

 KHABAR
KESLAN



ISSUE 2.
PASSAGE

cover art

mohamed khalid
@yesyessmk

contributing designers

knar hovakimyan
@knchuck

leila peinado
@ready2disco

okacha
@petitokacha

playlist

jackson allers



editors

omar alhashani
fala al urfali
oya rose aktas
audri augenbraum
hamza bilbeisi
james bowker
ali d.n.
yousif kalian
taylor m. moore
orla o'sullivan
tamara rasamny

contributing editors

michael carbone
patrick duffey
poppy ellard
bergen hendrickson



Contributors

Iman Abbato is a Sudanese political science student by day; and a visual artist, photographer and videographer by night. She is based between the crowded streets of Toronto and Cairo.

As a disillusioned idealist, **Marsya Abdulghani** constantly daydreams of endless possibilities of the future. She believes in how art and design go hand in hand to create a better society through the conscious decisions to reflect and evaluate, to become better. With a background in interior design and art history from VCU Qatar, she aims to integrate various disciplines to create better solutions.

Aziza Afzal is a Pakistani American, Quaker, and Muslim writer, performer, and collaborator currently based in Baltimore, MD.

Sarah Ahmed is a creative based in Abu Dhabi and the founder of the MENA e-mag and online creatives' community, *Jafat El Aqlam*. When she's not stressing out about meeting self-made deadlines, she experiments with glitch art, film photography or watercolor; sends postcards to strangers, publishes zines and waters her plants. Her art process involves experimenting with different traditional and digital mediums, and usually revolves around nostalgia and finding beauty in the mundane.

Omar Alhashani is the founder of *Khabar Keslan*. Born in Saudi Arabia, raised in Beirut, and graduated from Reed College, Omar now lives between Washington DC and New York City.

Jackson Allers is a filmmaker, music journalist, and broadcaster based in Lebanon for over 11-years. He directs and shoots documentaries about the subcultures around him for outlets like Netflix, VICE, BBC World Service, Radical Media, Red Bull Music Academy, and Boiler Room, and for 2-years has hosted a monthly international Red Bull Music Acad-

emy Radio program that exposes music from Lebanon and the region. Jackson is also a longtime member of the region's only all-vinyl funk and soul DJ collective—the Beirut Groove Collective. Through a commitment to overthrowing the system, he has embarked on a new wave of labor filmmaking.

Ammar Alqamash is a Yemeni interdisciplinary artist based in Doha. An investigational attitude and resilience among mediums comprise the bedrock of Alqamash's practice. His work is based on expressive graphics art, time-based media, and photography. Alqamash examines connotation of time, space, and belonging. How does one preserve romance that is on the verge of disintegration? Alqamash aims to capture these hopeful circumstances, both within the architectural realm and the human body.

As young as 10 years old, **Ahmed Alrefaie** started developing an interest in art and its differing forms. The Kuwaiti artist started with sketches, and developed his style as a an illustrator and graphic designer. He spends his time creating art that revives the Arabian culture and tradition in a more modern light.

Fatima Al Suwaidi is an architectural engineering student living in Dubai, author of *When We Wonder*. Her work has previously appeared in MICRO//MACRO zine by Nu Lit House and others. She is currently working on her second book.

Audri Augenbraum is a New York based researcher at Columbia University's Interdisciplinary Center for Innovative Theory and Empirics, where she works with oral histories of Tunisia's post-revolutionary transition. She is interested in mobile populations and the states that seek to control them, including pirates, migrant workers, and diasporic elites. Her work has been published in *The New Inquiry* and the Oral History Review blog.

Hélé Béji was born in 1948 in the city of Tunis (Tunisia) and grew up in a family (Ben Ammar) who took part in the struggle for independence from French colonialism. She is published widely in Tunisia and France. These days, Hele is a member of the executive Committee of Tunisie Alternatives, Tunisia Alternatives, and Think and Do. She is also the current president of the College International de Tunis, an NGO she founded in 1998.

Linnea Bennett is a freelance writer based in Washington, D.C. Her work has been published in state and national outlets, including *Forbes* and *The Hill*. Originally from Phoenix, Arizona, Bennett spent a year teaching in Karabük, Turkey on a Fulbright scholarship. She is an avid fan and ardent critic of country music.

Hamza Bilbeisi is a short story writer from Amman, Jordan. He primarily distributes his work through Instagram (@ketabhamza) and hopes he can help form a community for young creatives from the MENA region to also put forward their creative outlets.

Ajna Biya is a Saudi writer and artist, who uses satire to portray her social experiences, and her adaptation to Saudi cultural norms. In her sarcastic comedic style, she describes personal incidents that her memories hold dear. Throughout her 25 years in Saudi, she has developed a healthy sense of humor which has guided and helped her grow into the Saudi environment, which she loves and calls home.

Eden Chinn is a first generation American, half Jewish artist and photographer born and raised in New York City, currently pursuing her undergraduate degree in Art History at Reed College. Her photography focuses on the performance of identity for the camera as a source of creative collaboration and communication, self-knowledge, and self-actualization for women and femmes.

Raphael Cormack has a PhD in Arabic Literature from the University of Edinburgh. He is also the co-editor of *The Book of Khar-toum* (Comma Press) and has written for publications including the *London Review of Books*, *Apollo Magazine* and *The Scotsman*.

Amir H. Fallah was born in Tehran, Iran in 1979. He received his BFA from Maryland Institute College of Art in 2001 and his MFA from University of California Los Angeles in 2005. Fallah's artistic oeuvre encompasses painting, photography, sculpture, and installation combined with a visual vocabulary that includes collage and complex patterning. Fallah has exhibited widely across the United States and internationally.

Rima Hussein was born in Berlin and moved to the US because the Nazis there scared her. She now knows that there are Nazis here, too. *Bummer*.

Born in the UK, in 1995 but raised in Syria, **Entisar Mohannayeh** only returned to London in 2011. She is currently studying Fashion Illustration at the London College of Fashion. In parallel to her education, Mohannayeh is an avid gamer who is visually driven by video games such as Assassin's Creed, Gears of War, and Dishonored. This aesthetic stimulation is combined with an emotional response to the situation in Syria. Damascus had initially influenced her work with the positivity of its beauty, security, and religious harmony; however, after the conflict and the flight it precipitated, Mohannayeh's work darkened as a result of a damaged urban landscape and a deracinated history.

Priyanka Sacheti is a cultural writer currently transiting from the United States to India. Educated at Universities of Warwick and Oxford, United Kingdom, Priyanka previously lived in Muscat, Oman. She has published articles in various publica-

tions such as Gulf News, Brownbook, and Khaleejessque, with a special focus on art and gender. She's the author of three poetry volumes, and two of her short stories have been published in international anthologies celebrating Indian immigrant writing.

Adnan Samman is a musician and visual artist from Syria. He has lived between Jordan and Saudi Arabia since 2011. His work revolves around the unification of disparate images and forms, both imagery or sounds, to create alternate narratives to those shown in the media. In 2016, Adnan participated in a well received exhibition at the prestigious Central Saint Martins University in London.

Born in Tehran, and raised between Tehran and Dubai, **Mahya Soltani** is an Iranian graphic designer currently residing in Brooklyn, New York. She has received her bachelors degree in Multimedia Design from American University of Sharjah, and is currently pursuing her MFA at School of Visual Arts in New York. Her practice as a graphic designer and animator engages 'time' as a design tool challenging expectations and perceptions while delineating the existence of alternate realities.

Amina Soulimani is a 21 years old Moroccan poet, photographer and artist. She is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Social Sciences and African studies at the African Leadership University on the island of Mauritius. In writing, Amina managed to corral her existence into a precious prose narrative entitled "Beyond America" which can be read, lived and experienced. Yet, through her poetry and photography, Amina had been aiming to expand the dimensions of perception between Sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab world through in depth research on various elements, such as language, that constituted identities and wisdom within post-colonial states.

Jorge A. Rodríguez Solórzano is a writer, translator and chief editor of the forthcoming literature journal Moly. His translation work has appeared in *Khabar Keslan* and *Angelaki Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*. Jorge's interest in postcolonial history and thought originated at Reed College, where he majored in French and Francophone Literature. He is currently based in Los Angeles.

Yasmine Rukia is a no-normal radical thinking Muslim who dabbles in short stories. An Arabesque-American trying to explain the unexplainable, sometimes, always.

Lizzy Vartanian Collier is a London-based writer with a special interest in contemporary Middle Eastern Art. She has a BA in Art History and an MA in Contemporary Art and Art Theory of Asia and Africa from the School of Oriental and African Studies. She runs the Gallery Girl blog and has written for *After Nyne*, *Arteviste*, *Canvas Magazine*, *Harper's Bazaar Arabia*, *Ibraaz*, *Jdeed Magazine*, *Re-Orient*, and *Suitcase Magazine*. Lizzy is also curator of Arab Women Artists Now-AWAN 2018 (London).

Mohammad Zaza, a Syrian artist, was born in Riyadh in 1987 and currently resides in Brussels. Growing up in an artistic family, he started drawing and painting at an early age. After completing high school in Saudi Arabia, he moved to Syria in 2006 to study at the faculty of Fine Arts in Aleppo University. He held his first solo exhibition in 2008 and, after his graduation in 2010, was appointed as a painting teacher's assistant at the University until 2012. Besides painting on big canvases, Zaza also works on illustrations and animations. Mohammad has held 10 solo exhibitions in Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, in addition to his regular participation in many group shows and international art fairs.

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When you've moved more times than you can count, uprooted from very different soils, at some point, you'll get anxious. You'll stare longingly out a window, down a street, through a doorway. How can you know for certain that the life you're about to leave behind will keep on? Once you've left, does it stop existing altogether? Eventually, when your plane takes off or you pull out of the driveway, that last sliver of home in your periphery is replaced by clouds and wisps whizzing by. You're about to plant yourself anew—but until you're in the soil, do *you* exist? You're now in-between.

Our region is an ongoing migratory network with an ancient history, in which most of us—including many of the editors of this magazine—have participated. Some journeys are more violent than others. Some are voluntary, while others are the results of circumstance. But with every voyage comes a liminal moment wherein the anxiety subsides. While we move, wait, and reflect, an eerie quiet settles in, forcing us to confront our unknowns: a ritual that is, perhaps ironically, familiar and intimate.

The contributors to our third issue, *PASSAGE*, invite us to witness a diverse set of these confrontations. Their work shows us that time and memory defy our expectations, whether we seek to embrace growing older, finally realize our nation's autonomy, or discover the ghosts of past generations. They point out that new worlds, in the afterlife, in aliens, and in dreams, often resemble our own. They find home at their desks, in proverbs, among small possessions, at dinner parties, or nowhere at all. They highlight the creativity and empowerment that prevail in spite of forced displacement. Through their work, they render seemingly conflicting identities compatible.

PASSAGE illuminates the power of the in-between. It makes space for surprises—perhaps even beckoning them. It helps us remain open and welcome the unforeseen.

MOHAMMAD ZAZA

UNGROUND

ZAZA EXPLAINS HOW THESE PAINTINGS, WHICH SEEM SO OTHERWORLDLY, ARE IN FACT GROUNDED IN HIS CONVICTION THAT ALL THE ELEMENTS OF CREATION, BOTH NATURAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL, ARE ALREADY EXPRESSED IN THE UNIVERSE.

*The Redman's Journey II, 2015,
Acrylic on canvas, 200x250cm.*

**SPECIAL THANKS TO AGATA ZAZA
FOR FACILITATING THIS INTERVIEW.**

Omar Alhashani: What does the body mean for you in your paintings?

Mohammad Zaza: The body represents the complexity of the Creation.

What about the relationship between the body and machine?

The link between the two is very close. The machine is a new, modern tool created by humans to serve specific functions, and the body inspires its shape. More generally, technology developed by people always comes from shapes and ideas that already exist in nature. No new concept will ever come from outside our planet.

How do you conceptualize and execute your paintings?

When I start working on a painting, I have a general impression in my mind about the main, final shape it will take, which comes from the space and the initial abstract lines that I put on the canvas. The construction phase starts with a lot of overlapping colors and layers, and ends with specific shapes that are the collaboration between imagination and the initial abstract.

For a viewer, your paintings convey an ever-changing dreamscape. What relationship do they have to reality?

All the artworks come from and are part of it. My approach, when I try to express an idea on the painting in my own language, is to press reality, the perspective, the far and the close, into one image. By letting the elements fly inside the painting in order to create a new circular gravity, I aim at reinventing the configuration of reality.



Altawaf in a Parallel Universe, 2015, Acrylic on canvas, 200x150cm.



A Date with the Creator, 2016, Acrylic on canvas, 170x150cm.



Solo II Istanbul, 2016, Acrylic on canvas, 150x170cm.

A Prayer, 2016, Acrylic on canvas, 170x150cm.



Do you see any problems with art in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf at large?

There has been, of course, huge growth in the Saudi art scene in the past five years. This happened thanks to private initiatives, which encouraged the opening of galleries, various art spaces offering workshops and related cultural activities, with a focus on visual art. But, very often, art in the Middle East is seen as something prestigious, instead of people looking at it as a genuine way of expression. A larger effort should be put into art education to develop sensitivity to artistic creation.

The sense of movement in your work is phenomenal. Is that important to you?

Movement is at the origin of the shape and, by its impulse, affects the form and the structure of everything. The shape then matches the need for this initial movement. I wish to depict the different stages of this movement and its influence on what surrounds us.

With regards to your technical and conceptual approach; which artists from home influence you?

When I was studying Fine Arts in Aleppo, I was influenced by the thinking and the colors of the Syrian artist Omar Hamdi. The expression of Marwan Kassab Bachi also played a prominent role in the search of my own work. But now, I cannot say that any artist from the Middle East influences me.

A Look at the Mountains, 2017, Acrylic and Oil on canvas, 110x130cm.



What is home?

It is a place where I can work with any barriers blocking my artistic expression.

Do your origins affect your artwork?

Of course. Whenever I travel, my identity is a window through which I look at the world. It defines my vision, ideas and my position towards other people. This applies to my personal life but also to my art.

As a traveling artist, how do you stay grounded?

I actually don't feel grounded! I don't aspire to find a stability, I am excited to see how can life still surprise me and bring me to new places, geographically but also in my inner self.

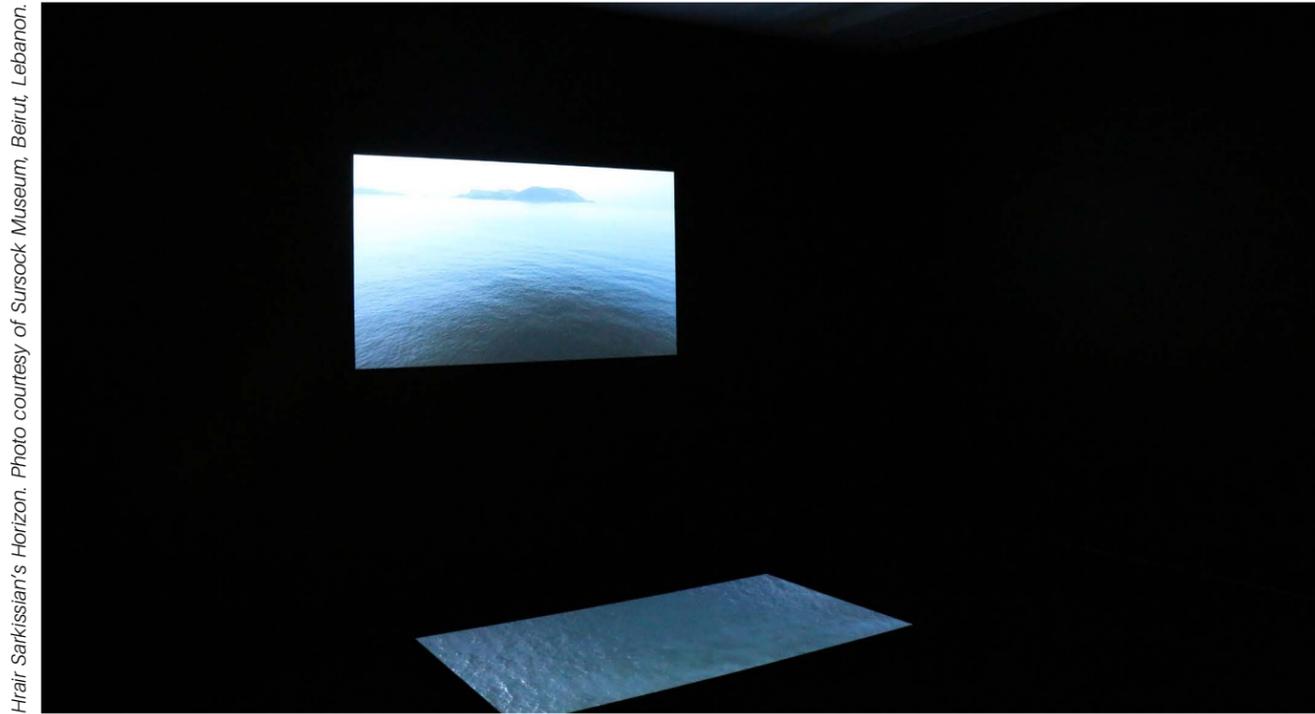
Why is migration important to you?

People are mirrors to each other. When I discovered that people are so different from

each other, I felt the urge to discover all their faces and lives, as a kind of pursuit to get a larger image of humanity. Seeing all those differences, but at the same time observing the same essence that lies in each of us, feeds me. Although this search is nourishing my art, it is most importantly a personal quest that I want to go after. ☺

THE JOURNEY

LIZZY VARTANIAN COLLIER



Hrair Sarkissian's *Horizon*. Photo courtesy of Surssock Museum, Beirut, Lebanon.

STEEPED IN THEMES OF LOSS, SYRIAN ART CONTINUES TO GROW

Inside a dark room on the ground floor of Beirut's Surssock Museum is a light blue screen. Projected onto the wall, and reflected onto another screen in the middle of a black carpet below, a film documents a journey taking place across a large body of water. In the distance lies an unidentifiable landmass that is easily seen but, despite moving forwards, never appears to get bigger.

Why is the film heading in this direction, and what lies on this island? There are no signs of human life; the sea is free of any other vehicle, although it is clear that, wherever this journey leads to, it is happening by

boat. It is possible that those on board this ship do not know what lies at their journey's terminus. This film, titled *Horizon*, is one part of Hrair Sarkissian's 'Homesick'—a two video installation displayed as individual halves, documenting the journey taken by those fleeing conflict across the Mycale strait from Kas in Turkey to the Greek island of Megisti.

Many Syrian artists have been forced to leave their homeland, relocating across the Middle East and further afield to find safety, unable to come back home. Sarkissian himself left Damascus in 2008 and has not returned to Syria since.

