cultural representation and the role of memory in the cultural histories of Egyptian? Second, what are the intricate relationships between individual memories, cultural memories, and the cultural imaginary of Egyptian Jewry? And finally, how may personal memoirs and memory objects find artistic expression in a digital memoir format?

1. How do digital storytelling techniques, memory work and practice-based research methods serve to create digital artefacts and a digital memoir about contemporary Egyptian Jewish life that challenges conventional binary histories of Egyptians and Jews?

2. What role might the traditional literary memoir play in shaping the cultural memories, imaginaries and histories of a global Egyptian Jewish diaspora?

3. How are digital memory quilts both performative and expressive of the complexities of cultural representation and research-creation processes and outcomes in relation to Egyptian Jewry?

Researcher's Role in the Study

My role as a researcher extends beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries, incorporating elements of curation, interpretation, creativity, and effective communication and cultural engagement through diverse media. As a filmmaker and photographer, this multifaceted engagement gave me the opportunity to weave intricate cultural narratives and to experiment with digital storytelling formats. First, I collected, organized, and documented diverse sources including segments of literary memoirs, family archives, and memory artefacts, to develop meaningful insights into how the past is remembered. In my engagement with Egyptian Jewish

literary memoirs, I adopted an interpretive process that involved capturing nuanced details in the texts and recording my own triggered memories in response. Second, I produced and managed a WordPress site, which served to collect research findings and field notes, enabling the organization of research materials, a creative synthesis of collected materials which became an integral aspect of documenting the research. This documentation forms an integral part of the comprehensive research record. Thirdly, I remediated these fragments into a pastiche of visual montages, adding a creative and artistic layer to the research. I produced a media installation and exhibition where I curated a multisensory, immersive art space aimed to enhance viewer immersion and engagement with historical traces of the lives of Egyptian Jews. Finally, the completion of a written dissertation encapsulates the journey chapter by chapter offering insight into the theoretical framework, methodological approaches, and critical reflections underlying the entire research-creation project.

“Research Outcomes”

In this final stage, this written dissertation tells the story of my journey towards the exhibition of original crafted artefacts borne from the research material. The patchwork methodology adopted in *Quilting the Memoir* is evident in the final work, manifesting as a series of digital quilts comprising a collage of images of the fragments collected from personal family heirlooms, including fabrics, personal objects, and family photographs. The quilts themselves operate in a modular fashion, in that they can be shown separately or together.

The process involved in rendering and remediating this personal archive into a digital format enabled me to “quilt” with digital materials and explore innovative approaches to memory work. The exhibition of *Quilting the Memoir* took place in Montreal at Gallery Produit Rien, from October 25-29, 2023.

A comprehensive documentation of the process is offered in Chapters Three and Four and photographs of the exhibition be seen in Appendix X.

Structure of the Journey

This is a journey of working through entanglements of memory using materials, images, and digital assemblages to create spaces of expression where a different sense of identity, home and belonging might be experienced.

This first chapter introduces the primary rationale for this study, outlines the problem, and introduces the research approaches employed to address the research questions of what will be elaborated in subsequent chapters.

Chapter One describes the first stage in the journey, which centers on the memoirs and life-stories of twentieth-century Egyptian Jewry, referring to a limited sample of texts that inspired this research-creation project. It provides a summary and reflection on two significant memoirs, along with a literature review on memoirs by Egyptian Jewish writers.

Chapter Two explores the philosophical implications of research-creation, specifically focusing on the quilt as a metaphor, artefact, and space of expression and how certain quilting traditions have shaped this project. Metaphors of the fold, the milieu and the rhizome are further discussed within the context of memory studies and digital storytelling.

At this stage in the journey, in Chapter Three I turn to the literature in memory and media studies, highlighting the unique methods from each field and the manner in which they were deployed in my research. In particular, I examine the importance of postmemory and remediation as central to my way of understanding how history works through personal stories.

In Chapter Four, I discuss the creation of the WordPress site, its role in the project and next step in my journey. I describe the method of quilting in detail and the qualitative research

methods deployed through the research-creation, such as process and documentation, the experience of producing the exhibition, and finally, I offer reflections on the media installation and exhibition.

Chapter Five brings us to the final portion of this research-creation journey, the exhibition and concluding remarks and reflections on this decade-long iterative journey. (See Appendix X for images of the exhibition).

Conclusion

Life stories have served as potent tools for recalling undocumented and contested histories, playing a pivotal role in an ongoing inquiry and dialogue concerning the project of making visible the histories of Egyptian Jewry and those of broader Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa. The *Quilting the Memoir* research-creation dissertation addresses relevant questions, theories, methodologies, and creative processes in a self-reflexive journey through memory, media, and art, that attempt to recount life stories, by “thinking about narrative as a process of self-making to consider how the making of media objects (of films, selfies, zines, websites, postcards, and art installations) is equally powerful, and in some instances given precedence over the work of telling a story” (Poletti, 23). In addition to the written component of the dissertation, the doctoral project includes a media installation and website. The website acts as a ‘virtual atelier’ and evolving artwork and archive that encompasses all relevant threads and media relevant to the thesis, including this dissertation.

It is essential to note that this is not a historical research project and, therefore, does not aim to historicize or essentialize a history or group identity of Egyptian Jewry. Rather, the goal is to demonstrate that due to the absence of “master” narratives of Egyptian Jewry history, literary memoirs and other forms of life-storytelling fill the gap that conventional processes of history

have neglected. *Quilting the Memoir* offers a case study in research-creation and practice-based research.

See Appendix II for a select list of research-creation projects on the subject of Egyptian Jewish memory and other minority Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa.

Chapter One: An Ambivalent Road: The Memoirs

And to relate to others, we do need to know, and when full knowledge is impossible, we still must try to approximate, encircle, or feel it. That is what it means to imagine. That is why imagination is so important.

(Bal, 2018, p. 39).

Introduction

Many writers who write about Jewish life in Egypt attest to the difficulties of doing so and to the challenges they face in trying to tell this story. A recurring theme in literary memoirs written by Jews from Egypt is the longing to return to a place that no longer exists. As Lucette Lagnado (2008) writes in her memoir *The Man with the White Sharkskin Suit: A Jewish Family's Exodus from Old Cairo to the New World*, “We were witnessing the end of a way of life that many would look back on with a mixture of bitterness and longing” (p. 149). And André Aciman’s (1994) poetic expression of longing in his memoir, *Out of Egypt: A Memoir*, writes:

I wanted to come back tomorrow night, and the night after, and the one after that as well, sensing that what made leaving so fiercely painful was the knowledge that there would never be another night like this, that I would never eat soggy cakes along the coast road in the evening, not this year or any other year, nor feel the baffling, sudden beauty of that moment when, if only for an instant, I had caught myself longing for a city I never knew I loved.

hand here is something imagined, and within that imagined place, a space of solace, familiarity, and the comfort of home, on the one hand. On the other, there is a sense of deep malaise and an inherent feeling of loss and disconnection to land, nation, politics and Arabic culture, all aspects

the native identity of Jews from Egypt (Miccoli, 2022). Historically, the portrait of Egyptian Jews is scarce. Yet, despite the absence of public documents recording Jewish life in Egypt, the fact of an Egyptian Jewish past is understood as real.

In his book *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture*, American scholar Ammiel Alcalay (1993) shares a significant episode highlighting his struggle to engage a community of intellectual peers in a dialogue about the historicization of Jewish people from the Middle East. Alcalay explores Levantine identity and culture, addressing its understudied and contested histories. While Alcalay attests to facing resistance to his addressing this subject in earlier publications, he notes that more recently, "the subject has actually become a legitimate field of knowledge in which certain prior and prevailing assumptions, often racist and exclusionary at the core, no longer have footing, or at least no longer pass uncontested" (Alcalay, 2021, p.19). Jewish studies scholars such as Michèle Baussant (2021, 2022), Michèle Baussant & Giorgia Foscarini (2017), Michèle Baussant & Dario Miccoli & Esther Schely-Newman (2019), Lital Levy (2017), Yoram Meital (2009, 2018, 2019, 2024), and Dario Miccoli (2015, 2020) study similar themes and subjects concerning the lived experiences of Jews from Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia, regions from which large Jewish communities dispersed. Many Egyptian Jews who migrated to Israel faced culture shock, discrimination, and profound loss in their new country. Despite their new homeland accommodating large communities of Jews, they felt foreign and struggled to adapt (Shohat, 2016; Starr, 2009; Miccoli, 2015).

This chapter addresses the challenges of historicizing the past of Jews from Egypt. While some "official" histories have been recognized as foundational texts (Kahanoff, Kramer, Maccabi), they are often shaped by dominant nationalist and political frameworks, including Zionist, Arab, colonial, or other hegemonic narratives. More recent historical studies of Egyptian

Jewry have begun to critically examine these dominant perspectives while attempting to construct a more nuanced and complex portrayal of this Jewish minority within an Islamic Arabic society.

Although the prevailing narrative frequently emphasizes an irreconcilable conflict between Arabs and Jews, historical evidence suggests the possibility of coexistence. This project invites a reconsideration of such dichotomies by exploring alternative narratives rooted in subjective, lived experiences. These perspectives challenge divisive accounts and offer counter-narratives that highlight the multifaceted realities of Jewish life in Egypt.

One of the shared perceptions often reflected in literary memoirs written by exiled Jews of Egypt is the representation of a unique coexistence of diverse cultures, identities and social classes, which shaped the daily lives of 20th century Egyptian society. Often recounted with anywhere from a tinge to a huge dose of nostalgic flare, the memories of a once happy and unfettered childhood, recreate the stage for the social and cultural lives of Jews from Egypt to unfold on the page, and play out in our imaginations. “Narrative memories, even of unimportant events, differ from routine or habitual memories in that they are affectively colored, surrounded by an emotional aura that, precisely, makes them memorable.” (Bal, 2018, p. 39; Crewe & Spitzer, 1999, p. 8). These affective memories of childhood circulate in ways that would be nearly impossible to trace and represent on a large scale but are present as a result of our interaction with these narrative-memories and cultural modes of expression.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. In the first section, I examine the official histories that have been written about Jews from Egypt. In the second section, I look at two influential memoirs and autobiographical writings that have contributed to the construction of a cultural imaginary among a global Egyptian Jewish diaspora, and which deeply influenced my

project. Here, I discuss the use of memoirs and of autobiographical accounts as source material for historians of Egyptian Jewry in recounting the ‘vanished’ past of Egyptian Jewish life, and I explore the various trajectories through which contemporary Egyptian Jewish histories have evolved. With a focus on the pivotal role that autobiographical writing has played in shaping the cultural narratives of Jews from Egypt, this chapter examines recent studies in Egyptian Jewish cultural histories that have drawn upon the memoirs and autobiographies of individuals from the late 19th and 20th centuries. These works, written in English, French, German, Arabic, and Hebrew, have contributed to a small but significant collection of life histories.

Victor Sanua an Egyptian-born scholar residing in the United States, established the International Association of Jews from Egypt in 1998. He compiled and published a comprehensive *Guide to Egyptian Jewry in the mid-Fifties of the Twentieth Century* (1998). The publication reflected Sanua’s efforts to collect and document an entire era of historical experience through a collection of personal archives that included photos, birth certificates and, passports stamped “no return”, including his own. After visiting organizations around the world, he reported that, “In this entire enormous Center for Jewish History, the only publication they had on contemporary Jewry was a single copy of the newsletter of the International Association of Jews from Egypt! Clearly there is a terrible dearth of information on the subject” (p.2). Of memoirs written by Jews from Egypt, he writes:

The unprinted individual memoirs are too many for me to mention in this preface, but The International Association of Jews from Egypt will make great efforts to obtain the financial support to put together all these individual memoirs, which reflect positive and negative experiences that Jews from Egypt have incurred during the "Second Exodus". It provides valuable information for future historians, who are hoping to get a picture of

their lives in the mid 50s, before and after their dispersion around the world” (Sanua, 1998, p. 4).

Sanua’s efforts were ambitious, and while he initially received some research funds to pursue the study of Jews from Egypt, the project did not evolve. Dr. Sanua held a doctorate and tenure position as professor of psychology at St. John’s University in Queens, New York. Many of the initiatives he launched were framed within an academic setting. In one of his entries, he includes a proposal “written about 20 years ago for the purpose of applying for foundation financial support to conduct a large-scale research in Israel to study the social and psychological problems of Jews from Egypt who came to Israel” (p. 5). The project was never supported.¹

The ‘Official’ Narratives – Early Accounts

For many years, German historian Gudrun Kramer's (1989) book, *The Jews in Modern Egypt, 1914-1952*, written in German and translated to English in the same year, held recognition as a seminal historicization of Egyptian Jewry (Beinin, 1998; Miccoli, 2015). Kramer posits that the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948 ultimately led to the demise of all Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa (Beinin, 1998, p.1). Despite this claim, the portrait she paints of a modern Egyptian Jewish community appears positive. Kramer acknowledges the diverse experiences of Egyptian Jews, noting that "no single experience was shared by all Egyptian Jews because differences of class, ethnic origins, rite, and political outlook all tended to erode Jewish communal solidarity without completely effacing it" (Beinin, 1998, citing Kramer, p.1).

¹ For a comprehensive insight into the evolution of the global social network established through various community organizations, and collection of information which serves as a rich archive see Victor Sanua’s *Guide to Egyptian Jewry in the mid-Fifties of the Twentieth Century* (1998).

Egyptian Israeli novelist and essayist, Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff, whose work I discuss in further detail later in this chapter, moved to Israel in the 1950s via Europe and the US, while her parents remained in Egypt. Interestingly, Shohet Kahanoff's writings present a more positive and complex portrayal of life in Cairo than Kramer's, and her observations on Egyptian society and the migration of Arab Jews to Israel are important. Despite advocating for a diverse Jewish culture, Kahanoff grapples with a fragmented identity and her own colonizing tendencies in her treatment of Arab culture (Starr, 2009). Shohet Kahanoff's original works were written in English and translated to Hebrew, making her work more accessible to an Israeli population than an Egyptian readership.

Rachel Maccabi's (1968) memoir *Mizrahim sheli (My Egypt)* published in Hebrew in Israel 1968, provides another early contribution to the existing body of work, offering insights into Maccabi's upbringing in Egypt, but the document was never translated into any other language. Contrary to the more affective and endearing portraits of Egyptian society offered by Kramer and Shohet Kahanoff in their autobiographical accounts, and despite the fact of Maccabi's paternal grandfather marrying into a prominent Jewish Egyptian family and settling in Cairo, Rachel Maccabi experienced isolation from Arabic culture. Her limited knowledge of Arabic led Maccabi to adopt her mother's perspective, perceiving "everything Arab as dirty, foreign, and barbaric" (Beinin, 1998, p.53). This prevailing narrative that developed in earlier texts about Jewish life in Egypt is perpetuated by what Mark Cohen (2013) terms 'neo-lachrymosity', a historicization of Jewish-Arab history that reinforces the idea that Arab violence and hatred against Jews were consistent throughout the history of Jews living in the Middle East and North Africa. *Quilting the Memoir* challenges this notion. Nonetheless, as Deborah Starr notes, Maccabi's book "inserts an Egyptian Jewish narrative, however Europeanized and

disdainful of Arabs and Arab–Jewish culture, into the Ashkenazi-dominated Zionist imaginary” (Starr, 2009, p. 119). The perspectives of women like Maccabi and Shohet Kahanoff were framed by their own worldview and interpretation of Arab culture.

The ‘Unofficial’ Narratives – Early accounts

In his paper, "A Fragile Cradle: Writing Jewishness, Nationhood, and Modernity in Cairo, 1920–1940," historian Dario Miccoli (2019) examines the works of Egyptian writers Georges Cattaui, Emile Mosseri, Albert Staraselski, and Lucien Sciuto, representing Europeans, local Zionists, Egyptian nationalists, and Communists, who engaged in public debate, albeit not always harmoniously. His comparative reading of three monographs from 2019 reflects “the diverse and at times painful past of this region and its people, while shedding light on the many stories and characters that waited a long time – and in some cases still are waiting – to be exposed” (2020, p.518). This Sephardic elite were “Jewish writers from this era [who] bear witness to a Middle East where debates on ethnonational, religious, and cultural belonging unfolded in ways that may now seem almost inconceivable” (2016, p.19). The autobiographical works originating from this period emerged from a profound ambivalence of what Miccoli refers to as a "fragile cradle," as exemplified in Georges Cattaui's *La promesse accomplie* (1992). These Egyptian-Jewish authors grapple with the complexities of navigating the turbulence of interwar Egypt, offering a nuanced perspective on the multifaceted nature of their experiences (Miccoli, 2016). Nonetheless, “Cattaui evokes a diverse yet unified portrait of a nation in which Muslims, Jews, and Copts live together peacefully” (Miccoli, 2016, p. 7). Such noteworthy memoirs and writings emerge from prominent figures deeply rooted in Egyptian society², with

² For a comprehensive analysis of the works of early Egyptian Jewish writers, see: Dario Miccoli, “A Fragile Cradle: Writing Jewishness, Nationhood, and Modernity in Cairo, 1920–1940”.

influence in politics, banking, or business, integral to the prosperity of the nation, authored memoirs in French, Arabic and Hebrew (Miccoli, 2018).

The Story of Egyptian Jewry Today

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the historical narrative of Egyptian Jewry evolved as scholars, historians, writers and artists have increasingly turned their attention to the subject matter. Joel Beinin's (1998), *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora* laid the groundwork for future historians and serves as a foundational piece in assembling the intricate and layered past of Egyptian Jewry, characterized by numerous entry points. His historical account of the lived experiences of Egyptian Jews addresses a critical gap, emphasizing that despite political tensions, Jewish-Egyptian life continued in Egypt post-1948 until the significant exodus of Jews from the region triggered by the Suez Canal crisis in 1956. Beinin deploys mixed methodologies in his research, which draws from a variety of sources, to create the beginnings of a historical narrative of Egyptian Jewry spanning the years 1948 to 1956. Beinin's research regroups a collection of texts authored by both Jewish and non-Jewish Egyptians, illustrating the diverse tapestry of Egyptian communities during this period. His approach utilizes "ethnographic vignettes" to spotlight the experiences of individuals and small groups of Egyptian Jews, recognizing the nuanced narratives that might be overshadowed in a grand historical narrative (p.12). Importantly, Beinin avoids essentializing an Egyptian Jewish identity, choosing instead to portray a historical snapshot of the diverse, pluralistic, and burgeoning cosmopolitan cities of Cairo and Alexandria (1998).

American film historian and cultural theorist Deborah Starr's book *Remembering Cosmopolitan Egypt: Literature, Culture, and Empire* (2009) notes that early investigations into

Egyptian Jewry looked at the culture of contemporary Egypt through the writings of authors like Ronit Matalon and Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff, and more recently, through the extensive body of films produced and directed by Italian Egyptian Jewish filmmaker, Togo Mizrahi. Her examination focuses on the cultural and literary landscapes of cosmopolitan Egypt and the interplay between various ethnic and religious groups, including Jews, during Egypt's multicultural era. Starr's scholarship often intersects with broader discussions of nationalism, colonialism, and migration in the Middle East and North Africa, providing a nuanced understanding of the historical forces that have shaped the lives of Egyptian Jews. This nuanced consideration of the “place of Jews in society—Egyptian and Israeli—[would] mobilize cosmopolitan discourses to disrupt the binaries posited by the postcolonial conditions experienced in both locales” (Starr, 2009, p. 114). In her more recent work, *Togo Mizrahi and the Making of Egyptian Cinema*, Starr (2019) investigates the pioneer filmmaker and the beginnings of Egyptian cinema “with particular attention to the construction of pluralist nationalism, the representation of Jewishness, and the disruptive deployment of unstable gender categories” (p. 24), offering valuable insights into the experiences of Egyptian Jewry and its contributions to the cultural fabric of contemporary Egypt. Her research on the writings of Jaqueline Shohet Kahanoff is further explored later in this chapter.

The important works of scholars such as Dario Miccoli and Michèle Baussant, in the fields of history, anthropology and cultural studies have demonstrated the gaps in the historicization of Egyptian Jewry and in doing so, develop innovative research methods and approaches to documenting the lived experiences of Egyptian Jewry, continuing on to a broader discussion of the complexities involved in narrating such histories. Their work is referenced

throughout the dissertation and has been fundamental in shaping my understanding of the nuances of historicization of Egyptian Jewry.

‘An Imagined Bourgeoisie’

Dario Miccoli's (2015) seminal work, *Histories of the Jews of Egypt: An Imagined Bourgeoisie, 1880s – 1950s*, explores Egypt as a culturally diverse space and highlights the need for contemporary scholars to carefully historicize the notion of pre-Nasserist Egypt as an idyllic place to live. Through an examination of school archives and family histories, Miccoli interprets Egyptian Jewish memory as a milieu characterized by a complex and multifaceted bourgeoisie imaginary. “This was largely due to the spreading of an imaginary that ... shows to what extent Egyptian Jews interacted with Europe as well as their Egyptian Muslim counterparts, borrowing and imitating numerous practices and ideas that led to the formation of an imagined bourgeoisie” (7). This term reflects Miccoli’s understanding of how the Jewish middle and upper-middle classes in Egypt were not only a real socio-economic group but also serves as a symbol or narrative constructed by themselves and by others. Miccoli’s concept is important in understanding how the history of the Egyptian Jewish community is remembered and how their social class is constructed and perceived. The concept offers a critical lens through which to view the intersection of class, identity, and memory in the context of Egyptian Jewry narrations of the past. Finally, the term "imagined" speaks to the nostalgia and idealization of the lived experiences of this Egyptian Jewish community in later years. Many memoirs and recollections of the Egyptian Jewish bourgeoisie portray this era as a golden age of prosperity and cultural flourishing, sometimes glossing over the complexities and challenges the communities faced.

More recently, in *A Sephardi at Sea: Jewish Memoirs Across the Modern Mediterranean* (2022), Miccoli not only investigates "how the migration from North Africa and the Middle East

has been told in narrative form but unravels how memory travels across the spaces that these migrants encounter in the process of identity remaking" (p. 42). In Micolli's (2022) study of the literary memoir as a source of investigation and Egyptian Jewish memory work, he reflects on Lucette Lagnado's description of her family's departure from Alexandria port in her 2007 memoir:

... if one were to search for the exact year, day or event that caused the end of this world and therefore the departure of the Jews from North Africa and Egypt, one would not find it. However, one could hear or read dozens if not hundreds, of stories similar to that cited ... in Lagnado's memoir *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit* (p. 2).

While numerous memoirs have recorded Egyptian Jews' final departures from their homeland, one might be hard pressed to locate them in state archives and official histories of the Middle East. Turning to life stories, family archives and personal objects, one can find traces that recall the past and offer a tangible way of retelling it (van Dijck, 2007). "[L]eaving aside the tools of historiography" (2022, p. 17), Miccoli draws from source material such as family photographs, texts, artefacts, and exhibitions, which have become valuable in the process of recounting the Egyptian Jewish past, transitioning from private to public spheres (Eser, 2018; Hussan, 1995). The value and form of these recollections within social, cultural, and political contexts are further shaped by the attention they receive within families, communities, commemorations, memorial sites, and museums (Rinehart & Ippolito, 2014), where memories may be mediated through interpreters, attributed interpretations, through oral and technological media.

The life writings of André Aciman and Lucette Lagnado also offer valuable narratives about Egyptian Jewish experience. However, narrating these life stories is not without complexities and ambivalence. Evidently, these stories and histories are only now beginning to

resurface, accompanying a concerted effort to historicize an era that remained buried and denied for decades. The journey to unveil and acknowledge narratives of the lived experiences of Egyptian Jews uncovers a complex and intricate tapestry of the Egyptian Jewish experience, now slowly revealing itself publicly in a broader cultural and historical context.

Storying Memories

William Uricchio has written that “stories are a constant in the history of media” (202, p. 1), a statement that is central to the research of this project. Traditionally, memories are storied, based on life events that become ordered in some logical fashion, dramatized and shared. The literary memoirs written by Jews from Egypt form a corpus of literature based on real life events and personal histories that shape a cultural and collective imaginary among the global Egyptian Jewish diaspora. These life stories, once shared, become open to new forms / ways of mediation and remediation.

In no way does *Quilting the Memoir* attempt to create a closed-ended narrative about Egyptian Jews, nor is the project a memoir about my family history. While I do use material objects and photographs from my personal collection, *Quilting the Memoir* aims, more broadly, to create a shared public space and an introduction to a broader investigation and dialogue. This research-creation project aims neither to demonstrate historical truths nor fixed cultural narratives of Egyptian Jewry. Rather, it aims to create a space where this underrepresented cultural history might unfold and engage broader publics and more global participants, audiences, and perspectives to ponder an alternative narrative reality to dominant conventional tropes about ‘Arabs’ and ‘Jews’ and their historical relations, to acknowledge the public memory of this rich, and not so black-and-white, cultural past. These complexities and characterizations are what I explore through a process of cultural analysis and visual storytelling through

mediated, transmitted memories. This alternative cultural narrative contributes to the cultural imaginary of Egyptian Jewry – the ‘imagined bourgeoisie’ of my mother’s youth – through the memories and objects she bestowed on me throughout her life. These are the fragments of her life, of my life, and of our lives which tell the story of a collective past. The process of ‘bricolage’ is a testament to my own journey back to a childlike state where I piece together my memories and recollections in creating digital memory quilts.

Autobiography, Memoirs and Life Stories

Memoirs, autobiographies, and life stories are terms often used interchangeably to denote a literary genre that recounts personal narratives based on real-life events (Farid, 2013). “The foundation of memory lies in narratives” (Ryan, 2007, citing Shank & Abelson). In contemporary scholarly discourse, the term "life stories" is frequently employed to describe autobiographical works that extend beyond oral and textual modes of expression and representation, encompassing visual elements such as montage, photography, and even unconventional media like quilting (Webster, 2011). Life writings inherently evoke emotions, immersing the reader in the intimate life experiences and the partly imaginary, partly remembered worlds through which memories are brought to life.

In their influential work, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, authors Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010) provide insightful strategies for navigating life narratives and interpreting autobiographical texts. They propose an alternative approach, suggesting that we view self-referential writings as an intersubjective process unfolding within a dialogical exchange between the writer and the reader/viewer. This perspective “shifts the emphasis from treating autobiographies as stories to be proven or falsified to ones that observe the processes of communicative exchange and understanding” (Smith &

Watson, p. 17). The memoirs selected for this study serve as starting points for engaging with narratives that illuminate the lives of Jews from Egypt.

A corpus of autobiographical and literary memoirs emerges as a valuable resource, catering to both the layperson and the academic historian alike. This next section discusses the memoir as a literary genre, focusing on the works of memoirists, André Aciman (1994) and Lucette Lagnado (2007). Additionally, it introduces authors who have made significant contributions to the literary portraits of twentieth-century Egyptian Jewry.

Dario Miccoli's (2022) recent book *A Sephardi at Sea* traces complex and non-linear paths through reading the life writings of Egyptian Jews and other Arab Jewish communities across the Mediterranean. According to Miccoli, "literature plays a dual role as an individual and collective tool, adept at bridging gaps in historiography, fostering imaginative ties with the homeland, and transmitting identity and heritage across generations" (2022, p. 42). Miccoli's work emphasizes the significant role of collective memories within this diverse diaspora of Egyptian Jewry, shaping narratives and histories that have often been marginalized amid the imperatives of colonialist, nationalist, and essentialist historical perspectives.

