

Trauma and Care: Abandoned Memories in Egypt and Saudi Arabia

“Lived Experiences of an Egyptian Family in the Diaspora”

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Key terms: diaspora, image texts, postmemory, Islamic revival, psychoanalysis, postcolonialism, embodiment, transgenerational trauma, sociogeny

Abstract: My research explores my Egyptian family’s migration from Egypt to Saudi Arabia and Canada. It examines the role of photography to document memories of family reunions, migration, and stories. The objective of my study is to foster dialogue and raise awareness about the lived experiences of an Egyptian family from the 1950s to contemporary times. The methodology used in this series is open-ended interviews and textual analysis with family members: my mother, father and maternal grandfather. My research aims to reconstruct the historical effects of migration and the lived experience of an Egyptian family in the diaspora. It looks into intergenerational psychological trauma, its several interfaces and role in familial relationships, and modernity's emergence in Egypt. I aim to explore transnational identities through storytelling and photography that capture historical and contemporary movements—the role of these movements in producing complex versions of identities, belonging and trauma.

1.0 Introduction

In 1996, I was born in Saudi Arabia to an Egyptian family that migrated from Egypt to Saudi Arabia for a better life. Migration for my family in 1994 was the only way to gain financial security amidst changing social and religious upheaval. The Egyptian revolution of 1952 headed by the Free Officers Movement, had caused a period of profound political, social and economic change to society along with the Islamic Revival movement slowly taking charge from the 1980s until the Arab Spring that has opened up space for the Muslim Brotherhood to take charge in 2011. All of these movements are interconnected and closely related to my parent's

lived experience and ultimately the displacement of many Egyptians. But for this project, I focus mainly on my parent's history in Egypt and their idiosyncratic perspective on migration affects, memories and the Arab world.

Growing up, I often felt that the concept of identity and belonging for me was hard to feel or understand, as it conflicted with where I was born, grew up and who I was in the eyes of others. The conflict was that I was and still am "the proverbial outsider," as Hartman describes herself in *To Lose your Mother* (Hartman, 2007). Hartman explains her arrival in Ghana as a foreigner was welcomed by 'Obruni,' which translates to a foreigner or white person. Despite being black and her ancestors stolen from Ghana as slaves-- her existence in the eyes of children in Ghana was a foreigner entering their motherland. Hartman describes her arrival in Ghana in tension with her walking, cloth, hair, and overall demeanor. Reading her book earlier in the summer of 2021, I felt connected to how she was a stranger in her own country of origin. To the anger, she felt while navigating a painful history of the slave trade in Ghana and the intensified anger when no one cared for the great injustice that occurred to her ancestors. An injustice that happened before she was born still affected her sense of self and identity.

Similarly, Egyptians living in Saudi Arabia were not citizens or residents. Instead, they were workers for the Kingdom under the Kafala system. In a sense the Kafala system is a new form of slavery that is not related to skin color but heavily relies on systems of oppression and the Othering of Egyptians and other foreign workers in Saudi Arabia. As Hartman describes, "A black face didn't make me kin." (Hartman, 2006, p.1). The Kafala system is a sponsorship system in the Gulf Cooperation Council such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Jordan and Qatar (Robinson, 2017). In Saudi Arabia, the government gives local individuals or companies sponsorship permits to sponsor foreign workers. This allows local individuals or companies to have agency and power over the foreign worker. For example, foreign workers' passports and visas were under the control of the sponsors.

In addition, the Kafala system prevents workers from labour rights as it falls under interior ministries rather than labour ministries (Robinson, 2017). This is not to say that foreigners living in Saudi Arabia did not have good relationships or intermingle in Saudi social and marital circles. But it is to recognize the unequal power dynamic at play and Othering present between foreigners and locals in Saudi Arabia.