Across the corridor, opposite tranquility, a more violent and destructive pair of films play in a similarly dark exhibition space. Projected onto a large screen on the central wall is a house in Damascus. The family home is falling apart, with parts of the building crumbling into dozens of pieces as its foundations struggle to support itself. This building is a model of Sarkissian's childhood home in Damascus. To the right, on the adjacent wall, the artist can be seen violently attacking something with a hammer. We are unable to see what he is striking, but by being positioned so close to the projection of the damaged house, it is almost certain that he is destroying his former abode. In the film he appears distressed, annoyed even. The anger that he has manifested on screen and through violence may even be a result of complete despair. As is reflected in the exhibition guide, together the films are: "both an act of catharsis and reclamation of agency at the same time: to destroy before others destroy you." What makes the whole sequence even more impactful, is knowing that Sarkissian's parents still reside in this Damascene house.

The exhibition in Beirut is a response to the war in Syria. While the two parts of the installation appear to juxtapose each other with one being aggressive, and the other being comparably gentler, together they portray a sense of loss and trepidation. While *Horizon* seems lighter on the surface, in reality, it is just the beginning of an ongoing journey that is often unfamiliar and dangerous: the beginning of life as a refugee.

Sarkissian's exhibition in Beirut is just one display of the situation of Syrian artists in Lebanon. In Aley, only 15 km north of Beirut, lies an art residency programme that provides a space for Syrian refugees living in Lebanon to create artwork. Art Residence Aley was set

up by Raghad Mardini in 2012: "It's a space of freedom and hope for every young Syrian artist," she says of the project. The programme occurs inside a 200-year old stable, which Mardini discovered in ruins in March 2011. The building had been destroyed during the Lebanese civil war, but Mardini, who had trained as a civil engineer, saw beauty in its remains. After a year-long restoration effort, Art Residence Aley opened its doors in April 2012. Much like the Syrian situation, Mardini describes the restoration project as emblematic of the artistic programme that now takes place in its grounds: "I saw the opportunity to turn the stables into something beautiful and also symbolic: ruined and in trouble but still possessing an inner beauty it was impossible to mistake, and which the right amount of love and energy could revive into something productive and new."

Art Residence Aley hosts artists for four-week residencies, providing the materials and daily necessities required for producing artwork and allowing artists to interact with each other. The non-profit organization has created a collective community of Syrian artists from different regions and different religious and social backgrounds, who live together peacefully in the renovated stables in Aley.

In *Art of Resilience*, a film about the programme, Mahmoud Majdal, who was a resident in December 2013 says: "This place was like oxygen to me with its spirit, people. This place has freed me." Coming from a zone of conflict, danger, and uncertainty, it is no surprise that the displaced artists, who make Aley their home, are re-energized inside its walls. Not only does Art Residence Aley provide a space for art making, but it also commissions projects for young Syrian artists, and exhibits the artworks produced during the residencies in galleries



Hrair Sarkissian's *Homesick*. Photo courtesy of Sursock Museum, Beirut, Lebanon.

across Lebanon and abroad. At the end of their stay, each artist leaves one artwork for Art Residence Aley, allowing the organization to build a unique collection of Syrian Art during a critical moment in Syrian history.

The artists who stay in Aley are not only encouraged to interact with each other but also the broader local community, creating an on-going interactive platform between Syrian artists and the world: "It pushed me to create more, the residence was my release," says Rabee Kiwan (June 2012). Art Residence Aley has collaborated to exhibit in Lebanon, Jordan, and Kuwait, and has also hosted poetry evenings, film screenings and performances. Art Residence Aley has also recently generated an extension to the project in Lebanon, in Litehouse Gallery London, exposing Syrian artists to western audiences.

Litehouse Gallery was born following Mardini's decision to relocate to London with

her children in 2015. On arriving in the UK, Mardini realized there was a gap to fill in representing Syrian art and artists in London, where they had been overlooked despite being highly appreciated in auction houses.

She went on to take further study, gaining a masters degree in Museums, Galleries, and Contemporary Culture with the aim of developing a space for Syrian artists within the London market. While Art Residence Aley remains in operation in Lebanon; in the UK, Litehouse Gallery is a platform that is becoming a central hub for Syrian artists in London through cooperation with local institutions. Having launched formally in February 2017, Litehouse not only operates as a gallery but also has an educational strand, organizing talks, workshops, and exhibitions to increase the exposure of Syrian art.

Litehouse is the only gallery in Britain dedicated to showcasing emerging contemporary

artists from Syria. The space also functions as a platform to engage in new ideas and perspectives, aiming to form dialogues with diverse audiences. Activities touch upon subjects of politics, war, exile, dreams, and visions, which portray the real image of modern Syria, bridging British and Syrian cultures through collaborative educational programs and workshops with artists from both backgrounds. Litehouse is forming a strong identity that stands for freedom of expression and integrity, addressing the misconceptions that surround Syrian people and their present predicament. So far exhibitions have taken place at the Arab British Centre as well as in the residences of private London-based collectors. The gallery has also participated in conferences globally, most recently in Japan.

Echoing Litehouse's introduction of contemporary Syrian artists to London earlier this year, the British Museum has acknowledged the value of contemporary Syrian art in an exhibition of artworks on paper titled *Living Histories*. The show includes posters, prints, drawings and photographs that are, as the exhibition's title indicates, living histories. The powerful works speak of their time, confronting the audience with the Syrian situation from the perspective of those directly affected by the war since the beginning of the 2011 uprising.

The most striking works on display are entirely anonymous. Alshaab AlSORI Aref Tarekh (*The Syrian People Know Their Way*) is a collective of unknown artists who circulate posters digitally via social media platforms for activists to download and print for use in demonstrations and to paste on walls in public spaces. It is possible that the posters were never intended to be read as works of art at all. However, displayed in the British Museum,

the political objects, which once required its primary audience to physically move the posters from the digital to the physical dimension, gain an additional layer of meaning and history. From having once been used to further political ideologies in the Middle East, they are now being exhibited behind a glass screen in Britain, confronting a western audience with a situation that most of them can't relate to. These posters, like Sarkissian's film in Beirut, evoke violence, despair, and pain. Amongst the Alshaab AlSORI Aref Tarekh papers on display in London, screaming faces, a bleeding Syrian flag, propaganda statements, and people in cages appear as a constant. The posters have been given evocative titles like *The Struggle for our Sake*, *Prepare for Rebellion*, and *Self-Defense is a Legal Right and Freedom*. The prints evoke desperation and suffering, presenting the viewer with a powerful manifestation of emotion that cannot be ignored or overlooked.

Also on display in the British Museum exhibition are works by Fadi Yazigi on rice paper. "I can't stop working; art is not only part of my survival – but it's also a way of looking for a solution," says Yazigi. The artist displays eight characters in eight different contorted positions. Their posture is strained, and their poses appear uncomfortable, but the expressions on their faces seem light, some are even smiling. By using rice paper, the artist, who still lives in Damascus, demonstrates his perseverance and determination to continue to create art despite the struggles and hardships during a time where art supplies are limited and difficult to acquire.

Displayed alongside the works on paper at the British Museum are two sculptural series by Issam Kourbaj. *Dark Water*, *Burning World*,

consists of a fleet of miniature boats that have been constructed out of “burned matchsticks and the mudguards of old bicycles.” They echo the voyage documented in Sarkissian’s video, except this time what the viewer is presented with is not so calm, or easy on the eye. Instead of pale blue, clear waters, Kourbaj exhibits burnt-out matchsticks and fragile vessels that have been battered and bruised. The dangerous materials from which these boats have been made illustrate the desperate measures and lengths people go to to escape the war. Born and trained in Damascus, Kourbaj now teaches at Cambridge University, yet his work is deeply tied to his upbringing in Syria and the destruction of his cultural heritage. The installation of boats in the British Museum reflects the terrifying passage made by Syrians fleeing violence via the sea between Turkey and Greece, while the artist’s choice of material stresses the severity and desperation of the journey made by those left with no choice but to flee from their homeland.

Alongside Kourbaj’s tortured ships is a set of objects that are incredibly harrowing. Lost consists of clothes that have been dripped in plaster, turning soft, protective garments into hard, lifeless phantoms haunting the exhibition space. On top of the cold, white clothing inscriptions are written in Arabic and Greek, reflecting the languages spoken in the departure zone and the arrival destination. These garments are lifeless ghosts that represent true horror. They are the remnants

left of children who have lost their lives while attempting to reach safety in Lesbos. While *Lost* is an alarming and shocking illustration of death, it is also a frank and honest comment on the reality of real consequences met by those desperate to escape war.

During this summer’s Shubbak Festival in London, Kourbaj also presented a one-day installation/performance entitled *Unearthed*. The work involved laying down hundreds of old hardback books across the floor of the British Museum’s Great Court. These books had each been marked with a single black line, reflecting the Syrian tradition of mourning the deceased in photographs by placing a black line over the dead. As a result of the conflict in Syria, many lives are being lost without ever being mourned. Through his performance, Kourbaj symbolically grieves the lives that have been lost to the war. Throughout the daylong performance, the number of books laid across the museum floor increased to a shocking degree, confronting the predominantly British audience with the reality of death in the artist’s region.

From Sarkissian to Kourbaj, dozens of Syrian artists who have been forced to leave their homeland are finding ways to make art that illustrate their predicament. By using a visual language to communicate what is often too complicated to tell people with words, these artists visually inform their audiences of the realities faced in an urgent situation. 🌟

SEVEN

YASMINE RUKIA

i.
we are the ISIS flag design
trapped
between
black and white
interpretations
of our reflection

ii.
in the milky white water of my perspiration
you can taste
the diasporic salt of my pores
seeping through broken drinking-glass
as you swirl around
sun and moon
drunk

iii.
the fireworks break the silence of dusk
and all I can imagine is shrapnel
and my rabbit
my white rabbit
caged under pine
with no branch to catch bullets
the sirens broke today

iv.
a dusty fez perched on mounted camel
head
above blue eye that wards off evil
you grab the fez and scatter dust like
farmers seed
you place the red dome a-top your head
and swear you can fly home
straight to heaven

v.
the women march in black
their cloaks catch wind
and wave like flags
like my grandmother
who waves from home
we cradled hands to heart
to gaping sky
and recite
stolen flag design

vi.
a record player scratches
plumes of sweet smoke
the sound calls to the birds,
asfour, asfour,
my hands have seven fingers
but they are enough to
hold you
home
white rabbit

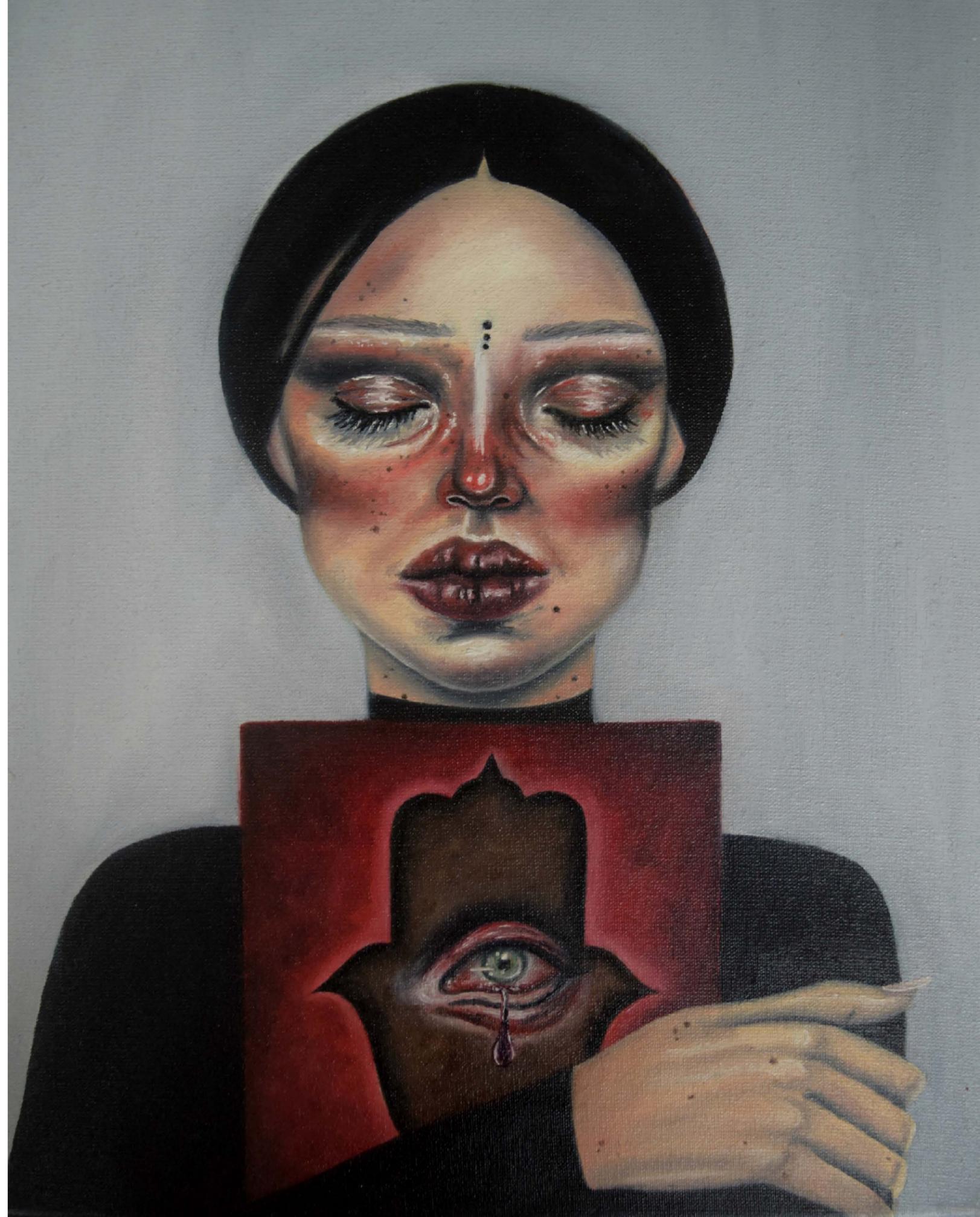
vii.
you win the lottery of random selection
with your beard and fez
seven fingers clutching
blonde camel coat
and blue eye
sticky with perspiration
the milky way is brightest over Texas
we see the reflection of you
no branches to catch bullets
no flags to catch wind
no rabbits to take home
but a woman singing
asfour, asfour
between black battalions
of white guards
on your way to heaven

THE UNTOLD STORY

ENTISAR MOHANNAYEH

I believe that everyone has a dark side, but most won't acknowledge it. My paintings depict cropped details of women in unusual situations where they seem to be distraught, terrified and tortured. The devil features in my work as the symbol of evil and darkness, characteristic of the chaos caused by human beings.

I focus on the harsh reality of life, a response seen through the characters populating my works and their surroundings. They are more than just subjects. Each face has a story to be interpreted by the viewer themselves.





EVERYONE IN BETWEEN

LINNEA BENNETT



FOLK SONGS SHARE A STAGE,
BUT CAN THEY BUILD A BRIDGE?

When I first met Bashar Balleh on a smoky patio above Istanbul in the early hours of 2016, it was by accident.

A New Year's Eve snowstorm had turned the city into a picturesque postcard for New Year's Day, but by January 2, the soft powder had melted and frozen into alternating streets of slush and ice. Well into the evening, with soaking socks and a thin winter coat, I—and most of the city—were looking for something or someplace warm.

That hunt had led me to a café on İstiklal Caddesi, Istanbul's most lively street, where I tagged along with a group of American ex-pats that happened to be meeting up with friends of Balleh. After a long day out in the cold, we were all eager for glasses of hot *çay* and—depending on which language you spoke—hookah, shisha, or nargile.

As we nestled in to our crowded table, I was introduced to Balleh, seated directly to my left. With an infectious smile and comical disdain for his engineering

classes, he reminded me of the Turkish students I taught at a university six hours away.

As we continued to talk, however, it became clear Balleh's story was quite different from those of my students. He had come to Turkey by way of Syria, he told me, and was now stuck in Istanbul after two failed attempts to escape to Europe. He was attending university classes out of necessity, but what he really preferred was music.

"I used to teach flamenco, and I play guitar," Balleh said, pausing for a sip of *çay*. "And I'm in a band that plays country music."

I stared at him blankly. "Like, American country music?" I asked.

"Yeah, exactly. Like American country," he said, nodding toward my phone. "You should check us out on Facebook."

Ten months later, in a packed bar in Washington,

D.C., I saw Balleh again. He and his eight bandmates were wrapping up their first tour of the United States, and I had hurried across the city to catch their final show. The night's set list ranged from "Deep in the Heart of Texas" to a popular Arabic song about a Mediterranean Girl, and featured guitar, accordion, ukulele, violin, trumpet, saxophone, and drums. As the song ended, Balleh came to the front of the stage.

"Thank you for coming out," he said to the crowd, flashing the same smile from the café months before.

"We are Country for Syria!"

A FITTING HOME

Country for Syria is a musical collective in almost every sense of the word. Onstage, it is hard to see exactly where the band begins and ends. Some musicians contribute vocals to nearly every song; others focus on instrumentals. Some hop on and off of the stage when a song changes, a new instrument is needed, or a drink has been poured at the bar. Most of the time, though, their stage is a unified chaos.

"We have nine musicians who we would consider the full Country for Syria," Owen Harris, the band's accordionist, told me in an interview over Skype last summer. "But most of the time venues can't afford all nine of us, or our musicians are playing in other bands."

At various points in time, the group has housed members who identify as American, Syrian, Turkish, Czech, Kurdish, Spanish, and French. Their songs are performed in a mix of languages, though English is their only universal tongue. A large portion of the songs they play are American country,

but Syrian and Turkish songs are played too. If the range of musicians in Country for Syria is surprising, the band's home base is not. Istanbul is renowned for its centuries-long tradition of hosting international guests. While the Bosphorus divides the city into European and Asian continents, Istanbul's inhabitants seem to bridge them. Country for Syria's diversity of nationalities, instruments, and languages is a testament to Istanbul's power to provide common ground for cultures to come together and collaborate upon. The band's focus on Syria also speaks to Turkey's unique geographical position – in recent years, Turkey has absorbed more than three million refugees from Syria and other neighboring countries.

THE BEGINNING

Country for Syria started in 2015, after Harris encountered Balleh busking on a street corner in Beyoğlu – a neighborhood just next to Taksim square, where Balleh and I met.

As the band's two front men, Balleh and Harris make an unlikely musical duo. Balleh is a gentle lion of a human with a wide, easy grin and a mane of untamed curly hair. Some days, his curls are pulled back into a bun or covered with a beanie. Other days, he wears his hair loose so that it falls in every direction around him. Originally from



Live Show. Courtesy of Country for Syria.

Latakia, Syria, he brings an impassioned and joyous presence not just to the stage, but in every conversation around him.