Constance de St. Laurent (2017) considers cultural tools, such as texts and narrative frames, as artefacts that mediate individuals' connections to the past and offer a means to construct discourses about a group's history and its place within larger historical narratives. It is crucial to recognize that as Miccoli notes, "not all Jewish memories were granted the same importance in the historical construction of the past" (Miccoli, 2022, p. 29). Within the global Egyptian Jewish diaspora, memoirs and life stories have played a significant role in circulating the narratives of Egyptian Jewish life that were neglected historically (Baussant, 2020).

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's (2016) important contribution to the study of autobiographies, assert that:

the autobiographical is not a single genre but a conceptual umbrella encompassing different forms that serve diverse audiences, purposes, and narrative strategies... they are *performances of self-narration through which the meanings of the past are produced* for the occasions and social identities of the future (p. 326, my emphasis).

These insights hold particular significance for the Egyptian Jewish global diaspora and the cultural imaginaries that it produces. For this diasporic community, memoirs serve as deeply personal reflections, offering a wealth of observations drawn from childhood memories. These narratives illuminate the people and the world events that played pivotal roles in shaping the formative lives of Egyptian Jews. In essence, these memoirs become performances of self-narration, contributing to the construction of meanings from the past that are relevant to both present occasions and the social identities of the future.

Perspectives Across Generations

While an individual life story may offer limited historical insight, a compilation of autobiographical and literary memoirs establishes a collective narrative that has the potential to transcend the limitations of a single account. The memoirs penned by André Aciman (1994) and Lucette Lagnado (2008) provide intergenerational portraits narrated from a child's perspective. Both memoirs prominently feature themes of identity and memory that are integral to the narrative constructs. These narratives unfold within the lived experiences of Egyptian Jewish families grappling with the repercussions of a shifting political climate that disrupts the social and economic fabric of their ostensibly comfortable, joyful, and cosmopolitan lives in Egypt.

As first-generation immigrant Egyptian Jews in the diaspora age, there arises an imperative to document their stories – “what we do not want to see or cannot, and what is both unseen and yet also seen” (Baussant, 2022, p. 2). The histories of Egyptian Jews are conspicuously absent from mainstream sources such as history books, films, school curricula, and memorials. This neglect in integrating the political, social and cultural history of European Jewry into broadly accessible forms of public memory underscores the need to bring to public awareness realities and stories that “have remained generally invisible and/or absent from social spaces and official histories of the different countries they came from or were exiled to” (Miccoli, 2022, p.2).

Life writings possess an inherent emotional quality, drawing the reader into intimate life experiences and the partially imagined, partially remembered worlds through which stories are reenacted. This literary form encapsulates both personal and collective experiences that are both unique and concurrently shared with others, occasionally evolving into components of broader social and cultural discourses (Bunty, 2018; O’Rourke, 2018). Being Jewish in an Arab world, where identifying as Arab, particularly as an Egyptian, was both perplexing and perilous, and continues to evoke a sense of ambivalence about one's identity, loyalties, and family histories to this day. Navigating the complexities of this context inadvertently influences what a life writer remembers, how it is remembered, and how a life writer struggles to define the intricate links between personal experiences and public events (Smith & Watson, p. 245).

The Literary Memoir – A Site of Activation

In this section, I highlight aspects of Egyptian Jewish memoirs and life stories within the contemporary literature that have influenced and shaped my research-creation process in *Quilting the Memoir*. Some of the works examined in this research are drawn from rare and

difficult-to-access materials documenting the history of Jews in Egypt. These narratives uncover stories of complex relationships, displacement from homeland, and the formation of diaspora communities. Other writings, primarily published in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, usher in a new era of literary memoirs and personal life stories, exploring a variety of styles and genres, ranging from traditional memoirs to graphic novels and cookbooks. These works, mostly published in English, French, and Arabic, are written by first and second-generation Egyptian immigrants, predominantly Jewish Egyptians, with significant contributions from Muslim Egyptians as well.

As Smith and Watson argue, a memoir transcends being a mere attempt to record personal history in a literary form; it significantly influences individual and collective engagement with the past and how it is remembered (2016). “[T]he remembering subject actively creates the meaning of the past in the act of remembering” (p. 22). Functioning as a product of cultural memory (Erll, 2010; Sturken, 1997), memoirs coalesce to stimulate people's imagination, to inform their past, to contribute an additional layer to their stories, or to enrich existing historical narratives. Typically composed in the first person, a memoir unfolds against and is deeply entwined with a social, historical, and cultural backdrop (Bunty, 2018; O’Rourke, 2018; Smith & Watson, 2016).

This research-creation project is inspired by two impactful Egyptian Jewish memoirs: Lucette Lagnado's *The Man with the White Sharkskin Suit: A Jewish Family's Exodus from Old Cairo to the New World* (2007) and André Aciman's *Out of Egypt: A Memoir* (1994). These personal accounts of the lived experiences of Egyptian Jews serve as pivotal elements in shaping my study. In contrast and in addition to these intimate narratives, I consider written life stories that historians have utilized as valuable sources for understanding Egyptian society and culture

(Levy, 2017; Miccoli, 2016, 2017; Starr, 2020; Starr & Somekh, 2011). Recent scholarship has brought attention to existing gaps in the literature on Jewish Egyptian life, offering fresh perspectives and posing crucial questions about the social and cultural histories of Egyptian Jews and their place within broader histories of Egypt (Baussant, 2021, 2022; Miccoli, 2022).

Both André Aciman and Lucette Lagnado offer intergenerational perspectives on Egyptian Jewish life narrated from a child's point-of-view. These memoirs revolve around themes of identity and memory, exploring the challenges faced by minority Jewish communities amid shifting political climate in an Arab world. The narratives depict the complexities of being Jewish in an Arab society, where identification as Arab, specifically as an Egyptian, introduces confusion, danger, and a lasting sense of ambivalence about the memoirist's identity, loyalties, and family histories. Both stories unfold within upper middle-class bourgeois settings, one in Alexandria (Aciman, 1994), the other in Cairo (Lagnado, 2007).

Lucette Lagnado (2007) and André Aciman (1994) penned these memoirs in English, following their departure from Egypt to their host countries as adolescents during the 1990s and early 2000s. The memoirs discussed in this chapter offer glimpses into the authors' childhood perspectives, transporting me, as the daughter of an Egyptian Jewish mother, to a time and place I have never physically experienced. Reading these memoirs and reflecting on them enabled me to explore how cultural memories travel through embodied experiences and material artefacts, informing the creation of media digital quilts. My reflections on these memoirs are documented in a WordPress blog, presented as appendices at the end of this thesis.

[\(https://quiltingthememoir.wordpress.com/\)](https://quiltingthememoir.wordpress.com/).

Lucette Lagnado: From Cairo to Brooklyn, N.Y.

I read *The Man with the White Sharkskin Suit: A Jewish Family's Exodus from Old Cairo to the New World* (2007) when it was first published in 2007, and like many other readers reported, I felt a deep connection to the author's life story, to her family members and to the Egypt many in the Egyptian Jewish diaspora long for still. Lucette Lagnado, author of *The Man with the White Sharkskin Suit* (2007), left Cairo with her immediate family in 1962 at the age of six, landing in Brooklyn, New York, following a short stint in France. As documented by Lagnado, her memoir sparked a global dialogue among Jews from Egypt who recognized themselves, their family and friends in her life story and the people who populated it. Lagnado concluded that first and second-generation immigrants, parents, and children could relate to the place she depicted in her story, a place that has had such limited representation, but one that lives on in the memories and imagination of exilic or diasporic Egyptian Jews.

Lagnado's memoir is deeply personal and told from a little girl's perspective. Loulou, as her father called her, offers insight into her family life and the tragedies her family endured. She describes having an affective attachment to her father, Leon Lagnado — the man who wore the white shark skin suit. From her window facing Malaka Nazli Street (which translates to Queen Nazli Street) that crossed the city of Cairo, she watched the world and life of Cairenes unfolding before her, with joy and curiosity, until with time, this was finally impossible.

Upon her first return to Cairo in 2005, Lagnado visited her old family home and met the owner, an old woman who had moved in after Lagnado's family left. The old woman remembered Lagnado's parents, describing her mother as "so little—very little—and your father was big, much too big" (Lagnado, 2007, p. 378). Inviting Lagnado to move back into the empty

old house, the author contemplates the possibility of her return, an option rarely considered possible for Jews, like Lagnado's father, whose dream of return would never manifest.

Lagnado's description of her father's departure from Egypt carrying only a couple of suitcases stuffed with his favourite items echoes the story of my mother's departure. Of her father Leon, Lagnado writes that "his bag ... was crammed with his books—prayer books, dozens and dozens of them, some so old and tattered they could have been holy relics... they were my father's most precious possessions" (p.176).

In Lagnado's memoir, the grand Malaka Nazli Boulevard remained a place that she associated with deep feelings of comfort, joy, and home. When Lucette returned to visit Egypt in 2005, the first place she asked to visit as she left the airport was home—that is Malaka Nazli. "I insisted that nothing else mattered to me but Malaka Nazli. I repeated the name for emphasis: Malaka Nazli. I said it at every opportunity, like a child in love with a singsong" (p.366). And once the author arrived at the building and was invited in, the first place she gravitated to was "the dining room, with the little balcony overlooking Malaka Nazli where [she] had spent so much of [her] childhood" (p.366), the young, observant little girl who carefully watched a rich life unfold on the grand Malaka Nazli Boulevard.

Perhaps the most striking moment in Lagnado's memoir for me, was when she describes her grandmother who died alone in Israel, without family, in an unfamiliar land that proved harsh and lonely. Her place of death was a far cry from the cosmopolitan centres of Cairo and Alexandria, places that once offered Egyptian Jews comfort, safety and familiarity, no matter their life circumstances, (Lagnado, 2008). Lagnado writes of her grandmother's passing in a place where she felt alienation and a deep loss:

Alexandra of Alexandria, the old woman who was more like a child, the grandmother who needed such intense mothering of her own, had died alone and bewildered in an institution, as solitary and lonely a figure in her narrow sickbed as on those walks, six years earlier, among the orange groves of Ganesh Tikvah (p.198).

The alienation and loneliness described in this passage of Lagnado's grandmother's passing away alone in a land foreign to her resonated deeply with me. And while my own mother was surrounded by her children most of her life and especially in the last decade of her life, I always felt the weight of her solitude, sadness and longing.

In many ways, Lagnado's *The Man with the White Shark Skinned Suit* is as much a biography of Leon Lagnado, as it is her own autobiography. Lagnado's distinct point of view ensures her father's presence remains in the foreground of the memoir from beginning to end. But I would argue that it is precisely the writer's perspective that offers such a carefully rendered portrait of her family's life story, and with all the love and empathy a daughter might have for her father. It is a remembrance that shares the contradictory feelings of nostalgia for a home and the memory of home as "hostile territory" (Miccoli, 2015). Lucette Lagnado went on to write a second book, *The Arrogant Years: One Girl's Search for Her Lost Youth, From Cairo to Brooklyn* (2011) about the years she and her family spent adjusting to their new life as immigrants in Brooklyn, New York, which further informs my research. From the age of six, Lagnado grew up and lived in New York where eventually she worked as a reporter for the Wall Street Journal. She passed away at the age of 62 in the Spring of 2019.

Response to Lagnado

Following the publication of her memoir in 2007, Lagnado was flooded with responses from Egyptian Jews all over the world who thanked her for validating their stories, histories, and

existence (Lagnado). In an interview with Deborah Kalb, Lagnado reveals her surprise about how her “book has developed a kind of cult following, I think, so that every day, or several times a week, I will get notes and letters from people across the world who have read it or are reading it and feel a need to communicate with me” (Kalb, 2010). In another interview with Michael Orbach at The Jewish Star, she states:

Mostly I liked the idea of recreating what this world of Jews in the Middle East had been like, that there were these incredibly vibrant cultures that were utterly destroyed. People had no idea. Even Jews, American Jews, had no idea, honestly. That is the tragedy of the Jews from Arab countries — people have no idea what was lost (Orbach, 2010).

I, too, remember feeling a sense of kinship with Lagnado when she expressed her “longing to return to the place we were supposedly glad to have left” (p. 298). This nostalgic account, echoes the sentiment of many diasporic Egyptian Jews, contributing to the creation of a collective imaginary and the possibility of recollecting a place that no longer exists. Lagnado concludes her interview with Orbach, saying, “I have been amazed by how much people relate to my personal story; it is as if it’s become their personal story” (2010), a testament to the impact and influence life stories have on the Egyptian Jewish global diaspora. It seems that everything and everyone that populated Lagnado’s world, also exists in a parallel world, in my own family. My mother’s affection for the place she once lived is echoed through Lagnado’s pages and her recollections of home. Of her father, Lagnado writes, “I was lucky to glimpse for myself what he’d meant all these years when he kept his small suitcase packed and ready to go” (2007, p. 380). This passage resonates with me, reminding me of all the things my mother kept as though she might have use for them one day.

Reference to such relics and precious possessions evoke a time and place that once defined and anchored Lucette's father and their family, as well as mine, in a culture and country which they had once considered their forever home. This detail of a packed, small suitcase, "ready to go" speaks specifically to a detail that resonates for many Egyptian Jews and speaks to that affective response and nostalgia that is generated by text and memories that are personal, familial, and collective in my readings and experience (van Dijck, 2007). The possessions, objects and memories from her life in Egypt were the only things that connected my mother to her past, and her past to me.

The image of Lagnado's grandmother's lonely death in a seniors' facility in Israel in her book's conclusion had a profound impact on me when I read it; even though my mother never set foot on Israeli land, I couldn't help feeling that Lagnado was describing my mother's own fate in her adopted second homeland of Canada. I felt an intense sense of loneliness and acute loss as I read those passages: as though the feeling of solitude that my mother had experienced and carried with her throughout her life, estranged from her home and everything and everyone that was familiar to her, was there on the pages of Lagnado's memoir.

André Aciman: From Alexandria, to Paris

"The image of Alexandria as a cosmopolitan space in which people and cultures come into contact has been immortalized, shaped and mediated by its literary legacy" (Starr, 2009, p. 36).

There can be little doubt that through the publication of his memoir, André Acimen contributed to the creation of the image of a cosmopolitan Alexandria that Deborah Starr refers to in her work. *Out of Egypt: A Memoir* by André Aciman (1995) is considered to be the first Egyptian Jewish memoir to be written in English and to become widely known within and

beyond the Egyptian Jewish diaspora (Laskier, 1997). Straddling between autobiography and fiction, this memoir is told from a young boy's perspective with Aciman's eloquence guiding the narrator's voice. This self-reflexive story about growing up in Alexandria, Egypt is both personal and universal, capturing the essence of a particular time and place while also exploring themes of home, belonging and loss. Set against the backdrop of the second war and the shift in the country's governance from monarchical rule to a nationalist regime, Aciman recalls the height of Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalization spree throughout the country, seizing properties, family businesses, and financial assets.

Out of Egypt (1995) presents a vivid portrait of a cosmopolitan city, offering a glimpse into the complex interplay of cultures and religions that once flourished there, and then of the undoing of that cosmopolitan city and society. Aciman chronicles the life of a Sephardic Jewish family whose members were of Ottoman, Ladino, Italian, and French cultures and who spanned three generations. Sephardic Jewish families that immigrated to Egypt after the third quarter of the nineteenth century frequently had family members of multiple and hybrid nationalities. (Laskier, 1997). The naturalistic account of life events in Aciman's memoir are vivid in tone, and recounted by the young narrator whose once bourgeois family life was spiralling out of control as a result of the nationalization of the assets of Egyptian Jews. Writing about the impact of nationalization on his family, Aciman's protagonist relates:

Now, it so happened that Aunt Elsa had had strange forebodings the week before the Egyptian government nationalized all of my father's assets. *Une étrange angoisse*, a strange anxiety, right here, she kept repeating, pointing to her chest. "Here, and here, sometimes even here," she would say, hesitantly, as though her inability to locate the peculiar sensation in her chest made it more credible. "Something always happens when I

have these feelings.” She had had them on the eve of President Kennedy’s Assassination (p.224).

Aciman’s insightful reflections on memory and identity explore the nature of memory and the role that nostalgia plays in shaping our perception of the past.

André Acimen’s memoir begins with the narrator asking his Uncle Vili about the past and about the pasts of some of their Egyptian family members, to which his Uncle Vili briskly responds: “‘That was rubbish. I live in the present’, he said, almost vexed by my nostalgia” (p.1). I recognized this curt tone from occasions in my life when some of my own family members responded to my questions about their past lives in Egypt. Curt and tight-lipped. Others, however, recalled nostalgically *la belle époque*, as it was commonly referred to. Depending on whom you approached with these questions, the answers would vary, each of the responses valid given the mixed feelings and experiences with which Jews left their one-time home of Egypt.

One common recollection of Egyptian Jews shared with me by my family, and later by friends and acquaintances, was the quality of the life they left behind. Aciman’s memoir is full of moments where vibrant smells, sounds, and diverse characters of the social and cultural landscape of Egypt were present. Aciman has a passage in his memoir where households are identified by the smells they emit from the kitchen:

It would never have occurred to either of them that all homes bear ethnic odors, and that anyone born in Alexandria would just as easily have sniffed out a Sephardi household like ours, with its residual odor of Parmesan, boiled artichokes, and borekas, as they themselves could recognize an Armenian kitchen by its unavoidable smell of cured pastrami, a Greek living room by the odor of myrrh, and Italians by the smell of fried onions and chamomile. Working-class Italians smelled of fried peppers, and Greeks

smelled of garlic and brilliantine, and, when they sweated, their underarms smelled of yogurt (2007, p.75).

The sense of smell often triggers memories of events that one cannot even name or identify, but through the shared experience of that sensory event, a bond is established, even if it is a bond forged through the pages of a book. This realization reinforces my own commitment to using sensory experiences in my creation-research. These identificatory bonds, bonds that exceed the text, are grounded in the feelings of connection that emerge during reading, feelings and memories that are connected to a distant homeland and experiences of displacement, exile, and loss, but also joy and love (Boym, 2001). As these emotive experiences are reproduced among a population, relationships between the exiled become more intimate and closer. (Boyarin & Boyarin, 1993). Through vivid descriptions of sounds, smells, and textures, Aciman brings the multicultural city of Alexandria, and the Jewish community that inhabited it, to life. André Aciman plays with concepts of time and memory as he recounts those memories:

All that remained of her was the memory of that white satin shoe resting on the pavement, tilting sideways as she struggled to unlock the other doors, then resting back on the gravel as she searched in the dark for the key to the ignition. Perhaps, before closing the door, she had even thought of leaving her shoe behind... And perhaps she had. For later that night, when he suddenly found himself unable to think of her, or when he felt the memory of her features starting to fade from his grasp, like an anthropologist reconstructing an entire body from a mere bone fragment he would think of that shoe, and from the shoe work his way around her foot, and from her foot, up her legs, her knees, her gleaming white dress, until he had reached her lips, and then, for a fleeting instant,

would coax a smile on a face he had been seeing for years across the street but had always failed to notice (2007, p.49).

Aciman went on to write a series of essays on the subject of memory entitled *False Papers* (2000) about his return to Cairo many years later, as well as several novels, including *Call Me by My Name* (2007) and more recently *My Roman Year* (2024) and *Room on the Sea* (2025).

Response to Aciman

From documenting the lives of working class to upper class families, recollecting the smells of food and the ocean, the sounds of Egyptian music and language, the old idioms that only made sense within a certain cultural or geographical context, André Aciman's recollections bring back these traces of the Egyptian Jewish past with a deep sense of longing for home (Aciman, 1999).

I read these memoirs in relation to my own lived experience growing up as the daughter of a displaced Egyptian Jew, as I negotiated the changing landscapes and my quest for a sense of identity and belonging in Montreal. The settings, stories, and characters, resonate with the stories that members of my family recount about their lives in Egypt. I experienced visceral and affective responses to the memoirs' vivid descriptions of sounds, images, and smell that intersect with my personal, cultural, intergenerational and embodied memories. During those rare moments reading the memoirs, I felt a sense of connection to a place with which I could identify—a unique time in contemporary Egyptian history that seemed to exist mostly in people's imagination and memories. I come back to the memoirs throughout the dissertation as a means of elaborating on discussion points and arguments.

Out of Egypt is the first popular memoir of its kind, to tell the story and share the fond memories of Jewish Egyptians living in mid-twentieth century Alexandria through the eyes of a

young man (Laskier, 1997). Both Aciman's and Lagnado's memoirs draw from their life experiences and childhood memories growing up in Egypt before their families' departures. Both memoirs are unique, relatable, and real, and offer their readers a tangible record and reflection of Egyptian Jewish family histories and experiences that inform underrepresented histories and people.

One of the perceptions often shared in literary memoirs written by exiled Jews of Egypt is the representation of a unique coexistence of diverse cultures, identities and social classes that characterized the daily life of twentieth century Egyptian society (Aciman, 1994; Lagnado, 2007). Affective and nostalgic memories of a once happy and unfettered childhood are recounted in these texts, suggesting that these memories are more than reflections of the past, these memoirs continue to nourish the cultural imaginary of an exiled people as they become woven into personal, familial, and communal memories, feelings, and their representations (Miccoli, 2015).

However, I have not relied exclusively on memoirs to inspire the creation of the digital media memory quilts in *Quilting the Memoir*. There are other genres in the literature documenting the lives of Jews in Egypt, that have provided me with historical references and insights. I now turn to some of those other writings to show how autobiographies, life stories, and other publications have informed my work. For the ensuing discussion, particular attention will be given to the work of writer Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff.

Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff: From Cairo to NY to Paris to Tel Aviv

While this chapter does not attempt to survey all life stories and autobiographies written by Jewish Egyptians, it is noteworthy to me that historians are actively uncovering a wealth of material to help them historicize the lives of Egyptian Jews. Among these sources, a notable

collection of essays by Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff stands out. Born in Cairo in 1917 and passing away in Israel in 1979, Kahanoff provides a vital and distinctive voice to narratives of Egyptian Jewish life, offering critical reflections derived from personal lived experiences. Kahanoff's work, however, is not so easily accessible. Her narratives, initially crafted in English from a first-person perspective, found particular resonance when translated and published in Hebrew for an Israeli readership (Starr & Somekh, 2011). A subset of her essays was later re-translated into English and compiled in the book "Mongrels and Marvels: The Levantine Writings of Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff," a collaborative effort by scholars, Deborah A. Starr and Sasson Somekh (2011).

Born into an Egyptian Jewish family, Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff embarked on a transformative journey. Leaving Egypt in 1940, she first landed in Europe and eventually found her settling place in Israel in 1958. Kahanoff's unique perspective on 'the Jewish condition' provides a compelling counterpoint to the memoirs of Aciman and Lagnado. Through a series of essays originally written in English and later published in Hebrew, Kahanoff unveils a world seldom glimpsed—a world where individuals of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds not only peacefully coexist but actively seek to heal the traumas of the past. Her essays serve as a window into a realm marked by a shared quest for understanding and reconciliation.

Response to Shohet Kahanoff

In her essay collection, *From the East* (1958), Kahanoff tells the life stories of Jews in Egypt, addressing themes of identity, culture, and belonging. Recognized as a significant contribution to the discourse on identity and cultural diversity in the Middle East, her writings examine tensions and conflicts between the Jewish and Arab communities in Egypt, along with the challenges faced by Egyptian Jews in the diaspora. Kahanoff's work is deeply personal as she

reflects on her own experiences as a Jewish woman living in Egypt, exploring the struggles to reconcile her Jewish and Arab identities.

Kahanoff's literary contributions address broader themes of identity, culture, and belonging. In her essay collection, she candidly expresses her internal struggle, noting feeling "conflicted between an urge for self-expression and a deep distrust of self-exposure" (Kahanoff as quoted by Starr and Somekh, 2011, xvii). Reflecting on this conflict, Kahanoff acknowledges, "It is one I have never quite solved. One consequence of this is that I've written quite a lot, but published relatively little, mostly in fragmentary form" (Kahanoff, as quoted in Starr and Somekh, xvii).

As observed by Starr and Somekh (2011), Kahanoff's writing is distinguished by its sensitivity and profound exploration of the intricacies of cultural identity. Regarded as a significant work in Jewish literature, her contributions make a noteworthy impact on the broader conversation surrounding identity and cultural diversity in the Middle East. In Starr and Somekh's assessment, "her representations of the past are fraught simultaneously with reverential nostalgia and distaste, yet in her writings she returns to that society over again as a flawed but once functioning model of pluralism" (p. xxiii). Kahanoff explores the tensions and conflicts between the Jewish and Arab communities in Egypt. She sheds light on the challenges faced by Jews in the diaspora as they navigate the intricate cultural terrain of the Middle East. Additionally, Kahanoff offers a personal reflection on her experiences as a Jewish woman in Egypt, revealing the struggles she faced in reconciling her Jewish and Arab identities.

In one essay, Kahanoff describes a childhood memory about an exchange she had with her school friend, Kadreya:

When I met Kadreya in the Gezira gardens, I told her the little I knew about the Passover story and all we had suffered at the hands of Pharaoh, until God opened the Red Sea for us to escape. “Ya allah,” she said.

“It’s not possible. I swear that not my father, or his father, or my grandfather’s grandfather would do such things to your father, his father, or his grandfather’s grandfather. I love you; you are my friend.”

“I love you, too,” I said, “but it’s all written in a book called the Haggadah. Father also says Palestine is our Promised Land. So perhaps I’m not Egyptian like you.” (Starr & Somekh, 2011, p.16).

Kahanoff’s writing serves as a welcome counterpoint in this study in two ways. Not only does Kahanoff’s use of Hebrew to represent an Egyptian diaspora disrupt the ways people think about the identities of people originating from the Middle East, but her representations of friendship and shared experiences with (non-Jewish) Egyptian neighbours also challenges dominant discourses of intrinsic discontentment between Jews and Arabs (Starr & Somekh, 2011).

Kahanoff offers an interesting counter-perspective on Egyptian Jewish life as her accounts are not romanticized and remain sober and unceremonious. Kahanoff’s essays were written after her departure from Egypt, but in the 1950s and while her parents still resided in Cairo.

In the initial stages of her writing career, Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff opted for several pseudonyms due to the fear of potential backlash against her representations of Egyptian Jewish life. This precautionary measure persisted until her parents' departure from Egypt in 1958. Her inaugural essay, "Reflections of a Levantine Jew," marked the commencement of a four-part series exploring the theme of the Levantine.

Kahanoff's literary journey exploring her Egyptian Jewish history and identity broke new ground, introducing the Hebrew-speaking population of Israel to a voice grappling with the complexities of a culture and a home that were no longer within reach. Her pioneering efforts to document the lived experiences of Egyptian Jewry remain a pertinent and essential contribution to the corpus of Egyptian Jewish diasporic writing, maintaining relevance and significance in contemporary discourse.