My Arab identity and features were not enough to fully recognize my belonging to Saudi Arabia or Egypt in other ways that I will get into later. It is also worth understanding that the word Arab refers to a diverse group of people that have been homogenized under the word Arab. To some extent, the non-Arab world still does not know or recognize the origins and diversity of 'Arabs.' Of course, this is with any other group of individuals – Canadians, Europeans, etc. However, that is the point I am making; my identity is multiple, and I have always felt so since I was a child. I did not feel that I fit in the categories created by individuals, cultures, or societies- so I included this description of being diverse or multiple to exclude myself from attachments of being an Egyptian, an Arab or a Canadian. My thesis does not aim to situate myself or the subjects I write about among a unique different other nor under a nationalistic identity.

In addition, the word 'Arab' in the 1960s and 1970s has been explicitly defined as "deceitful" and "clumsy" in Roget Thesaurus (Al-Matrafi, 2018). Another aspect in tension with my inner conflict of identifying as an Arab was the false pretense of being inferior to the West or the white person. The internal tensions I have felt growing up in the Middle East are connected to the years of making the Orient. As discussed by Edward Said, Orientalism was more of a culture produced by Western and European expeditions and studying the East and knowing the Orient that aimed to control and constitute the right to socially, linguistically, virtually and physically maim the Orient (Said, 1978).

Going back to the waves of Othering I have felt in Saudi Arabia. I capitalize the “O” in Other and Othering here to bring up the affect of being different and excluded- sometimes scapegoated. Said has coined the Other and Othering. Said describes the Other as the strange- the Orient, the East,

“them” (Said, 1978, p.43). I use the term Othering here to express affects of discrimination I have felt across the diaspora. It is also a term that continues to have relevant and relative meaning to experiences of discrimination in contemporary times. For example, I remember learning the difference between a Saudi Arabian resident and a foreign worker from a very young age. The culture and government boxed the identity of the Egyptian people in Saudi Arabia into an economic one through the Kafala system.

Foreign workers were Othered in Saudi Arabia through the sponsorship system as it left them vulnerable and under the mercy of the sponsor or local individual. They were marginalized due to restricted communication and movement. I remember my father retrieving our passports from the sponsor each time we wanted to go to Egypt to see family members. The foreign worker was perceived as replaceable at times. For example, contract substitution can become a common tactic for forced labour among workers to accept poor wages and conditions (Robinson, 2017). Psychological and mental exhaustion was also common among foreign workers as there is always the fear of losing residency. The threat of losing residence was commonly used as an ultimatum for foreign workers to forced labour (Robinson, 2017).

In this research, I aim to navigate photography's role in my family's movement and migration across Egypt and Saudi Arabia. I also aim to explore my family's documentation of lived experiences through visual cultural material such as photography, with the camera present in our lives in Saudi Arabia from 1996 to 2007. I remember the formality of smiling and being captured and the resulting imagery. It virtually captured and processed family moments into a material object we can cherish. The camera was the instrument that confirmed and represented our existence and identity among the somewhat alien landscapes and architecture of Saudi Arabia.

This thesis focuses on how the camera plays an essential role in capturing identity among the constant migration movement in the past 50 years of my family's lives. I chose this focus because the concept of belonging and identity seemed to be foreign and familiar at the same time. It also intrigued me to learn about my family's lived experiences and the idea of identity and to belong

throughout their constant movement and migration. The camera is an instrument that modern society takes for granted today- due to its widespread and excessive use: social apps, surveillance, media, and security measures in popular trends. As Silverman introduces us to *The History of Photography, part 1*, she talks about how "we have grown accustomed to thinking of the camera as an aggressive device" (p.1), an aggressive device that surveys individuals or other security-related measures. However, another side to the camera is that it is profoundly subjective and can focus on affects such as lived experiences and memories through different spaces and times. By challenging the concept of the camera as an aggressive device, we focus on the referent's reality it captures (Silverman, 2015). Similar to a footprint that acts as an evidentiary of a foot's existence (Silverman, 2015), so does photography; through Photographs, we can illustrate the "*having been there.*" The "*having been there,*" by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*.