Harris is more reserved than Balleh. He's from Sarasota, Florida, spent his college years in Asheville, North Carolina, and wears thin wire-framed glasses you'd expect to find on an esteemed professor twice his age. After an initial move to Turkey, followed by a stint teaching English in Eastern Europe, Harris made his way back to Istanbul to see if he could gather willing musicians to play what he envisioned as "Middle Eastern tango."

Tango was not what Harris ended up playing, however – at least not in this story. One night during a show, he and Balleh ran out of songs, so Harris suggested they try some country songs he knew by heart.

It was after this show that Harris began to wonder if country music might be an unexpected but fitting genre for connecting to Syrian and American audiences. Country music, he said, was born of the American Civil War as a mode for telling stories and for exploring themes of migration, loss, and longing in a region ravaged by conflict. This made it a good fit for a pair of musicians who hoped to shed light on similar stories from another country torn apart by war.

Playing songs that spoke to the Syrian experience was important to Balleh, but he had a complicated relationship with the way the world used the word "refugee."

"Syrians were being made out like a 'huddled mass,' or a desperate group, or something shapeless and de-individualized," he said of news coverage of refugees at the time. This narrative stripped refugees of their own agency, Balleh said, and ignored the various religions, ethnicities, and individual lives of the millions of people who had fled.

By playing songs alongside Syrians and for audiences of Syrians, and by using music born in the American South to empathize with the plight of millions in the Middle East, Harris and Balleh hoped their project would deconstruct the stereotypes associated with the word "refugee."

More importantly, they hoped to build a band that could become home to all sorts of identities—country music fans, refugees, Turks, Americans, Syrians, and everyone in between.

BLURRING LINES

At first, the crowds that showed up at Country for Syria's shows were puzzled. Was this band for Syrians, Americans, or someone else?

Initial crowds were often composed of one group of people, all Syrians or all Turks, said Harris. After they played a show, the band would tweak their songs to fit what it seemed the audience expected, only to find their next gig was for a bar full of Europeans. Striking the right balance of English, Turkish, and Arabic was hard.

Eventually, however, the group's complicated identity became less cumbersome. People liked their energy, their menagerie of instruments and languages, and their funky

renditions of familiar songs. Language, it seemed, mattered less than spirit. Rhythms and tones could be felt even if lyrics were not fully understood. Soon enough, the crowds at their shows began to mirror the members on stage: people from all over the world, united in a common curiosity and cause.

"Now there's a community of people who all come to our shows and sing all the songs, not just the one in their own language," Balleh wrote in an email. This community has brought Country for Syria new friendships and bandmates—and even love. Last year, Balleh married an American woman he had met at one of their shows.

Harris is also married, to fellow bandmate and ukulele player Başak Oktay (now Harris). Much like the city and band they love, their

marriage is a celebration of more than one culture; Oktay Harris is a Muslim Turk and Harris is Jewish American. In photos of their wedding ceremony this past summer, there is both a henna ceremony and a chuppah—all with a hint of country western flair.

BUILDING ON DIFFERENCE

While all of the members of Country for Syria call Istanbul home, their reasons for staying vary widely.

Harris and his Czech bandmate could live almost anywhere, but choose freely to live in Istanbul, says Oktay Harris. Oktay Harris says she came to Istanbul herself for better education opportunities within Turkey. For Balleh, Turkey is the only country he can currently reside in without risking his life.

His other options would be to return to Syria, or try a third time for a boat bound for Europe.

The bandmates' perceptions of their host country vary as well. In a Skype interview with Harris and Balleh this summer, Harris said discrimination can make Turkey an unsafe place for refugees – an idea to which Balleh sharply objected.

"Turkey is the ideal place for refugees," Balleh said, turning to Harris. "If I go to Europe and spend three years in a camp—this is bullshit. I'll spend three years of my life doing nothing."

The way the two pass through Turkey also speaks to their differences. Since learning Turkish, Balleh says he mostly passes as a Turk. But for Harris, even perfect Turkish

Band Watches Another Performance. Courtesy of Country for Syria.



Visiting Refugee Camp II. Courtesy of Country for Syria.



wouldn't hide the fact that he is a *yabancı*. These experiences might make it easy to put the bandmates into one-dimensional boxes of "Western" or "Middle Eastern" – but Harris says making music together has allowed the members of Country for Syria to breakdown stereotypes about one another's cultures.

"There's no stereotype about East or West that has rung true 100%, because so much is personal and depends on the way that culture makes itself manifest in ourselves," Harris wrote in an e-mail. "Working, living, and playing together has oddly taught us that those differences are both fundamental but also not as consequential as we might have thought before."

The band members' different backgrounds also influence their travel and the music they make. Last year, in an effort to highlight different marginalized communities living in Turkey, the band visited several refugee camps along Turkey's southern border. This included a trip to a camp that is now home to thousands of Yazidi Kurds who fled the Islamic State in Iraq. Talking with Yazidi children, and bearing witness to their profound trauma and resilience, inspired the title track of the band's new album, "Brave as a Pigeon," says Harris.

Earlier this year, the band penned a song called "In the States" in response to the Trump Administration's travel ban on seven majority-Muslim countries. The accompanying video opens with stories from band members and friends of the band discussing how the ban has impacted them, their families, and their spouses. Though their original music has taken on more political themes, Oktay Harris says the

band's goals have never been political. Their purpose is to shed light on the crisis in Syria and to give a voice to Syrian musicians and audiences.

"This is a humanitarian issue we want to point out," she said. "We don't want to lose that."

AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Despite the band's success, rising tensions in the bandmates' home and host countries pose questions about the future of Country for Syria.

This time last year, the band was finishing their first American tour. But in 2017, post-election of Donald Trump and several iterations of a travel ban, at least five band members would no longer be allowed back into the United States. Balleh and his wife hope to relocate to America one day pending approval of a spousal visa.

Turkey has also undergone immense change. Even before last summer's attempted coup, the country was mourning its worst terrorist attack in modern history and grappling with the results of an election that closely followed.

Tensions between Turkey and the United States have reached an all-time high, as both countries have banned nearly all visas to the other. Harris says he no longer outwardly identifies as American to strangers. He and Oktay Harris had plans to travel to the States for the holidays but, in light of visa restrictions, will stay in Turkey for now.

Last but not least, Istanbul is changing rapidly, too. Neighborhoods are growing

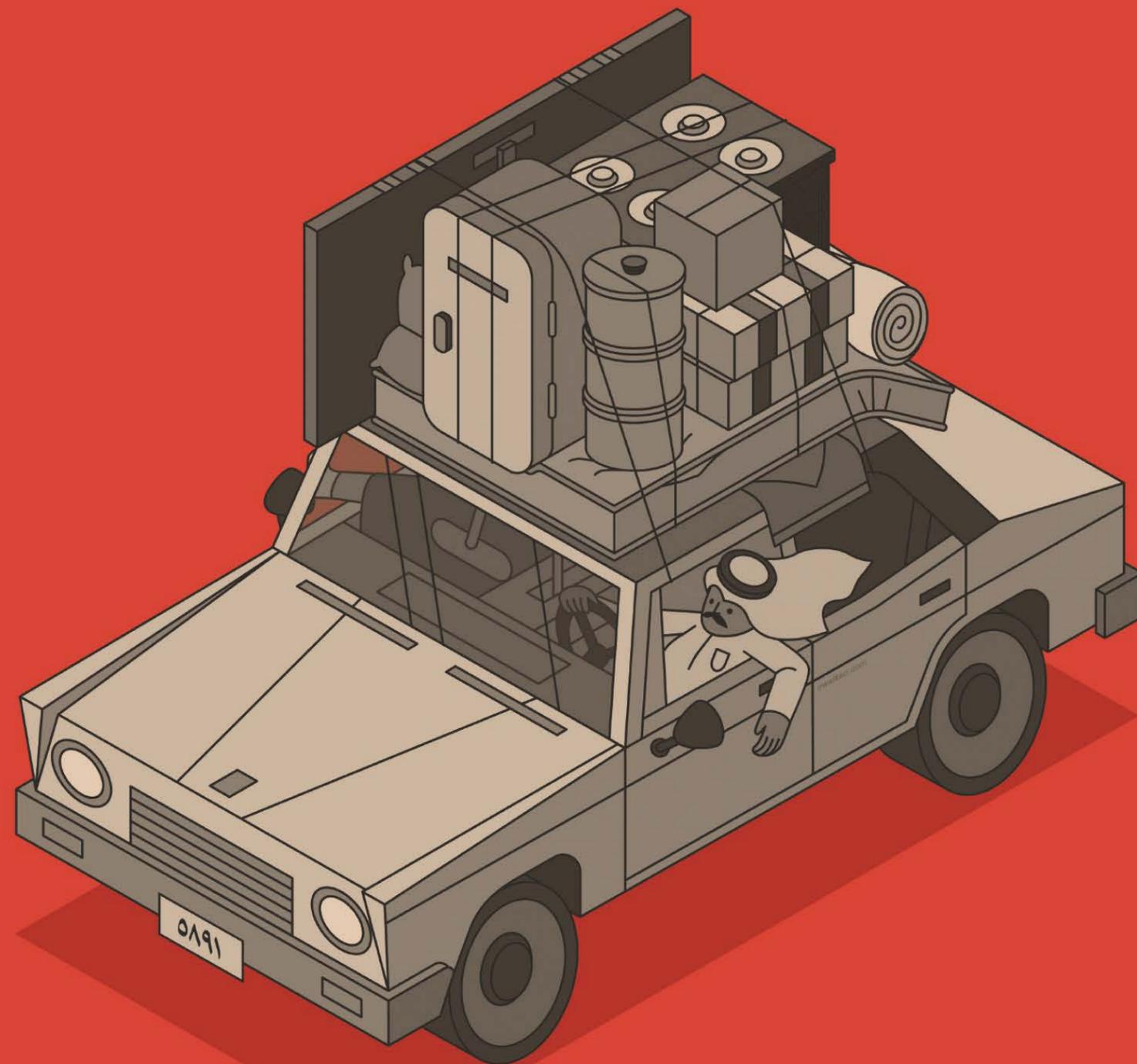


Owen Harris (left) and Bashar Balleh (right). Courtesy of Country for Syria.

more crowded, Taksim has been torn up by developers, and activity on Istiklal—the street where Balleh and I met nearly two years ago now—has been dampened by multiple terrorist attacks.

But even in the midst of all this tension, Country for Syria continues to play shows and draw crowds. On any given Friday night, the band members' Instagrams

are lit up with scenes from a Beyoğlu bar, a wedding near the Black Sea, or the Ambassador's residence in Ankara. Last summer when I asked Harris if he was worried about the band's future, he shook his head. The band's members have always come and gone; change has never been a challenge but a norm. As long as there are people willing to come together and play, he said, Country for Syria will still exist. ●



BLAST FROM THE PAST

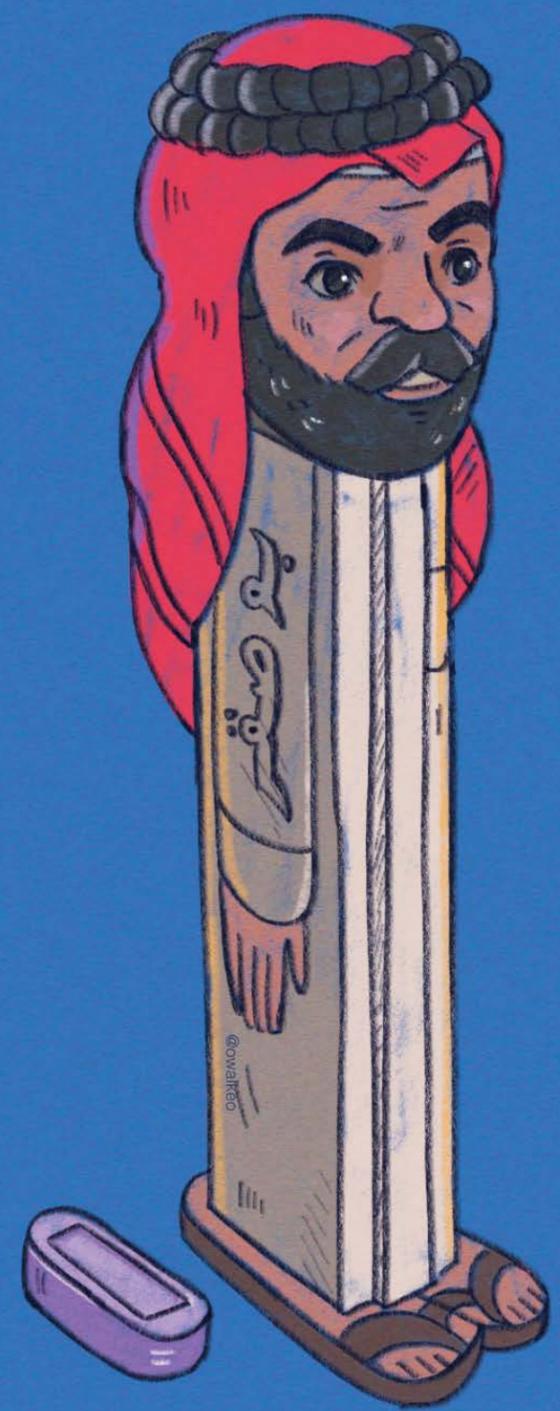
AHMED ALREFAIE

As an artist, I have ventured in experimenting with different artistic styles, but have found myself deeply involved in a theme that captures the Arabian culture and traditions.

My art revolves around bringing culture and tradition into the modern age. In this day and age, I find that we are slowly moving away from our cultural values; but by inviting tradition into a form of modern art, I hope to bridge this gap—or at least narrow it down.







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ALTERED STATES: THREE ESSAYS BY HÉLÉ BÉJI

JORGE A. RODRIGUEZ SOLORZANO & AUDRI AUGENBRAUM



Hélé Béji, fondatrice du Collège international de Tunis. Photo Axelle de Russe. Taken from [Le Figaro](#), December 2017.

HÉLÉ BÉJI EXPLORES THE DISSOCIATIVE FEELING OF TUNISIA'S TRANSITIONS

“To remain-leave is a hopeless mental state: if I am no longer colonized, and if I am not decolonized, what am I? Outside of secular oppression, but outside of the freedom of the soul. Nothing except the echo of this impasse can be discerned from the future.”

—Hélé Béji, *National Disenchantment: Essay on Colonization*

The word “decolonization” is often used to designate the historical period during which campaigns for national liberation across the world were fought against European imperial powers. In its verb form, “decolonize,” the term becomes a call to action among those seeking to dismantle white supremacy.

“Decolonize your mind,” “decolonize your body,” “decolonize your art” is to say: “resist their subjugation to racism.” Despite the wars fought against colonial rule and the official proclamations declaring its end, the struggles continue. This fact, as well as its renewed life as a call to action, evince the

persistence of colonialism. But, following Tunisian writer Hélé Béji, this is not to say that it is the same colonialism of the past.

The fact that colonialism did not end after national liberation campaigns restructures our notions of subjugation and freedom. This, in turn, pushes us to re-evaluate over a century of resistance. It is with the hope that revisiting past struggles will teach us about present ones that we publish these three essays, spanning a period of more than thirty years, that Béji has generously shared with Khabar Keslan, available for the first time to a general English language audience: [Decolonize Time](#) (2014), [Discourse of Identity](#) (1982), and [Tunisian Islam or Civil Islam](#) (2015).

For more than forty years, Hélé Béji has endeavored to understand the position of the subject living in a decolonized society, addressing the various forms of violence the nation state wages against its own people. Béji, whose intellectual career includes several books, philosophical essays, a novel, as well as hundreds of articles published in France and Tunisia, was born on April 1st 1948, in the former’s capital, to a family that participated in the Tunisian struggle for independence from French colonial rule. Béji moved to France to complete her university education, where she studied modern literature at La Sorbonne and was later named “professeur agrégé” in 1973. Her first book, *National Disenchantment: Essay on Decolonization* (1982), was awarded the Prix de l’Afrique méditerranéenne a year after its publication. Apart from her work as a political writer and novelist, Béji is also the founder and president of the Collège international de Tunis, established in 1998

with the aim of fostering open philosophical and social debate amidst the heavy police surveillance and censorship of the Zine El Abidine Ben Ali regime.

DECOLONIZE TIME

The first of the essays featured, “Decolonize Time,” was published three years after the Tunisian Revolution of 2011—the first of several revolutionary mass movements in North Africa and the Middle East that eventually came to be known as the ‘Arab Spring.’ Major news outlets in the West, like [The Economist](#), praised these movements for signaling the advent of pro-Western democracies in Muslim-majority countries. Over several months, hundreds of thousands of Tunisians across the country joined protests and peaceful sit-ins, where they often faced violent retaliation at the hands of state police forces. On January 14, protesters achieved the ouster of president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. This inaugurated a series of regime changes—a total of seven between 2011 and 2017—as Tunisians struggled to remain faithful to the objectives of the popular forces that rose up against dictatorship.

Béji’s description of the aftermath of Tunisia’s revolution gives a complex interpretation of these years, one that decidedly does not fulfill fantasies for a spring of democracies in the region. Instead, the revolution provoked a temporal maladjustment that led Tunisians to an important realization about their condition as historical actors: “the modern conscience, beyond the event itself, is not summarized by a simple threshold that one crosses, beyond which all that which existed beforehand disappears like a bad dream.” It surfaced a paradox of modernity—the persistence of a malaise following rejections

of tradition and legacy. Neither the end of the French protectorate in 1956 nor the end of Ben Ali's dictatorship in 2011 set up a blank slate. What was common to both of these tumultuous periods was a generalized discontent among Tunisians that reached across wide swaths of Tunisian society.

This discontent was linked to the duplicitous modernization narrative on which the infant nation staked its independence. A rivalry between two leaders negotiating with France, Habib Bourguiba and Salah Ben Youssef, nearly precipitated a civil war on the eve of the protectorate's termination. Bourguiba and Ben Youssef became near perfect foils: Bourguiba was a Western-educated gradualist [*étapiste*], while Ben Youssef delivered fiery sermons employing Islamic rhetoric to preach a total break with French involvement. Ultimately, Bourguiba became the republic's first president as Ben Youssef was forced to leave the country in exile to Egypt. The new leader of the nation lost no time in consolidating both the executive and legislative powers of the previous Ottoman monarch in his own office. In Bourguiba's own terms, he "waged a jihad on underdevelopment," often by subordinating Islamic institutions to French ones. His relationship to Islamist leaders was fraught.

The disenchantment Tunisians felt toward their government seemed to have only grown during the decades following Bourguiba's rule. In "Decolonize Time," progress and tradition, archaism and technology, past and present, liberty and slavery are not

mutually exclusive, not an either-or. On the contrary, Béji wants to emphasize how all of these often share a temporal plane. The revolutionary events of 2010-11 exacerbated this paradoxical situation. Progressives, traditionalists, and others across the political spectrum contributed to Tunisians' frustration with their present conditions. There was archaism in the technological age, progressive parties pushing for 'regressive' agendas. Individuals who had served under Ben Ali's regime and profited from it came together in the Bourguibist, anti-Islamist Nidaa Tounes party, and in unregulated private media outlets seeking to take down the Islamist-led coalition known as the Troika. Religious fundamentalism, often regarded as a regressive ideology, had provided refuge and resources for anti-dictatorship activists—an example of what Béji calls "[the] reconstruction of faith in a progressive ideology." However, even the Islamists and secularists of the Troika who pledged to work together remained unable to push through economic reforms that would alleviate chronic unemployment, address security crises, and secure transitional justice for victims of state repression.