Conclusion

As emphasized at the outset of this chapter, the personal writings of Jewish Egyptian authors serve as valuable windows into the societal, cultural, and political landscapes of mid-twentieth-century Egypt. Notably, these writings exist in diverse linguistic forms, and in multiple languages, including Hebrew, Arabic, and French. The multilingual nature of these accounts reflects the pluralistic fabric of a society where a multitude of voices coexisted, sharing varied experiences of growing up and living in the cosmopolitan cities of Cairo and Alexandria (Miccoli, 2015; Starr, 2020).

As scholars dig deeper into the histories of Jewish Egyptians, as well as into the broader narratives of Jews across North Africa, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean (Azoulay, 2019; Shohat, 2004; Levy, 2019), there is a growing interest in uncovering sources that provide insights into lives that remain unrecorded and relatively unknown (Abdulhaleq, 2016). This pursuit underscores the scholarly commitment to amplifying Jewish voices that have been historically marginalized, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse experiences within these communities.

Memoirs penned by both first and second-generation diasporic Egyptian Jews, spanning the globe, constitute a rich literary tapestry. Predominantly narrative in nature, these memoirs

serve as first-hand testimonies, offering glimpses into past lives that linger vividly in people's memories. They reflect a profound desire to convey deep ancestral legacies and to preserve family heritage. For instance, in, *To Egypt With Love: Memories of a Bygone World* (2021) Viviane Bowell extends her personal narrative beyond a self-published memoir, engaging with her audience through regular Instagram posts featuring anecdotes of “La Belle époque”. Colette Rossant's (1999) work, *Memories of a Lost Egypt: A Memoir with Recipes*, presents an intimate and detailed portrait of a young girl's upbringing in a bourgeois Egyptian Jewish household, skillfully weaving in recipes throughout the narrative. In the art exhibition “Nostalgic Glimpses of a Bygone Era”, Egyptian-born Jewish artist Camilla Fox has crafted a noteworthy body of work, capturing the essence of cosmopolitan Egypt through her paintings and portraits. These works represent the social and community gatherings etched in her memories of her childhood. Finally, going forward, exploring social media platforms promises a substantial contribution to the study of Egyptian Jewry, given the burgeoning social network facilitated by online presence within this global diaspora.

A Note on Diaspora Studies

In this study, diaspora is examined through the lens of cultural memory and research-creation, exploring how Egyptian Jewry might be preserved, transmitted, and reimagined. Marianne Hirsch's (1997, 2012) concept of postmemory is particularly relevant in understanding how the descendants of displaced communities engage with a past they did not directly experience. Diasporic memory, in this sense, carries the weight of displacement and loss, and fuels cultural innovation, collective resilience and artistic forms of expression. The digital memory quilts in this project serve as acts of remembrance, bridging generational gaps and offering new ways of engaging with a fragmented past.

The concept of diaspora is central to this dissertation, as it frames the lived experiences, cultural memory, and identity formation of Egyptian Jews who were displaced from their homeland in the mid-20th century. As Stuart Hall (1990, 1996) argues, diasporic identities are never static but are constantly being reconstituted through cultural practice and historical change. These connections are maintained through digital media, remittances, cultural organizations, and political advocacy. Scholar Khachig Tölölyan (1996) expanded the definition of diaspora to encompass a wide range of displaced communities, whether through forced migration, colonial legacies, or voluntary movement. In his book, *Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment* (1996), Tölölyan argues that diasporas are not merely dispersed populations but rather intricately linked to both their places of origin as well as their new environments. Unlike older models that view diaspora as a temporary phase before assimilation or return, Tölölyan highlights that diasporic communities often sustain long-term transnational connections. The memory quilts and digital storytelling elements demonstrate how diasporas do not merely inherit history but actively reinterpret and reimagine it. In the context of Egyptian Jews, this dissertation demonstrates how memory work, artistic production, and digital storytelling serve as strategies of diasporic self-definition. Rather than existing solely in a state of longing for Egypt, Egyptian Jewry engages with their heritage through various forms of expression.

Khachig Tölölyan's argues that diasporas act as political and cultural intermediaries, shaping discourses on identity, history, and belonging. The Egyptian Jewish diaspora, continue to actively engage in preserving their history through academic work, cultural heritage, historical documentation projects and art. This dissertation illustrates how research-creation methodologies – such as the development of digital memory quilts and archival storytelling – contribute to the

collective agency of Egyptian Jews in redefining their cultural memory and their diasporic existence. *Quilting the Memoir* serves as an act of cultural production, reinforcing Tölölyan's idea that diaspora is not merely a condition of displacement but a framework for generating new knowledge. In emphasizing the nature of diasporic voices and how creative interventions might challenge dominant national narratives and exclusionary histories, this research contributes to diaspora studies by illustrating how cultural memory is enacted, deepening our understanding and appreciation of how displaced communities sustain their identities across time and space.

Chapter Two: Stitching Methodologies

According to anthropological and semiotic theories, culture can be seen as a three-dimensional framework, comprising social (people, social relations, institutions), material (artefacts and media), and mental aspects (culturally defined ways of thinking, mentalities)

(Bal, 2008, p. 4).

Introduction

In this step of my journey, I consider the ways in which memories are weaved, transmitted, mediated and remediated through the lens of postmemory and digital storytelling and where the digital memory quilts begin to take form.

This chapter examines the intersection of digital storytelling and research within memory studies. Divided into three parts, the first introduces digital storytelling as an extension of oral history practices and its potential for conveying fragmented life stories and histories. The second focuses on the field of memory studies tracing the critical turns that have shaped new methodological approaches and emphasizing its cross-disciplinary potential. The third offers reflections of the intersectional nature of digital storytelling and cultural memory studies particularly the way in which I have integrated concepts of digital storytelling and postmemory. These frameworks provide a means to understand how cultural imaginaries and the narratives they produce are shaped, transmitted, and continuously reimagined across global communities.

Memory studies, as a subfield within cultural studies, offers a lens through which to examine how collective and individual memories are shaped, preserved, and transformed within cultural contexts. The field of Cultural Studies approaches media and memory from broader cultural and social perspectives, emphasizing the intersection of media texts with cultural

discourses and historical narratives. In the case of my research, this framework is applied to the study of Egyptian Jewry, focusing on how memory is produced, negotiated, and contested within the cultural contexts of the Egyptian Jewish diaspora. This approach enables a critical analysis of the ways in which the histories and identities of Jews from Egypt are mediated and reimagined across time and space.

Digital Quilting, Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling finds its home in the field of Digital Humanities and has been adopted across a broad range of disciplines. “Dana Atchley first used the term digital storytelling in the 1980’s as he experimented with the use of multimedia elements in storytelling performances” (Garcia & Rossiter, 2010, p. 191). He later went on to become the founder of the San Francisco Digital Media Center that later became the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) with Joe Lambert and Nina Mullen. Digital storytelling has served the fields of interactive media and multi-modal media platforms and has developed as an extension of oral history practices, contributing to developing innovative research methods in autoethnography, and other related fields. As John F. Barber notes, “digital storytelling combines digital content/media and the art of storytelling. The resulting stories might be documentaries, essays, historical/eyewitness accounts, memoirs, narratives, research findings/presentations, and more” (Barber, 2016, p. 3).

Digital storytelling has also developed an important scholarship and become central in creating “new opportunities for cross-disciplinary, iterative approaches to practice-based scholarship and pedagogy” (Barber, 2016, p.2). While storytelling is not typically considered a qualitative methodology in the sciences and humanities, the field of digital humanities is interested in “storytelling as a methodology for sharing information [and] the relative ease with which digital stories can be created and distributed, and opportunities to provide engaging

opportunities for scholarship, pedagogy, [and] cross disciplinary discussion” (Barber, 2016, p. 11). Digital storytelling offers alternative strategies and ways of conveying life stories and experiences.

Digital storytelling is rhizomatic in nature: non-linear, multimodal, and open-ended. Digital storytelling complicates the traditional notion of storytelling as defined by classical narrative studies. The fluidity of digital media allows for multiple relational connections to be made – through different means than structured, linear storylines and conventional dramatic plots. Being able to “narrate” memories, multiple and mixed perspectives, moments of disjuncture and open-ended life stories, engages the maker/storyteller, the materials/media, and the viewer/participant in a completely different relation than traditional, linear and plot-driven screen stories and literary texts. As Mieke Bal describes it: “Memory militates against a binary view of narrative as a text telling a story, or a story telling a plot” (Bal, 2018, p. 49).

The unique form of digital storytelling in *Quilting the Memoir* offers a structure with which it is possible to work through traces of the material memory and untold histories, to contribute to the development of pedagogical tools in the field of digital storytelling. A central visual motif of *Quilting the Memoir* digital storytelling stems from the fabrics that belonged to my mother and which she brought with her from Egypt. Handmade haute couture dresses made of lace, silks, and jacquard constituted the dozen or so dresses she bequeathed to me throughout my life.

For *Quilting the Memoir*, the fragments of “fabrics” (digitized images of my mother’s clothing from Egypt) were blended in montage sequences that eventually became the digital memory quilts. In the words of Tim Ingold:

To tell a story then, is to relate, in narrative, the occurrences of the past, retracing a path through the world that others, recursively picking up the threads of past lives, can follow in the process of spinning out their own. But rather as in looping or knitting, the thread being spun now and the thread picked up from the past are both of the same yarn. There is no point at which the story ends and life begins (Jefferies, 2016, p. 97, quoting Tim Ingold, 2007, p. 90).

Quilting the Memoir picks up the “threads of past lives” and interweaves them into brief montage sequences using abstract visual media drawing on the imagined cultural milieux and histories of Jews from Egypt. The metaphor of the digital quilt is appropriate for the story I seek to tell, for as Sarah Diamond notes “The metaphor ‘the fabric of memory’ evokes the image of a giant complex tapestry, its many layers woven and embroidered by events and experiences” (2016, p. 367). *Quilting the Memoir* uses the metaphor quite literally, transposing the craft from traditional, physical materials, to mixed media in digital formats.

Similar to sewing, weaving and embroidery, quilting involves threads: specifically stitching together various pieces (or fragments) of fabric, of different colours, patterns, and textures, to create a single, unified quilt. Each piece (fragment) contributes to the overall design, and the arrangement of these pieces can convey a specific aesthetic and narrative. Quilting often plays with contrast—whether through color, texture, or pattern. The juxtaposition of different fabrics (or fragments) creates visual interest and contributes to the overall narrative or thematic message of the quilt. Quilts can also tell stories, especially in traditions like American folk quilting, where each piece of fabric may represent a different memory, event, or symbol. The arrangement of these pieces creates a narrative, whether literal or metaphorical, that is communicated through the quilt's design. “The significance of digital storytelling is affirmed by

reaching back to the roots of storytelling, citing the multi-dimensionality afforded by the digital context, exploring the reflective nature of the article produced, and recognizing its potential to present the voice of the underserved” (Benmayor, 2008, p. 192).

When overlooked histories come to light, their existence inevitably complicates established narratives, spawning new narrative strands that seek to generate fresh meanings and perspectives. This further raises questions about the politics of remembering and forgetting; about which stories get told, when they get told, by whom they are told, and for whom they are told. While literature preserves cultural memories and traditions, serving as a repository of collective experiences and identities, visual media has the potential to remediate and reframe stories of the past which have the potential to interrogate and alter dominant narratives that may have obscured lesser-known life stories. As Simon Biggs notes: “New media artists almost routinely undertake applied research” (2009, p. 68). In this section I discuss the interconnection between digital storytelling and memory studies.

Memory Studies

Several important turns in memory studies have evolved to advocate for “different modes of remembering” (Erll, 2008, p. 6). While early concepts within the field of memory studies are rooted in cultural and social perspectives, namely with the seminal works of Pierre Nora (1985) and Maurice Halbwachs (1925). And while their works continue to lay the foundation for the field of memory studies, which has evolved as “a field to which many disciplines contribute, using their specific methodologies and perspectives” (Erll, 2008, p.3). this section provides an overview of various approaches on memory studies and why I advocate for a more dynamic and holistic approach in research-creation, art-based practices and digital storytelling.

Seminal Works

Cultural and collective memory are concepts that overlap in their most basic definition. Collective memory is a social phenomenon (Halbwachs, 1925) that refers to shared knowledge by a group of people, while cultural memory reaches further back into the past and encompasses a broader form of memory, often mediated through cultural artefacts, practices, and institutions such as literature, art, museums and education.

Maurice Halbwachs, renowned for his work *On Collective Memory* (1925), posited that memory is a social construct shaped by social interactions and shared among members of a social group. For Halbwachs, collective memory encompasses the memories and representations that a group of people collectively shares, influenced by their shared experiences. Notably, Halbwachs asserts that collective memory differs from history, even though historical events may influence the formation of collective memory.

For historian Pierre Nora (1989), collective memory finds its form and preservation through the creation and maintenance of specific sites known as "lieux de mémoire." Nora contends that these sites (lieux) can be either physical or symbolic, encompassing places, objects, or practices that serve as repositories for shared memories, thereby fostering connections between a community or nation and its historical past. For Nora, memory is intricately tied to "spaces, gestures, images, and objects" (p. 9), encapsulated within a space he terms a "lieux de mémoire" or sites of memory, which may take the form of museums, monuments, commemorations, and other cultural expressions (1989). Nora emphasizes that these sites are not mere passive repositories of the past; instead, they function as active instruments through which a society negotiates its relationship with history, memory, and identity. However, these sites,

whether physical or symbolic, embody and reflect collective memory, preserving and anchoring histories within a designated "site of memory."

The Turn in Memory Studies and Memory Work

Memory work (Bryant & Bryant, 2019), is a research methodology and method developed by German feminist scholar Frigga Haug involving "the collective analysis of individual written memories" (Onyx & Small, 2001, p. 773). Traditionally carried out in some form of participatory research with human subjects "memory work is also an individual method. In research that involves individuals, memories are often analyzed by participant-researchers and academic researchers and as such, also creates collectivity" (Bryant & Bryant, p. 529). As of the early 1980s, the field of memory studies developed beyond the fields of psychology and sociology, with a shift in focus from individual memory processes to broader social, cultural, and political dimensions of memory. The field expanded with the notion of memory as a cultural phenomenon and with it, new methodological approaches in the study of cultural memory studies (Erll, 2008).

In the following section I discuss the important contributions in memory studies of scholars such as Marianne Hirsch, Annette Kuhn, Astrid Erll, Michael Rothberg, Jan Assman and Aleida Assman to expand on theories and concepts of memory as dynamic and that reach beyond the individual and collective, from dualistic cultural and social paradigms to rhizomatic and relational intersections of culture, biology and materiality. Inherently multidisciplinary (and multidirectional, as discussed in the next chapter), the field of memory studies intersects with studies and research methods in the fields of visual media, history, sociology and autoethnography (Erll, 2008, p. 4). These scholars explore memory studies as a dynamic force

that intersects with the historical, social, environmental, individual and collective entities, that also manifest as remediations in the digital memory quilts.

In her introduction to *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, cultural theorist in memory studies Astrid Erll (2008), defines three key concepts in cultural media studies. The first concept, “*Dimensions of Culture and Memory: Material, Social, and Mental*” (p. 3), addresses the most common use of collective memory, which bridges social, material, and mental dimensions. The second, “*Levels of Memory: Individual and Collective*” (p. 4), operates at two levels of memory – biological and symbolic – the first “triggered as well as shaped by external factors” (p. 5), while the second involves “practices by which social groups construct a shared past (p. 5). And finally, the third distinction she makes “*Modes of Memory: The ‘How’ of Remembering*” (p. 6) critiques Halbwachs’ binary opposition between history and memory — where history is seen as “dead” and memory as “lived.” (p. 6). Erll advocates for “*modes of remembering*” (2008, p. 7) – that ask not only “what” is remembered, but “how” things are remembered. This perspective embraces memory as an active and evolving process, rather than a static or fixed entity. Each of these modalities describe the epistemological shifts that have impacted the way memory is studied.

The following section focuses on a discussion of the various methodologies adopted to investigate cultural memory of Egyptian Jewry, more specifically, in aiming to understand *how* the cultural imaginaries of Egyptian Jews has been shaped, contributing to my own original and personal homage to my mother, in turn shedding light on the Egyptian Jewish diaspora around the world. *Quilting the Memoir* asks the viewer for a moment of reflection, a moment to feel and experience the possibility of a different kind of Egyptian and Jewish identity in the 21st Century.

Dynamic ways of Remembering

Postmemory

According to Marianne Hirsch: “Collective or cultural memory brings forward the stories and experiences of those who are left out of grand historical narratives, contesting, complicating and disseminating those narratives and their hegemony” (Interview with Marianne Hirsch, 1997, p. 3). Hirsch emphasizes the emotional and imaginative engagement of the second generation with the memories of the first. This engagement often leads to the reconstruction or reimagining of these memories in ways that resonate deeply despite the lack of firsthand experience.

Postmemory operates through family stories, photographs, and other cultural artefacts that serve as conduits for transmitting the trauma of past events to later generations. Visual and textual media, such as photographs or films, are central to postmemory, as they allow later generations to connect to the past and bear witness to events they did not experience. Postmemory is mediated and shaped by the narratives, artefacts, and representations passed down through families and communities.

Memory-Text

Cultural theorist Anette Kuhn (2010) has developed visual methodologies using family photos and visual media as central elements of the theoretical concepts and research methods she has deployed in her memory work which she defines as "a performative act in and with media" (p. 98). Central to these concepts is that memory not only resides in oneself, our environments, objects and our interactions with them, but also in the way we animate them. She writes that “It is impossible to overstate the significance of narrative in cultural memory – in the sense not just of the (continuously negotiated) contents of shared/collective memory-stories, but also of the

activity of recounting or telling memory-stories, in both private and public contexts – in other words, of performances of memory” (Kuhn, 2010, p. 298).

The memory-text emerges as an assemblage, intertwining strands and fragments of material, affective, and imagined memories through various forms of mediation. “The memory text”, as described by Kuhn, “is typically a montage of vignettes, anecdotes, fragments, 'snapshots,' and flashes that can create a sense of synchrony: remembered events seem to exist outside a linear time frame or resist easy anchoring to 'historical' time” (2010, p. 299). In the case of *Quilting the Memoir*, the interaction with family photographs plays a pivotal role in the interpretative and iterative process, contributing to the reconstruction and assembly of non-linear and multidirectional memory fragments from the past.

Annette Kuhn's, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (1995), which contributed to a critical turn in the field of anthropology and memory work, is a blend of autobiography and autoethnography. Family photographs hold a crucial place in the production of cultural memory. According to Kuhn, “personal and family photographs figure importantly in cultural memory, and memory work with photographs offers a particularly productive route to understand the social and cultural uses and instrumentalities of memory” (2007, p. 283). Describing her book as “the outcome of a considerable reworking of the raw materials of an identity and a life story” (p. 149), Kuhn illustrates how a family photograph becomes a source of possibilities in defining her life story and constructing “narratives of identity” (p. 2) from a memory fragment. The interpretive methodologies using family photos stand as significant contributions in memory work practices, and the field of visual media: “as commonplace material artefacts, family photographs and albums contain meanings, and also seem infinitely capable of generating new ones” (Kuhn, 2007, p. 281).

Memory-Art: Mediated and Remediated

For media scholar José van Dijck, the concept of “mediated memories” implies a performative act that is mutually transformative for the memory and the media (2015, p. 20) where “personal memory objects become sites where individual minds and collective cultures meet” (p. 25). According to van Dijck, mediated memories are not singular modes of media. Rather, they are vibrant and relational pathways through which various modes of media converge and move through sentient and non-sentient entities: The term “‘mediated memories’ refers to both the concrete objects ... and a mental concept ... that encompasses aspects of mind and body, as well as technology and culture” (p. ii). That is, mediated memories enable and activate processes of remembrance and mediation, in the minds and bodies of those who engage with them.

Mediated memories, according to van Dijck, therefore, are not simply neutral transportation systems that facilitate movement of fixed or static content from one medium to another, from sender to receiver. Rather, she maintains that mediated memories are relational, in that meaning is made both by the sender and the receiver through the movement and connections between content, media and mediator. van Dijck posits that mediated memories are concepts that take shape through interactions between and among ourselves, our technology, and our culture.

Upon stumbling on a shoebox of personal memorabilia from her past, van Dijck began thinking more critically about these objects and the kind of material memory they hold. “My collection of personal items” she writes, “made me reflect on how we present and preserve images of ourselves to others; it caused me to speculate on how private collections tap into the much larger phenomenon of communal rites of storing and retrieving” (van Dijck, 2007, p. ii). Through her own memory work, van Dijck (2004) considers how shifts from analogue and

digital technologies (remediations) “raise poignant concerns about the relation between material objects and autobiographical memory, between media technologies and our habits and rituals of remembering” (2007, p. ii). She gestures towards theories and dynamics of remediation, “the way in which technologies tend to absorb and revamp older forms or genres without completely replacing the old” (p. 48). For van Dijck, meaning is found in the interaction with the objects and media that become “mediated building blocks that we mould in the process of remembering” (p. 23).

From Remediation to Postmemory – An ‘Imaginative Investment’

Remediation is inherent in the creation of any form of media and can be traced to the Renaissance (Erll, 2008).

Indeed, the very concept of cultural memory is itself premised on the idea that memory can only become collective as part of a continuous process whereby memories are shared with the help of symbolic artefacts that mediate between individuals and, in the process, create communality across both space and time (Erll & Rigney, 2009, p. 1).

The term ‘remediation’ refers to the process by which new media adopt and recontextualize older media while also differentiating themselves (Bolter & Grusin, 2000). In essence, remediation highlights how media are not distinct entities but part of a continuous process of borrowing, transformation, and re-invention, driven by both technology and popular culture. Similarly, memory is a dynamic and continuous process of sharing, re-imagining, embodying and transmitting through the stories we tell one another, our ancestral heritage and “all representations of the past draw on available media technologies, on existent media products, on patterns of representation and medial aesthetics” (Erll & Rigney, 2009, p. 4). Remediation therefore is inherent to all forms of media and mediation of content “concerned with the ways in

which the same story is recalled in new media at a later point in time and hence given a new lease of cultural life” (Erll & Rigney, 2009, p. 9). *Quilting the Memoir* is a project that embraces different forms of remediations, from old media to new, analog and material to digital, culminating in a series of digital memory quilts composed of stitched digitized fabrics, personal epigraphs, family photographs, and pattern maquettes hand drawn by my mother.

For an example of postmemory, I turn to Marianne Hirsch (1992-1993), a term originally introduced in her study of intergenerational memory trauma among Holocaust survivors, where memory is mediated through stories, images, and behaviors inherited from survivors. The concept of postmemory which extended to other histories within the field of memory studies, was influenced by Andrea Liss's work in *Trespassing through Shadows: Memory, Photography, and the Holocaust* (1991), marking a significant conceptual shift in memory studies. Both Liss (1991) and Hirsch (2020) employ the concept of postmemory to complicate engagements with history and memory, viewing memory as a negotiable system, constantly evolving between the historical event being remembered and the subject recalling it. According to Marianne Hirsch “[p]ostmemory’s connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall, but by *imaginative investment*, projection, and creation” (Hirsch, 2019, p. 172, emphasis mine). Hirsch raises crucial questions about the transformation of memory into postmemory, challenging us to reconsider how memories are transmissible and influential in the lives of those who were absent from the recalled events.

As the questions posed by Marianne Hirsch and her contemporaries become increasingly pertinent across disciplines, the role of artistic research practice within academia comes into focus. Hirsch defines postmemory “not as a strict identity position but rather as a generational structure of transmission embedded in multiple forms of mediation” (2017, p. 172). Hirsch

emphasizes that acts of "reading, writing, and listening" foster receptivity, responsiveness, and openness, allowing for vulnerability and unpredictable emotional responses (2018, Talk). This raises the critical question of "[w]hat aesthetic and institutional structures, what tropes and technologies best mediate the complex psychology of postmemory, the continuities and discontinuities between generations and between proximate and more distant witnesses to historical events" (Hirsch, 2019, p. 174).

Postmemory offers a way of conceptualizing memory as a dynamic form of engagement, mediation and remediation, creating intersectional generative spaces for alternative modes of remembering. An illustration of the concept of (re)mediated postmemory memory, is found in Marianne Hirsch's critique of Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* (1972), which recounts a story based on Spiegelman's father's experience in a Nazi concentration camp during WWII, in a comic strip format. (See Figures 1 & 2 below). Hirsch notes that the book cover's remediation of photographer Margaret Bourke-White's famous image of Nazi prisoners at Buchenwald concentration camp, humans are replaced with figures of mice wearing prison clothes, standing behind barbed wire. "Across the globe, contemporary writers, filmmakers, visual artists, memorial artists and museologists have forged an aesthetic of postmemory in relation to past and geographically distant catastrophic histories" (Hirsch, 2019, p. 174). Spiegelman's biographical adaptation of his father's life story offers readers the opportunity to engage with a historical event through a personal, docu-fiction literary experience. "Maus" serves as a personal biographical account, intertwining a son's recollection of his father's traumatic life with his own embodied memories of his ancestral past. Similarly, "[f]amily pictures depend on such a narrative act of adoption that transforms rectangular pieces of cardboard into telling details connecting lives and stories across continents and generations" (Hirsch, 1997, p. xii).



Figure 1: Photo by Margaret Bourke-White



Figure 2: Book Cover, “Maus” by Art Spiegelman

Quilting the Memoir draws on the concepts of postmemory and remediation in its study and creation, as a means to explore, express and experience what Hirsch refers to as a “stateless memory” (2019). This type of memory encompasses “multiple temporalities, spaces, and conceptions of identity and community,” offering “multiple possibilities of encounter and transformation” (Hirsch, 2019, p. 419). Hirsch highlights that this type of memory “is not static but dynamic, not passive but active, not linear but repetitive, recursive, circular, rhizomatic” (Hirsch, 2019, p. 419). The digital memory quilts are remediated artifacts that mediate fragments of memories in a rhizomatic, layered patchwork of digital imagery.

According to comparative literature scholar Andreas Huyssen in his book *Memory Art in the Contemporary World: Confronting Violence in the Global South*: “Any understanding of the past now had to be seen as subject to narrative and visual strategies of representation” (Huyssen, 2024, p. 11). Huyssen’s most recent analysis of “transnational memory art”, provides thoughtful reflections and aesthetic strategies in working through this “vast field encompassing many different practices” (Huyssen, 2024, p. 13). Informed by his insights, *Quilting the Memoir* becomes the performance and rhizomatic result of a memory act through the gathering and

layering of memory objects, fabrics, and photos, and the digital weaving of materials into dynamic artefacts were the processes and results of acts of recollection, of engaging with memories and life stories, of piecing fragments of the past to form, to remember but a patchwork of a story, offering a postmemory.

‘Acts of memory’

It is through the act or performance of memory that memories are actively shaped, enacted, and embodied through ritual and other forms of expression. The concept of performative memory emphasizes the dynamic and interactive nature of memory, focusing on how memories are not just passively recalled or ‘retrieved’ but rather are actively produced and reproduced, mediated and remediated. Performative memory is often expressed through various cultural forms, providing media through which memories are communicated and experienced. Individuals and groups can assert agency over how their histories and identities are remembered and represented, which has proven critical for marginalized voices within underrepresented communities. According to Annette Kuhn:

It is impossible to overstate the significance of narrative in cultural memory – in the sense not just of the (continuously negotiated) contents of shared/collective memory-stories, but also of the activity of recounting or telling memory-stories, in both private and public contexts – in other words, of performances of memory. The question, then, is: how may the past be re-enacted in the present through performances of different kinds?” (2010, p. 298).