Barthes's term shows how photography acts as an evidentiary of existence—demonstrating the ability to invoke a specific time and space through photographs. This invocation interests me and produces tensions of identities and belonging regarding my family's ancestral and migration history because of different reasons. First, when I look at the images, I have family members that I do not know, and family members have captured these images before my birth in Egypt. The corporeal existence of the image and the individual in the image intrigue me to learn more about them and reveal the hidden aspect of the photograph. To open up the image and explore it. In a way, to learn something about my ancestral history.

Barthes' search for his mother in an image grieving her death, both separated from her physically in the present but also from past childhood images of her. He starts to envision photography as a signifier without a signifier. That is "a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see." (1980, p.6). Still, it was this aspect that intrigued him about photography and what intrigued me in my search for some identity and belonging among old photo archives. The camera captures lived experiences and mechanically produces the subject into a material object. Barthes explains that this material object "could never be repeated existentially"(1980, p.5). The photograph

is unique because it focuses on the corporeal and represents the dead's return (1980, p.5).

Concentrating on the corporeality of the image reminds us of the moment the referent was alive and posing. As Barthes explores visual imagery, he reveals that death is the nature or *eidos* of photography (1980).

Looking through family images, a part of me searches for a familial 'look' or an identity that has the opportunity to discover something new. In her introduction of *Family Frames*, Marianne Hirsch discusses how a family image is read through *imagetext* and by looking. When one reads an image, the observer looks at the image, and the referent looks back at the observer (Hirsch, 1997). This process of looking allows for a new perspective on the relationship between the image's referent and the observer. This is similar to Barthes' discovery in his search for his mother in *Camera Lucida*. A finding that would not have been possible without his interest in discovering the nature of photography.

Yet, reading through my family's photos, I sense a disconnection while looking at images of family members I inherited shortly after my grandmother's death in 2016. Barthes describes "heavy, motionless, [and] stubborn" (1980, p.12). The photo archives in my possession span from 1950 to the early 2000s. They consist of several pictures of my grandmother as a teenager, young adult, and in adulthood. I search for a photo of her—a symbolic and imaginary search as her corporeality is present in my pictures. Yet, when I look at them, I wonder about her parents' life and how it eventually led to my eyes looking at her. Observant of this search and the purist deictic language that photographs hold, I begin to think of how images connect, reveal, hide, and juxtapose the viewer on the past, present and future.

1.1 Research Purpose

This master's thesis research aims to analyze the role of photography on my family concerning their geographical location in the Middle East and their North African culture and identity. I will only focus on my family to explore the role of photography. My research does not aim to generalize or universalize the roles of photography across other ethnicities, cultures or

communities. It explores the nature of visual material in my family's movement throughout the years and how photography became part of their lived experiences and memories. I use family photo archives to explore social questions of history, memory, and intergenerational trauma. In using photographs as a site of investigation, I hope to explore further work that has been conducted in image studies. My research has three areas of social impact:

1. Historical documentation of lived experiences in the Middle East and North Africa (i.e., Egypt and Saudi Arabia).
2. In the psychological theoretical sector of anthropology of migration and diasporic communities.
3. The impact of the camera as a technology on humans' personal and cultural narratives.

My research is interdisciplinary. It connects to subjectivity, psychoanalysis, transnational identities, diasporic communities, and intergenerational trauma studies. My multidisciplinary research contributes to the interconnected aspects of politics, history, families, and social relations to the forms of care and trauma it produces. It exposes these aspects by utilizing a subjective approach to researching lived experiences through storytelling and photography to understand better the diaspora's distinctive social, physical, and psychological experiences. I chose to implement a phenomenological approach because it helps form discoveries and vulnerabilities that otherwise remain hidden. It also allows the participants to have an active role in the research process.