The contiguity between decolonization and revolution is grounded on the fact that both propelled Tunisians into a radically different mode of temporal being: "the revolution, like decolonization in its entirety, is a dissociated experience, torn from temporality, deprived of an ideal of continuity and unity." It takes a moment of crisis, the overthrow of a regime, to bring these paradoxes to light. ●

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[View](#) the rest of this introduction to two additional Hélé Béji translations

DECOLONIZE TIME

HÉLÉ BÉJI



Bourguiba in Tunis, 1955, post-independence. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

On January 14, 2011, Tunisia set in motion a Revolution, the first in the Arab world, one that suddenly made us enter into the time of "liberty." We had believed it would be inaccessible for still many decades, perhaps forever. Suddenly, it seemed to us for the first time that we enthusiastically coincided with our epoch, that we no longer had the need to search for our place in time, that we had found it. But after this moment of fusion, in which modern times no longer forbid us

from living them as our own, we realized that the modern conscience, beyond the event itself, is not summarized by a simple threshold that one crosses, beyond which all that existed beforehand disappears like a bad dream. Submission, fear, religion, despotism, ignorance, and obscurantism are not taken away with a single blow to the anachronism of bygone times. The feeling of having overcome a historical fatality, the absence of liberties, does not thereby guarantee the

eradication of servitude. We easily observe this today, three years after the Arab "Springs," in the impression of chaos and confusion that emerges from the invention of a democracy the general principles of which do not suffice to reproduce the peaceful rhythm it demonstrated in old democracies. And the mechanisms of democratic suffrage must suffer the tragedies of secular civil conflicts that attack new institutions before they are even born. The old times are not extinguished; they are ignited by their own revolutionary renaissance. The genesis of democracy, as the philosopher Eric Weil has already stated it, is far from being democratic.

The last political revolution of the twenty-first century has taken this mutation to its paroxysm. We feel ourselves to be submerged in multiple temporalities the confrontation of which makes them unintelligible to us. Our conscience of the past, present and future is disoriented.

The revolution, like decolonization in its entirety, is a dissociated experience, torn from temporality, deprived of an ideal of continuity and unity. I have personally observed when I travel between Europe and North Africa that I am struck by a strange sensation of distance, not a spatial one, but temporal. I literally skip: a voyage in time. All this translates into a profound inner displacement of the mind and of senses, an indeterminate difficulty of the body. Suddenly, the abyss of anteriority takes possession of my being, though I remain in a kind of lucid vertigo, perfectly conscious of my epoch. My experience then plunges me into a prism of times in which old and new, archaic and technological (in the broadest terms), tradition and progress, are projected

into the hearts of each other. From this, there emerges a new, indeterminate and unresolved dimension of our being. In fact, if one watches our societies well, they are no longer truly in the naiveté of belief, but neither do they dwell in the efficacy of the technological. They would want to restore Being and, thus, to produce Becoming, freeze the patrimony and edify the revolution, maintain tradition and embrace progress, resuscitate religion and exit from the religious.

After the revolution, we remark that all political parties struggle in order to articulate themselves toward a consensus, but one observes an even more virulent antagonism emerge between those who think that they defend a modern order and those who alternately propose a past golden age. We are left with the trivial poetry of a time that does not happen to be born and of another that does not happen to die.

There stems a time simultaneously deformed and dynamic, in which progression and regression become simultaneous actors. The facts of progress are innumerable, but regressive logics are not any less so. They are not the breaks, but the accelerators of something else. For example, fundamentalism [*intégrisme*] is not simply a residual archaism. It is also a reconstruction of faith in a progressive ideology. It is a "progressive" regression, if I may allow myself this paradox.

We are thus confronted with the temporality of an off-beat Orient, transmuted, beleaguered by a thousand foreign constraints, but in which, far from dissolving itself, the energy of reminiscence is imprinted constantly. Everything bears the visible mark of this destruction of the Orient, that is to say, the

invisible manifestation of its footprint and its form. At the same time, the time of the Occident appears. Everything that has been taken from it does not exactly resemble it; it is submitted to a severe test. But the destroyed part of occidentality also holds a redeployment, just as deformed, sometimes absurd, but irresistible. Here we have, then, in the profusion of an untraceable time, an unknown modality of time in which the presence of God encounters once again the death of God. Myth and disenchantment, republic and feudalism, individuation and tribalism, absolutism and democracy, restoration and revolution, despotism and liberty, form an acrobatic and pathetic scene in which all our density holds before a sort of void into which it is threatened to fall, in the terrifying silence of infinite times.

Where to find the key to these inextricable combinations? It is as if decolonization was already in a beyond, and not in a within of civilization, but without having accomplished it itself. Civilization appears in this elsewhere [*cet ailleurs*] like a new, unpredictable Self, like a future of itself the primordial manifestation of which would be the rebirth of the past.

The refuge in tradition has not been enough to liberate progress from its concerns. And the hope in progress has not been enough to deliver tradition from its prejudices.

Memory is a kind of tangible, carnal compensation before a future asset that is yet too unreal. The fascination of memory can appear like the exact counterpart of what in the West one knows as the celebration of the new. In a world laminated by the race toward the new, how to avoid conceiving of the ancient as a life-saving recourse? In the face of technologies of power, the technique of the ancient is without a doubt a way of forcing oneself as one wishes.

In both cases, slavery to the new or tyranny of the old, there is a bewildering of time, a loss of the human feeling of inhabiting time. The experience of decolonization was for us the experience of this erratic voyage in time. This says a great deal about the nature of our epoch: namely, its faculty of taking from us the very place of time, its living place, its human face. The revolution exacerbated our temporal paradoxes to the point of the specter of a civil war barely avoided in Tunisia, but, alas, not elsewhere. From our different paths since independence and up to the revolution, we have known this unprecedented test of super-temporality [*surtemporalité*] and its revealing acuteness of a universal soul, its search of a time that would truly correspond to us, its representation of an epoch that still shirks, which it calls "democratic," the insufficiency of all our epoch to reconstitute a habitable figure of time, to bring together time with its human identification. ●

Translated by Jorge A. Rodríguez Solórzano

LOST IN MEMORIES

AMMAR ALQAMASH

Space, time, age, and the numbers are indefinable terms for me. My life is an endless journey of finding meaning. I wonder, what does it feel like to find yourself?



The more I try to find myself, the more I get lost in my memories.

Memory #1

It has been 23 years since I lost my mother, I remember that day well. I was there, I saw her, she was beautiful, and it was peaceful. I was a five-year-old kid back then. I remember the chaos her death caused. Everyone around me was whining and crying except the younger me. I still don't know why I did not cry that day, or the next day, or the day after. 10 years later, I absorbed the fact that she's gone, and only then I started crying.



*I looked for my tears, and I didn't find any...
And here I'm, old, weak, and lost in memories.*

As I grew older, I realized how her death made a dent in my life and affected me in so many ways. Have you ever woken up and realized that you're weaker than a flower in a cold winter?

NOTE TO MY KIDS

Pain is a bitch, it always gets you at the worst time.

Growing up alone, with an always busy father and a cold stepmother, made my childhood memories revolve around me, and only me. I spent most of my time

reading books. I had a wild imagination, so I ended up with 3 best friends; imaginary ones. When I remember them, I remember the good times we had together. I recall our time in the backseat of my dad's car, and in my almost-a-library bedroom.

I don't know what I'll do without my memories, I have no one to talk to. I keep retrieving them to feel alive. To me, my memories are my legacy, it's the only thing I want to leave behind.

How do you retrieve a memory?

Being part of a small family gives you no choice but to go wherever they're going. Family visits, for example; parties you are not interested in, shopping for clothes to hide their bodies/sins, and many more. Shopping for me was the worst among them all, I remember how I hated to stay in one spot for more than 10 seconds, always hyper, always wanting to explore and observe the big universe. I had 3 friends I wanted to enjoy my time with... My 3 best imaginary friends.



NOTE TO MY KIDS

Pain is a bitch, it always gets you at the worst times.



Memory #2

Doha has changed, so did I. Unfortunately, I lost my imaginary friends and fortunately, I replaced them with real ones; precisely the way Doha is replacing the old Souq with skyscrapers and fancy malls. It's a matter of time before we lose everything beautiful we had, and this project is about retrieving and preserving memories.

Last week I visited the old Souq with 3 of my friends, real ones this time, and it felt like travelling back in time. Walking around the Souq brought all my childhood memories back to life, the smell of this

place is a scent that lingers in my lungs everytime I visit, my eyes sparkled while gazing at the old neon signs and the silent mannequins. It wasn't only a walk, it felt like opening the book of life, a book of MY life.

One day, in Istanbul, I met an old man, and he invited me for a cup of coffee. We talked for some time, and I asked him to share some of his good memories. *"There is no such thing as a good or bad memory, memories are memories, and that's how they should always be,"* He said.



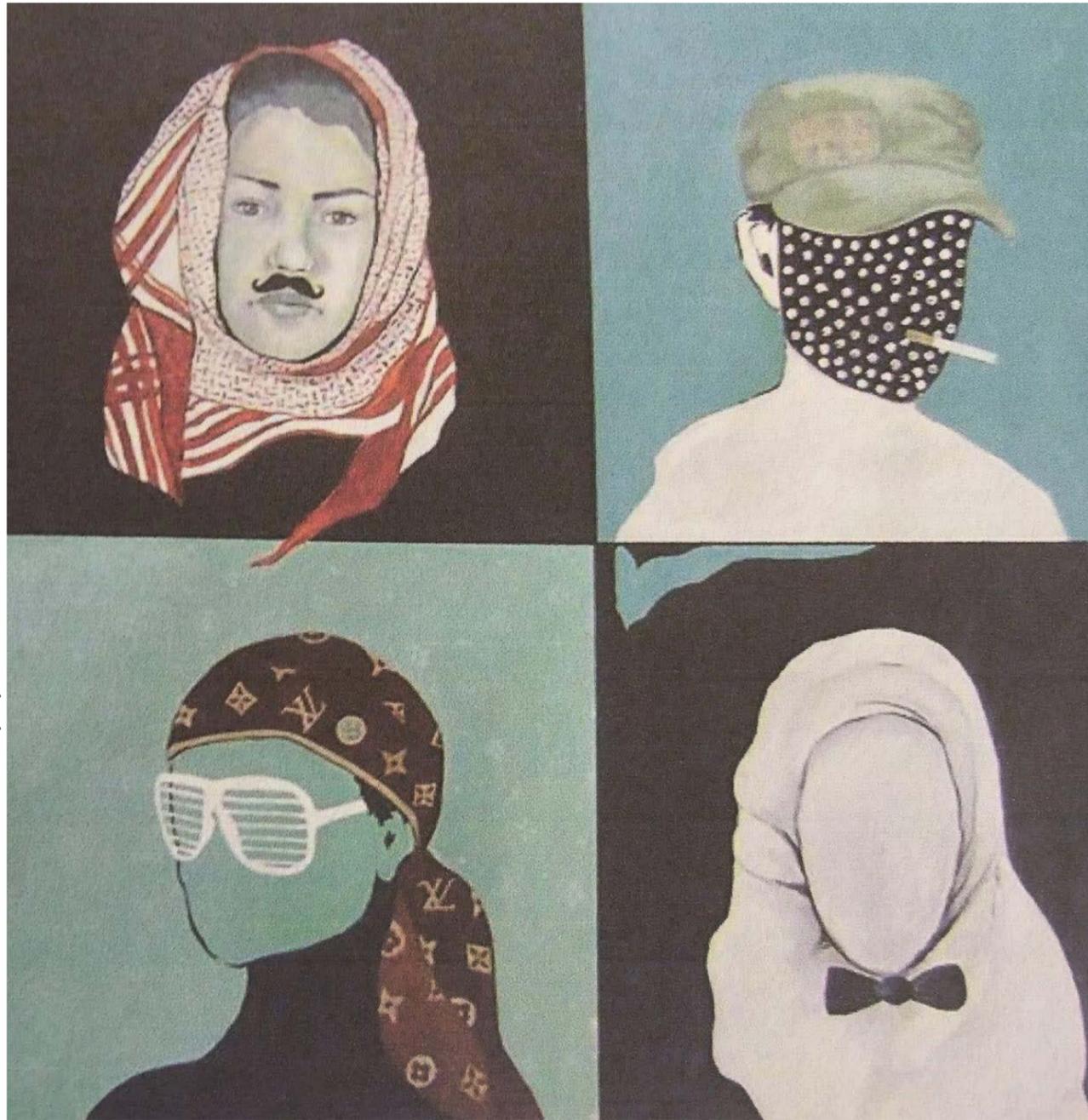
How
do you
retrieve
a memory?



...And here I'm, old, weak and with no family.
And here I'm, old, weak and with 3 real friends, 2
amazing kids and a lot of memories.

THE GATHERING

AJNA BIYA



“The Saudi Muslim Communist Socialite Artist” by Layla Mossalem.

HOW TO SURVIVE SAUDI WOMEN'S HIGH SOCIETY

When I first came to Jeddah in 1995, the women of my particular social circle had two main occupations in life: they shopped for luxury brand outfits, and they had lavish gatherings that required them to shop for luxury brand outfits.

Rule #1: You don't want to be seen in the same outfit twice.

These women gathered daily; usually for lunch, sometimes for dinner, sometimes for both lunch and dinner. They gathered for other reasons too: to get out of their houses; to see the same people—even if they can't stand them (and especially if they can't stand them so they can gossip about them); to look for potential wives for their sons; to keep track of who got married, divorced, remarried, whose husband took a second wife, who gave birth, who was pregnant again, who changed her hair color, and who died. These women also gathered to check each other out. They were curious to see who gained or lost weight, who shopped where, and—since this was a time before Botox and fillers were the norm—who looked older.

Women of this circle primarily gathered to eat. Food was offered in exaggerated abundance, as this was the mark of a hostess' hospitality, and you would insult your guests if you did not produce enough food to feed the Russian Army. Also, you want everyone to get fat.

Unfortunately, my Russian communist mother did not prepare me for this lifestyle. Nor did she introduce me to any of the capitalist values that would have eased me into these new activities. I did not even know how to shop for clothes, and luxury brands meant nothing to me. I was raised to be frugal, to only buy what a human being needed to survive, like bread and galoshes. When I was growing up my closet consisted of clothes that I absolutely needed, mostly my school uniforms and underwear. I also had a few hand-me-downs. For those of you who don't know, they are clothes that are handed down from kids who outgrew them; one parent gives a dress, another parent

provides shoes. It doesn't matter if they don't go together and you end up looking like Pippi Longstockings—you wore them, and you were happy to have something new. Jeans were a luxury in the communist era, but believe it or not, I actually had a pair handed down to me, which I wore like the rebel that I was. I also had some T-shirts to go with the jeans. My family was progressive, you see.

So one sunny day in Jeddah, shortly after I settle here, my mother-in-law has a gathering. Of course, I have to be there, because now that I exist, everyone wants to see the new wife in town. What nobody bothers to tell me is that these gatherings are lavish affairs and that I have to make an effort to dress up, high heels, make-up, hair, and ATTITUDE.

Attitude is key to making an impression. You need to walk in theatrically, nose in the air, in a fancy abaya, without looking at anyone in particular, because having a bitchy attitude and acting like you're better than everyone protects you from the jealous glances of toxic women, wards off evil eyes, demands respect and shows that you are from an upper-class family. You should smile coldly with your lips but not with your eyes, as is the protocol when meeting strangers; you should give three kisses in a certain sequence with a semi-bored look that says, "I don't give a shit about you; just kissing you because I have to." Then you should sit still with your back straight for the rest of the evening like something out of a Victorian painting and stare into space, only speaking if spoken to, and limit your answers to three main words: *Inshallah*, *Mashallah*, and *Hamdullah*. You're supposed to vogue your face like Madonna while they look you up and down and whisper to each other. When they are done, you could make small talk—but not smart talk—and never spend too long with

any one person because conversations are for low-class women who talk too much.

Needless to say, I do not make my mother-in-law proud at this gathering.

I do not go shopping; I do not buy a new outfit.

I stumble into the room from the heat and humidity of Jeddah, all sweaty in my jeans, Harley Davidson T-shirt, and practical Converse shoes, no makeup, with my hair in a mommy ponytail, and my new baby in a kangaroo sling in front of me, his bare feet dangling from the sides. Instead of a classy bag, a huge Mothercare bag is slung over my shoulder that contains anything my baby might possibly need.

Disapproving looks cut through me like a Turkish sword.

Rule #2: Never bring your child anywhere without a nanny and never carry anything yourself unless it is a luxury brand bag.

Perhaps it is worth mentioning that at the time I was practicing something called "Attachment Parenting," which requires you keep your baby physically close to your person at all times. He can hear your heartbeat as he did in the womb, feel secure and nurtured, develop healthy emotional ties, learn that the world is a loving, caring place, and thrive. I believed in this method and stuck to it firmly, carrying my baby around in a sling while I did household chores, went to the supermarket, or anywhere else. I only put him down when I was cooking or when I went to the bathroom, for obvious reasons.

Everybody thought I was crazy. Why would I spend so much time and effort on a meaningless little thing when I could be doing much more

life-enriching and entertaining activities like shopping and going to gatherings? The maid will sit with the baby. What does the baby care anyway? He's just a baby. He doesn't know anything.

Rule #3: Never do anything yourself when you can have someone else do it for you.

I scan the room quickly, and it's all a blur of make-up, hairdos, heavy perfume, and scrutinizing eyes, which disorients me. I move around the room randomly, not sure if I should shake hands or kiss or both, so I end up doing the awkward half-shake-half-hug-almost-kissing-people-on-the-lips, not knowing which way to turn for the next kiss, trying not to squash the baby and not get him too close to anyone so he doesn't suffocate from their perfume. I smile a big, warm smile like I'm happy to be here with all you lovely ladies and your lovely smells. In my awkwardness, I blurt out stupid compliments to women I just meet about the color of their nail polish. I comment on color to a few more unimpressed women, probably because I am an artist, but mainly because I don't know what I'm supposed to say or to whom.

I'm sitting there with my baby on my lap, and the dreaded whispering begins. People eye me suspiciously and whisper to each other, "That's the daughter-in-law... She's a foreigner... She doesn't pray..."

Finally, somebody asks, "How are you?"

"Inshallah good," I reply.

"How is your husband?"

"Mashallah, he's good."

"How is your baby?"