The “activity of recounting” is a performative act that bridges aspects of cultural memory, narrative memory, and the transmission of memory. In his essay “Research Acts in Art Practice” (2016), Graeme Sullivan notes that “Some in the research community are skeptical that non-

linguistic forms of artistic engagement such as performance, time-based media, and the plastic arts, can be defined and defended as research modalities” (2006, p. 25).

In *Quilting the Memoir*, the act of quilting is a performative action akin to the act of recounting a story that seeks to piece together the fragmented memories of a yet-to-be remembered past. In *Quilting the Memoir*, it is through acts of remembering and remediating personal and cultural memory that creative and artistic storytelling techniques such as assembling and layering the quilts are performed. The collection of quilts and their digital presentation within the gallery space invites viewers to engage with this process and to participate in performative acts of memory within a shared space (discussed further in Chapter Three and Four).

The digital memory quilts of *Quilting the Memoir* are composed of a montage of fragments, mixing family photos and digital renditions of fabrics and personal objects. This approach to remembering Egyptian Jewish experience tests Kuhn’s hypothesis that “[a] combination of memory work and photography brings something entirely distinctive to the methods and findings of cultural memory research” (Kuhn, 2007, 285). *Quilting the Memoir* engages with memory objects, experimental storytelling strategies, and cultural imaginaries, creating relational connections *with* and *through* my own family memories. The digital memoir quilts and media installation are tangible products of these performative acts of memory, inviting viewers to engage in a relational space where memories are activated, transmitted and remediated – initiating a process of transformation.

Conclusion

Digital storytelling offers an innovative approach to performative acts of postmemory remediation, utilizing multimedia tools to enable self-reflexive expression. Rina Benmayor captures this potential, stating that digital storytelling allows the storyteller to use “a palette of technical tools to weave personal tales using images, graphics, music, and sound...with the author’s own story voice” (Benmayor, 2008, p. 192, quoting Porter, 2004, p. 1). Experimenting with digital storytelling tools allows me to push the boundaries of recounting life stories in a less conventional and linear fashion while concepts of postmemory and remediation provide me with the conceptual tools to explore innovative methodologies. Concepts of postmemory and remediation further provide the theoretical framework to explore innovative methodologies. Crucially, this form of media design supports narrative structures that embrace liminality—a space of in-betweens—rather than adhering to rigid dichotomies or linear extremes.

This chapter has discussed concepts within media, memory studies and digital storytelling that have significantly shaped the methodologies I deployed in the research-creation process of *Quilting the Memoir*. Informed by conceptual frameworks in media and memory studies, the exploration thus far focuses on the significance of personal narratives and life stories in shaping both the official and unofficial histories of Egyptian Jewry.

Chapter Three: Quilting: Modes of Expression

Introduction

In this stage of the journey, I explore how both theoretical and philosophical concepts as well as traditional quilting methods and traditions influence my aesthetic choices and critical thinking. This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first, I discuss different types of quilts and quilt making techniques such as patchworks, appliqué and the crazy quilt and the Egyptian *khayamiya*, as part of my review of the quilt as a form of material media. In the second, I Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1994) theoretical concepts of the 'rhizome', the 'milieu' and the 'fold' further inform my thinking and approach to cultural memory studies and the cultural imaginaries of Egyptian Jewry. Finally, I demonstrate how these notions are reflected in the process of making the digital memory quilts and producing the exhibition.

Employing various metaphors, including the rhizome, the fold, the quilt, and fabric, Deleuze and Guattari (1994) developed an ontology of relations through their engagement with socio-political and philosophical discourses. Their thinking has informed my own research, conceptualizing the digital memory quilt as a space where layered memory objects fold and unfold, exposing layers of images evoking diverse voices and traces of the lived experiences of Jews displaced from Egypt. The weave of these life stories creates a shared space of familiarity and curiosity: a cultural imaginary. This cultural imaginary offers a space of belonging, recognition, and becoming to diasporic Egyptian Jews.

Process

The art and technique of quilting is metaphorically transposed within a dynamic visual media space where processes of digital stitching, folding and layering could be referred to as

techniques of montage, glitching and superimposition. Using the metaphors of quilt-making, patternmaking, and sewing, I have applied digital representations of fabrics and materials in crafting digital memory quilts. This metaphor was particularly appropriate for this project because it emerges in part through my reflections on fabrics, dress patterns, textiles and clothing designs worn or created by my mother whose Egyptian Jewish experiences are an integral part of this research. The processes I undertook in creating my digital memory quilts were equally processes of remembering – taking apart and putting back together – the significance of objects that held meaning for me in relation to my Egyptian Jewish heritage and identity. “Making implies unmaking, remaking, making connections” (Jefferies, p. 4), an iterative process that was repeated throughout almost two years of working through the material personal objects, photographs and fabrics that were threads of my mother’s life.

Textile Art

In *The Handbook of Textile Culture* (2016), editors Jefferies, Conroy, and Clark advocate for novel approaches in arts-based and practice-based research within textile studies. The collection of essays considers the diverse trajectories in research approaches to textile production, influenced by interdisciplinary studies such as “technology and visual media, history and cultural theory, anthropology, philosophy” (p.3) as well as the emergence of “new strategies of collecting, documenting and showing work ... and a plethora of exhibitions that are exploring the roots and routes of textile display” (p.9). These new approaches to textile production demonstrate how textiles and textile fabrication contribute to research-creation, particularly for practitioners interested in expanding modes of representation within cultural memory and media studies.

Quilts, recognized as historical testaments and aesthetic expressions, have traditionally been associated with women's crafts—a domestic pursuit that can be both unique and personal, undertaken either individually or collectively (Ducey et al., 2018). The process of quilting, historically physical, involves using local fabrics and textiles that reflect environmental conditions in both production and the final artefacts. Despite their being rooted physicality, quilts possess an inherent mobility, traversing, migrating, and relocating based on the trajectories of those who possess them. With roots in Ancient Egypt, quilts have a rich history, serving as a means of communication among slaves and playing a significant role in activism. However, due to the vast scope of quilting traditions and histories, establishing coherent taxonomies and methodologies has proven challenging (Forrest & Blincoe, 1995; Kiracofe, 1993).

Despite the inherent challenge, the authors of “The National History of the Traditional Quilt” undertake the ambitious task of constructing “a life history of the traditional quilt based upon the Euro-American quilt as a prototype” (Forrest & Blincoe, 1995, p. xxi). This work includes the development of a comprehensive taxonomy and morphology specifically focused on traditional Western quilts. The researchers trace the life cycles and ecologies of quilts, considering them as artefacts and products shaped by their environments (p. 161). Scholars, curators, and artists contribute to an ongoing dialogue through reflections on and historical insights into the designs, aesthetics, and functionalities of quilts, engaging in the study and inquiry of form, process, and production.

As numerous scholars emphasize, a quilt's complexity lies in its multidimensional form, featuring fragments, layering, and the craftsmanship evident in the completed work (Forrest & Blincoe, 1995). These quilts are material objects that seamlessly merge artifact and

utilitarianism, uniting aesthetics with function and embodying the foundational principles of design.

There is a misconception that traditional material quilts are static forms. However, as highlighted by Forrest and Blincoe (1995), individuals who live with quilts recognize the dynamic nature of these pieces, which undergo radical changes throughout the day, season, year, and even across a lifetime. “Such transformations are intricately linked with the passage of time—from the conceptualization and design phase, through the production process, to the entire lifespan of the quilt, which may span multiple generations” (Forest & Blincoe, 1995, p. xxiii).

Quilts stand as cultural artefacts, reflecting a vast technology and a system of values and meanings inherent in the culture in which they are created and circulate. As aptly expressed by Forrest and Blincoe (1995) “any quilt in its very existence implies the existence of a vast technology and a system of values and meanings, which if explored systematically, can eventually reveal the whole culture in which the quilt resides” (p. 161). Quilts engage in a continuous process of interaction with humans, their environment, and other physical objects. Quilts, with their delicate, structured, or eclectic patterns, varied sizes, and diverse fabric compositions—whether silks, cotton, wools, or a myriad of other fabrics—evoke feelings of warmth, nostalgia, or emotional connection. “Importantly, quilts carry unique odors, produce sounds through their fabrics, and have diverse uses” (p.171). Forrest and Blincoe underscore the sensual qualities of quilts as crucial for understanding the multifaceted interactions that can occur between quilts and individuals, emphasizing that the appreciation of quilts, even on the most basic level, is far from monolithic (p.174).

The art and craft of traditional quilting with fabrics is deeply rooted in diverse personal and social histories, experiencing numerous revivals throughout human existence (Holstein,

1991). Holstein notes that quilting histories are intricately tied to the cultures, traditions, and geographies from which the quilts originate, often crafted by local communities and bearing the touch of artistic expression. Golden embroidered quilts, once the adornments of nobility, also served as humble shelters for families who ingeniously fashioned them from recycled fabric scraps. Forrest and Blincoe (1995) remind us that “the narratives associated with quilts draw upon aspects of their life history but are not necessarily synonymous with it” (p.97).

Quilting – The Artefact

Jonathan Holstein, a co-curator of multiple exhibitions featuring American Quilts, notably the groundbreaking 'Abstract Design in American Quilts' at the Whitney Museum in 1971, has been instrumental in showcasing quilts as an art form. Holstein's Whitney Museum exhibition presented artistic quilts in a gallery setting, emphasizing the skill required for the creation of intricate patterns, designs, colors, and textures. Holstein's work highlights quilts as products of fine craftsmanship and elevates them to the status of an art form. He suggests that the aesthetic evolution of American quilts can be discerned by 'looking for particular qualities in the quilts' (Holstein, 1991, p. 12), emphasizing the importance of attending to the histories of a quilt's materiality and textiles through these qualities.

Quilts, fabrics, and textures often serve as metaphors in media studies, reflecting not only the form of a quilt but also its vibrant material value in the context of the cultural, historical, aesthetic traces it offers, and the life span of a quilt (Deleuze & Guattari, Bruno, Sturken, van Dijck). The concept of the quilt in this study is used metaphorical, while also taking on a remediated form from cloth to digital media. Abstract images, family photos, and textual elements converge in this practice-based research inquiry and final installation, representing both the processes and the outcomes of this study of the collective memory of Jewish Egyptians. As

Woolhouse (2017, p. 112) notes, the act of art-making provides a route to understanding experiences and accessing new knowledge by offering a tangible format for sharing such experiences.

Employing a process of remediation, where one medium appropriates another, the project creates mixed-media or multimodal forms of representation. Central to my research-creation practice are techniques of assemblage, collage, and bricolage, converging at the crossroads of memory, media, and material studies. Drawing inspiration from a range of scholarly fields, disciplines, methodological approaches, and lived experiences, the aim of *Quilting the Memoir* is to foster spaces for generative modes of thought through material activations (Loveless, 2019) of Egyptian Jewish experience.

Traditions and Techniques in Quilting

A quilt is a type of textile or blanket composed of three layers: a quilt top, batting (or wadding), the middle layer, and a backing. The quilt top is typically designed and the layers stitched together through a process called quilting. Quilt designs and patterns vary vastly from one era and culture to another. The stitching of the layers is not only functional process, weaving patchwork and layers, but it becomes an aspect of the quilt's aesthetic design and narrative quality. Quilts are functional, made for warmth and comfort, as well as becoming works of art, recognized for excellence in craft, skill and design. In many cultures, quilts carry historical and familial significance, often passed down through generations as family heirlooms. Quilting is also considered a communal and social activity where people, typically women, gather to share techniques and stories, while working on a quilt.

The designs, patterns, visual motifs and narrative traditions inspired the visual patchwork of the animated digital memory quilts that I created in *Quilting the Memoir*. The digital memory

quilts were inspired by a number of traditions and techniques in quilt making, namely the patchwork, appliqué, and crazy quilt techniques, and by the Egyptian Khayamiya, a decorative Egyptian applique textile which I discuss below [See Appendix IV].

Patchwork

A patchwork quilt is a creation formed by sewing together small pieces of fabric in particular patterns and forming larger designs (Forrest & Blincoe, 1995). Traditionally, quilts have been crafted using fabric scraps sourced from clothing and household linens, contributing to the quilt's top layer. Over time, distinct patterns emerged in these crafted coverlets, prompting textile scholars to develop a topography for these creations (Forrest & Blincoe, 1995). Patchwork quilts can be produced in various styles, ranging from traditional patterns to more contemporary designs, yet they generally feature conventional patterns, using a range of fabrics, colours and materials. The quilts are made of a top layer of smaller pieces of fabric, called patches, which are cut into various shapes such as squares, triangles, hexagons. Together, the stitched together fragments of fabric form designs, from simple to complex patterns.

Appliqué and Crazy Quilt

Appliqué, as a quilting technique, involves the intricate stitching of different patches and pieces onto the quilt. The word "appliqué" comes from the French term, which means "applied" or "attached." In the context of quilting, appliqué refers to the technique of attaching one layer of fabric onto another to create a decorative effect. These appliqués serve as references to various designs and stitching methods, playing an integral role in the overall design and construction of the quilt. Appliqué quilts offer a great deal of creative flexibility and allow quilters to showcase

their artistic skills. They can be as simple or as complex as the quilter desires, making them a popular choice for both traditional and contemporary quilt designs.

In contrast, ‘crazy quilts’ depart from structured designs, embracing a more random assembly of pieces and patches. Popular in the late 1800s, these quilts were crafted from irregularly shaped fabric pieces, boasting a variety of textures and colors. The seams between these fabric pieces in a crazy quilt are often adorned with intricate, elaborate, and decorative embroidery stitching. Notably, crazy quilts were often fashioned from high-quality fabrics such as silk or velvet, suggesting a more luxurious appeal than a utilitarian function. The irregular shape of the fabric pieces in crazy quilts allow for heightened creative expression, resulting in many crazy quilts featuring whimsical or unusual motifs like animals, flowers, or even buildings. Beyond their aesthetic value, these quilts materialize significant aspects of their time, including developments in the arts and crafts movement, advancements in dyeing techniques and the advent of more durable fabrics in the late 1800s, as well as reflecting social class distinctions and the degree of a quilter’s access to expensive materials and leisure time.

The crazy quilt is a type of patchwork quilt that became popular in the late 1800s. Unlike traditional patchwork quilts, which are made from small, uniform pieces of fabric sewn together in a regular pattern, crazy quilts are made from irregularly shaped pieces of fabric in a variety of textures and colors. The seams between the fabric pieces in a crazy quilt are often decorated with embroidery stitches, which can be elaborate and decorative. This embellishment can include embroidery, appliqué, lace, ribbon, or any other type of embellishment that the quilter desires. The end result can be visually striking, one-of-a-kind work of art. The irregular shape of the fabric pieces also allowed for more creative expression, and many crazy quilts feature whimsical or unusual motifs. Today, crazy quilting is still a popular form of quilting, with many quilters

using modern fabrics and embellishments to create their own unique and colorful crazy quilt designs.

The crazy quilts serve as metaphor for Deleuze and Guattari: “in ‘crazy’ patchwork, which fits together pieces of varying size, shape, and color, and plays on the texture of the fabrics” (Deleuze & Guattari, p. 476). In my project, *Quilting the Memoir*, the literary and visual texts I stitch together, the textures, tones, the physical and digital textiles in my exhibition become a means for visitors to reflect on the life experiences of Egyptian Jewish families. The abstract patchwork, the erratic quilt patterns, the varying rhythmic montage sequences, the family photo archives are fragments that I thread together in various configurations serve to reconstruct collective memories of Egyptian Jewry in abstract forms and expressions.

The Egyptian Khayamiya

The Egyptian khayamiya is a handcrafted traditional quilt dating back to the 11th century, that played a decorative role in the ceremonial tents of empires such as the Fatimid, Mamluk, and Ottoman (Noshokaty, 2021). Functioning as a form of appliqué textile art, the khayamiya involves the creation of vibrant, colourful designs on cotton or linen fabric. This process employs intricate stitching, geometric patterns, and stylized depictions of animals, flowers, and other decorative motifs, often drawing inspiration from Islamic art, geometric patterns, arabesques, and figural representations. These designs can hold symbolic meanings and reflect cultural stories and heritage. Woven into the socio-cultural fabric of Egyptian life for centuries, khayamiyas feature appliqué patterns and techniques inherited from the Ottoman empire (El Rashidi & Bowker, 2019, p.7). While El Rashidi & Bowker claim that khayamiyas were used by Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities, the specific applications among Jews, such as

potential use in Jewish synagogues during Sukkot, remain unspecified. According to *The Tentmakers of Cairo* (AUC Press 2018), a book by Seif El-Rashidi and Sam Bowker:

‘Khayamiya are used in Egypt in two main forms. The first is as an architectural textile—literally tents—ranging from mammoth rectangular pavilions (*suradiq* or *siwan*) used to host ceremonial events such as weddings, feasts, and funerals, to single-poled camping tents (singular *fustat*) used by travelers, particularly tourists. The second form of khayamiya is individual panels (singular *tark*), which can also take the form of screen-like bands or tent walls. This is the most significant form today because it produces quilt-like artworks for interior display rather than cumbersome ephemeral buildings. Both forms of khayamiya in the late nineteenth century regularly featured Arabic epigrams (Noshokaty, 2021).

In the exhibition 'Reimagined Memories' (2021) held in Zamalek, Egypt, curator El Rashidi emphasizes that despite maintaining traditional designs and handcrafting techniques, the ancient craft of the *khayamiya* perpetually incorporates a sense of novelty through the artisans' “re-imagining” of classical and traditional motifs. (Noshokaty, 2021, *ahramonline*). The relationship between Egyptian *khayamiya* and storytelling lies in the art form's ability to depict visual narratives, preserve cultural stories, and innovate with storytelling approaches and techniques. “It is expressed in a slightly different way and so the re-imagination is the creative part. A lot of designers think the *khayamiya* artists reproduce the same art with no newness. Actually, I don’t think this is true ... There is a creative process of thinking in a new way about what I can do that catches the attention” (Noshokaty, 2021, *ahramonline*). These visual elements act as a medium for storytelling, conveying stories through images rather than words. They might depict scenes from daily Egyptian life, historical events, or folklore. Each piece can be

seen as a canvas that captures and passes down historical and cultural narratives from generation to generation. Historically, the *khayamiya* was used to decorate spaces where storytelling and performances took place, on or around stages at festivals, celebrations, and public gatherings (Noshokaty, 2021, ahramonline). These decorated tents created an immersive environment that enhanced the storytelling experience. The art form remains a way to express cultural identity and share stories visually.

Creativity Meets Theory

A central objective of this research-creation project is how the ‘cultural imaginary’ is likened to a ‘patchwork’ of narrative memories of exile and the forced displacement of Jews from Egypt. Framing the cultural imaginary as a patchwork and adopting a philosophy of relations through a process of quilt creation was as a central objective of the *Quilting the Memoir* project. The time-based media installation of digital memory quilts, facilitates the (re)assembly of events in non-linear, non-hierarchical ways, offering the potential for the creation of innovative and immersive storied spaces, methods, and practices. The idea of the patchwork resonates with the work of Michael Rothberg, who writes “the transnational approach to collective memory requires a collaborative-methodology, for once remembrance is freed from the (never actually) homogenous space-time of the nation-state, potential links and references multiply beyond grasp of any one scholar” (Rothberg, 2010, p. 12). Aleida Assman attests to the merits of the patchwork approach when she writes, “there are indeed many indirect subject positions, modes of participation and ways of suturing oneself into a larger historical narrative if we accept that history is not a linear narrative but a yet largely undiscovered network of analogies, points of contact and entangled relations” (2018, p. 215). This concept aligns with

Miccoli and other scholars interested in how cultural memory and imaginary spaces are shaped among an Egyptian Jewish diaspora.

In *Quilting the Memoir*, I mix figurative and abstract images, family photos, and personal objects to prompt viewers to interact with the digital memory quilts. These quilts, while personal, convey threads of the broader narrative of Egyptian Jewry. They serve as publicly accessible portraits evoking a dreamy and intimate glimpse into a family's history and the viewer's own imaginary. The quilts invite viewers to connect with the experiences of others. The affective storytelling unfolds in a manner distinct from literary and linear modes of expression. The immersive media space encourages viewers to engage in a dialogue with the quilts, and the digital memoir space, fostering a deeper contemplative and affective connection with the memories presented and their resonance with the viewers' own memories and life experiences.

Multidirectional Memory: A Rhizomatic Milieu

Philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari use the metaphor of the quilt in their seminal work, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980) to illustrate concepts of multiplicity, assemblage, and rhizomatic thinking. Quilts, with their varied fabrics, textures, and patterns, embody multiplicity, a central concept in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy. They reject singular, linear narratives advocating for difference and plurality, much like the diverse elements that come together to form a quilt. For instance, a quilt's patches can be rearranged or extended indefinitely, representing an evolving structure. Similarly, the rhizome is a non-hierarchical, interconnected network without a single origin or fixed endpoint. The stitching together of fragmented pieces reflects the ongoing process of constructing meaning and identity through different iterations of the same process. The process of quilting parallels the act of creating connections and fostering becoming, a recurring theme in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1994) work introduces insightful metaphors for theories concerning relationality and ontologies of difference and sets a foundation for the conceptual framework for this research project. Three core concepts derived from their work — namely, the rhizome, the fold, and the quilt as milieu — have critically guided the epistemological inquiry and creation of digital memory quilts, the research design of *Quilting the Memoir*, and the final output in a time-based media installation and art exhibition.

The rhizome, the fold, and milieu metaphors offer a poetic and conceptual framework, facilitating the connection between theoretical ideas around making meaning and the tangible outcomes of the research process and digital memory quilts. They serve as metaphors for philosophical reflections on cultural memory and extend to artistic and spatial forms of expression and spaces of engagement, acting as bridges between the theoretical and the practical. They enable a holistic exploration of diverse realms, fostering a nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between concepts and their manifestations in the real world.

Composed of various plateaus or modes of thought that are inherently interconnected, fluid, mobile, and non-chronological, “A Thousand Plateaus” invites readers to navigate between chapters, or plateaus, much as one might move through the digital memoir and media quilts of *Quilting the Memoir*. In the same way that readers are prompted to adjust, question, and reassemble understandings and beliefs as they meander through the text, the *Quilting the Memoir* gallery exhibition offers a multi-layered non-linear space through which visitors can explore fragments of the past to be experienced and reassembled in unique ways through each viewer’s experience.

In the philosophical realm of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the concept of the 'milieu' unfolds as a spatial setting, be it physical or metaphorical, where a dynamic web of

relations, potential connections, and interactions between diverse entities takes shape. The concept of the milieu can also be related to the metaphor of the quilt. In their work, the *milieu* refers to an environment, setting, or medium that mediates relationships between entities and facilitates exchanges. This is how I would describe the cultural imaginary of Egyptian Jewry – an ever-evolving imaginative space, influenced by a myriad of forces, including organisms, social, economic, and political structures, as well as biological and geological influences, all of which operate both within and beyond the *milieu*. I argue that Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical concept the *milieu* serves as fertile ground for an exploratory and speculative research-creation project investigating the lived experiences of Egyptian Jewry.

Memory’s Rhizomatic Threads

A rhizome, in botanical terms, refers to the root plant (such as ginger and turmeric) that sprouts new roots as it grows and shoots in multiple directions horizontally beneath the earth. This metaphor aptly aligns with theories of media that explore systems of networks or assemblages that are non-linear, complex, and more unpredictable than traditional linear networks. In the realm of media studies, a rhizomatic network is a dynamic space characterized by pluralities—multiplicities connecting and disconnecting with other multiplicities—in perpetual flux (Atkinson & Brooks, 2008; Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). This concept has been influential in understanding the interconnected nature of global migration and global diaspora, and the life stories that were integral in shaping the project.

This interconnectedness supports the proliferation of diverse voices, ideas, and perspectives and the ability for these multiplicities to co-exist within a space of cultural imaginaries. Using Deleuze and Guattari’s (1994) concept of the rhizome as a metaphor, I am able to look at the layered and oftentimes paradoxical nature of Jewish Egyptian lived

experiences and identities within a spatial philosophy that allows for multiplicity and difference to be negotiated, rather than negated. Rather than seeing inquiry as a linear procedure or an enclosing and conclusive process, research acts can also be interactive and reflexive, yielding imaginative insight that emerges from a creative and critical practice. “As such, research can take on rhizomatic qualities through remaining open to possibility and resist enclosing processes and forces” (Sullivan, 2006, p.19–20). *Quilting the Memoir* seeks to bring together an amorphous collection of testamentary fragments that are juxtaposed and create an artefact that represents, in part, my own paradoxical existence.

I also draw from the idea of the rhizome in my reading and understanding of a cosmopolitan mid twentieth century Egyptian society and culture. I argue that the layers of complexity that constitute Jewish Egyptian cultural memory are best analyzed through a rhizomatic lens. A rhizomatic lens offers relational, dynamic, non-linear, and interconnected perspectives, versus dualistic perspectives and thought processes that shape oppositional paradigms and ways of thinking about differences (Atkinson, 2008).

Deleuze and Guattari (1994) provide a concise historical overview of quilting and categorize it into two broad styles: the crazy quilt and the appliqué, patchwork, on the other hand, may exhibit similarities to themes, symmetries, and resonances, placing it in proximity to embroidery. The basic motif or "block" of patchwork consists of a single element (or fragment), and the repetition of this element generates uniquely rhythmic values distinct from the harmonies of embroidery. This is evident, especially in the case of the crazy quilt, which is constructed from “varying size, shape and color, and plays on texture” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 476) and in a centre-less design.

For visual studies scholar Giuliana Bruno, “in between spaces” are critical in visual studies and analysis as they often reveal the complex and often paradoxical nature of the social and cultural fabric of contemporary Egyptian society and culture. “As a theoretical fabrication, the fold sports a particularly fluid, adaptable, intricate texture, comprising a variety of mediatic surfaces that become interconnected in its generative field” (Bruno, 2015, p. 15).

The Story – Between the Fold

In Deleuze and Guattari, the idea of the fold invites us to explore the interconnected, complex, and dynamic nature of the process of the fold in a fabric, “a permeable connector of inner and outer landscapes, the enfolded surface engages a process of imaging and imagining fashioned in movement” (Bruno, 2015, p. 20). The fold is at once a symbol of multiplicity and can be used to emphasize the diverse perspectives and possibilities that exist within a global diaspora involving multiple narratives, dimensions, experiences, and voices. The fold suggests a non-linear understanding of reality. The fold is repetitive and involves a continuous process of unfolding and refolding. Similarly, diasporas are not fixed destinations but represent a dynamic and ongoing engagement with all kinds of power structures across multiple geographies.

Deleuze and Guattari's connection of the fold to mathematics can be extended to the reimagining of knowledge systems in the context of decolonization. This involves not only decolonizing educational curricula and political discourse, but also embracing diverse ways of knowing and understanding the world, acknowledging the multiplicity of epistemologies and “in between spaces” of inquiry (Bruno, 2015).

The Quilt – Milieu

In order to offer opportunities for engagement with time-based media, a designated space is needed to exhibit the work in a manner that invites the public (viewers and audiences) to experience the media and story. The gallery space, or designated outdoor spaces, are not arbitrary. The exhibition space shapes the content and the experience where potentials for affective interactions unfolds between the media content and the viewer through a process of engagement. Bal's theory of narratology is based on a triadic paradigm where the meaning of the narrative is created through the interaction *between* subject and object. Only when the viewer experiences exposure to the object is there possibility for narrative and meaning to become transformative.

Quilting – A Practice of Remediation

Quilts, as personal material objects, carry the potential to resonate with affective meanings, histories, and memories. Margaret Seebold, as quoted by Kiracofe (1993, p. 81), notes that quilts often prompt reflections on the person who made them or whose dresses were incorporated into their design. The International Quilt Study Center & Museum at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, housing over 3,500 quilts from more than 25 countries, underscores the global significance of this art form (Hanna, 2014). Examining the history of quilting among African Americans, (Little, 2022, p. 2) emphasizes that quilting not only preserves memory through repurposed fabrics but also serves as a vital medium for protest, allowing artists to assert their voice, claim identity, confront racism, and challenge sexism. Quilting is not simply a daily domestic practice but becomes a powerful form of political expression.

Material quilts are composed of fragments of fabrics, at times organized, at times randomly selected and designed using patterns, or subverting the use of patterns all together.

Niedderer's notion that 'artefacts may be produced as part of a creative exploration to develop a new understanding of an object or concept' underscores the transformative potential of artistic or cultural production as a means to analyze and comprehend complex concepts (Niedderer, p.65). This resulting work, critically informed, presents a research approach that integrates creative and academic practices, fostering the development of knowledge and innovation through art, scholarly investigation, and experimentation.

Remediation quilts focus on life stories and their representation across various visual media forms, including writing, photography, digital media, and art (Scrivener, 2009), creating a pastiche of memory fragments aimed at evoking memories in viewers, perhaps more than narrating a linear story (Sturken, 1997). These quilts reflect how people, places, and cultures might be remembered using mediated and technologies. In a collection of life stories, there exists no clear beginning, middle, or end—only fragments that viewers might piece together (Kuhn, 2007). My digital media quilts serve as an expression of the fragmented nature of Jewish Egyptian identity refracted through a personal lens and the medium of artwork. The exhibition is designed to invite viewers to contemplate the inherent complexities of cultural identity, in recounting the story of Egyptian Jewry as they engage with fragments of the lived experiences.

Quilts, as functional objects, endure through time as personal, communal, familial, and heritage artefacts, passed down through generations. They represent both material objects with a rich history in arts and crafts and traces of the everyday lives of their makers and the communities in which they laboured, worldwide throughout history. Quilts also function as a metaphor for a multidimensional and multimodal screen space or cultural imaginary, a design methodology, and a conceptual framework. The taxonomy and cultural traditions inherent in the

histories and processes of quilt-making prove particularly relevant to the production and documentation of the digital quilts throughout this research process.

Conclusion

A uniqueness and complexity of the Egyptian Jewish global diaspora is its broad reach throughout the world (Miccoli, 2022). The cross-section of Jews from Arab lands is interconnected through a vast, complex, non-linear, understudied network of experiences of home, homeland, exile, and displacement across multiple geographies of a global diaspora. As explored in this thesis, the pluralist and cosmopolitan society of Egypt throughout the twentieth century, characterized by the coexistence of diverse religions, nationalities, social classes, languages, and political movements, formed a unique socio-cultural milieu where differences were not only tolerated but also often celebrated (Baussant, 2022; Bowell, 2021).

Baussant, Miccoli, and Schely-Newman (2019) underscore the need for a thorough examination and analysis of the contemporary concepts of exile, homeland, and homecoming. They posit that individuals in exiled communities are enmeshed in interconnected yet dissonant histories, "spaces of origin and cultures," transnational affiliations, as well as borders, roots, national histories, and territorialized identities (2019, p. xiv). Memoirs written by exiled Jewish Egyptians in multiple languages reflect these shifts and displacements, contributing to the expansion of cultural imaginaries of the homeland.

“However, for much of the twentieth century, the plot of Egyptian Jewish migration as represented in Hebrew literature is circumscribed—if not supplanted—by the Zionist narrative” (Starr, 2009, p.114).

In my analysis, the textual, material, cultural, and life cycle qualities of quilts—characterized by their uniqueness in form, colour, texture, and their processes of creation,

whether individual or communal—draw parallels to the formulation of concepts of cultural memory, identity, and the threads of the socio-cultural histories that shape them. *Quilting the Memoir* is not intended to solve unilaterally the problem of missing cultural histories or to reconstruct a singular historical account of the lived experiences of Egyptian Jewry. Instead, by posing questions about the nature of socio-cultural transmission in the processes of remembering, I aim to explore how these stories might be constructed, represented, contemplated, and circulated.

As explored in this chapter, the concept of the rhizome by Deleuze and Guattari helps inform my conceptual framework for navigating the paradoxical nature of Egyptian Jewish histories, offering potential avenues for innovative storytelling spaces, methods, and practices. Similar to Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of the significance of the quilt as a metaphor for crafting stories, I perceive the patchwork quilt as an intricate construction capable of both narrating stories and of transcending those narratives. The act of performing memory through quilting encompasses the material, tactile, spatial, and temporal dimensions of the craft. In the words of Kristina Lindstrom and Awa Stahl (2016), the patchwork ways of knowing involve both "making and knowing *ways of living with technologies*" (p.65, their emphasis). In their collaborative practice-based research project, "Threads - A Mobile Sewing Circle", Lindstrom and Stahl "intervene from within" to establish "a specific engagement with the world that is closely entangled with multiple temporalities and materialities" (71).

In *Quilting the Memoir*, the *khayamiya* has served as inspiration for the large-format video walls used to project the images of the digital quilts within the exhibition gallery. Much like the *khayamiya*, the quilt patterns and the media quilts amalgamate various materials, colours, geometric shapes, and textures found in the traditional *khayamiya* design. According to

Noshokaty (2021), "Every part of *khayamiya* has a name, like *rank*, *bahr*, and there is a certain technique where they cleverly play with the lines to create different perspectives and designs." Techniques such as these have influenced the methods I employed in crafting my digital quilt creations, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Research-creation is an interdisciplinary approach which combines traditional research methods with artistic expression, design and other creative processes. The goal of research-creation is to produce new knowledge and understanding through innovative, experiential and sometimes unconventional means, and to push the boundaries of what is considered research within academia. As Loveless describes it, research-creation is about “holding dissonant forms together in ways that are passionately attached and that resist naturalization, research-creation tells new stories and offers new sites of traction in the academy (Loveless, 2019, p. 105).

This chapter discussed the processes of research-creation undertaken for *Quilting the Memoir*, the concepts that motivated my research and creative methods, and the craft and traditions in quilting that informed my processes of remediation from the material to the digital realm. I have described the key theories and concepts in media studies that informed the creative choices I made in designing the digital memory quilts of *Quilting the Memoir*.

The next chapter illustrates in detail the methodologies and research methods, I pursued, including innovative ways of collecting and processing field notes, and the creation and exhibition of the *Quilting the Memoir* time-based media installation.

The digital memory quilts of *Quilting the Memoir* reflect my experiences and understanding of one of the ways cultural memories can be re/mediated and re/constructed. Each quilt, or series of quilts, was fashioned around a theme of memory – homeland / individual memory, collective memory and heritage of Egyptian Jewry. Each was also fashioned from

fragments of fabric, design sketches, and items of clothing worn or created by my mother, incorporating some of the threads of her experiences as an Egyptian Jewish woman.

Pursuing more conventional, structured forms of expression and rigid ontologies and theories in traditional narratology studies would not have permitted the exploration and reflection made possible by my approach in *Quilting the Memoir*. While each quilt resonates for me in some way, individually, and within the whole of the exhibition, it acquires different dimensions of meaning once a viewer / audience sees the digital quilt and engages with it. It is in the engagement of the visitor with each media memory-artwork that a cultural imaginary emerges.

Chapter Four: Quilting: Material Activations

The contemporary arts engage with ethical issues as they work with, draw on and contribute to our historical and narrative imagination—to our existence as situated, historical beings who are constituted in culturally mediated narrative.

(Hanna Meretoja & Colin Davis, 2018, p. 2)

Introduction

This stage of the journey is one of the most rewarding as applying theoretical and methodological concepts to creative processes is a central motivation for this study. The first half of this chapter discusses the various methods deployed in creating the digital artefacts throughout the research process, the creation of a WordPress site, and the creation of the patterns. The second half of the chapter elaborates on the exhibition space, and the aesthetic strategies deployed in designing the exhibition. This section offers reflections on each of the digital quilts and the critical and creative motivations for the aesthetic and narrative choices made, and how they were made.

The Virtual Atelier

Practice-based research experiments involve structured investigations within artistic practice to explore specific research questions. Artists experiment with design strategies to test the effects of different artistic techniques, materials, or processes on the creation and reception of artworks. These experiments often involve systematic documentation, reflection, and analysis of the artistic process and outcomes. “In *practice-based research*, the creative artefact is the *basis* of the contribution to knowledge” (Skains, 2018 p. 5). Drawing from methodologies in the fields of media and cultural memory studies as well as digital storytelling, this practice-based research

explored ways of bridging interdisciplinary methodologies through the practice of creating the digital quilts (original artefacts) and a digital memoir (a time-based media installation). These methodologies, akin to the design of the digital quilts, are rhizomatic (Deleuze and Guattari, 1989), allowing for more diverse perspectives and approaches to generate comprehensive and nuanced understandings of the social and cultural milieux of Egyptian Jewry.

Media scholars Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk (2015) contribute their experiences and critical insights to the discourse on research-creation, prompting a consideration of various modalities within exploratory and artistic research methods (p. 49). They identify and define four different stages of the research-creation process. Under the umbrella of "Creation-as-Research," they delineate three distinct research-creation modalities: "Research-for-Creation," "Research-from-Creation," and "Creative Presentation of Research" (p. 49).

The initial phase, "research-for-creation" involves the iterative gathering of materials, practices, technologies, collaborators, narratives, and theoretical frameworks characterizing the initial stages of creative work, occurring iteratively throughout a project.

For *Quilting the Memoir*, the first stage of the journey draws from memoirs written by Egyptian Jews, collecting personal materials and objects, and using digital technologies and platforms such as photography and online repositories, to document and archive the collected materials. The second phase, "research-from-creation" encompasses the extrapolation of theoretical, methodological, ethnographic, or other insights from creative processes, which are then integrated back into the project. In engaging, observing and interpreting the materials gathered in phase one, I was able to engage with methodologies and theoretical concepts that helped guide and frame the research process. The third phase, "creative presentations of research", refers to alternative forms of research dissemination and knowledge mobilization

linked to the research-creation project. In the case of *Quilting the Memoir*, I gathered research material and my “field notes” and posted them on a WordPress site that served of a repository and atelier for my project, where research materials and creative objects recorded aspects of my process for the making of digital quilts. were approached in critical and creative ways. And finally, phase four, the “creation-as-research” phase which draws from all preceding three categories, proposing the ontological question of what constitutes research to create space for creative material and process-focused research outcomes.

These ideas have significantly influenced my process as I navigated the design of the project, first, in the initial stages of collecting materials; second, in the methodological insights that emerged from the creative process; and third, in the design of an alternative media format for presenting my research. The modes of research I deployed were born out of a process of experimentation and exploration that were guided by key conceptual frameworks: rhizomatic networks, affective storytelling and creative research design methods.

My mother's meticulously crafted haute couture dresses, handmade from silk and jacquard fabrics, along with her jewelry, scarves, shoes, purses, books, and other personal items, profoundly shaped her sense of aesthetics, grace, flair for fashion, and feminine identity. These memory objects form an integral aspect of this memory work. The material nature of these memory fragments comprises non-linguistic, embodied, affective, haptic material matter, capable of activating sensorial and emotional memory responses within both the self and others.

Research Methods and Documentation: Curating and Presenting Memory

Quilting the Memoir involves multiple forms of memory work that preserve and interpret the history of Egyptian Jews. This includes innovative research methods, designing the digital memory quilts and the producing the exhibition. The curatorial memory work is a careful

thought process about how memories are framed and how diverse narratives intersect to create an engaging and evocative space of relations, recalling Marianne Hirsch's concept of "stateless memory". "It can open up the possibility of imagining alternative potential relationships between contemporary subjects and citizenship, national belonging, and home, as well as alternate temporalities of becoming" (Hirsch, 2019, p. 420). The study of memory and the exhibition of works produced throughout the study provide a holistic work of critical and artistic research.

The creation of digital quilts integrates images, texts, and artefacts from the community's past. Like the *khayamiya*, the digital memory quilts act as a visual narrative, reflecting individual and collective memories of Egyptian Jewry. The project incorporates reflexive memory work, with me occupying a central role, writing reflective pieces that explore my own memories, biases, and emotional connections to Egyptian Jewish heritage. This creative memory work reimagines history in a dynamic form, allowing the community to see its heritage represented in new ways that foster personal reflection and public remembrance. A key aspect of the project is the digital archive and the process of scanning and digitizing materials, which serves both as a repository of memory and a source of remediation. The digitization process ensures a broader dissemination and engagement through digital platforms, making digital archives more broadly accessible. "Imagine them [historians] equipped with artisanal tools such as tapes, photos, pens, colors, excerpts of texts, and rubber erasers, and using them to acknowledge that the incommensurable was never the past but was and always is a living force" (Azoulay, 369). This creative memory work enables the community to see their history represented in a new, dynamic form, encouraging both personal reflection and communal remembrance.

Material Engagement

As discussed earlier, creation-as-research (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2015) implies the necessity of artistic creation for research to manifest. Such an endeavour guides the inquiry through creative methods, that encompass experimentation, analysis, critique, and interaction with theoretical frameworks and methodological inquiries. This next section explains the step-by-step methods I adopted and developed throughout the research-creation project.

This phase of the journey entailed the collection of textual and physical materials. The process of reading *Out of Egypt: A Memoir* by Andrée Aciman (1999) and *The Man with the White Shark in Suit* By Lucette Lagnado (2008), led to the recollection my own family memories. The Aciman and Lagnado families are kindred and familiar; they may as well be my own family stories. This is consistent with José van Dijck's observations around the impacts on listeners and readers of hearing or reading others' stories: "when people read or hear reminiscences narrated by others, they often feel triggered or invited to contribute their own memories." (van Dijck, 2007, 56).

During the process of reading Aciman and Lagnado's memoirs, I reflected on my own memories of family life growing up in Montreal, and the memories I inherited from my mother, father, and other family members, as well as some recollections from my childhood visits to Egypt between 1977 and 1982. I recorded these recollections, some deeply buried, that had been triggered and brought back to memory through my encounters with the memoirs, and engaging with the authors' recollections, which often echoed my own. Initially, these textual passages, quotes and responses, were meant to be weaved into the quilts. But the textual elements proved to overwhelm the frame and the experience with engaging with the quilts.

See Appendix I, Table 1 for a breakdown of research materials, sources and data.

Patternmaking: A Practice of Remembering

“Cultural tools such as texts and narrative frames mediate people’s relation to the past and provide the means to produce discourses about the group’ history” (de St Laurent, 4). During several years, I built a personal archive of memory objects by photographing select personal objects and fabrics that belonged to my mother. Prior to this, I moved my mother from her home of 30 years into an apartment next door so that I could care for her. During that time, I began to collect the artefacts that she had carried with her all her life, and which I still didn’t have the heart to part with. When she passed away in 2021, I inherited more “stuff”, some of which were included in the final quilts. Given the experimental nature of the project, I allowed myself to meander at this initial stage, before fully figuring out how I was going to create a media installation from these materials.

The creative process of developing and producing a digital media quilt begins in part with collecting data by reading the memoirs and writing my responses to certain passages. I organize these passages, and the images of the memory objects connected with my mother into an assemblage, constructing multi-modal, multi-linear, rhizomatic patterns layered into a patchwork of digital designs and stitching styles using a WordPress webs site platform.

The WordPress site gave me the space to work with these fragments, first in designing the patterns thematically, secondly in providing a writing space and third as a way of documenting the process and the artwork in progress.

Phase One: The Scraps: Observing, Collecting, Digitizing

Phase one of the research consisted of collecting ‘data’ on Egyptian Jewry by reading a wide range of texts about the social and cultural lives of Jewish Egyptians, which included memoirs and other forms of life writings, as well as more recent anthropological studies and

historical texts that address a gap in the historical accounts of contemporary and cosmopolitan mid-20th century Egypt. The two memoirs that I focused on are *Out of Egypt: A Memoir* by André Aciman (1994) and *The Man with the White Sharkskin Suit* by Lucette Lagnado (2008). Alongside this data collection activity, I continued to collect “material” data – meaningful objects in the form of my mother’s personal belongings, family photographs and select dresses and fabrics. I photographed or scanned this data and used it to inform the design of and create the digital quilt memoir.

Alongside this process, I worked through the texts by André Aciman (1994) and Lucette Lagnado (2008), responding to excerpted written segments that activated my own memories. Instead of writing and designing the quilt patches using paper and pen, I used a WordPress photo gallery interface to organize my images spatially and to reflect on the memoirs and my recorded written responses to them. (See Appendix VIII for excerpts from the WordPress website).

Phase Two: Patternmaking: Reading, Processing, Layering

WordPress offers a free blogging space with a vast selection of interface and web architectural design options that a layperson with no programming experience can use to build a virtual space for creative and research purposes. WordPress became my virtual atelier, where my metaphorical “sewing machine” was located, and where I threaded my personal memories with passages from the memoirs by André Aciman (1995) and Lucette Lagnado (2008) I was reading. The WordPress patterns were crafted by recording my reactions and feelings to the passages from the texts by Aciman and Lagnado. Although each pattern quilt was conceptualized to reflect a specific theme, they initially struggled to coalesce in a meaningful dialogue. It wasn't until I began rearranging individual squares and layering the images that the montage started to evoke a more potent sense of 'memory' and 'meaning.'

The WordPress blog-building platform served as a space where I collected and experimented with the initial quilting designs and patterns. These early creations laid the groundwork for the digital quilts that were presented in the final media installations. The exploratory nature of this project created a space for experimentation using conceptual and practical forms of engagement with memory, materiality, and digital storytelling. According to Marianne Hirsch, creativity:

fosters receptivity and responsiveness as we practice openness, interconnection and imagination [and] as we acknowledge our own implication in the worlds we read and watch and listen to, we necessarily allow ourselves to be open and vulnerable, to be moved in ways that are not easily determined or predictable (Berlin Institute, 2018).

With Hirsch's insights in mind, I set out to explore how 'reading, watching and listening' through material engagement might serve research and creative practices.

I designed each WordPress page in a grid layout composed of photographs. Each segment acted as a bridge between the memoir's text and my response, connected via a hyperlink.

Although the memoir quotes and my written responses were crucial to the development of the quilts, they were not incorporated into the final pieces as initially planned. The textual elements served as inspiration, evoking my own memories not merely through recall but through a relational process where aspects of the memoir's stories intertwined with my own.

Phase Three: Affective Spaces: Life Stories and Cultural Imaginaries

My mother and I spent a significant amount of time making clothes together while I was growing up in Montreal. We strolled for hours at local fabric stores, shopping for Vogue patterns and matching them to new fabrics. It was a creative and time-consuming endeavour that made for an eclectic and unique wardrobe and a great way to bond with my mother. My mother was a

fashion designer and pattern maker by trade. “Un sale métier”, “a dirty job”, she used to say, of the factory floor and the discrimination she faced daily. It was only in her early retirement that she took up the craft of sewing clothes at home, for herself and for me. My mother took pride in making women’s fashion clothing exclusively, so quilts were never part of our sewing projects. However, my mother stitched many of the clothes she made by hand, a distinct, delicate, stitch that evoked, for me, a memory of the hours she spent in her “atelier”, a.k.a. the dining room kitchen, in our Montreal apartment, toiling over the making of a garment.

See Appendix I, Table 2

WordPress Site – Pattern Making

The three patchwork quilt patterns developed around the central themes of home, memory and heritage. Pattern #1 explored the theme of home; Pattern #2, the theme of fragmented memory; and Pattern # 3, the theme of heritage. Each of these themes was an integral part of the process in creating the content for the digital quilts. This provided me with a focal point for developing the themes explored in the final digital memory quilts.

Each of the WordPress patterns was created using a photo gallery template from the WordPress site. Inspired by a basic patchwork design of squares, I wove together a patchwork of squares images made of “digital fabric”, mimicking the pieces of fabric of a traditional square patch quilt. On the WordPress site, each square / patch is hyperlinked with a word to another page, which contains a quote from one of the two memoirs by André Aciman and Lucette Lagnado and a brief passage from me recording my response to the passage taken from the memoirs.

The texts included quoted fragments from one of the two memoirs by Aciman and Lagnado, and my written response, which consisted of my own memory – a brief account of an

anecdote, a feeling, or a similar story. I didn't know what the final composition of the work would look like other than these were going to become digital memory quilts.

Examples of this process are shown below in the screenshots from the WP site in Figure 3 and Figure 4.

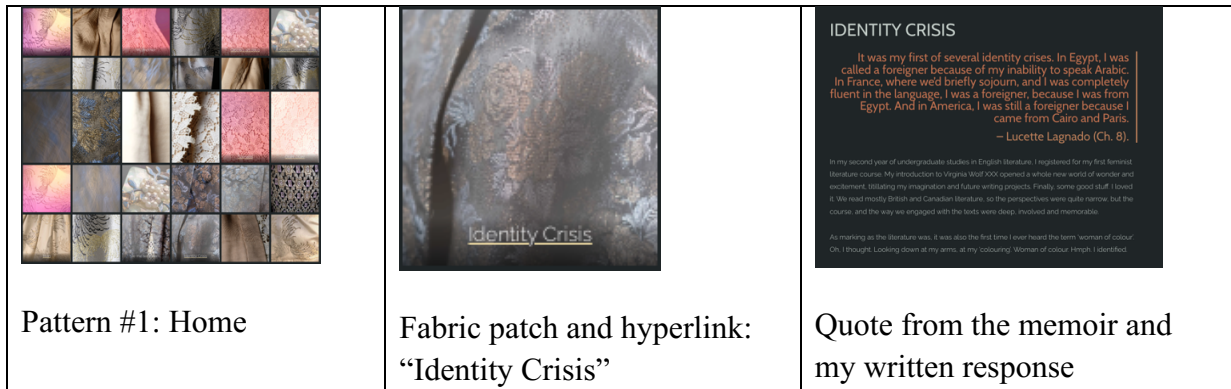


Figure 3: Screenshot Pattern #1 from WP site.

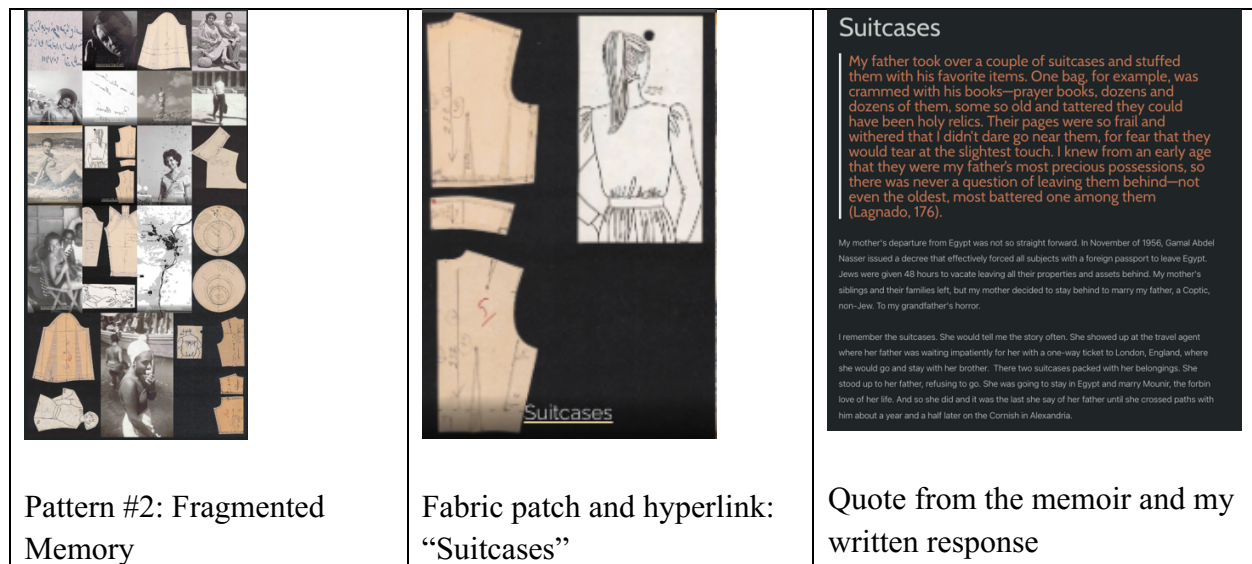


Figure 4: Screenshot Pattern #2 from WP site.

The WordPress site remains active, where I ‘house’ the collection of materials as I work with and through these memory objects.

Pattern #1

Pattern #1 (<https://quiltingthememoir.wordpress.com/>) explores an intimate and personal space, composed of fabrics, objects, and letters that belonged to my mother. The contours of my mother’s dress, the silk embroidery, the dainty lace, the sheen of an earring that defined her time and her place as a bourgeois young woman growing up in cosmopolitan Cairo, Egypt. My mother brought very little with her to Canada when she left Cairo in 1966, but the objects that journeyed with her sixty years ago, continue to vibrate with life today. Her couture dresses, jewelry, family photographs, the love letters my father wrote to her in the early years of their courtship, and a tiny bible with a silver casing are heirlooms and relics of another era, another place.

In response to the theme of home, I reflected on my upbringing in Montreal, Quebec. Up until my young adulthood, I rarely felt out of place in my place of birth and my home. There was always the question of identity and “origins”, but essentially, I was more attached and identified with Montreal, Quebec, and Canada as my place of birth, and therefore as my home, than I had been with my family origins. As I got older, that started to shift, and progressively, my feeling of home, my sense of belonging dissipated. I felt less and less at home in Quebec as a first-generation immigrant and anglophone.

Pattern #1 is symmetrical and balanced, conjuring a sense of stability and comfort. The concept of home is one that is intimate and personal. The fabric, an intimate “second skin” forms a vibrant tapestry rich in colour and texture, evoking a sense of life. The fabrics were chosen from dresses and scarves that my mother cherished and carried with her throughout her life. They

were material belongings that seemed to define her, to remind her of who she was, once, in a place she identified as home. The engagement and interaction with the materiality of these memories deepened the connection with memories of my own family's history.

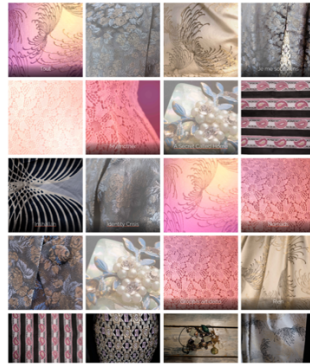


Figure 5: Pattern #1: Home. WordPress Quilt. Field Notes. See

<https://quiltingthememoir.wordpress.com/> or Appendix V

Pattern #2

The central theme of this Pattern #2 explores the concept fragmented memory. Family photographs of family members and gatherings, with inscriptions on the back side of the photographs are mixed with handmade sketches of sewing patterns taken from a collection in one of my mother's study binders.