"Hamdullah, he's also good."

"Do you love your baby?" one woman asks.

"Yes, Hamdullah," I reply, dumbfounded.

Everyone smiles. Mashallah, everyone is good and Hamdullah, she loves her baby. Small talk is over. Not too painful. Hamdullah that was all they wanted to know about me and nothing else was of interest.

Rule #4: At least one of these three words, Inshallah, Mashallah, and Hamdullah, is a requirement in each sentence, especially in answering questions about husbands and children. You can use two together for extra credit.

Maids in pastel colored uniforms bring out tea, coffee, juices, and begin serving dates and other snacks while more maids bring out the shishas. Soon everyone is smoking and discussing various topics. First, they compare drivers: "You can't believe how annoying my Indonesian driver was yesterday. I told him to go left, and he went right! We kept going round in circles, and by the time we reached the Boutique it was prayer time, and they closed already! I wanted to buy a new blouse, like the one I bought last month but a bigger size, for some reason that one got small on me..."

"Well, my Indian driver is more annoying than yours; he doesn't understand a word I say! The other day I told him to buy Otrivine from the pharmacy, and he went and got an electrician to fix the TV... I almost got a heart attack because all of a sudden I see this man walking into the house asking where is the AC that needed fixing!

"Well, my Pakistani driver is the worst. He keeps forgetting to buy Pepsi. I explained to him a billion times my husband can't eat if there's no Pepsi. He doesn't know how to take care of us; he just doesn't get it that we can't live without Pepsi..."

Another group of women is talking about the Cooking Show and comparing recipes, each

one arguing that hers is the original one. Then they start talking about another TV show like it's for real.

"Can you believe she showed her hair to her husband's brother? She's such a slut!"

"Well, her husband was beating her because he didn't like her cooking."

"Well, that doesn't give her the right to go running off without a tarha! Besides, she should watch the Cooking Show and try harder; she's giving us all a bad name, I bet you anything she's going to have an affair with her brother in law. Either tomorrow or the next episode."

I'm sitting there thinking this better be over soon before I kill myself and thankfully my baby starts to cry. I make an excuse to my mother-in-law about it being too smoky for the baby, hurriedly pick up my stuff and leave.

"Why is she leaving?" one woman asks. "Doesn't she want to stay with us?"

"Of course she does," my mother-in-law says politely to her guests, "but she has to go cook for her husband."

Approving glances stab like a thousand Turkish swords as I realize that, to them, this would be the only acceptable excuse.

You really don't want to know the details of what happened post-traumatically, but my husband had to buy his mother a really expensive luxury brand bag to apologize for my behavior. What pissed her off the most was not that I did not dress for the occasion, or that I brought my baby—but that I did not stay for the food, the whole purpose of the gathering.

Rule #5: Always stay for the food. ●

DIASPORA // IDENTITY LOST IDENTITY FOUND

IMAN ABBARO

Whether we immigrate to escape the harsh realities of political turmoil, or to seek better opportunities in another man's land; leaving our home often means leaving a part of our identities behind. According to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), there are more than twenty million migrants working within the MENA region, or in Europe. Those who are a part of the African Diaspora in particular, are no strangers to the loss of their identities as they immigrate elsewhere due to inevitable assimilation.

Although I lost a part of my Sudanese identity as I attempted to integrate into different societies, I found myself clinging on to my heritage. As immigrants, we often hold on to our identities without realizing it as we attempt to assimilate or integrate into a new society. This is a reminder that immigration does not mean completely letting go of our heritage and our identities. We may lose ourselves along the journey only to find ourselves with a stronger sense of our heritage and a new identity formed within our new home.



PEACHFUZZ

HAMZA BILBEISI



Photo courtesy of Wikicommons.

MASCULINITY COMPLICATES DEATH AND GRIEF

Saturdays are not usually for mourning. It was around ten in the morning, and Nasser still had sleep in his eyes. Mama edged into the kitchen looking uneasy. *Ibrahim is dead.* The room became deathly silent. *He snuck out with his cousin last night and took the family car. His mom just called me. They were both drinking.* She shuffled her feet and the washing machine hummed in the background. Nasser

blankly scooped up the last bite of breakfast. *Labneh and za'atar.*

He locked the door to his bedroom and lay on the floor. He reached for the box under his bed and grabbed the Marlboro Reds. He blew thick smoke out the window while the fan whirred behind him. Who was he kidding? Mama probably knew. Everyday

he came home from school smelling like an old ashtray. He'd say the bus driver liked to smoke while driving; that's why acid couldn't even wash the smell out of his uniform. Still, Mama wasn't about to barge in and bust him right there.

The phone rang four times before he picked it up. *You heard?* Firas was his loose friend through Ibrahim—and he almost never called. The three of them always sat together in History class and made fun of the teacher. Mr. Suleiman had moved from Turkey and only learned Arabic a year before. He rolled his L's funny. *We should get ready for the 'aaza tonight. I'll come pick you up with my cousin.*

He checked his cupboard for a clean suit. Wearing jeans to the funeral would be *eib*. His only white shirt was wrinkled and smelled like cigarette ash and fries. He decided not to shave the few hairs on his chin and cheek. Mama hugged him close before he left the apartment. He kept his arms to himself.

Firas was leaning against the car. He looked ghastly. His cousin hung his head low in the driver's seat and didn't make eye contact. Nasser hugged Firas tight. Only for a few seconds, until they pushed one another away. Firas had sprayed knockoff Calvin Klein cologne under his chin. They weren't going to a wedding, for God's sake.

Firas dropped his eyes to the street. He sat up front and ushered his cousin forward. His cousin offered his condolences and kept driving. The next ten minutes were unbearable. Ibrahim's death was wedged between the three of them. His death filled the car. Nasser was paralyzed. Firas locked and unlocked his phone over and over.

They stopped by Abu-Saleh to pick up bitter coffee in paper cups. Firas' cousin noisily sipped his and drove with one hand. They stopped at an open plot of land and sat on the hood. The muted-beige brick buildings snaked around the hills down there. Firas sparked his cigarette and coughed a ball of phlegm on the soil. It was that time of the day. The *adaan* went off in the distance, then each mosque chimed in, one by one. Just like dominos. Nasser's eyes welled up. He cocked his head and held his breath. He was a man. He rarely prayed but he found himself reciting the Fatiha. If God was really up there, he wanted him to take care of Ibrahim.

You need a cigarette. Nasser reached for the cigarette in Firas' palm. He cupped his hand over the cigarette in his mouth to keep the wind from stealing his light. The flame kept his hand warm.

At school, smoking was a rite. Nasser took his first puff two years prior when Firas told him it was time. Firas had always been a little larger than Nasser, and a rough outline of his beard had surfaced before either of the boys'. He never backed away from fights after school. His older cousins always showed up to fight too. He would pick up the phone and they would all show up in minutes. Who has that kind of time? They were a pack of wolves. Firas had picked up his first *shisha* that year too. It was no wonder he coughed like an old engine. The ritual happened behind the school, by the recycling bins. How ceremonial. Firas smiled when he handed Nasser his first cigarette. Saying no would be suicide.

Firas was huge. He looked like he could be nineteen. Sometimes Nasser wondered if

he ever felt anything. He sat on the car not saying much at all. It didn't seem like he was thinking. Or mourning. Firas was really good at seeming confident and relaxed no matter the situation. He sipped his coffee. Then he sucked on his cigarette.

His cousin was content sitting in the car. He dangled a smoky cigarette out the window and endlessly scrolled his phone. Until everyone got their licenses, they relied on beat-up yellow taxis and older cousins. Did he want another cigarette? He's fine. It was also convenient to have washed-up older cousins around. They were bigger and burlier. Even bigger than Firas. Nobody could fuck with you if you were with an older cousin. Older cousins were also trouble though. Maybe they let a bunch of kids drink coffee and smoke cigarettes. Maybe they helped steal a household car late at night and got kids killed. But nobody could avoid it. Nasser knew it was either ride with them or stay at home. He was a man. He always told Mama he was taking a taxi when he left the house. Sometimes he did take a taxi. Except, if they were going somewhere as a group, and an older cousin came, he wasn't going to be that whiny asshole. Mama would have him skinned if she found out. Ibrahim just got killed with his older cousin behind the wheel, and, there, he was doing the exact same thing.

You want another cigarette? Nasser had barely finished his first one. He didn't even like smoking. Firas passed him the lighter. He was still closed up, holding his shoulders near his ears. Like a man. He avoided eye contact at all costs. His eyes were fixed on the mosque down the hill. The building's blue dome broke the beige arrangement. Maybe he felt like he was being watched by

his cousin. But he never felt anything. His cousin's eyes were still fixed to his screen, his cigarette still smoking.

The smoke was suddenly suffocating. The Adaan was ringing in his ears. Ibrahim was dead. His best friend, gone forever. What the fuck. The last time he was forced to mourn someone was four years prior. Diabetes took *Teta* away. At the time it was ok to cry. He was with family, and family didn't tell you to man up when family died. His dad never cried, even at his own mother's deathbed. He probably cried later though, when people weren't looking. Nasser knew he would eventually be expected to do the same. His cue came when Firas handed him his first ever cigarette.

Nasser flicked his cigarette butt.

"Firas, are you ok man?"

"I'm fine, dude."

"It's ok man, you can say it."

"Dude, I told you. I'm fine."

Firas was usually cool-headed. If he ever got mad it was because some kid cursed at him and said some shit about his mom. Or his sister. He didn't even have a sister. He would promise to knock their teeth out after school. He made sure everyone at school knew how he was going to fuck this poor kid up at three, sharp. This Firas was hotheaded. This Firas was always on the brink of 'fucking someone's mom'. The Firas that Nasser and Ibrahim chilled with was different. He wasn't softer, just different. The Firas at the shisha cafe, or the bar, or at home playing FIFA, or in the street sipping shitty coffee, was a mystery. He laughed like any teenager would—in explosive bursts that turned adults' heads. He made jokes like any other

horny piece of shit kid. Still, he never really talked to anyone. He spoke a lot but he didn't say anything. Nasser knew nothing about Firas' parents, except Firas was a spitting image of his dad. His mom was sweet and offered Nasser tea every time he went over. His dad gave firm handshakes and never smiled. He walked with his shoulders pinned to his ears. Just like a man. At school, Firas never had a bad day or a good day. They all drifted through their friendship without really knowing him. He was just a big ball of energy they associated with in class and on weekends because he ran shit. Nasser opened up to Ibrahim sometimes. Ibrahim did too. Ibrahim didn't run shit though, and nobody opened up to Firas, ever.

Ibrahim was Firas' best friend before Nasser ever joined them at school. Their moms were best friends growing up, and they were raised together. They had inside jokes that Nasser could never get in on. But Ibrahim was dead, and all Firas could talk about was smoking.

"Firas, seriously, we don't have to talk in front of your cousin, but tell me what's up, dude."

He sighed, "Nasser, it sucks, ok? Is that better?"

His cousin watched them go at each other, eyeing Firas. They shuffled back into the car, and Firas cocked his head forward to usher his cousin to move. Nasser tore his phone out of his pocket. The backs of his eyes were on fire. He slouched deep in his seat until they reached the 'aaza.

Nasser couldn't help but think about fifth grade. Nobody had facial hair then. He had just moved schools, and while everyone was

playing football during break, he ate his lunch alone. Ibrahim was the first to break the silence. He seemed confident, like he was sure they would be best friends. Their parents would drop them off at each other's houses on Fridays after praying *salaat al-dhuhr*, and they would play video games and mess around outside. Firas would come over too. They would play hide-and-seek, or they would sneak into neighbors' gardens and pretend to be undercover spies. They would have sleepovers and sometimes watch movies. If they weren't watching movies they would just talk. It was ok to talk then. They would walk to the neighborhood *dukaan* and buy too much chocolate. Firas wasn't always the way he was. He used to make fart jokes and throw a fit if his parents picked him up too early.

Nasser had seen him cry a few times too. Like the time he fell off his bike.

Eventually there were less sleepovers. In seventh grade Firas began to hang out with his cousins and some older kids from school. Ibrahim tried to please everybody. He spent Fridays with Nasser, but on Thursdays he left with Firas after school. The two of them would sit on a street corner and eat *bizr*. They would whistle at girls in the street that would hurry by in discomfort. The girls were definitely too old for them, but nobody could stop them when they were in a pack with older kids. Ibrahim would invite Nasser out of guilt sometimes. Those days were uncomfortable. He laughed at their jokes and whistled with them. He would have rather been at Ibrahim's house, like it used to be.

Firas rolled down the window and hacked up more phlegm onto the street.

"Firas, sorry I kept pushing you to talk."
"Whatever, man. Don't make a big deal out of it. Take a cigarette."

Nasser's lungs were going to deflate at his pace. Firas pressed his chest out and cleared his throat.

"Unbelievable that he died, right?"
"Yeah, it's crazy."
"Man, I was his best friend ever. I can't believe he didn't tell me he was sneaking out."
"What—were you going to stop him from sneaking out?"
"No, but at least if I went with them I could have stopped them from crashing."
"Yeah."

Ibrahim had just died, and Firas seemed like he was bragging more than grieving. All Nasser could do was nod. Firas looked lonely for the first time that day. Nasser wanted to tell him it was ok to cry. He wanted

to as well. But Ibrahim was only dead for a moment, then he would disappear and life would start over again. They needed to be ready to greet all the men in Ibrahim's family with stiff handshakes at the 'aaza.

They got out of the car and fidgeted with their belts. Firas' cousin poked his head out the window. *Yeslam rasak, habibi. Salaam, Nasser.* Then he dumped his cigarette butt on the floor and veered off. The 'aaza happened so fast. They shook hands with every man in Ibrahim's family. They started with his father, brothers, and uncles at the door, and then they went around to the older men sitting in chairs. They sat down together in the back. Firas took two dates and a small coffee in the fancy cup when they were offered. Nasser's water was just fine. Some men fiddled with glimmering prayer beads. Nobody cried. It was quiet except for the *yeslam rasak* every few seconds at the front of the room. A *sheikh* stopped by and called out a few prayers, then left. ●



TICK TOCK

FATIMA ALSUWAIDI

dressed in a dark cloth
is a tick tock
rushing
I see it
between thirty nine thousand and five hundred words
six hundred and thirty two eyes
three hundred and sixteen breaths
all at once
it ticks
and ticks

clockwise
no
I see it
counter clockwise
it stops
how can a place hold so much oxygen

I stop
baggage claim
fifty four hands
breathe
breathe

strange wind
strange chill
how can air feel different
three thousand and sixty kilometers away from home

home;
a word that is stuck
under a bomb
a word buried
under a heavy heart
deep inside a heavy soul

home;
they say
is where the heart is
but home, was engraved on my soul
by an old mans smile
a child's laughter in the park
a woman's knitting needles
a tick tock, on the wall



AMIR H. FALLAH
**A STRANGER
IN YOUR HOME**

AMIR H. FALLAH DISCUSSES RESEARCH, SMALL POSSESSIONS, AND HIS CURRENT EXHIBITION WITH SHULAMIT NAZARIAN

Omar Alhashani: You have been a part of many projects throughout your life. In the case of *Beautiful/Decay* for example, which you founded when you were 16, what was it like to hand off the reigns of the project?

Amir H. Fallah: It felt like the right time to stop working on it and focus on my own projects. I wanted to have more time to devote to my own work and there simply wasn't enough time for both. I learned a lot by publishing but, in the end, it made me realize how bad I wanted to spend all my time in the studio.

Follow the Sun, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 18 x 14 inches.



Out of curiosity, what has *Beautiful/Decay* been up to since the last issue? Also, where can I find a copy of Issue 1?

Beautiful/Decay is now archived. The first print issue is sold out as are many of the back issues. But I'm sure you could find one on Ebay.

Did 'A Stranger in Your Home' start as a research tool for your portraits or did it precede the series?

I started thinking about this body of work during the 2016 presidential election in the US. There was so much talk about immigration and it made me think about what it means to be an American and how I see myself fitting into this country that I've spent 32 years in. Unfortunately, things got only worse for those of us who were not born here or are of a darker complexion.

The most unexpected thing that I realized during my research was that my family struggled even more than I remembered. We had a very turbulent move to America. I knew it was bad but while I interviewed my parents I found out many horrific details that were new to me.

How do you find your subjects? Are you looking for something specific?

Most of the subjects were friends and relatives. I was looking for either immigrants or children of immigrants. I posted a call for models on Facebook and found the group in a few hours. From

there I photographed each subject in their home and created an audio interview with them that eventually turned into a sound piece that plays in the gallery.

How about the research/interview process? What does a typical 'research ritual' look like for your paintings?



Genealogy, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 48 inches.

For this project my interview process was very straightforward. I asked all my subjects the same set of questions. I wanted to capture the similarities in their feelings and stories. I wanted the audio recording to turn into a universal story of the life of immigrants, regardless of which country they came from. One surprising thing I encountered was that, regardless of the country of origin, all immigrants brought jewelry and photographs with them. These small possessions are not only easy to carry but most are charged with deep sentimental memories. I decided to create a series of botanical paintings for the show that featured some of the jewelry and photographs that people brought over with them.

How has your experience with immigration engendered your craft?

Moving all over the world at an early age makes you realize how large it truly is. I experienced many cultures and got to see how wonderful exposure to diversity can be. I can't help but think that these early experiences not only changed my world view but also influenced my work. For instance I sample, reference, and borrow from many movements in art history and from different cultures. I want my work to feel just as Iranian as it looks American. Within the same painting, you can have references to Persian miniatures, graphic design, graffiti, dutch painting, and eastern ornamentation. Life is made richer when you allow yourself to experience a variety of cultures and ways of life. I think the same could be said about art.

The female figure has historically been an objectifying lens in Orientalist

paintings. What does your art hope to do by representing the female figure?

Well, I honestly don't only think about the female body. An assumption that viewers often make is that the figures in my work are all female. I paint both men and women without a distinction as to how I conceal their bodies. I'm not making any sort of commentary on Islam or veiling. Rather, I'm interested in how one can create a portrait of a person without showing their physical features. How can you reinvent the idea of what a portrait can or could be?

Can you speak a little more about these aesthetic and social relationships we draw between fabric and femininity?

I think some often associate clothing and fashion with femininity, but I never think about clothing in those terms when it comes to my paintings. I'm looking primarily for patterns rather than clothing, and I'm not thinking about fashion. I'm not always covering the figure with actual clothes. It could be a curtain, a quilt, or a piece of raw fabric.



Young Pioneers, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 48 inches.

I'm interested in the patterns on the fabric and the various symbols and embedded meanings that they contain. I also sometimes create my own pattern. I may

drape a white piece of fabric over a figure and then superimpose a pattern I find elsewhere in the home. This pattern could be from wallpaper or it could be a pattern I create based on a book cover illustration.

You've had numerous exhibitions throughout your career—California, UAE, and Iran, to name a few. Do these places feel connected?

When I first went to Dubai it seemed like the regular rules of the Western art world didn't apply. However, in only a few years, Dubai had its own biennials, fairs, museums, etc. I'm actually amazed at how fast they went from not having an art scene to being on the global art radar. I don't think this could have been possible even twenty years ago. Technology has allowed us to access anything and everything with a click of a button. This helps places like Dubai become part of the global dialogue in less than a decade. It's quite amazing.

Do you have anything we should expect?

2017 was a whirlwind of a year. I'm looking forward to slowing down a bit for 2018 and working on fewer projects. My next big project is a solo show with Denny Gallery in NYC which will happen in the Spring of 2018.●



Original art by Okacha (@petitokacha).

THE OTHER SIDE

RAPHAEL CORMACK

SPIRITUALISM IN THE ARABIC-SPEAKING WORLD CLAIMED TO BE SCIENTIFIC, PROGRESSIVE, AND MODERN

After World War II, Egyptian teacher, Ahmed Fahmy Abu al-Khayr, ran a monthly magazine called *‘Ālam al-Rūḥ* (*The World of the Spirit*). In its heyday—from 1947 to 1960—it featured articles on the science and history of communicating with spirits. It also included advertisements for spiritual healers and translations of texts from spiritualist magazines around the world—all run from Abu al-Khayr’s house on Rhoda Island in Cairo. Abu al-Khayr produced an issue of *‘Ālam al-Rūḥ* every month until his death in 1960. After 1960, the magazine continued to publish, albeit on a less frequent schedule, under the name *Al-Rūḥ* (*The Spirit*).

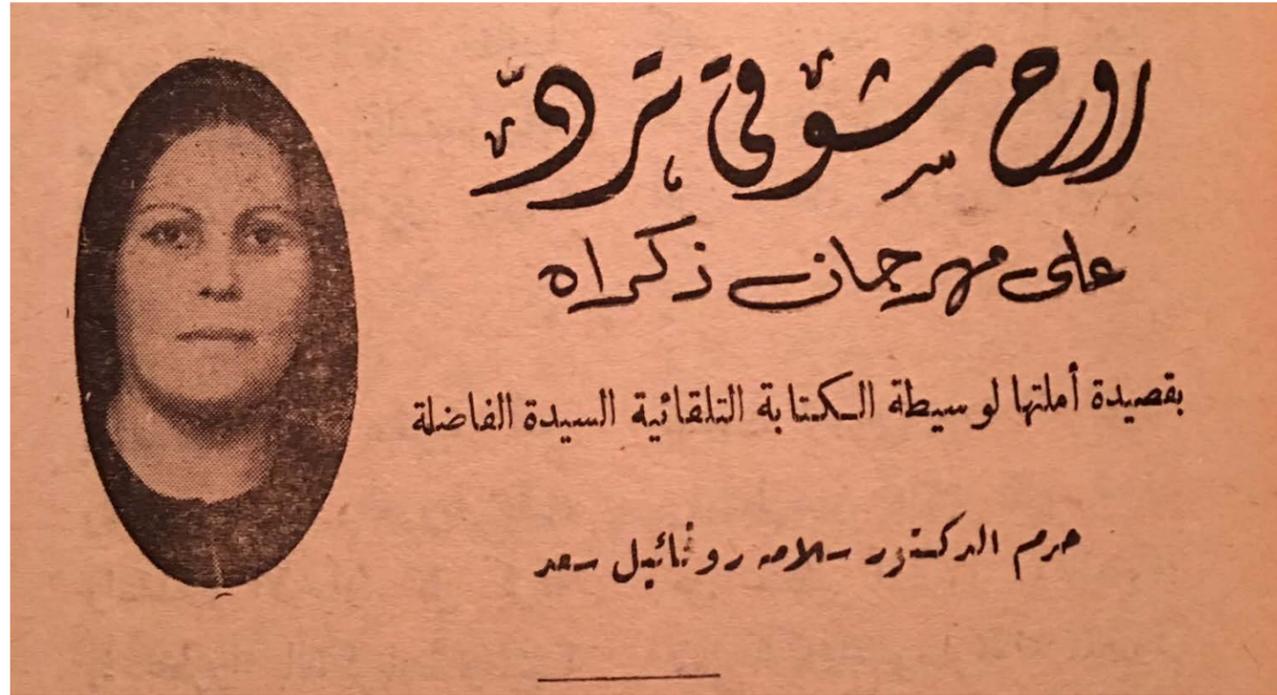
Although published in Egypt, its readers and contributors came from across the Islamic world. They were excited to share their spiritual experiences with the like-minded readers of *‘Ālam al-Rūḥ*. In the early to mid-20th century, many magazines closed down after a few years of operation if they were lucky, paling in comparison to *‘Ālam al-Rūḥ*’s thirteen years. Proponents of spiritualism—which attracted a considerable following in the 20th century but has now been treated as an eccentric and unorthodox movement, especially by modern secularists—were involved in a serious attempt to reconcile science and religion, providing logical explanations for what had previously been thought of as supernatural and metaphysical. This magazine stands as a tribute to these

pioneers and its pages provide fascinating accounts of the séances that Arab spiritualists were conducting in the heyday of the movement.

THE SÉANCE

The methods that mediums used to communicate with the dead [varied](#), and there does not seem to have been any specific requirements for the status of ‘mediumship.’ They could be either men or women, young or old. For example, one of the regular contributors to the magazine, Dr. Salama Rufa’il Saad, enlisted both his wife and his son to help him contact the world beyond. His wife acted as a vessel for the Egyptian neoclassical ‘Prince of Poets’ Ahmed Shawqi, who died in 1932, and his son was the medium for a new ode by another deceased Egyptian poet and nationalist, Hifni Nasif.

In another example, Hosni Kanaan, a contributor from Syria, describes a séance in Damascus in 1959 in which the medium’s body would go stiff before speaking in the voices of the dead. One Egyptian attended a meeting in Indonesia where a skeleton was dressed up in a suit and a mask. After the attendee asked some questions, the skeleton’s hand would move and write its answers on a chalkboard or piece of paper. Other times, a medium would become the vessel for the spirit to write a message rather than to



speak; the medium would enter a trance and produce a small note. Then, someone in the crowd would invariably confirm that it was, indeed, in the handwriting of the deceased and that the note must be genuine.

POETS, POLITICS, & PARENTS

Most interestingly of all, during 'Ālam al-Rūḥ's thirteen years of operation, the spirits contacted situate the magazine's audiences' concerns firmly within the twentieth-century Arab world. Furthermore, the figures who communicated with the Arabic-speaking spiritualists from the other side—namely artists and political figures—and the information they conveyed to their audiences gives a rare insight into the interests and concerns of Arabic-speaking spiritualists in the mid-twentieth century.

To start, 'Ālam al-Rūḥ's spiritualism is characterized by explicit attempts to produce, predict, and influence. Additionally, a common request from spirits was the desire for their deaths to be properly remembered. In 1942, for example, Beirut's attorney general, Dimitri al-Hayek, attended a séance at the same house where Khalil Gibran appeared. He managed to reach the spirit of his father, Yusuf al-Hayek, who was famous for his anti-Ottomanism and his related death in Damascus by Turkey's hand during World War I. Yusuf told his son that he needed to secure justice for his father's death.

But the souls of the dead also loved to meddle in their family's business. In the same séance, Yusuf al-Hayek went on to give his son advice about his personal life. He claimed to have known that his son had been seeing a dermatologist for a particularly painful

and persistent skin problem. He knew the location of a box of ointment in his house that will help clear his skin. He then made the cream appear in his son's pocket. After Dimitri reached into his pocket to find the cure to his rash, he left that séance a believer.

At another séance in 1959 in Damascus, the mother of one of the members of the group spoke through the medium. She warned her son not to take a second wife, saying that it would not be fair when he already had a wife and children who loved him. Death was no obstacle when it came to parents who wanted to correct the paths of their unruly or wayward children.

In addition to giving family advice, the participants of séances also made political predictions. At a séance in Indonesia in 1958, the spirit of Egyptian Prime Minister Saad Zaghloul spoke from beyond the grave. He predicted that Algeria would be liberated from the French, that Arab Nationalism would remain a powerful force, and that Britain would become lower than a second-tier power in the world. Indonesian general Sudirman, who died in 1950, followed Zaghloul, predicting that General Charles de Gaulle would win the upcoming referendum on a new French constitution with 91% of voters in agreement. When asked why the number was high, Sudirman replied that it was because Charles de Gaulle would rig the vote.

The dead sometimes expressed interest in events that happened in the world long after they left it. When [Huda Shaarawi](#)'s spirit returned during a séance in Egypt in 1960, she asked for a charity to be set up in her

name to help Palestinian refugees. Having died in 1947, before the consequences of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, she could have known little about the exodus of Palestinians during her lifetime. Her spirit still wanted to let it be known that, after her death, she was supporting them.

But by far, the most common personalities to appear in the pages of the Cairo-based spiritualist magazine were those of renowned poets. As we have seen, Ahmed Shawqi was a particularly prolific communicator. In 1952, a reader called Kamel Nakhla sent a letter to 'Ālam al-Rūḥ describing a vision he had as he was dozing one afternoon in his home. "Perhaps," he said, "in a temporary state of dissociation, my spirit met with Shawqi in the eternal world of the sprits." Shawqi forced him to repeat two lines of poetry three times over so he would remember them. When Nakhla awoke, he dictated them to his sister:

*Tell my people that Shawqi is none other than,
the poet of eternal creation.
Or he is the pipe, on which this world sings its
songs of eternity.*

Nakhla comments that this poem is very similar to the ones that Shawqi wrote during his lifetime. This legendary poet appeared in more places than Kamal Nakhla's dreams. He even composed an introductory poem from beyond the grave for Dr. Raouf Ubayd's book, *A Human is a Spirit, Not a Body*. Shawqi's spirit frequently appeared with other poets at his side. At one Syrian séance, he appeared with Hafiz Ibrahim and Al-Mutanabbi, and they all delivered some verses, which they improvised on the spot.

Khalil Gibran, who died in 1931, was another common poet to communicate from the spirit world. It is not hard to see why the spiritualists might have been drawn to his work. In his seminal work, *The Prophet*, he wrote, “for life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one.” In fact, this metaphysical verse was, in a sense, proto-spiritualist and Dr. Dahesh, one of the most prominent spiritualists in Lebanon in the 1940s saw Gibran as a predecessor to his own work.

In 1942, Gibran appeared to pass on some detailed instructions to the attendees at a séance in Beirut. He was annoyed that his memory had not been preserved as he wanted. First, he asked the assembled crowd to tell his friend Mikhail Naimeh to write an article about his life in a journal “like *al-Makshuf*,” addressing the rumors plaguing his reputation. He then ordered them to move his body from where it resided. The “empty ornamentation” that had been added by “traders in religion” was pure self-aggrandizing arrogance and against his wishes. His spirit informed the individuals gathered that he wanted his grave to be moved to a simpler plot. To this day, Gibran’s body still lies in his original mausoleum, pomp and all.

LOCATING ‘ĀLAM AL-RUH’S SPIRITUALISM

Beyond reporting on séances, *‘Ālam al-Rūh* carved out a space for spiritualism within the Arab world. But did Abu al-Khayr create a distinct Arabic spiritualism? If he did, he did not do it in the way that we might expect; he did it by situating the Arab world in a wider global history of spiritualism.

“Spiritualist practices” have long been a part of both Arab and Islamic histories and cosmologies. In particular, oneiromancy, the interpretation of dreams, has a history that goes back to the Quran, such as Joseph’s dream, in which the celestial bodies prostrate themselves before him. Islamic scholars have written that the dead could communicate with the living in dreams or visions and that the dead spoke the truth in these dreams.

For instance, the 8th-century dream interpreter Ibn Sirin, in his *Book of Dreams* says, “Whatever a dead person tells you about himself in a dream is true, for he dwells in the abode of truth, and he cannot lie when he is there.” He also adds that if you see a dead person whipping someone, then that person must be wrong because the dead cannot commit false deeds in a dream. Appearances of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) himself in a dream were said to be particularly trustworthy since the devil could not take his shape (122, Bukhari, Volume 9, Book 87). In early 20th century, the Shaykh of al-Azhar, [Tantawi Jawhari](#), produced spiritualist writings that were grounded both in Quranic learning and contemporary Western writing on psychic science.

It is striking, therefore, that *‘Ālam al-Rūh*, did not devote much space to the discussion of the local histories of spiritualism. Abu al-Khayr did not completely ignore the topic—a few articles appeared, for instance, on “The Spiritualist Dimension of the Quran” or “The Spirit in Sufi Islam”—but it was far from his focus. When Islamic justifications for spiritualism did appear, they were taken from the greats of classical Islamic philosophy, such as [Suhrawardi](#), or from the Quran. However, he was much more likely to turn to contemporary English-language

periodicals, such as *Psychic Times* and *Psychic News*, or Western spiritualists like [Arthur Findlay](#) or [Dr. Nandor Fodor](#).

Although classical Islamic scholarship was used to lend some credibility to the spiritualist movement, the magazine shied away from discussing Egypt’s rich traditions that had a close resemblance to spiritualist practices. The most prominent of these was *Zar*, which is a ritual that involves (in some cases) curing a disease by embodying a possessing spirit and inducing it to stop causing illness. The ceremony, often led by women and accompanied by music, calls upon the spirits in a way similar to a séance. Despite the similarities between local traditions and spiritualism, *Zar* is not mentioned in any of the copies of *‘Ālam al-Rūh* that I have seen.

For Abu al-Khayr, spiritualism was a science. Any association with “folk practices” like this may have been simply embarrassing. He had to show that spiritualism was compatible with the Abrahamic faiths, but he aimed to be a part of a modern, global movement that could be empirically proven across the world. The articles that were published on the practice of spiritual healing situated it firmly within the sphere of modern medicine.

In June 1948, for example, Dr. Saber Gabra, the head pharmacist at the Qasr al-Aini hospital, wrote an article in praise of spiritualist healing. In the 1950s, a special section was

created for people to write in about their experiences with spiritualist healing and the magazine published a letter from a member of UN’s Permanent Central Opium Board. Additionally, Abu al-Khayr’s own articles had titles that emphasized the modernity of his movement such as “Spiritualist Phenomena in the Light of Modern Science” or “[The Atomic Bomb and Spiritualist Phenomena](#).”

Abu al-Khayr wanted to construct a modern spiritualism situated in a worldwide context, reporting on international spiritualist conferences that took place around the globe. Egyptian spiritualists were proud to be represented at one of these conferences by the Brazilian ambassador to Egypt, who was a keen spiritualist and member of their association. It demonstrated that national borders did not restrict their outlook.

In the history of spiritualism, “The East” has long been seen as a place of untamed mysticism and esotericism, that could inspire travelers in search of a world beyond the materialism of the West. The spiritualist pioneer Madame Blavatsky famously went to India with her Theosophical movement, searching for the spirituality of the East. She also went to Egypt for similar reasons. These Arabic spiritualists themselves, however, rejected traditional, local forms of spiritualism. *‘Ālam al-Rūh*’s mission was not to romanticise Eastern spirituality but to show the world that they too were part of a modern, global and scientific movement. ●

...

[View the original](#)
“*The Atomic Bomb and Spiritualist Phenomena*.”

تعارف TAA'ROF

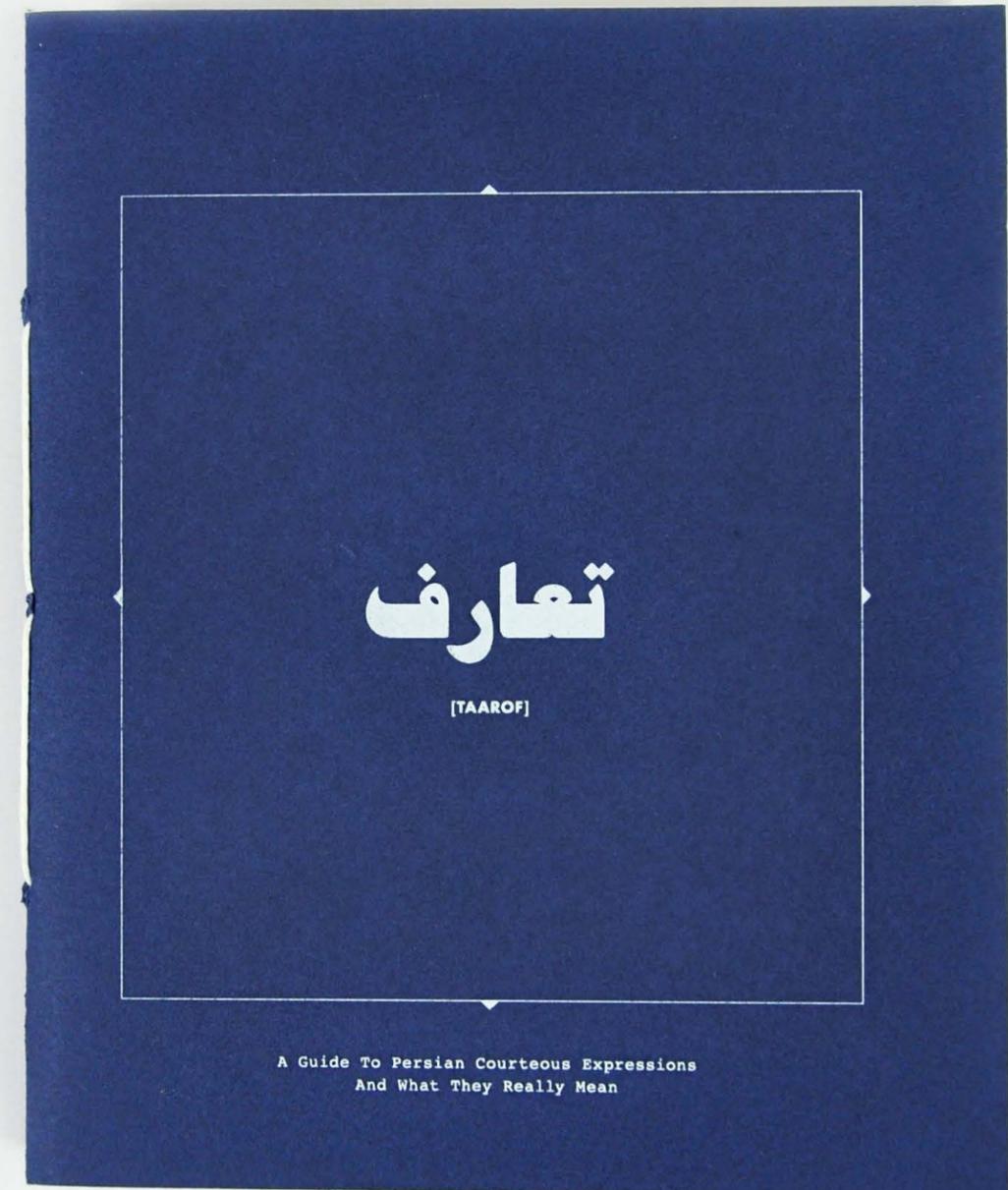
MAHYA SOLTANI

تعارف [taa'rof] is a form of verbal and practical etiquette in Iran. Persian culture is very courtesy-conscious and the language (Farsi) is exceptionally rich in polite and formal proverbs. It is difficult to fluently communicate in Farsi without knowing these expressions of civility. They sound extremely polite, sometimes poetic, or perhaps even flamboyant as they are almost utterly divorced from their literal meanings and are used rhetorically.