Pattern #2 (<https://quiltingthememoir.wordpress.com/>) explores the theme of disjointedness and the messiness of individual and cultural memory, with an emphasis on the body through sketches and photographs displaying disjointed images of different body parts, alongside black and white family photographs of Cairo and Alexandria. I always thought that I could easily conjure the worlds that my mother and father came from. Eventually, I had my own memories of summers spent in Cairo and Alexandria with my father's family, between the ages of six and nine years old, (1974-1977) which provided me with a tangible sense of where they

came from geographically. But the Egypt that my mother spoke about, that she remembered, was significantly different than the one I was getting to know. And yet, it was my own childhood memories of my visits to Egypt that helped fill the gaps of the family stories that were imparted to me.

The fragmented and elusive nature of memory is evoked here in the representation of the disjointed body, family photographs of unidentified people and places, and snapshots and inserts of the intimate notes that were shared between and among siblings, cousins and friends. Memory of the past is framed within the photographs' frames: the past reflecting a moment in time, a snapshot of a place that has been extracted from its context altogether.



Figure 6: Pattern #2: Fragmented Memory. WordPress Quilt. Field Notes. See

<https://quiltingthememoir.wordpress.com/> or Appendix V

Pattern #3

Pattern #3 (<https://quiltingthememoir.wordpress.com/>) is composed of a series of photographs taken during my research trip to Egypt in the spring of 2019. The images are superimposed perspectives of Jewish heritage sites throughout the city of Cairo. The intention with this quilt was to explore images of heritage sites through a series of superimposed images

that show current daily life unfolding and juxtaposed alongside heritage sites and traces of Egyptian Jewish life and memories. The series is compelling as it conveys a strong sense of the entanglement of past and present creating a dialogue between them and evoking a curiosity about both.

Each photograph in this series is composed using at least 2 superimposed images taken from the same location but from different positions, emphasizing the shift from site to onlooker. Here, the onlookers are often local Egyptians, some of whom are learning about the presence of Egyptian Jews, a part of their heritage they were not aware of. These heritage sites are complicated. They have been protected from demolition, but nonetheless have crumbled with time. Different spaces have been repurposed, synagogues as cultural centres. Recently the Bassatine cemetery was vacated of its ‘tenants’ where hundreds of Muslim families had for decades made makeshift homes on site.

This quilt Pattern #3 wasn’t further developed, and these documentary images were not integrated into the quilts. This series of photographs will eventually become the subject of a separate photography exhibition. (These works are available to view on myriamrafla.com).



Figure 7: Pattern #3: Heritage. WordPress Quilt. Field Notes.

<https://quiltingthememoir.wordpress.com/> or Appendix V

From Pattern to Quilt

The patterns did not serve as typical blueprints, giving shape and form to the digital memory quilt's patchwork, stitching, layering, design and construct laid out in WordPress. Rather the format, collection of materials, and the focus on thematic aspects of cultural memory, were the start of the collage process. As the work shifted from the interactive WordPress web platform to a spatial environment, the material took a new form. The layers and stitching of materials within each frame and video wall were developing an aesthetic and thematic focus. From here on, each quilts explored a specific theme and idea exploring different aspects of cultural memory specific to Egyptian Jewry.

Memories, when expressed and engaged with, have the potential to become cultural narratives that manifest in and through various media: literature, photography and other mediated forms of expression. The transition from one mediated space to another, from web platform to art gallery imposed technological challenges and changes in the design of the exhibit. Those changes are discussed below.

Quilting the Memoir – The Exhibition

Giuliana Bruno's *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality and Media* (2014), examines the relationship between art, architecture and mediated surfaces, such as cinema screens, and how spaces like the museum are defining new forms of storytelling. She writes, "Assemblages of disparate objects and montages of mundane, poor materials are charged with political meaning. Sparse spatial representations replete with metonymic artefacts create storytelling environments" (Bruno, 2015, p. 223).

In this iteration and stage of the journey, the memory quilts are more closely designed with the clearer specifications about the gallery space and technology required to create the

digital quilts. The digital memory quilts are constructed using a collage of images capturing objects, fabrics, books, family photographs, and other personal belongings, arranged in a series of animated digital quilts. Inspired by traditional patchwork, crazy quilting techniques and the *khayamiya*, I conceive and craft quilts which when shown as an ensemble of works, culminates in a time-based video art installation.

The exhibition takes place in a gallery composed of a square room. Projected onto the four walls are two expansive video wall projections, a TV monitor tryptic, and a single TV monitor. The installation includes a 40" x 80" paper quilt (6 x 20" x 20" photographic prints), two dresses (my mother's), and two scarves (my mother's). (See Appendix IX for a list of artworks and gallery space layout design). The animated montage of images of each quilt is interwoven using visual transitions such as superimposition, dissolves, and fades, creating a continuous weaving movement within the quilts. Adobe Photoshop software was used to create the video montage. The pieces were complemented by Arabic and Sephardic music, which resonated throughout the gallery space.

Each screen in the exhibition presents a dynamic quilt comprising of moving visual elements, a reflection of the intricate and abstract nature of memory and modes of remembering. The aesthetic design of each piece draws inspiration from appliqué quilting practices and the *khayamiya*, demonstrating the relational and rhizomatic approaches to engaging with materiality, research, and art. The digital memory quilts are a culmination of the research efforts, critical and creative processes investigating the concept of cultural memory and cultural imaginaries, and the final public exhibition of the works. Digital storytelling and the multimodal format create all sorts of possibilities in the way a story is designed. The process, media format, and exhibition space, shape the viewer's experience.

The interlaced textures, tones, colours, layers and human portraits in each digital memory quilt evoke the cultural memory and social history of Egyptian Jews. The abstract and blurred images, the multiple layers of superimposed images, the constant motion, the shift in pacing from quilt to quilt, create a dynamic space of engagement and curiosity. In her book, “Hanan al-Cinema: Affections for the Moving Image” (2015), Laura Marks writes, “A found image may stimulate the act of remembering, generating a ‘cloud of virtualities,’ some of which actualize in the process of viewing” (Marks, 2015, p. 172). Here, Marks is referring to an artist’s response to an image found in the archive, but I would argue that the same is true for the viewer in a gallery. The artist / researcher has extracted the image from the archive in order to reframe / recontextualize it within a specific narrative context for the viewer to experience and for the artist / researcher to re-experience.

In *Stories of the Self: Life Writing after the Book* (2020), Anna Poletti, examines “how personal storytelling is materialized” (p.8) through the relationship between materiality, media and autobiography. Thinking beyond genre conventions and classical narrative analysis, Poletti’s interests are in “how life materialized in narrative, mediation, and matter” (p.8). In *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality and Media*, cultural and media theorist Giuliana Bruno “reflects on the relationship between cinema and the museum as sites of exhibition and archival fabrication” (Bruno, 2015, p. 143). She examines the relationship between media, cultural memory and public exhibition. “In exploring this material connection, I intend to show that a particularly porous museum sensibility—a sense of public intimacy — developed as a modern, hybrid phenomenon out of the interaction among different sites of mobility, cultural memory, and public exhibition” (Bruno, 2015, p. 143).

In her monograph, *Double Exposure: The subject of Cultural Analysis* (1996), Mieke Bal explores the terms “exposition, exposé and exposure” to evoke the meaning of the Greek word “*apo-dek-numai*” which refers to “the action of making a presentation” a “public presentation of someone’s views” (p. 2). For Bal, the interaction between the subject and the object is where narrative begins. The space of exhibition, of engagement between subject and object is where meaning is created for the viewer. The lack of textual materials gives the viewer the opportunity to engage in an embodied experience where the quilted screens become dynamic entities and spatial elements. “Entering and exiting the exhibition space of an installation increasingly recalls the collective ritual of inhabiting a movie house, where forms of liminal traversal and cultural habitation are experienced in public, surface intimacy” (Bruno, 2014, p. 151). For Bruno, the space of exhibition is a public and shared narrative space of engagement.

Video Wall #1: “Golden Circles – Global Diaspora”



Figure 8: *Golden Circles – Global Diaspora. Video. 2m30.*
Gallery Produit Rien. Fall 2023.

The digital memory quilt entitled *Golden Circles – Global Diaspora*, is made of a collection of abstract fragments which were “cut” from the classic Hermes “Eperon d’Or” scarf, designed by Henri d’Origny in 1974. The Hermes scarf is symbolic of Egypt’s colonial past and the broken traces it has left on Egyptian culture. The scarf fragments and erratic animation are reflective of the unpredictability and unknowability of one’s future when caught in a migratory flow. Fragmented flows of forced displacement and migration of Egyptian Jewry throughout the mid-20th Century might express that experience as disjointed, non-linear, and unpredictable; at times violent. The square segments were patchworked to create the larger animated quilt played in a continuous loop. It is the only memory quilt that doesn’t include family portraits or other figurative imagery. The patterns and patchwork are abstract and random.

The Hermes “Eperon d’Or” scarf hangs intact, fixed, alongside the video wall (see Fig. 9), juxtaposed against a quilt that evokes the erratic movement of migration, thereby creating a tension between the two pieces, one fixed and material, the other animated and digital, old media vs. new media, forms of remediation and their symbolic meanings.

When Egyptian Jews were handed the decree to leave Egypt they were offered passage as refugees to France, England, Israel, Canada and America. As in the case of my family, they dispersed to France, England, Canada, America and one of my mother’s siblings eventually moved to Israel. They were separated overnight as with many migrant families who experience dispersal and separation when they leave home. The *Golden Circles – Global Diaspora* quilt further conveys the complicated relationship to Egypt experienced by Egyptian Jewry. On the one hand “Om al Donya” (Mother Earth) is a national identity that Egyptian Jews identify with. On the other hand, there is an undeniable and seemingly unresolvable conflict between Jews and

Arabs that has evolved and intensified historically. A more thoughtful and inclusive history might teach us otherwise.

Video Wall #2: “Mother, Mother”

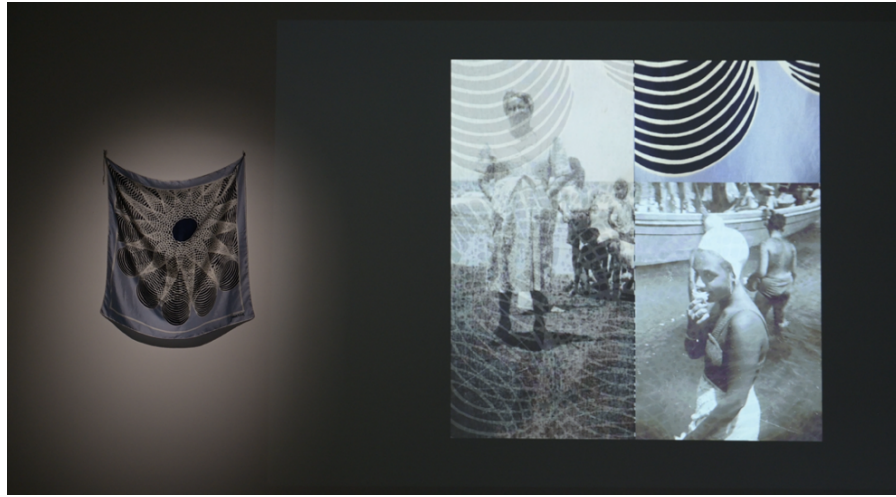


Figure 9: *Mother, Mother. Video. 1m52sec.*
Gallery Produit Rien. Fall 2023.

Movement throughout this video wall divides the screen in four with alternating photographs of my mother and her mother, fading in and out of the frame, with layers of superimposed fabric that also fade in and out of frame, creating an interplay between mother and daughter. I don't know if these family portraits were taken on the same day, or even during the same summer holiday. The location, *Ras Al Bar*, a small village down the coast from Port Said in Alexandria, was a popular beach haven for middle-class Egyptians looking to escape the summer heat of the city of Cairo. The collection of family photos is a testimony to Nazira (my grandmother's) presence, and subsequently her absence. As my mother became a young adult, and her brothers, young married men, the portraits of youth and family changed and then stopped all together.

While she never forgot she never forgot me or my brother, as my mother aged, her dementia progressed, her memory loss worsened. For much of her life, my mother remembered her own mother vividly—until one day, she acknowledged that she no longer could. Her ability to recognize the absence of that memory highlighted the complex nature of her condition and her relationship with the past.

The montage *Mother, Mother* is inspired by this interplay of presence and absence in memory, particularly regarding our mothers—hers and mine. This quilt features two photographs, one of my mother and the other of my maternal grandmother, gradually fading in and out through a patchwork of fabrics. My mother often spoke of her mother, reflecting on her loss. She was 15 years old when her mother, Nazira Levy Ammar, passed away, and she felt that absence profoundly throughout her life.

Even as her memory of her mother began to fade, Nazira remained present in the stories my mother shared and in the act of remembering itself. My mother often remarked, “I don’t remember my mother anymore, can you believe it?” Yet, even in that absence, my grandmother’s memory persisted, becoming part of a broader effort to ascribe meaning to a life otherwise unacknowledged and to maintain a connection with the past.

Tryptic: Screens #1, 2 & 3



Figure 10:
Haute Couture, Blue Pearl and Beige Dentelle
Tryptich.
Gallery Produit Rien. Fall 2023.



Figure 11:
Haute Couture, Blue Pearl and Beige Dentelle - Tryptich.
& Mother, Mother – Video Wall

Gallery Produit Rien. Fall 2023.

“Fashion embraces the folds of time as its very model insofar as it shows how the fold of cloth embodies the actual pattern of memory: its iterative way of returning in repetitive pattern, like undulating pleats” (Bruno, p. 45). The triptych is composed of three digital memory quilts entitled *Haute Couture*, *Blue Pearl*, and *Beige Dentelle* as shown in (Fig. 10) and was mostly inspired by my engagement with the literary memoirs discussed earlier in Chapters One and Two with a focus on family portraits, social milieus and personal belongings.

The family photographs I chose for this installation are intimate and personal, and yet they resemble family photographs published in Lagnado’s memoir (2008). The portraits are stoic, posed, evocative of a cosmopolitan bourgeoisie, what they considered a dignified life. The family members portrayed in them were the main characters in the stories that I heard repeatedly growing up, not only within our nuclear family, but within a larger Egyptian Jewish community in Montreal and elsewhere.

Guiliana Bruno describes the screen as a relational space, “[a] form of dwelling that engages remediation between subjects and between subject and object” (Bruno – talk). This series of quilts is inspired by the literary memoirs I read of Egyptian Jewry, intermingled with my own family histories and memories, which reflect and represent a time referred to as *La Belle époque*. These material relations create transformations through and beyond the screen.

The triptych of quilts in the exhibition, entitled *Haute Couture*, *Blue Pearl* and *Beige Dentelle*, were designed based on the following themes: family heritage, family portraits, and family vacations. Each quilt is composed of different materials, objects and photographs. Unlike the video wall quilts that are made of a uniform patchwork design and are drawn from one source of fabric, repeating a visual pattern, the TV monitor quilts are composed of layers of superimposed images weaving family photographs, clothing, books and personal memory

objects, blending, fading, in a constant state of entanglement and transformation. Inspired by the Deleuzian fold, what Bruno interprets “as a form of sartorial philosophy ... where pleats of matter and folds of the soul are treated, the world emerges as a body of infinite folds, a set of ‘in between’ spaces” (Bruno, 2014, P. 41). This constructed imaginary, is perpetually played out through the quilts, that remain open to evolution and interpretation through a constant process and engagement with viewers.

The three TV monitors of *Haute Couture*, *Blue Pearl* and *Beige Dentelle* frame the images differently than the video-wall quilts “Golden Circles – Global Diaspora” and “Mother, Mother”. The orientation of the TV screens and the juxtaposition and layering of images on the vertical quilts displayed on them are more constricted and compressed than the images on the larger video wall projections. That said, while the frame sizes are smaller, the ratio of the images is larger within the TV monitor frame, drawing the viewer into a more intimate space and encounter with moving images.

Single Monitor Installation

The horizontal single monitor installation quilt, *Kalthoum wa Mourad / Kalthoum and Mourad* was set apart from the triptych and was installed between the two video wall quilts. This quilt is named for two iconic figures of Egyptian popular culture, whose musical voices continue to resonate throughout the Arab world and the global diaspora. These figures are, Oum Kalthoum (1898 – 1975) and Leila Mourad (1918 – 1995). Oum Kalthoum was an Egyptian singer, songwriter, and actress who was widely regarded as one of the greatest and most influential Arab singers of the 20th century. Kalthoum’s career spanned several decades, and she became known for her powerful voice, her emotional expression, and her ability to interpret classical Arabic music. Kalthoum continues to be a symbol of Egyptian national pride and an icon of the Arab

world and its global diaspora. The other figure highlighted in this quilt is Leila Mourad, who was a well-known Egyptian Jewish singer and actress who starred in numerous Egyptian films, including the early works of pioneer Italian-Egyptian Jewish filmmaker, Togo Mizrahi (Starr, 2019). Mourad became one of the prominent voices in Arabic music and contributed to the golden era of Egyptian cinema. Music from both Leila Mourad and Oum Kalthoum permeated the exhibition space.

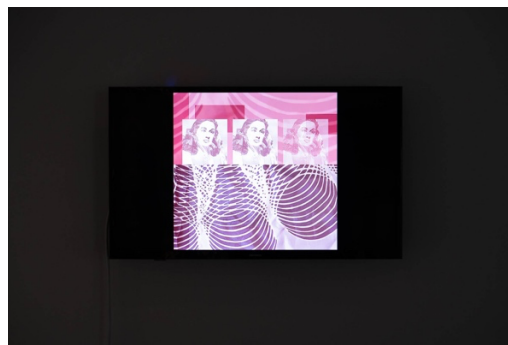


Figure 11: *Kalthoum wa Mourad*.
Gallery Produit Rien. Fall 2023.

Kalthoum wa Mourad is a quilt I started to create early in my research process but did not complete. The original thesis proposal included quilts that explored archival materials and themes that spanned Egyptian popular culture, history and textual citations from my research. The quilts shifted from broader historical themes to more focused memory quilts of family. The *Kalthoum wa Mourad* quilt is both a remnant of one experiment and a future sample of something a little larger than what was produced here. While this quilt conveys a different aesthetic sensibility than the other quilts, it is rooted in the nostalgic sentiments that these two figures evoke, gesturing towards a further development of the project in the future.

Photographic Prints

One of the art works was a quilt made of photographic prints on cotton paper (dimensions 6 x 20" x 20" / 40" x 80"). I was experimenting with the different collage designs I had produced and upon receiving the prints, decided to make a sort of mock-up of a patchwork quilt. Initially, I was simply going to pin the images to the wall. The idea of stitching the photo prints and hanging them rather than pinning them to the wall, came from a friend as we were putting up the exhibition.



Conclusion

Working outside the framework of mainstream media and within the traditions of video art, my goal with *Quilting the Memoir* was to experiment with research-creation methods and expressions of diasporic cultural memory in visual media art. In the research-creation process, I have considered how theoretical concepts of postmemory and research-creation methodologies

have driven my creative and research practices and allowed me to explore concepts of visual historical representation in the performance and production of new media art.

It should be noted that *Quilting the Memoir* is a prototype of a project with a broader future potential, which could include cultural portraits, political and historical portraits, and which could open the terrain of diasporic Egyptian Jewish postmemory to a broader viewpoint and history.

The research-creation work culminates in a media installation and exhibition held at Gallery Produit Rien in Montreal, Quebec, October 26 – 29, 2023. The exhibition aimed to create a multisensory immersive experience, providing opportunities for public engagement with some lesser-known cultural and historical narratives of Egyptian Jewry. The exhibited works included two expansive video wall projections, a TV monitor triptych, an animation displayed on a single TV monitor, a paper quilt, two dresses, and two scarves that were significant emblems that belonged to my mother. A narrative description of the project appeared at the entrance of the exhibit (See Appendix IX for a list of artworks and gallery space layout).

“Private collections” speculates José van Dijck, “tap into the much larger phenomenon of communal rites of storing and retrieving” (2007, p.xii). The WordPress site served as a repository for organizing and presenting the research materials, including the making of the digital quilts, my field notes, and artefacts that were included in the exhibition. The digital memory quilts, the immersive exhibition, the interactive WordPress site, and the detailed documentation of my research process, all serve as examples of how research-creation can expand the creative possibilities for scholarly work, and more specifically, “raise poignant concerns about the relationship between material objects and autobiographical memory, between

media and technologies and our habits and rituals of remembrance” (van Dijck, p. xii). The website continues to provide a space for ongoing reflection and documentation of the research.

By combining concepts in memory work, digital storytelling such as non-linear, fragmented storytelling, and creative practices in digital multimedia such as experimental editing techniques, *Quilting the Memoir* offers ways of exploring the transmission of life stories through mediated forms of memory among an Egyptian Jewish diaspora. I turned to literary memoirs (Aciman, 1994, Lagnado, 20008) and considered their central role in the transmission and constructs of cultural imaginaries. In so doing, *Quilting the Memoir* contributes innovative approaches in research methods that might be applied to other contexts and cultural histories.

The digital memory quilts propose a novel way of presenting under-represented cultural narratives and engaging with the cultural imaginary of an Egyptian Jewish global diaspora. As Graeme Sullivan (2006) writes: “Arts-based researchers make use of methods found in the arts and humanities that emphasize literary traditions and therefore the ‘artistry’ characteristic of the research is akin to art criticism and narrative storytelling (p. 23). Similarly, memory quilts serve as a form of visual storytelling, weaving together elements of the fragmented and dispersed memories of the Egyptian Jewish global diaspora. They offer a way to engage with elements of complex narratives that might be difficult to experience through textual accounts, such as the literary memoir and autobiography.

Chapter Five: A Journey's Reflections

Introduction

The stories that I heard growing up about my family's past life in Egypt, fascinated me. But they were fleeting, distant, ephemeral. As an adult, I discovered memoirs that resonated with the stories my mother told me of her youth. The place I had created in my mind's eye and childhood imagination was now being evoked through texts and life stories that belonged to strangers, and their childhood memories. Until that moment, the references to this old world my family called home had existed only through the stories they told, the culture they embodied and enacted daily through food, music, language and tradition.

Digital storytelling techniques, memory work and practice-based research methods serve to create digital artefacts and time-based media installation about contemporary Egyptian Jewish life that challenges conventional binary histories of Egyptians and Jews. In so doing, I undertook research that engaged with personal archives, literary memoirs and my own family memories of a rich and unique ancestry that serves as an opening to rediscover other untold stories of the past, and to recognize the potential for new stories of the future.

This approach purposely avoided trying to piece together, or transcribe, a conventional linear narrative of remembered accounts. Rather, the project's aim was to engage with the messy entanglements through personal memories of the past, that aren't so clear cut, obvious, and linear in their retelling. This self-reflexive approach allowed me to reflect on the research process and develop an approach that didn't simply aim to reconstruct the past, but rather to better understand how that past was constructed through the personal life stories of its subjects.

Quilting the Memoir is a family portrait that aims to reflect the broader socio-cultural landscape of an Egyptian Jewish diaspora and the story of Arab Jews as a whole. At a time when

the politics between Arabs and Jews are more divisive than ever, my hope is that we can forge a path to a different way of seeing the Other through a process of remembering a past that tells a different story than the present one. *Quilting the Memoir* at its core is about a unique culture that now seems impossible to reconcile and yet offers a glimmer of hope when rekindling its past.

Old Media

As discussed, the literary memoir plays a central role in shaping the collective and cultural imaginaries of Jews from Egypt. *Out of Egypt: A Memoir* by André Aciman (1994) and *The Man with the White Sharkskin Suit: A Jewish Family's Exodus from Old Cairo to the New World* by Lucette Lagnado (2008) served as a starting point in exploring concepts of cultural memory and the shaping of a collective imaginary among exilic and diaspora Jews from Egypt. These memoirs written from childhood perspectives brought me 'back' to a time and place I had never actually been, allowing me to explore the ways in which cultural memories travel through relational and dynamic interactions between embodied and material entities.

Developed, in part, as a means to document the untold histories of Egyptian Jews, the literary memoir imparts a legacy to future generations and tells unique life stories which the writers continue to long for. These memoirs are written in a variety of languages including English, French, Hebrew, Arabic, German and others and date as far back to the turn of the 20th century. The memoirs have been varied but mostly rooted in some form of nostalgic expression. Nonetheless, memoirs written in the early 1900s by local elites of the Egyptian Jewish community have proven as valid as the contemporary accounts that continue to be written and published.

The unique body of work that has evolved with the years, illustrates the need for life stories to fill the gap that history has created in the narratives of Arabs and Jews. This body of

work is a key factor in readdressing certain fundamental misconceptions about the contemporary history of the Middle East and North Africa. Personal voices, first person accounts, descriptive intimate moments provide representations of a world that would otherwise go unseen. Literary memoirs were the first place in which I witnessed a representation of my family's history. First with André Aciman's *Out of Egypt: A Memoir* and then with Lucette Lagnado's *The Man with the White Sharkskin Suit: A Jewish Family's Exodus from Old Cairo to the New World*. Both books were captivating and novel.

Historians, anthropologists, and cultural theorists have turned to memoirs as a primary source of research which provide social and cultural insight into the contemporary lives of Egyptian Jews. Though they do so with caution as the portraits while often genuinely positive, are also tinged with varying doses of nostalgia. Like many scholars in this field research is a process of excavation, piecing together fragments of history wherever one can. These life stories are attestations to an otherwise unrecorded past.

New Media

Over the course of this dissertation, I approached the research problem through the development of an online platform, the creation of digital memory quilts, and the production of a time-based media installation. Digital storytelling provided me with a framework for my research methods, documentation and content presentation. This framework and research approach could serve other practitioners, scholars, artists and educators working with life stories. The platforms are accessible online for archiving, documentation, and presentation. The multimodal nature of the work provides for a seamless workflow that is non-linear and moves organically between pre-production, production and post-production.

The nature of research-creation calls for performative, self-reflexive, and experimental methodological frameworks for researchers to succeed in their practice-based approaches. Each digital memory quilt is a portrait, the result of a performative act and the outcome of a creative collage process based on themes of home, memory and family. Following from the works of Guiliana Bruno, Annette Kuhn, Astrid Erll, Marianne Hirsch, and José van Dijck, the *Quilting the Memoir* project explores how material culture, and visual expression informs the mediation of memories within a digital context and space of exhibition. The process of creating these quilts allows for the reimagining of Egyptian Jewish cultural memory in a digital format (van Dijck, 2007). The digital medium enables the layering of images creating a multi-dimensional space where cultural memories are evoked and shared, exploring how digital representations can both preserve and transform the meanings of material culture (Poletti, 2020).

At an art gallery opening, a friend showed me the original photograph that inspired the painting she was showcasing that evening. I couldn't believe the transformation. The abstraction was so far removed in one way, and so intimately connected, in another. The moment was enlightening, and it inspired me to consult my contemporary art books on contemporary abstract paintings. Paul Klee, Vasily Kandinsky, Jackson Pollock, and Pierre Soulages, to name a few, were inspirational in starting to imagine the quilts. I am so grateful to my friend's transparency with her work. A window into her painting process guided my aesthetic strategies.