This book attempts to gather and list some of these verbal models of etiquette. Each spread is dedicated to a common 'taa'rof'. On the right side, the literal translation of each phrase, its pronunciation, its setting in Farsi, and its usage can be seen. On the left, the real meaning of the phrase is revealed—with the help of the mirror.

Using these expressions usually leaves an inexperienced, non-native listener in a muddled state, as they never know how serious they should take you on your offer. But a Farsi speaker always knows an acquaintance does not really mean it when, for example, they insist that you should step on their eyes (to pay them a visit).

Instructor: Warren Lehrer, Writing and Designing the Visual Book, School of Visual Arts, NY - 2016





PLEASE PAY
US A VISIT

PLEASE PAY
US A VISIT

May your
footsteps
fall on
our eyes

قدمتون
روی
چشم
[Qadametoon
Fooyeh
cheshm]

It is used for inviting people to
your house.

THE TALKING CURE

RIMA HUSSEIN



Original artwork by Leila Peinado.

THE SEARCH TO UNDERSTAND ONESELF SPANS GENERATIONS

I look at my mother's crying face. The corners of her mouth pull it into a downward-facing moon. Her eyebrows frown. Her face sits atop her small c-shaped body in a recognizable crying pose. She clutches her right arm with her left hand. Her knees are pressed together and her feet point towards the ceiling. I had just asked her a follow-up question about her childhood in colonial

Algeria and she had broken into tears. I hadn't anticipated this. I sat there—awkwardly aping the signs of empathy. I placed my hand on her knee, and she clung to it. Her tears fell aimlessly from her eyes and landed on the top of my hand. At no point did I think that unearthing this story unknown to me would make her cry. But it did.

My plan had been simple: I wanted a story that had the potential to make me understand myself. After all of these years in which my parents repeated the typical immigrant line that I wouldn't understand the stories of their past, they had left me in quite a difficult situation: They had taught me behaviors informed by their pasts without telling me these same stories. So, me not knowing these stories, let alone knowing about them, means that my learned reactions to specific situations will have me shooting into a void again and again. If I don't know what exactly makes me angry about this situation, then my anger becomes irrational to me.

I have seen endless iterations of this phenomenon in people whose histories are inaccessible to them: either because their family died or abandoned them or they were displaced or sold into slavery; or just because they do not talk to their families; or because they never understood that there is family even in the absence of blood ties. I have seen it in people who simply don't assume their parents have good reasons for any of their behaviors and in people who—much like me—cannot stand the idea of their parents having been vulnerable, tortured, lonely children at some point.

It could not enter my mind. It would hurt me beyond measure to think that, at some point, someone had been this cruel to my mama and my baba whom I love with all my heart. After hearing their assertion that I would never understand these stories, I created a comfortable mental image of my parents—neither growing nor changing—and the stories of their pasts became mysteries. At some point in my life, my shooting into so many voids created pain and provoked my anger and misunderstanding to an intolerable

extent, so I dove into psychoanalysis to cure myself. After having read everything available to me, after having taught an entire class on psychoanalysis, after a long year of trying to fix 'it,' I had found myself with no other conclusion than the following: Some of these symptoms were the very real result of inherited trauma. They must be.

All the stories that I had told myself about myself were laid out in charts, tables, and statistics on my desk in front of me. I had gone all-out crazy on this one. Account after account and narrative after narrative on the same event piled on top of each other in neat plastic Herlitz folders. Thank the Germans for teaching me the filing cure. Numbers, charts, words, maps, all formed an insane-looking pile of material. In the attempt to perfectly balance out the utter randomness of what we remember with the clarity and force of the recurring symptom, I had exhausted myself trying to win this battle for peace, joy, and beauty to determine my life.

On the day that I had decided to interview my parents, I was sitting in a brightly lit but windowless room at the university, looking at some of the data that I had thrown onto a whiteboard. I was looking at a list of symptoms and their traumatic trigger. "That's a bad theory of causality," I mumbled to myself, not really knowing what to do about the reductionism of psychoanalysis. Exhausted by the prospect of more metatheory but intrigued by the possibility of putting off the inevitable next step, I contemplated theories of the causality of trauma. "There is no logic to it," I would tell myself. "The attempt to control is a symptom itself," I would tell myself. "Fear of the inevitable may be fear of change," I would tell myself.

I went back to Gayatri Spivak. I thought, "Unearth the unknown narratives." I thought, "Talk to them." I thought, "Make them hear it come out of their own mouths."

I pulled back my hair with my hands and let it spring into my face. "Shitshitshitshit," I said. I dreaded the moment when I had to move on from assessing which theory made the most sense, to collecting more data. Figuring out whether a Lacanian, a postcolonial or a Marxist account would have more plausible explanations for the trauma was easier, much easier, than starting to conduct interviews. I could find comfort in abstract, politically ambitious theory, but real people would force change on me. It meant that I would start the process; it meant that I might actually change. It meant that I could not fix it, and it meant that I had to let go of the desire to control the situation. This terrified me. But I needed to do it. Shitshitshitshit.

I pulled my hair out of shape, let it do its thing, and pulled it back again, let it jump to its form and pulled and pulled. I felt the curl-shaping creme coat the tips of my fingers. This hair will not change. Some things will yield and others will subsist. Calm down. Think about rivers, think about machines, think about skin, and make them speak. Make the stick-figure-family in your fantasy come alive. It's the only way. My finger moved on the whiteboard and erased some of the writing. I drew a line from the top right corner to the

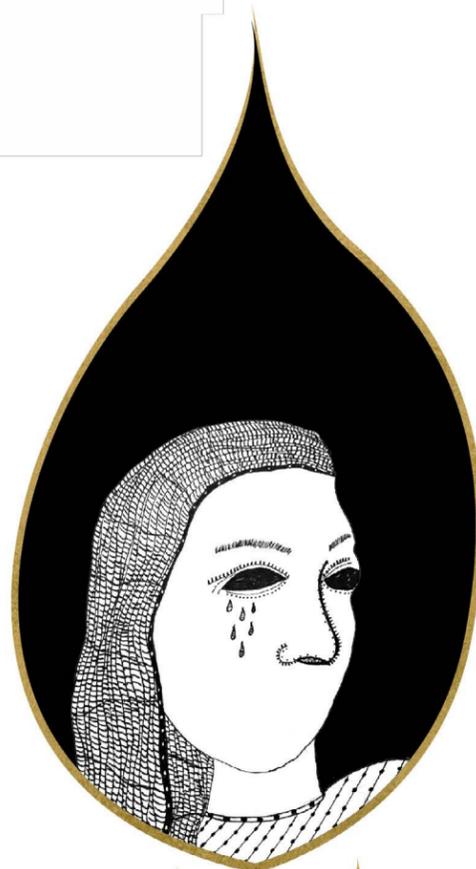
third bullet point, which read, "Panic in situations of spatial confinement." This was a symptom. I took a pen and wrote next to it: "Did you ever panic in confined spaces when you were a child?"

Three months later, I'm sitting with my mother in a small café in Berlin, on a sofa, erratically scribbling notes into my tiny white book, writing down her stories as fast as I can. The beautiful cousin Jahya, colonial Algeria, the word "Aljazair" itself. When my mother quiets down, I look at my prep notes and ask my question, "Did they ever leave you alone when you were little?" And she talks and talks and talks. Her teaching job, her father's death, her previous boyfriends.

"Go marry a Jew," she tells me. An endless stream of words from this mouth that never had to answer to the genuine interest in her story.

I ask again. "No," I say, "that's not what I meant, I meant were you ever locked up? As a kid?"

She tells me that when she was five years old and attending school in colonial Algeria, one of the French teachers had locked her up for hours in a dark hole by herself.



Her body curves into a small c-shape and tears start flowing from her eyes. She becomes-child. My awkward hand pulls itself away. Her suffering is so genuine; it bothers me. This is one-dimensional, pure, un-ironic pain. I had not anticipated this. I do not want to admit my lack of empathy, but it is hard for me to understand authenticity and I do not like to lie. After all, there's nothing authentic about me. Born a Palestinian on paper, which, according to the discursive Gods that be, is not a real nation to begin with. Born on German land, which, according to the discursive Gods that be, not a real German to begin with. Born from an Algerian womb and dropped out of the motherland by decree, which, according to the discursive Gods that be, not a real Algerian to begin with. What do I know about authenticity?

At the end of our meeting, something unlocks. Who knew that the talking cure would work, even when someone else was doing the talking? So, I start diving more into the gaps in narration to find the source code of myself.

Interviewing my father is pleasant. He's a funny man. He leans toward me with the biggest grin on his face, smiling so widely I can't help but join in. "You know," he says, "I saw a man be tied to two cars and then the cars

driving off. That's how they treated us." I once read in an Elias Khoury novel that Europeans think we Palestinians have been hurt so much, we can't be human anymore. You know, we've been traumatized so much that we can't even appropriately react to horror anymore. This 'shattered soul' kind of bullshit. So, before everyone effortlessly slips into this line of argument, let me just say this: He's a funny man. His mode is joking. He's a funny man, not inhuman.

We sit in the kitchen of my parent's home in Charlottenburg, Berlin. I stare at the black and white tiles on the floor, trying to regain control of my face. After I reassume a professional shape, I ask him more questions and he draws maps, tells stories, and reconstructs memories. He doesn't know much about our family's history before colonization. Nobody seems to. But he sure knows how to confess as if he had jumped straight out of the Victorian age. He says, "I was a bad father." He says, "I never forgave my father for giving away my sister." He says, "I just walked out of the camp into the sunny road, I knew they would kill me."

Among others, these are the stories he chose to keep from me until I insisted. In the hope that my upbringing in Germany would keep me from the memories that hurt him so much, he will not give details. Not even now. And yet he curls up in front of the television, routinely once every other year or so, to watch bombs drop on our homeland. Not moving, eyes wide open in constant horror. Not moving, not even a bit.

And yet I do the same. I take a blanket and quit replying to emails, consumed by the wars. Gaza, Iraq, Syria. Guilty to watch, guilty to look away, guilty to survive, guilty to feel well, feeling the same wired fence tightening up around my throat and chest as he does, clutching my right arm with my left hand, clutching my left arm with my right hand, bent over the cool screen of my computer in dread dread dread. "This is the story of my people," I think as I watch severed heads of Syrians displayed publicly in a Vice News video. Baba loves me, but he doesn't know I emulate him in my grief. He thinks, "What does she need this for?" He thinks, "She doesn't need to know any of this." He thinks, "What is wrong with her?" And believe me, Baba, I wonder, too.

All this information exhausts me. How far into the past, the future, and the present do I have to dig in order to find this thing called 'myself'? Blood ties are neither beginning nor end of me. I need to dig deeper, look further, find more kin, find different kin. I sit down with Haneen. She is so beautiful, I want to tell her--but before I do, the words stick to the inside of my lower lip. I bite them.

I ask, "How have you been?" She talks and talks and I talk and talk. Stories rolling off the tip of my tongue like loose pearls.

She says, "The word 'queer' was introduced into Palestine by the Mossad in 2005."

She says, "We're queer when we're working for them."

She says, "Before this, there were no queer Palestinians."

And indeed, after some research into the matter, I found that the Israelis have

started labeling Palestinians with non-heteronormative sexual behavior "queer" in order to single out the ones who would be easy targets to provide information about Palestinian society. Through my desire, I became-spy.

My own history is made while I look away. 2005! The never-resting mills of the state produce a self that I have to run run run after if I ever want to catch it. Isn't it funny how this thing called the self-turned from being the basis of all knowledge to being the unknowable par excellence?

We sit in white, wired chairs in a French café in the Village. We sit at a round white table. Her freckles, her gums, the bend of her nose, her pitch-black hair, and her heavy eyelids arrange themselves into the perfect composition that I call "Haneen."

I say, "Identity politics are dead."

I say, "I don't know, I actually don't."

I say, "Palestinians hate Palestinians even more than they hate Israelis."

She looks at my face. She thinks, "What is wrong with her?"

I pull my hair back and fix it with an elastic band. I look at my notes. I pull the band away and let my hair fall into my face. I wonder, "Why is she hanging out with me?"

I say, "Let's just hope the next generation will remember our work." I wonder whether I can ever be free.

I say, "Maybe."

She says, "What?"

I say, "I was talking to myself." ●

SATURAT-ED?

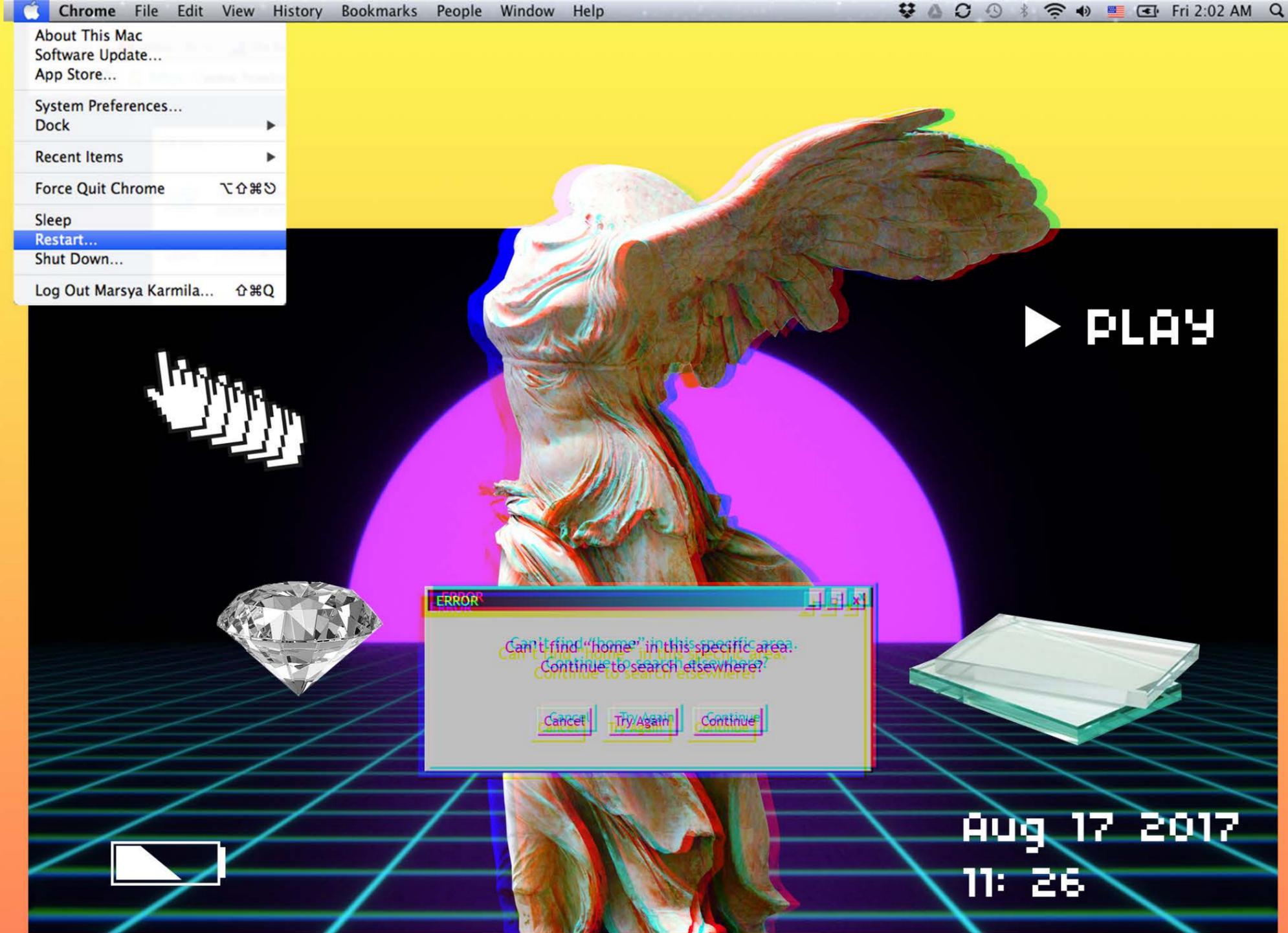
AMINA A.SOULIMANI

Unborn—in a bleeding womb
Bathing in a sinking cradle, soft and silent.
A colonial hand fed me, or so I thought, as they
spelled the words
for my illiterate granny.

The poetry that I held on my bare hands
looked at me, and laughed.
It walked slowly towards a regulating compass
Half broken, half varnished, and tore it into pieces.
It ain't your tongue, it ain't your turn —
yet.

And I stood there, in a liminal space
tracing this skin complexion that whispered pain.

I engraved our maid's lineal heritage on the foot-
prints of those
who claimed to own her, through the routes of
Tombouctou—
Those I called my people, never gave
place to a rite of passage
to succumb the mourning,
of the unborn flesh.