Eventually I research quilting traditions and the *khayamiya* and was pleased to learn that there were all kinds of traditional influences that helped develop a language for the transposition and remediation of material, digital and mixed media to create a collage of short moving image clips – what I have called digital memory quilts.

The Journey Unfolds

This personal and professional journey feels complete. While there were many moments along the way where it would have been easier to give it up, I persevered, often against my better judgment. I began the study, unbeknownst to me, as my mother's dementia was setting in and worsening ever so slowly, with major turns, impacting our daily realities, and having to adjust to them, somehow. The research-creation journey was similar. As I delved deeper into the stories and research, new turns and opportunities presented themselves, impacting the project's direction and outcome. What began as an interactive experimental documentary based on conversational interviews, resulted in a time-based media installation that was better suited to the kind of investigation I had launched.

The journey unfolded in several key stages: first, the investigation into Egyptian Jewish memory and literary memoirs; secondly, the production of a WordPress site where I collected research materials, field notes, designed the patterns and conceived of the digital memory quilts (See Appendix V). Once the memory quilts were designed, I was able to think about the aesthetic strategies that would now guide the exhibition of the finished works. All the while, my queries about postmemory and remediation were being addressed. This alternative approach in storytelling as both methods of research and presentation, are foundational elements of this research journey. The intersection of methodologies in memory studies and digital storytelling provided tools of investigation that were flexible and fluid enough to experiment with new digital platforms as a means of documentation and conducting research.

The workshop I offered on my research methods integrating the WordPress site was well received, notably demonstrating an appreciation for a method in organizing and presenting collections of research materials.³

The research design, methodologies and theoretical concepts were guided by the works in memory studies of scholars Marianne Hirsch, Andreas Huyssen, Annette Kuhn, and Astrid Erll, and in media studies with José van Dijck, Anna Poletti, Giuliana Bruno, Laura U. Marks, Marie-Claude Laure, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Penny A. Garcia, Martha Rossiter and John F. Barber in digital storytelling.

Further Reflections on the Cultural History of Jews from Egypt

Egyptian Jews historically lived at the crossroads of multiple cultures—Middle Eastern, North African, Sephardic, and European—resulting in a rich and multifaceted cultural heritage. This research study underscores how this cultural intersectionality shaped Egyptian Jewish identity, from language and cuisine to religious practices and social customs. The digital memory quilts register this complexity, showcasing some of the diverse cultural elements that have contributed to the unique identities of Egyptian Jewry.

Proceeding from the premise that the history of Jews from Egypt has often been erased or marginalized in both Egyptian and Jewish historiography, this research-creation project addresses this gap by attempting to bring traces of these experiences to light, seeking to ensure that these aspects of Egyptian Jewish experience are preserved, acknowledged, and explored further by others within and outside of Egyptian Jewish diasporic communities. “Once they were exiled and dispersed, it is therefore possible to think that these populations, who had fled colonial worlds and their equivocal heritages, would disappear ... wiping away the past” (p. 7)

³ Concordia University

writes Michèle Baussant (2022) of the global diasporic communities of Jews from Egypt. But on the contrary, she continues, “by leaving this country, many of them reconstructed links between members of the community in the places where they were reimplanted (p. 7). She attributes one of the reasons for this marginalization is the self-imposed silence within the Egyptian Jewish diaspora, where many “remained reticent about defining themselves in these terms and recounting the detail of their departure” (p. 8). My mother had this fear as well.

The creation of digital memory quilts and the research reveals an approach to how fragmented memories might be reclaimed and reassembled using alternative media formats and digital storytelling techniques and aesthetic strategies. The quilts serve as both a metaphor and a literal means of piecing together scattered fragments of Egyptian Jewish experiences, creating a form of cultural memory that transcends geographic and temporal boundaries. The inclusion of personal narratives to inform broader cultural contexts highlights the way in which minority histories can contribute to the development of broader cultural histories of Egyptian Jewry, the Middle East and North Africa.

Creative Process and Exhibition

Beyond the academic research, memoir reading and family reflections that informed the ‘quilted’ structure of the digital memory quilts, the act of digitization invites reflection on the evolving nature and interaction between of personal, familial, cultural and collective memory in the digital age. The time-based media installation and exhibition at Gallery Produit Rien in Montreal marked a significant milestone in the iteration of this research. By displaying the digital memory quilts on large TV monitors and expansive video walls alongside physical objects like couture dresses, the exhibition created a multisensory environment and immersive experience that transcends traditional forms of historical documentation.

By bringing the research into a public space, it allowed a broader audience to interact with the outcomes of the study, fostering a deeper connection with the cultural memories being explored. “The answer is ... to open up new pathways of research that would help us understand better how memory works to create positive forms of attachment and connectedness” (Rigney, 2017, p. 181). The digital memory quilts exemplify how creative practices can be used to engage with and interpret historical narratives, providing a visual medium through which memories can be preserved and reimagined.

The documentation of the creation of *Quilting the Memoir* offers valuable insights into the research-creation process, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges of integrating creative practices with academic research. The development of a WordPress site as part of this research serves multiple purposes. It functions as a digital archive, as a platform for ongoing reflection, and as a means of disseminating the research. The self-reflective documentation of the process is particularly valuable in research-creation projects, where the process is as important as the final outcome. The documentation provides a permanent digital archive that can be revisited and built upon in the future, contributing to the longevity of the research. The WordPress site offers an interactive platform for exhibition visitors to further explore the digital memory quilts, to read my field notes, and to engage with the reflective documentation.

Challenges

The research-creation methodology employed in this dissertation presented me with both challenges and opportunities. One of the key challenges I faced, was navigating the intersection of creative practice and academic research. Balancing the artistic and scholarly aspects of the project required careful consideration and supervision, particularly in ensuring that the creative outputs were both meaningful and academically rigorous.

The project reflects on the challenges of documenting a history that has been contested, underrepresented within larger historical narratives, complicated by global displacement and the fraught politics of the “Arab” and “Jew” divide which continues to grow. The fragmented nature of the community’s memories, the scarcity of archival records, and the dispersed nature of the diaspora all pose significant obstacles to remembering what has yet to be put together. However, the use of research-creation methodologies in bringing together threads of Egyptian Jewish experience as *Quilting the Memoir* attempts to do, offers a way to overcome these challenges, demonstrating how creative practices might be used to fill in the gaps left by traditional historical methods.

Implications for Future Research

It has always been my intention to develop this concept further to include a broader scope of Egyptian culture and heritage in the making of digital memory quilts. Additionally, the interactive and visual nature of digital memory quilts makes them a powerful tool for engaging with lesser-known historical narratives, offering new possibilities for how history can be taught and understood. The findings and methodologies developed in this dissertation open up several avenues for future research. The use of digital media to document and preserve cultural memories has significant potential for application in other communities. The methodologies developed in this study can be adapted and applied to other cultural narratives, expanding the understanding of how digital media and memory work intersect.

The Egyptian Jewish diaspora has developed a vibrant online network and living archive through online organizations on social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram, as well as independent groups across the US, Europe and Israel. The online communities share historical content such as documents, photographs and life stories and make connections with lost family

and friends. Online organizations host continued talks, book launches and other community events, globally. The archives and life stories that are circulating is worthy of further study and centralized systems of archiving this rich body of historical materials. (See Appendix II and III).

Conclusion

Quilting the Memoir contributes to the broader discourse on cultural memory and cultural imaginaries by offering new ways to preserve, reimagine, and represent cultural histories. Through the creation of digital memory quilts, the project not only re-members and re-circulates the personal and cultural memories and experiences of Egyptian Jews, but it also redefines how these memories might be more broadly considered and engaged with in the digital age. The reconstruction of the past for Egyptian Jews, therefore, brings to light a history that not only serves the past, or its restoration, but one that might serve a future by reframing mainstream concepts and reductive perception of Arab and Jewish identities.

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Appendices

Appendix I – Tables – Research Methods

The following three tables offer a breakdown of the research materials, processes and methods deployed in the research.

Table 1: Research Materials

Methods, materials, and data are outlined in the following Table demonstrating the result of each of the methods deployed.

Methods R-C (interpretive / observational / digital storytelling)	Sources	Materials / Tools	Research - Data Collection	Outcome / Results
Readings Interpretive	Memoirs / Essays / History	Printed books / E-books	Fragments of literary text	Role of memoir in construction of cultural imaginary
Writing Observational	Personal + Intergenerational Memories	WordPress Site	Documenting Memories	Field Notes
Quilting Digital Storytelling	Personal family objects	Photographs, Adobe Photoshop	Quilt Patterns, Postproduction	Digital Quilts + Exhibition

Table 2: Research Methods and Documentation

Four phases of research were deployed – the following Table demonstrates the breakdown for each phase.

Phase 1: Data Collection and Documentation	Phase 2: Pattern Making and Field Notes (WP)	Phase 3: Digital Quilting	Phase 4: Exhibition: Time Based Media Installation
Collection: Text, objects, family photographs, family heirlooms,	Designing quilt patterns on WP, compiling images and notes on WP site using images, text and hyperlinks.	Working in Adobe Photoshop, creating moving video loops and photo montage sequences.	Digital Memory Quilts
Documentation: Original photographs, archiving.	Regular input of textual content in response to literary memoirs	Experimentation with form, technique, video / image editing, image manipulation	Selecting a gallery space, designing the exhibition.
Archiving	Development of digital media quilts	Production of digital memory quilts	Designing space and technological platforms for display of digital memory quilts.

Table 3: WordPress Patterns

Each WordPress page represents a layer of the quilt patterns and patterning proces.

Layers	Pattern #1: Home	Pattern #2: Cultural Memory	Pattern #3: Heritage
Top	Collection of square patches of digitized fabrics	Collection of family photographs and hand sketched sewing patterns for women	Composite images of Jewish heritage sites juxtaposed with images of every-day life of Egyptians
Middle	Hyperlink - Text	Hyperlink - Text	Defunct
Back	Website Interface	Website Interface	Defunct

Appendix II - Oral History

Examples of Oral Histories about Egyptian Jewry by scholars and organizations worldwide.

Michèle Baussant (2022)

"Seeing the voices": Egyptian Jews from one shore to another: Europe, Israel, United States.

Conserveries mémorielles Revue transdisciplinaire #25. Disrupted Histories, Recovered Pasts

Abstract: *This article focuses on the Jews of Egypt and how they rebuild their connections to Egypt from several spaces and contexts of exile. Based on a "retroactive ethnography," it relies on work with memory and the memory of the Jews of Egypt encountered both as actors and narrators and is interested in the crossed constructions of the presence and absence of Jews and Egyptians. To do so, she explores the persistence and relevance of certain traces, practices, and concrete memories of the past in their relationship to material spaces - what we might call the memory of the inhabited. It also focuses, through return journeys, on the confrontation with the ignorance or silence of the Egyptians who today occupy the various spaces where the Jews lived, frequented, and left their traces: what one might call the uninhabited of memory. These traces, journeys, exchanges between Egyptians and Egyptian Jews reveal the discrepancy and the encounter of displaced histories of people "without traces" and persistent traces of a past as "without history."*

Piera Rossetto (2017)

Dwelling in contradictions Deep maps and the memories of Jews from Libya. Memories at stake:

Sharing stories and exchanging experiences. Volume 39, Number 2, 2017. DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.7202/1051669ar>

Abstract: Jews from the Middle East and North Africa region, with a focus on Jews of Libyan descent. It acknowledges the complexity that intrinsically characterizes these sources in terms of the heterogeneity of their contents, but also the political implications inherent to their transmission and communication. What is needed, however, is to make this complexity readable, and to make it readable, the author suggests making it visible. To achieve this goal, the author proposes adopting a new research approach which takes inspiration from the field of digital humanities, to assist in thinking spatially and visually about the performances of memories and identities. This can bring about a kind of methodological reconciliation between the researcher, the complexity of the data, the necessity to transform them into accurate research results and the responsibility to effectively communicate them to the larger public.

Ranya Essmat Saad (2017)

Performative Photographic Narratives: Stories of Egyptian Jewish Diaspora and Egypt's Lost Cosmopolitan Identity

Abstract: The purpose of my research is to investigate how photography informs the ways we perform storytelling and self-reflections of diaspora as a lived experience emerged from wars and contradicting political ideologies. The Egyptian Jewish diaspora was the result of series of wars between Egypt and Israel from 1948 to 1973. Through an ambiguous perspective of diaspora, I am representing my story in diaspora as a Canadian immigrant with Egyptian roots comparing my experience with those of my research participants, two Egyptian-Canadian Jews who fled Egypt during the nationalism wave and after the Suez Canal War in 1956. In a Deleuzian sense of multiplicity, I am examining the ways video-recorded interviews create

unfolded images of the narration process that links the narrators' geographic presence to memories of lived experiences and personal identity, and invite the viewers to become part of the process. Photographed self-portraits are self-representations that are analyzed through understanding the intersectionality of the body, mind, and soul. Our stories highlight shades of relatedness that emphasize cultural hybridity and multiculturalism as a means of understanding the complexity of humans identity and life experiences. I describe a rhizomatic learning experience that brings holistic education into community practice as a method that foregrounds social and cultural transmission and transformation as the process of self-realization and becoming other.

Sephardi Voices UK – Organization

<https://www.sephardivoices.org.uk/>

About: Sephardi Voices UK was founded with the mission to record the experiences of the Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews from the Middle East, North Africa and Iran who settled in the UK. Our filmed interviews document the fascinating history, rich culture and vibrant traditions of the communities our interviewees left behind. Our work allows the families of our interviewees to connect with their past, whilst simultaneously allowing both researchers and members of the general public a window into the histories of these unique communities.

Appendix III – Museum and Galleries

A partial list of museum and gallery exhibitions on Jewish communities from the Middle East and North Africa and the *Khayamaya*.

INSTITUT DU MONDE ARAB – Exhibition

<https://www.imarabe.org/fr/expositions/juifs-d-orient>

Jews of the Orient: A history spanning several thousand years. November 24, 2021 - March 13, 2022

Abstract: From November 24, 2021 to March 13, 2022, the exhibition “Jews of the Orient” will take a unique look at the millennia-old history of Jewish communities in the Arab world.

A chronological and thematic approach will outline the great periods of Jewish intellectual and cultural life in the Orient and reveal the prolific exchanges which shaped the societies of the Arab-Muslim world for centuries. From the Mediterranean coast to the Euphrates, via the Arabian Peninsula, the exhibition will explore the multiple facets of cohabitation between Jews and Muslims, from the first links woven between the Jewish tribes of Arabia and the Prophet Mohammed to the emergence of the main figures of Jewish thought during the medieval caliphates in Baghdad, Fez, Cairo and Cordoba, from the rise of Jewish urban centers in the Maghreb and the Ottoman Empire to the beginnings of the definitive exile of the Jews of the Arab world. The story of this coexistence, by turns fruitful or tumultuous, will bear witness to the role of each in enriching the culture and religion of the other, whether it be the spoken language, customs, crafts or even scientific and intellectual production.

The Sephardic Heritage Museum - Museum

<https://sephardicheritagemuseum.com/about/mission/>

About: The Sephardic Heritage Museum houses the largest known collection of artefacts and archives documenting the history of the Jewish communities of Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and other regions dating back some 3,000 years. We wish to instill in our community a strong sense of purpose, identity, and connection to our heritage. We have collected thousands of rare objects, texts and photographs, and hundreds of video interviews and oral histories chronicling the story of our community. And we are actively working to salvage, rescue and repair the remnants of our Jewish past in the Middle East, before they are lost forever.

The Museum of Jewish Montreal – Exhibition

<https://museemontrealjuif.ca/event/iraqi-jewish-voices/>

Iraqi Jewish Voices - Sun September 22, 2019 - Sun October 20, 2019

About: Placed in the context of 2500 years of Jewish life in Iraq, this exhibition focuses on the 1930s to 1970s, when state-sanctioned discrimination, violence, and political unrest saw Iraqi Jews leave en masse, many as refugees. The exhibition presents portraits, oral histories, archival images as well as a video projection highlighting the underrepresented history of Iraqi or Babylonian Jews, a vibrant -and now exiled -community whose love for their country persisted even as they were forced to leave.

Appendix IV - Appliqué

Patchwork, Crazy Quilt and the *Khayimiya*

Taken from: *The Tent Makers of Cairo Egypt's Medieval and Modern Appliqué Craft*
by Seif El Rashid and Sam Bowker



5 Mamluk chronicles often mention red and yellow textiles used by the court. This appliquéd *mahmal* of Sultan al-Ghuri, dating from the early 1500s, is one of the most impressive surviving examples. Photograph courtesy of the Topkapi Palace Museum Collection, Istanbul.



10 Reginald Barratt, *The Mawlid*, 1907.



16 The Bath Panel, ca. 1900. Private collection. Photograph by Seif El Rashidi, edited by Timothy Crutchett.



18 The Egyptian Tent of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. Photograph courtesy of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia.



14 The dining room of Doris Duke at her Shangri-La mansion, Honolulu, features elaborate appliqué work from the early twentieth century. Photograph by David Franzen.



Taken from:

The Tent Makers of Cairo Egypt's Medieval and Modern Appliqué Craft

by Seif El Rashid and Sam Bowker

Appendix V – WordPress Patterns

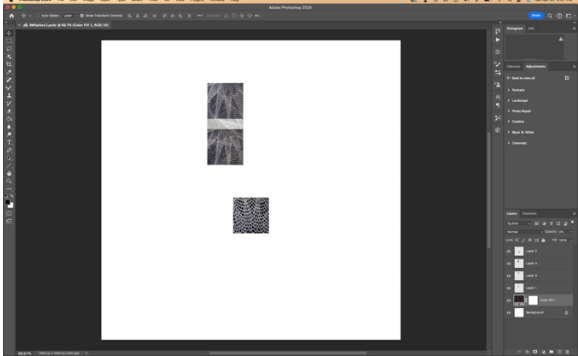
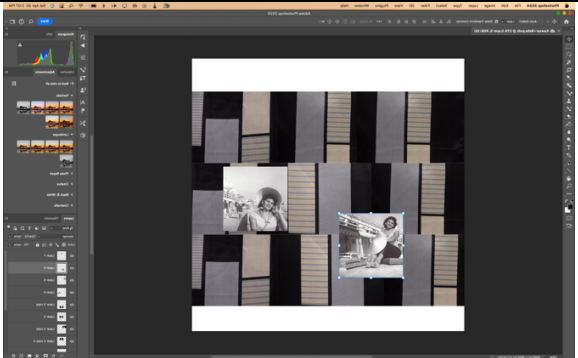
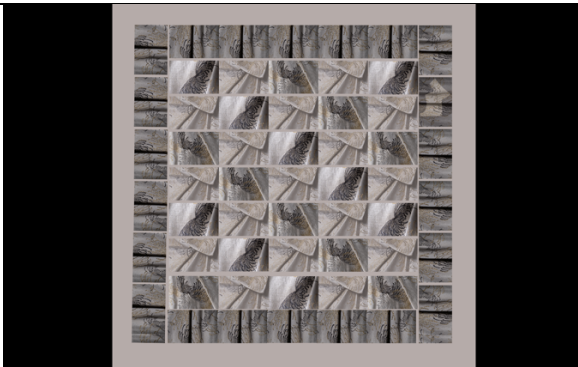
Quilt patterns designed on WordPress.

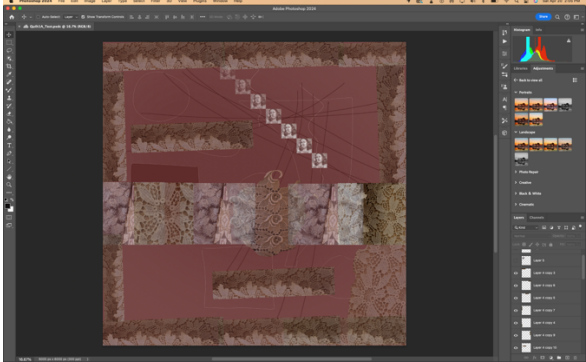
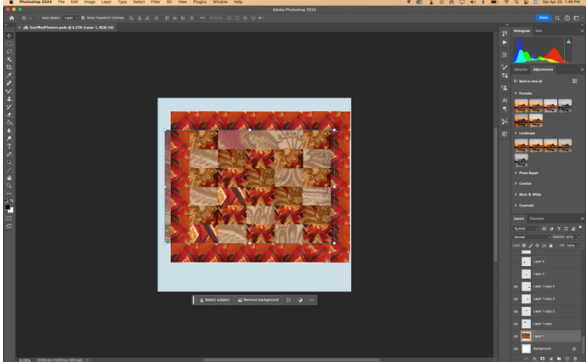
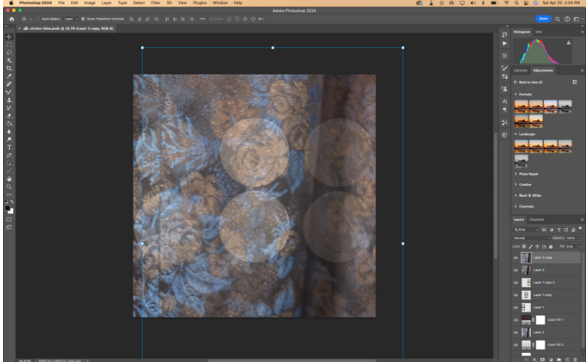
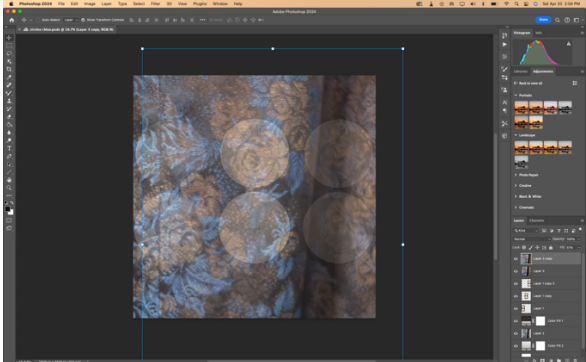
Go to: <https://quiltingthememoir.wordpress.com/>

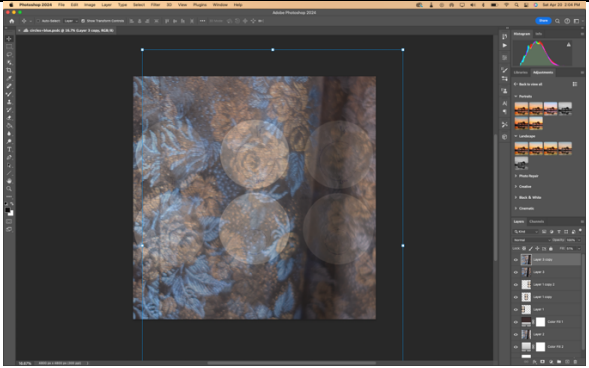
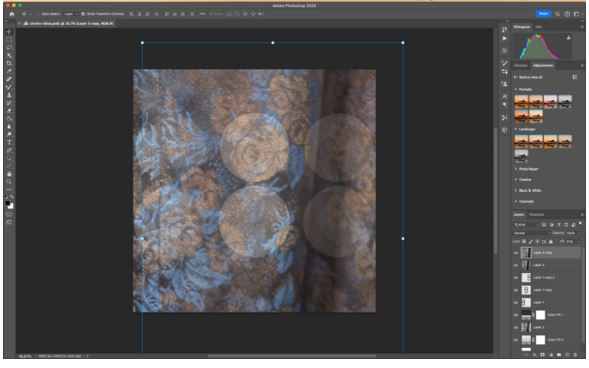
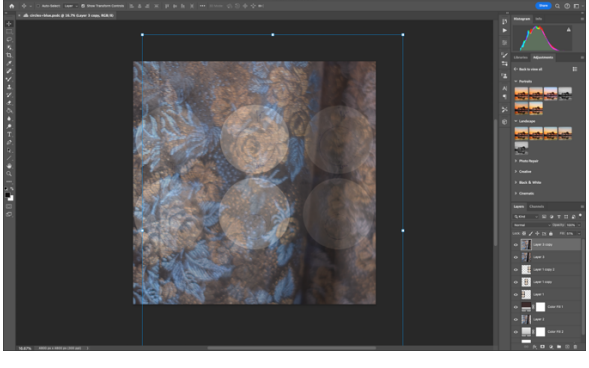


Appendix VI – Early Experiments

Screenshots of works in progress. Early experiments in quilt designs.

Mother, Mother	 A screenshot of the Adobe Photoshop interface. The central canvas shows a white square with three small, dark, rectangular quilt blocks arranged vertically in the center. The Photoshop tools and panels are visible around the edges.
Tryptic	 A screenshot of the Adobe Photoshop interface. The central canvas shows a quilt design with a grid of dark rectangular blocks. Two smaller, square photographs are placed within the grid. The Photoshop tools and panels are visible around the edges.
Silk Fire Works, Mural	 A screenshot of a quilt design. It features a large, rectangular quilt block composed of many small, triangular pieces arranged in a grid. The pieces have a dark, textured pattern. The quilt is set against a dark background.

Stitching, Experiment	
Stitching, Experiment	
Layering experiment	
Layering experiment	

<p>Layering experiment</p>	
<p>Layering experiment</p>	
<p>Layering experiment</p>	

Appendix VII – First Iteration

A brief description of the original quilt design. The descriptions below the quilts would include the original concept for each quilt, which were in various stages of production.

Mapping Memories

“Mapping Memories” (30 seconds) was composed of a portrait of my mother with a series of four superimposed map images of Cairo, from 1940 to today. The superimposed maps fading in and out of the frame chronologically were to illustrate the changing urban landscape of Cairo over the years. The earlier maps (1930, 1940) reflect the urban scape which Lucette Lagnado (2007) writes about in her memoir about Jewish life in Egypt, locating the time and place where my mother grew up. The newer maps illustrate how the city has changed and evolved with time. Incomplete.



Mapping Memories (2021)

Mother

“Mother” (45 sec.) is a multimedia projection composed of a photographic image of my adolescent mother (at around 13 years old) taken on a beach in Alexandria, and a photo of her mother Nazira (at around 39 or 40 years old) intercut with the fabric from a blue and white scarf. The blue and white swirls weave in and out of the image, creating a mixed patchwork of designs

with the photographs dissolving and fading in and out of the fabric. I do not have the precise dates or locations of when and where either photograph was taken, only that they are rare photographic images of both women at this time in their lives.

Mixed Tongues

“Mixed Tongues” (20 sec.) is a time-lapsed multimedia quilt composed of photographs taken of a copy of the Old Testament a rare rendition written in Arabic and Hebrew, mixed with photographs of a white lace-patterned dress that belonged to my mother. In this quilt, I show the makings of the dress from the inside— the seams, thread, zipper, snaps, hooks and lining. The images move slowly through the layers, illustrating the lengthy past co-existence of Arabic and Hebrew cultures, through the evidence of two languages used on pages of a translation of a seminal historical and religious document. The composition of textures, of white lace and the intricate makings of the dress, is reflects the rich texture and complex subject matter of the history Egyptian Jewry, emblematic of the complexity and richness of a semitic or Judeo Arabic peoples and their histories.