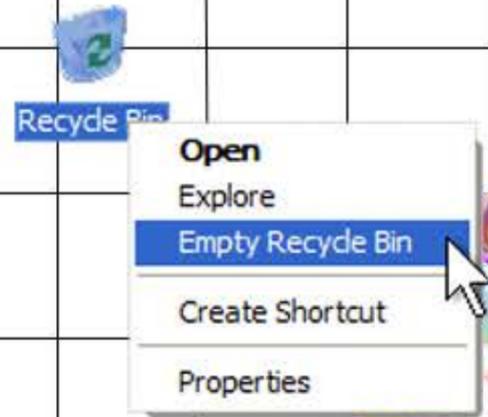
I FEEL HOMESICK

ART: MARSYA @BRBTEATIME
POEM: HAZEL HIRA @HAZELHIRA

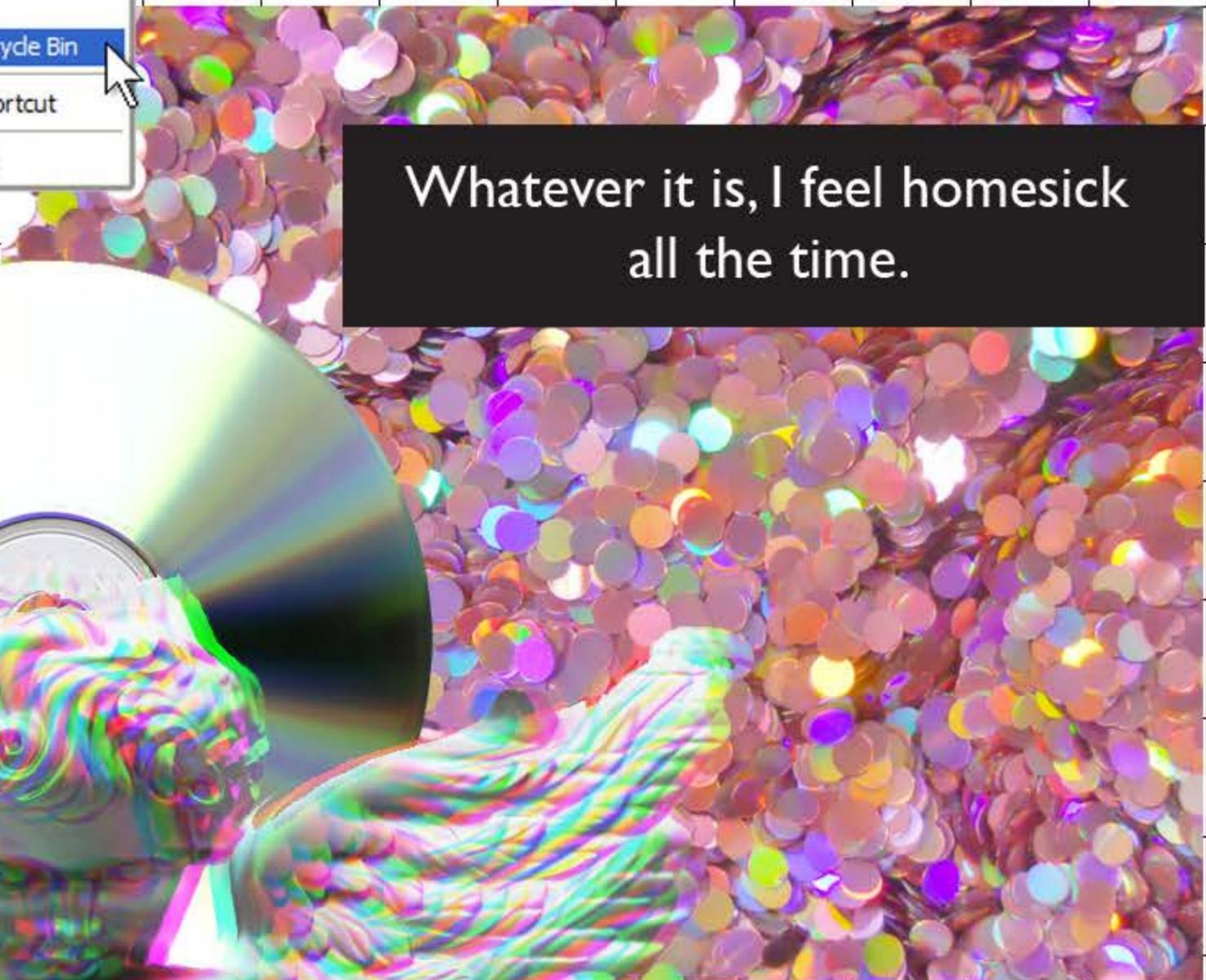




Home is an interesting and vague concept.



Whatever it is, I feel homesick
all the time.



At a time when I was fed-up with my surroundings, what was going on in MENA, being unemployed, and feeling uninspired; I hit rock-bottom and thought, "an alien invasion wouldn't be the worst thing right now."

A lot of my inspiration and photo manipulations are drawn from 90s sci-fi art and comics. All original photographs were taken in my city, Abu Dhabi, and edited with that 90s field of color.

INVA~SION

SARAH AHMED
(GLITCHED PLANT)





THE HERMIT CRAB'S HOME

PRIYANKA SACHETI



Original art by Knar Hovakimyan.

A PERPETUAL MOVER BUILDS HER HOME OUT OF WORDS

For the past few days, as fat gray monsoon clouds congregate over Bangalore, where I now live, I have been experiencing a peculiar lassitude, a sense of lacuna, which I usually interpret as a symptom of missing Oman. In this state, the oddly luminous rainy light engulfing my apartment recalls the brilliant sunlight that would flood my room every morning before turning into stuff of poetry at dusk, transforming mountains and desert into palettes of blush, mauve, and lavender.

Oman's scorching summer heat becomes a visceral, palpable memory and I don't miss it as much as I miss being home. Once I start remembering, I find myself being caught up in an avalanche of memories, the giant conjoined memory mass that was my time in Oman now crumbling into pieces. I sift through each distinct piece, jumping from childhood to early adulthood to adolescence, each conjuring up a set of sub-memories. I smell the mountains, petrol fumes, baking tarmac, hot desert sand—and most of all, the overwhelming scent of the sea.

For most of my life, I lived in a city by the sea. However, since I moved away from Oman five years ago, I've lived in landlocked cities: Pittsburgh had a river, Delhi a dying one, and Bangalore is dotted with ghost lakes. I have come to observe that homesickness advances and recedes like waves, which deposit beautiful gifts at your feet. Wherever I go, I search for Oman, as if I'm cajoling it to emerge from wherever it is hidden. And sometimes, just sometimes, I chance upon it in the brilliance of papery fuchsia bougainvillea blooming against the blue sky, intricately patterned carpets draped over ochre walls,

and crowded bazaars that teleport me to the souks where I grew up. It doesn't last more than a moment, this illusion of returning, but it's enough to nourish me for a while, inducing this feeling of security—that home is just around the corner.

The hermit crab borrows a home and lugs it on its back and I too carry around my adopted home in suitcases, layering them with an exhaustive library of memories. I am a perpetual nomad, never fully inhabiting the present, forever yearning to be somewhere else. I may be an Indian citizen but the fact that my formative years took place in Oman means that the country has shaped me like no other place in which I have lived. I am what I am because of Oman and Oman alone. There is also this truth: when I was growing up in Oman a couple of decades ago, it was India I was constantly searching for. During our annual trip to India, around June-July, we would fly down to Jodhpur. Even now, I associate these months with anticipation, departure, flights, and brief but joyful displacement. We would return to Oman in August in time for school to start – and I recall the intense homesickness that would



Bougainvillea in Oman, by Priyanka Sacheti.

envelop me for a week. I would gloom about in the hot, dry air, yearning for India's humidity, the noise, the sheer lushness that permeated and indeed defined it. To abate this homesickness, I would either lose myself in the material objects I had carried back—books, magazines, clothes, food, audio tapes—or visit the two Hindu temples in the neighborhoods of Ruwi and Muttrah

in downtown Muscat, where large numbers of Indian expats resided and which always felt more like India to me.

As we drove back from the Shiva temple in Muttrah, more than two centuries old, we would stop by a little shop near the Muttrah Corniche to munch on freshly fried samosas. Muttrah represents the confluence of cultures

Jodhpur, Rajasthan, by Priyanka Sacheti.



Rajasthan Architecture, by Priyanka Sacheti.

that shaped Muscat: the Portuguese forts rising from the rocky outcrops and the still preserved traditional coastal architecture, which is a marriage of Indian and Omani architectural styles. Gujarati merchants had been trading and living in Oman since the 16th century; I would see glimpses of that past in the Gujarati script above a door in a three-storied house squeezed between other traditional buildings on the Muttrah Corniche, testifying that Oman's cultural geology is as fascinating as its physical one.

In March this year, I happened to attend the third edition of India's first Biennale, the

Kochi-Muziris Biennale in the port town of Kochi, Kerala. The Biennale seeks to pay homage to both the present Kochi city's rich cosmopolitan legacy as well as its near-mythical predecessor, Muziris. A port city, Muziris played a central role in the trade between southern India and the Phoenicians, Persians, Egyptians, Greeks, and Roman Empire, primarily exporting spices and facilitating the Spice Route. It had trade dealings with Oman, too. Oman's equally rich maritime past witnessed its voyages to many lands, resulting in cultural cross-pollination—food, costume, and architecture. When I visited one of the beaches, I imagined

the waters churning all the way to Oman, sailors journeying from Muscat to Kochi and back.

In 2010, friend and colleague and I worked on a research paper to present at an Indo-Oman conference. We spoke to several Indian creatives living in Muscat, wondering whether and how their temporary home had played a role in their aesthetics and creative sensibilities. Did the fact that Oman's almost-home-like air mean that India was too close to allow Oman to influence their creative production at all? Us Indian expats would ultimately never settle down in Oman: we would forever be expatriates, not immigrants who eventually assimilate into the cultures of the countries they moved to. Both the awareness of this disorienting temporariness, and the process of questioning others, found me more deeply contemplating the writing I had produced over the years—and my relationship with Oman. While I had extensively written about Oman in my journalism, I realized that very little of my fiction had much to do with Oman; for some reason, I found it impossible to do so.

And then, I bid adieu to Oman in 2012 and the yearning to return has never left me since. This yearning is also the realization of how influential Oman has

been in making me. Just as the continents were once a gigantic conjoined physical mass called Pangea and which had now split into the world that we know today, I too was a product of constantly shifting tectonic plates of cultures, Oman and India.

In an interview some years ago, Indian-American writer Jhumpa Lahiri, acclaimed for her short stories delving into the Bengali immigrant experience in the United States, remarked that her desk was her home. After moving away from Oman and having lived in Pittsburgh, Delhi and now, Bangalore, I ultimately find myself conjuring up home through words; if homesickness is a sea depositing beautiful memories at my feet, I turn them into imaginary palaces built along the coast, constructing them one word at a time. If commerce continues to be a language binding Oman and India together, words are my personal equivalent of this cultural exchange. When I write about the searing warmth of the sun, I am thinking of May in both Muscat and Rajasthan. When I think of the sea, I see Kochi's cobalt waters juxtaposed with those of Seeb. The mountains of Oman merge with the ones that surround Bangalore. Where India ends, where Oman begins, is impossible to tell. I jigsaw my dual selves, those distinct continents of memory and identity, through my words. ☺

Muttrah, Oman, by Priyanka Sacheti.

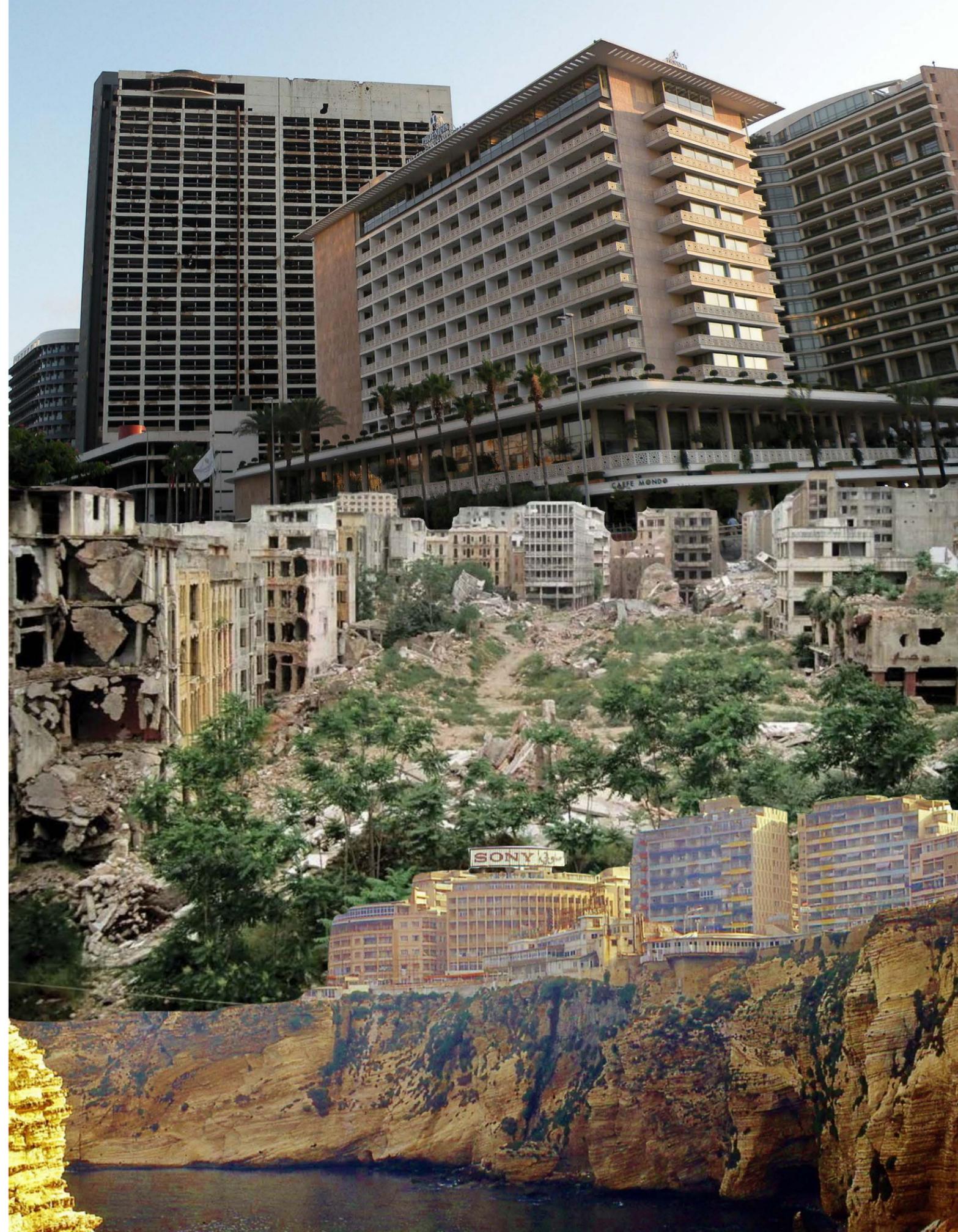


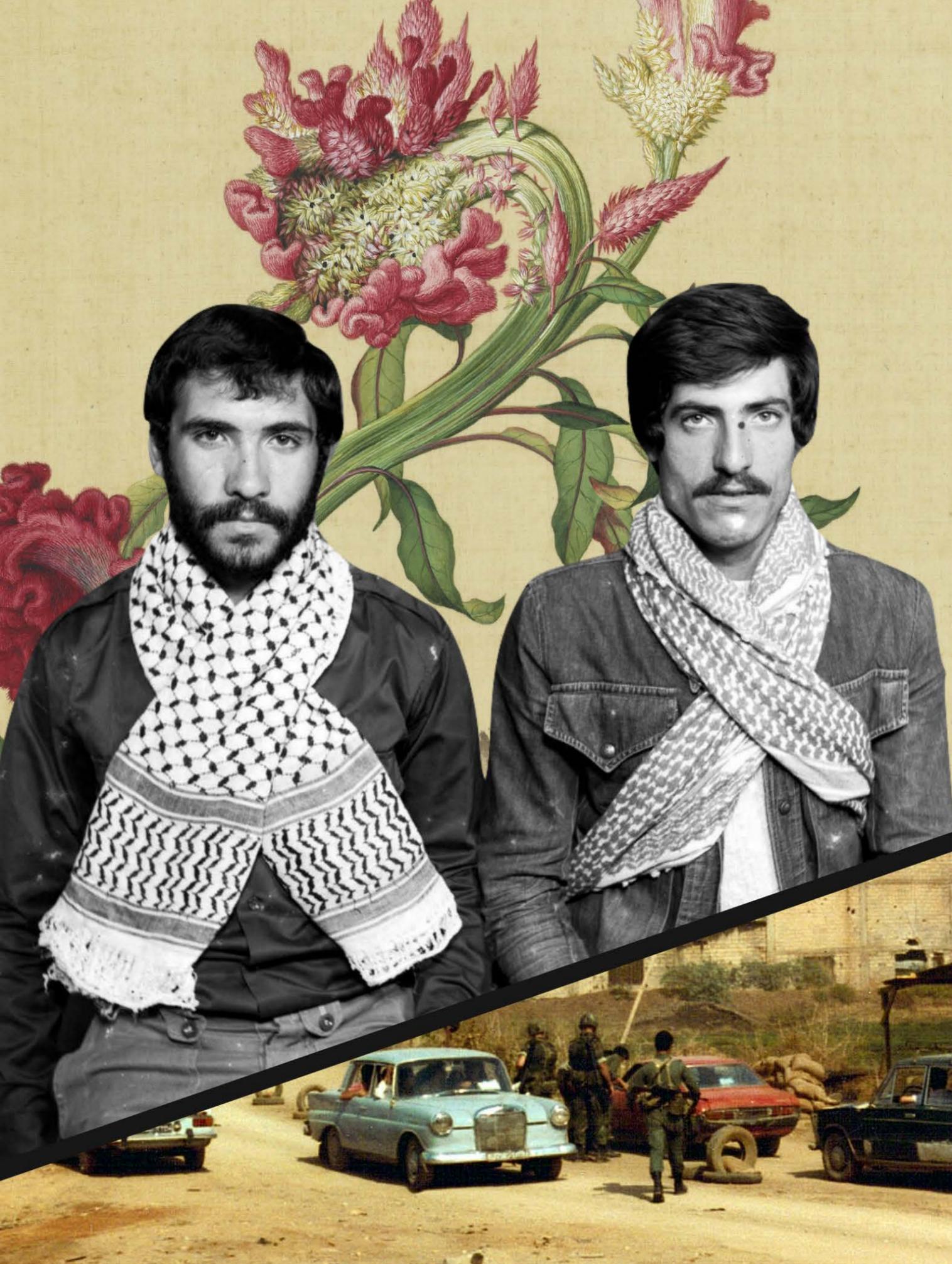
THE LEBANESE WAY

ADNAN SAMMAN

My work almost always comes to life on its own. I start by brainstorming a general concept, and then immediately begin my attempts at realizing it. The process is much more rewarding when one gives freedom to the spontaneous side of the brain! My collages start to take shape, then it gets to the point where both the self and the work become actualized and satisfied. There is usually some sort of concept in my mind, but I tend to leave things open for interpretation by the viewer. I've been interested to see works hold different meanings depending on the viewer.

One of my recent series focuses on Lebanon. I chose Lebanon for its incredible story of dealing with decades of war. I love contrast; there's a beautiful one within the stories of civil war. I don't think that many people would remember the delightful details of a happy Lebanese life when they see images of war and violence, and vice versa. I try to bring both together to create contradiction.





BISMILLAH / IN THE LIGHT

AZIZA AFZAL & EDEN CHINN

I pass through space thinking about how I am seen. I conceal and expose elements of myself to feel permitted. I am not pretending. Just conflicted. To hold conflicting truths, "*bismillah*" (R Hand) and "in the light" (L hand), as one. I am a whole entity despite my many halves. I give myself permission to exist opaquely and transparently. Bismillah, I hold you in the light, may safe passage be granted to all the parts of our wholes, no matter what parts are visible as we move.





Khabar Keslan is an independently run, volunteer-based, primarily English-language online review featuring art and critique from the Middle East, North Africa, and South (East) Asia (MENASEA). This is a dedicated platform for dissidents, artists, critics, and those on the margins to express themselves.