Mixed Tongues (2022). Complete

Extended Family

“Extended Family” (120 sec.) is a multimedia time lapse quilt composed of strips of fabric layered in and out with photographs of my mother’s cousins, Kawsar and Beba. The animation is slow and reflective. The fabric design resembles a contact sheet with photo images fading in and out throughout the multiple individual frames. Growing up in Montreal, my mother would tell me stories about her friendships with her cousins and the mischief they would get into. She also lamented that her cousin (Beba) had died so young. On the other hand, she would rejoice when she spoke of Kawsar, Beba’s younger sister, who was more like a sister to my mother. They were the best of friends. The series of photographs captures leisurely moments the cousins spent together with my mother on holidays, playfully capturing a passage in time.



Extended Family (2022). Incomplete.

Family Portrait

“Family Portrait” (60 sec.) is a multimedia time lapse animated quilt composed of seven family photographs of the ---- family taken in Egypt, including photos of my mother, her parents, and her five siblings against the image of a purple and black fabric of one of my mother’s scarves. Her siblings from the oldest to the youngest were named: Felix (Saad), Jacques, Maurice, Yousef and Solomon (who died at the age of 12).

Include Image

Mourad and Kalthum

“Mourad – Kalthum” (60 sec.) portrays renowned Egyptian Jewish singers Leila Mourad and Umm Kalthum. These are interspersed with swirl patterns from one of my mother’s scarves and with black lace from one of her dresses. Leila Mourad was a screen star and singer, beloved nationwide. Uhm Kalthum was a singer who ascended to stardom. She was revered by the monarch, King Farouk, and later by Arab nationalists under Gamal Abdel Nasser’s regime. She is a unique symbol of a living entity that crossed the boundaries of a divergent Egyptian Jewish and Arab traditions across social class, age groups, and religions.



Kalthoum wa Mourad. (2023) Work in Progress.

Appendix VIII – WordPress Excerpts

These textual experts are from the WordPress site section where I quoted from the two memoirs, “Out of Egypt: A Memoir” (Acimna, 1994) and “The Man with the White Sharkskin Suit” (Lagnado, 2008) and responded with a brief anecdote.

Otah! Otah!

The Old Bride turned to her son, thoroughly bewildered. “Otah? Otah?” she said, repeating the Arabic word for cat to make sure she understood. She was such a kindly woman, deeply instinctive, and blessed with a good heart: Who else would have saved some forty-year-old bills for a black phone? It seemed entirely plausible to me that she would have taken Pouspous in, fed her cheese and sardines, exactly as my father had told me when we left. (Lucette Lagnado, Sharkskin, p.#)

A Secret Called Home

Without explaining why, Mom instructed me never to reveal I came from Egypt. I told anyone who asked me that I was from Paris. To my teachers, this made me a charming novelty, “that little French girl”, and even my closest friends didn’t know the truth. Yet I always felt I was living a lie, burdened with a dark secret that was bound to surface; that I wasn’t French at all, that I was born in Cairo. (Lucette Lagnado, Sharkskin, p. 230)

My response: I understand Lucette Lagnado’s mother’s logic and instruction. While I don’t remember my mom instructing me on how to introduce myself, it became evident to me early on in life that people frowned upon unconventional responses to: “Where are you from?” or “What religion do you practice?”. Questions about my cultural identity were always thorny, confusing, needlessly complicated. As a kid, I felt increasingly self-conscious about the odd hybrid mix of ‘Coptic-Jewish’ religions and cultures, an exotic anomaly at best, that most people had never heard of.

Orientalism was the more familiar portrait of the Middle East throughout the late 19th and better half of the 20th C, while contemporary, modern Egyptian culture seemed to evade most Westerners I met, as it continues today.

The first time I felt grounded, a true sense of home, was the first time I set foot in Sinai, a contested land between Egyptians and Israelis who both call it theirs. Home. This is what ‘home’ it felt like to me. To feel grounded. To belong. Odd place. I’d never been, nor really heard of it through family stories. Its historical legacy was an abstraction to me at the time.

My Aunt Ziza

Still, no matter how loudly we sang, our holiday had become not a celebration of the Exodus from Egypt but the inverse—a longing to return to the place we were supposedly glad to have left. (Lagnado, p. 298)

My response: My aunt Ziza’s (Gracia) death marked the end of high holidays celebrations and gatherings with family. Here, me and my mother began our journey of trying to find a home, a community, a place of belonging, as Jews (from Egypt). We spent years, a good part of my young adult life roaming from one Rabbinic household, or Synagogue event, to the another, from year to year, high holiday to high holiday, rarely finding stability and a place we’d return to, comfortably, willingly. Over the years, attendance was dwindling, and synagogues stopped hosting private events. With time, the Chabad communities (FN what is Chabad) were literally opening their homes, to those without families or Jewish homes. My father and brother had been out of our lives for decades, so they weren’t a factor in the logistics of being Jewish. It was just me and mom.

My mother, always the resourceful woman, did eventually build a relationship with a Sephardic Orthodox couple in Cote-St-Luc. Rabbi Ruskin and Mrs. Ruskin. Here, we found refuge, year to year, holiday to holiday for about a decade, mostly throughout the nineties and until Mrs. Ruskin

stopped hosting as her health had become compromised. The venue moved from the Rabbi's home to the shopping mall where a pop-up synagogue was set-up. Given the distance, and the impersonal feeling of the shopping mall dinners, my mom started to look again. This is when we met Leah and Rabbi Schneur Silberstien. A young, newly married orthodox Jewish couple who had taken charge of the Ville St-Laurent Chabad. The first time we had dinner at their home, my mother and I, and one other guest, were present. We continued to attend, until my mother's health would no longer permit.

Identity Crisis

It was my first of several identity crises. In Egypt, I was called a foreigner because of my inability to speak Arabic. In France, where we'd briefly sojourn, and I was completely fluent in the language, I was a foreigner, because I was from Egypt. And in America, I was still a foreigner because I came from Cairo and Paris. (Lagnado, Ch. 8).

My response: In my second year of undergraduate studies in English literature, I registered for my first feminist literature course. My introduction to Virginia Woolf opened a whole new world of wonder and excitement, titillating my imagination and future writing projects. Finally, some good stuff. I loved it. We read mostly British and Canadian literature, so the perspectives were quite narrow, but the course, and the way we engaged with the texts were deep, involved, and memorable.

As marking as the literature was, it was also the first time I ever heard the term 'woman of colour'. Oh, I thought. Looking down at my arms, at my 'colouring'. Woman of colour. Hmph. I identified. Myriam Rafla

Gropi's Art Deco

Gropi's art deco interior was lovely, with its distinctive glass ceiling and venetian mosaics. Beyond the counters there was a big tearoom, where people could sit, have a drink and socialize. It was very elegant, with high ceilings and beautiful chandeliers... This tearoom symbolized cosmopolitan Cairo in the 1940s and 1950s and I was very disappointed to note how much it had declined when I visited in 1994. (Bowell, p.)

He Had Survived

... exile from three different countries, but it would take the fourth, America, and its quintessentially American institutions to defeat him" (Lagnado, Sharksin, xx).

My response: Three Nationalist movements impacted my family – Israeli, Arab and Quebecois. Three times my family was uprooted. Cairo. London. Quebec. Three times, my father started new careers. Film Producer. University Professor. Immigration Lawyer. Each time the circumstances were precarious, left to the whims and folly of the nationalistic fervour of the day. But once nationalist sentiment settles in people's hearts it's often very difficult to disrupt / dislodge.

My Father's Sisters

My father's sisters, Suzanne and Esther, doted on me and often looked after me; they were very close in age, and neither was married. They left Egypt for Israel in 1948, very soon after the creation of the State. (Bowell, To Egypt With Love).

My response: My mother was very close to her sisters in law, Ginette who lived in Paris and was married to my mother's brother Jacques, and had three daughters, and Ziza, who was married to the eldest sibling, Felix, who lived in Montreal, also with their three daughters. My aunt Gina (Ginette) was my favorite aunt on my mother's side of the family, even though I only spent very little time with her. I could tell her all my secrets. She was mischievous and a true diva. My aunt Ziza was a riot too, but her life was difficult, and we didn't see her as much as I think my mother would have liked. I didn't spend as much time with my mother's family as I did with my father's sisters, and my paternal grandmother. My father's sisters doted on me, and still do whenever they get the chance.

Remember this Night

And suddenly I knew, as I touched the damp, grainy surface of the seawall, that I would always remember this night, that in years to come I would remember sitting here, swept with confused longing as I listened to the water lapping the giant boulders beneath the promenade and watched the children head toward the shore in a winding, lambent

procession. I wanted to come back tomorrow night, and the night after, and the one after that as well, sensing that what made leaving so fiercely painful was the knowledge that there would never be another night like this, that I would never eat soggy cakes along the coast road in the evening, not this year or any other year, nor feel the baffling, sudden beauty of that moment when, if only for an instant, I had caught myself longing for a city I never knew I loved. (Aciman, xx)

My response: This passage always made me feel as though I'm remembering memories that weren't mine. Memories that belonged to another. An intimate other, perhaps me in another life, I sometimes wondered.

It was Not Until

It was not until Saturday, 26 January 1952, that Cairo went through one of the most extraordinary upheavals in its long history. The city that the British had known and loved virtually vanished overnight. (Bowell, 2021, p. 30)

My response: This date, Saturday 26 January 1952, Black Saturday, was a date my mother referred to often in the stories she told me about Egypt youth growing up in Egypt. She was 12 years old when this incident happened and she speaks of the devastation of the city and the loss of the great landmarks – The Opera Square, Cicurel, the Casino, Shepherd's Hotel and many, many more. It was a revolt against British occupation. "Les anglais" ... This moment paved the way for the 1956 revolutionary military coup that rid the British and all other foreigners from Egypt. Nasser's grand project of spreading Arab Nationalism across the Middle East and North Africa had begun.

Many years later I heard the same story from a British friend at an Irish wake, who told me the same story from his perspective as a young boy growing up in England and listening to this news on the radio, something that had marked him.

Suitcases

My father took over a couple of suitcases and stuffed them with his favorite items. One bag, for example, was crammed with his books—prayer books, dozens, and dozens of them, some so old and tattered they could have been holy relics. Their pages were so frail and withered that I didn't dare go near them, for fear that they would tear at the slightest touch. I knew from an early age that they were my father's most precious possessions, so there was never a question of leaving them behind—not even the oldest, most battered one among them (Lagnado, 176).

I Tried to Speak

I tried to speak to him of Alexandria, of time lost and lost worlds, of the end when the end came, of Monsieur Costa and Montefeltro and Aldo Kohn, of Lotte and Aunt Flora and lives so far away now. He cut me short and made a disparaging motion with his hand, as if to dismiss a bad odor. "That was rubbish. I live in the present," he said almost vexed by my nostalgia. "Siamo o non siamo?" he asked, standing up to stretch his muscles, then pointing to the first owl of the evening. (André Aciman, Out of Cairo, p.5)

My response: It's uncanny how many times I've heard a similar story again and again. What was it about this past that people felt so ambivalent / torn about recounting? How did they live with what seemed to be an inherent conflict in people's alliances with their nation / home ... (explore this idea).

Cairo's Memory Lives

Cairo's memory lives largely in the names of its streets and squares, all of which have been changed. Ismaila Square, the business centre of Cairo, has always been an important landmark and square has made history on many occasions. (Bowell, p. 43)

My response: The last time I travelled with my mother, I was 14 years old. We went to Egypt and stayed with my mother's (Muslim) cousin Kawsar. One generation removed, Kawsar's

mother, my mother's aunt Victoria, married a Muslim man. By default, her children were considered Muslim and their Jewish heritage never to be spoken about again.

I remember tante Victoria. My mother spoke of her often – “c'était la seule dans la famille qui me recevez”, she would say.

When my mother went back to Egypt in 1982, she was devastated and disappointed that the Cairo she knew and remembered, was gone. Everything had changed. street names, the demographics, the crowded streets, the shops and cinema, the beaches in Alexandria, the corniche, and the traffic! Everything had changed.

Appendix IX – Exhibition Design

Gallery Produit Rien. Exhibition space design. Sketches and inspirational art installation.

All works below by Myriam Rafla and presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Social Sciences & Humanities) at Concordia University.

All works were produced between 2022 – 2023 and exhibited from October 26 – 29 2023 at Gallery Produit Rien, 6909 Marconi St., Montreal, Quebec.

2 x Video Wall:

Golden Circles, Global Diaspora: 2m30sec.

Mother, Mother: 1m52sec.

3 x 32” TV Monitors Vertical projection.

Tryptic:

Haute Couture. Video Loop. 1min.

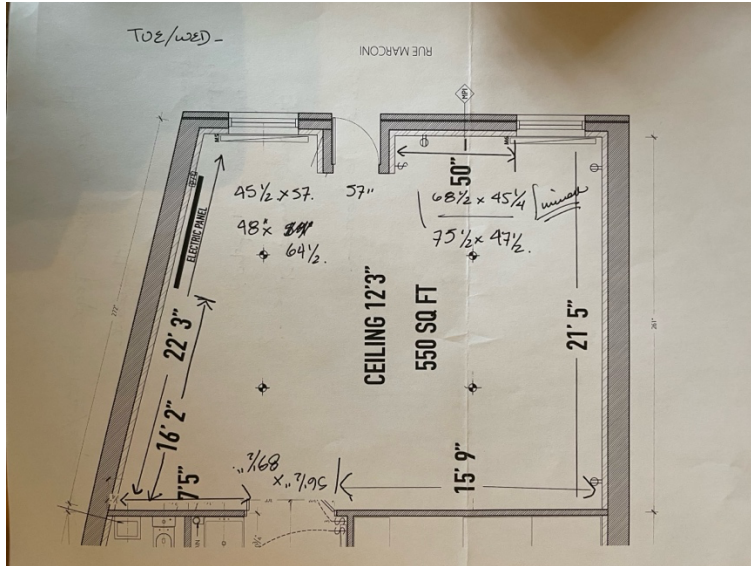
Blue Pearl. Video Loop. 57sec.

Beige Dentelle. Video Loop. 50sec.

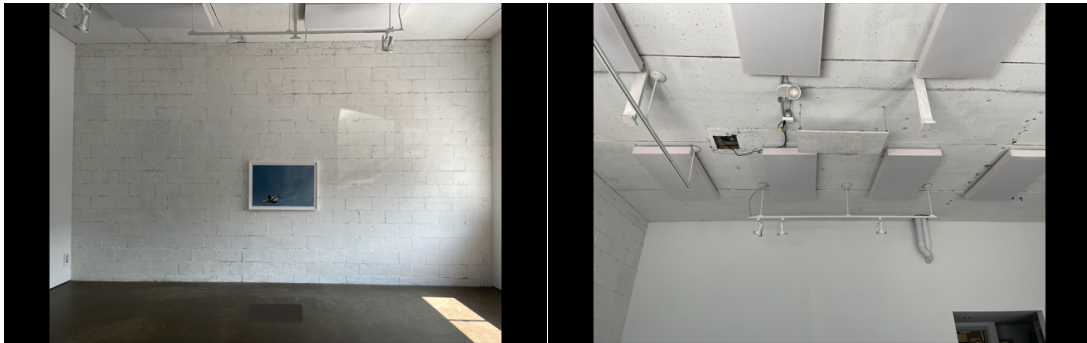
1 x 32” TV Monitor. Horizontal projection.

Kalthoum wa Mourad. Video Loop. 22sec.

Paper Quilt: 8 x 20”x20” Print. Cotton Paper. Woven by hand.

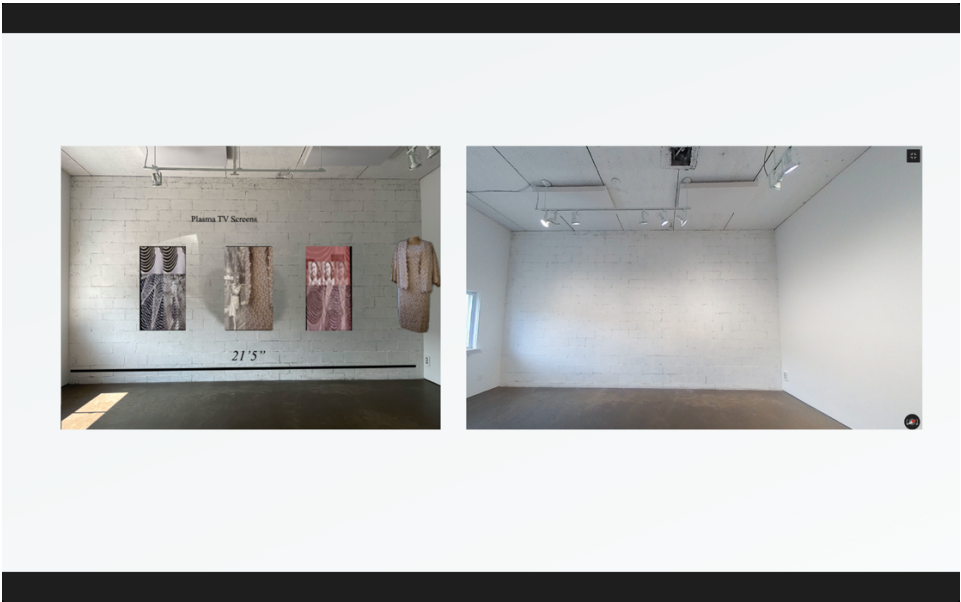


Art Gallery. Floor plan.





Empty space mock ups.





Split screen video wall and printed quilt on paper.



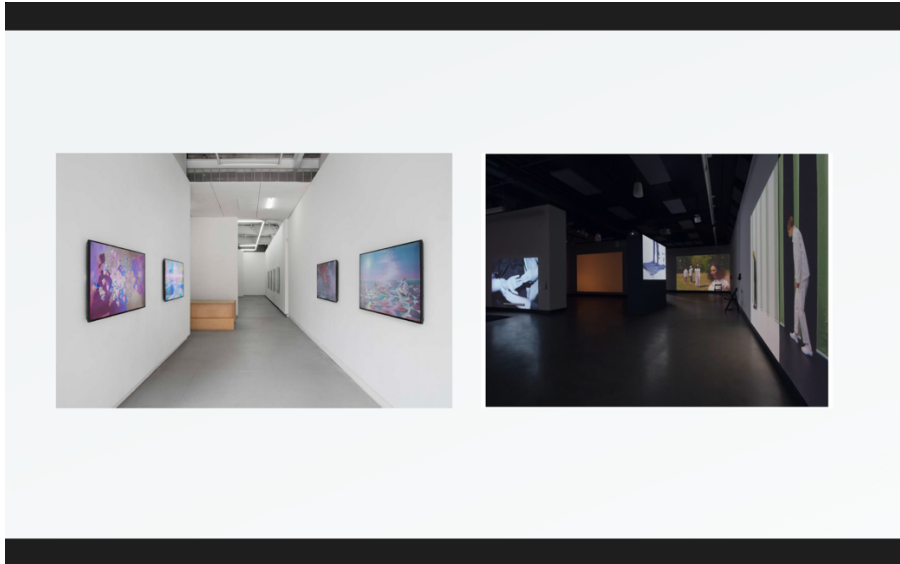
Projection test.



Mother's dresses.



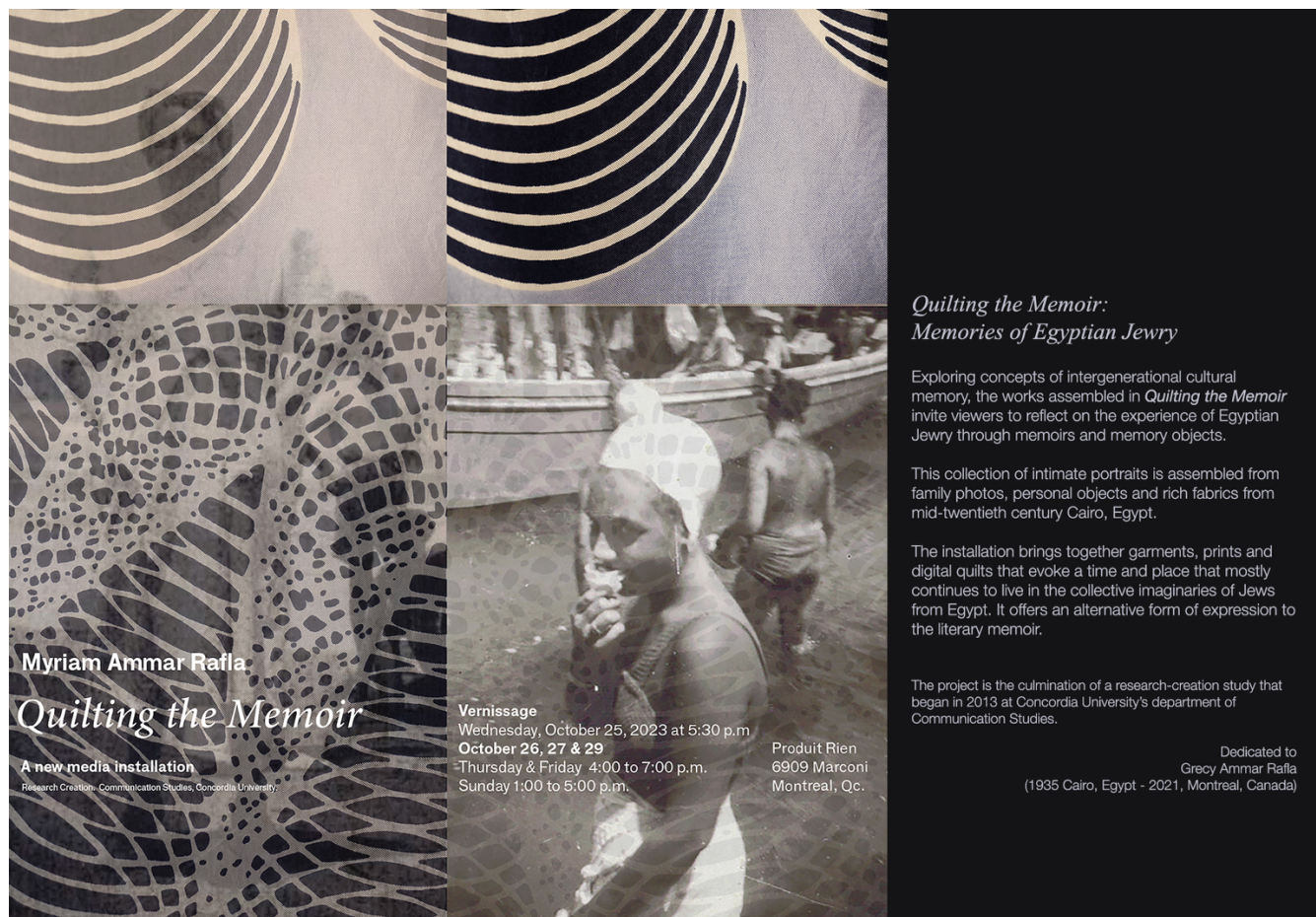
New Museum. NYC. 2019
Exhibition name, unknown.



New Museum and space unknown. Exhibition name, unknown.



Assemblages.
Angela Melitopoulos and Maurizio Lazzarato.
Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź



Quilting the Memoir. Exhibition invitation.
October 26-29, 2023

Appendix X - The Exhibition - Documentation

"We were witnessing the end of a way of life that many would look back on with a mixture of bitterness and longing".
Lucette Lagnado, *The Man with the White Sharkskin Suit* (2008)

It's within this context that "Quilting the Memoir: Memories of Egyptian Jewry" emerges, seeking to reassemble the fragments of collective memory. With this project, I explore concepts of intergenerational cultural memory through engagement with photographs, memoirs, and media. I consider forms of life-storytelling as both extensions and alternative expressions to the literary memoir.

In the creation of the digital quilts, I drew inspiration from two literary memoirs written by exilic Jews from Egypt. The first, *Out of Egypt: A Memoir*, by André Aciman was one of the earliest memoirs to be written by an exiled Jewish Egyptian. *The Man with the White Sharkskin Suit: My Family's Exodus from Old Cairo to the New World* written by Lucette Lagnado was particularly influential. Both these memoirs touched me deeply as it was the first time I saw, heard and felt my family's history represented in a way that was familiar and true to me.

Jewish presence in Egypt has experienced periods of coexistence, prosperity, and also challenges. These life stories are a testament to the complexity of history, culture and identity and the way we negotiate our way through them. They are a reminder that memory is a dynamic living force that travels through time, people, place, and things. Much like memory, photographs possess a dynamic energy, accompanying us on our journey and transporting us back to the moments and locations from which they originated.

Traditionally quilts are personal, handcrafted artifacts that are shared from one generation to another. Inspired by rich traditions in Egyptian and North American quilt designs, the artwork resonates with the vibrant Jewish presence that once thrived within the cosmopolitan cities of Cairo and Alexandria.

This series of digital quilts offer an intimate family portrait that recalls a time and place that continues to inhabit the collective imaginary of Jews from Egypt. Each quilt is a patchwork of abstract animated images that range from 10 to 80 seconds in length. They explore concepts of memory through processes of mediation, remediation and transmission. The series invites the viewer into an affective memory space as a means of exploring their own relationship to memories, materiality and media.

The project is the culmination of a research-creation study that began in 2013 at Concordia University's department of Communication Studies.

Dedicated to
Grecy Ammar Rafia
(1935 Cairo, Egypt - 2021, Montreal, Canada)

Exhibition Text.



Video Walls:

Mother, Mother (left), *Golden Circles, Global Diaspora* (right)
with Hermes Scarf - "Eperon d'Or".



Scarves:

Mother, Mother & Golden Circles – Global Diaspora (Hermes) - “Eperon d’Or”



Tryptic: TV Monitors – *Haute Couture*, *Blue Pearl* and *Beige Dentelle* (left)

Video Wall: *Mother, Mother* (right) with Scarf



Tryptic: TV Monitors – *Haute Couture*, *Blue Pearl* and *Beige Dentelle* (Right)

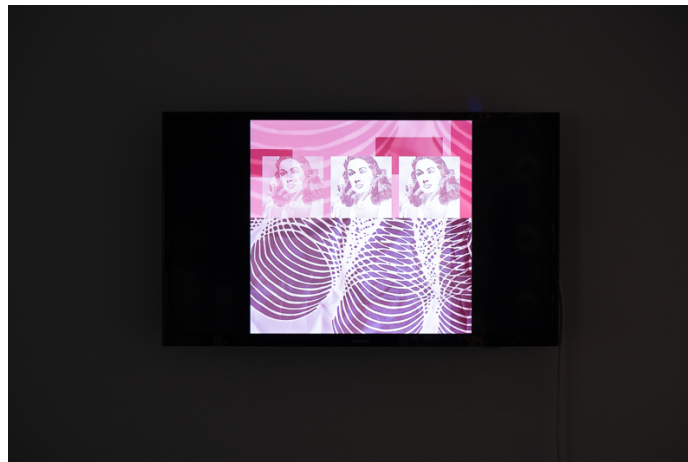
Printed Quilt: 6 x 20" x 20" photo prints on cotton paper stitched together with sewing threads and hung as one piece from the ceiling.



Tryptic: TV Monitors – *Haute Couture*, *Blue Pearl* and *Beige Dentelle*



Tryptic: TV Monitors – *Haute Couture*, *Blue Pearl* and *Beige Dentelle* (Details)



THE END