Therefore, it allows for a greater understanding of the relationship between me, the researcher, the participant and the reader. That being said, I believe that delving into subjectivity is essential to researching transnational identities and migration. It is necessary because it opens space for migrant families to open up about the perception and lived experiences of the world that led to my and many other presences in post-secondary education in North America- despite the challenges BIPOC people face here. This research may influence other migrant families to open up about their past experiences migrating to different countries.

It is significant to research the interconnected impact of migration and socio-political movements such as the Arab spring 2011, the modernization of Egypt and Saudi Arabia and the forms of care and trauma that emerged from such events. One aspect that can manifest trauma and care is the inheritance of post-memory in migrant children. Post-memory refers to the inheritance of narratives that preceded the birth of new generations. It disrupts the spaces of their own stories to create space for the memories of previous generations shaped by traumatic events that can neither be understood fully nor recreated.

Photography can be a helpful tool in understanding and investigating this form of memory inheritance called post-memory because it analyzes the conditions of post-memory migrant children inherit from parents and grandparents' socio-political trauma. Textual analysis of family pictures allows for a closer reading of images. Family photographs act as personal memory and social history, a public ideal of an ideal family, juxtaposing with the personal unconscious. In a way, our memories are never entirely ours as we share them with other individuals. Images are a direct and material representation of a past moment through which textual analysis of imagery can help animate its inanimation (Hirsh, 1998; Barthes, 1980).

We live in a culture increasingly influenced by photographic images, and technology develops more rapidly than our ability to understand and research its impact on us. My research aims to investigate the ethical dimensions of the camera as a technology and how it shapes our cultural and personal narratives. Cultural narratives in which certain norms and rules socially bind an individual. In contrast, personal narratives focus on idiosyncratic beliefs and perspectives that aren't essentially bounded by socio-normative views. These narratives affect my research by revealing aspects of personal memories and social history. In tandem with Roland Barthes, Marianna Hirsch writes about the *eidōs* of photography as a social function, personal memory, and social history.

Photographs affect and shape human life in a way that we cannot predict right away. The purpose is to investigate the relationship between the referent in the picture and the spectator in the present. As mentioned earlier, through photography, researching lived experiences in Egypt

and Saudi Arabia can contribute to the *punctum* that emerged from images and its connection to the diaspora's effects and lived memories. The word *punctum* is a word by Barthes in *Camera Lucida* to explain that of which occurs from an image to wound you. Ultimately, my research is meant to excavate and track my own family's Middle Eastern and North African memories. I aim to analyze the image concerning their stories and emotions that emerge from old family photographs. This can be of significance for research on transnational identities and diasporic trauma.

1.2 Terminology

There are specific terms that I have chose to keep in Arabic as I move across the chapters, and the reason is that it adds more cultural context to the language used. It also allows the reader to gain insight into my participant's narratives as they are interviewed. For example, the words *zekra* and *kan zaman* are relevant due to how they converge to elicit a distant memory.

The word *zeker* also elicits an Islamic meaning, Dh-i-kr, which refers to remembrance of God or even as a reminder. In the same manner, *zekra* refers to a memory that comes into the present from past memories. Thus, it manifests itself at the back of many images I include in this project. It is also a complex and dense term that encompasses activating a memory that is already there and bringing it to the present. Consequently, the word *kan zaman* refers to not only the past, but also foreclosed from the present and forms an affect, an *ihsas*, that compromises affective responses and emotions but indexes the sensory realm.

Mozeakra and *zekra*, while they mean different things, essentially have the same meaning of the act of remembering the past that is there but seemingly far away. The photographs I inherited represent themselves in the form of a short blurb.

The word *kan zaman* that I use here refers to the conversation of bringing up the past to the present. It is different from *zekra* in that *kan zaman* means "in the past." Yet, *kan zaman* is also foreclosed from the present and represents an *ihsas*. Here *ihsas* compromises affective responses and emotions that index the sensory realm. Therefore, together they situate themselves in a distant past, coming into the present and the future. The reason why I state in the future as well is because of the materiality of the images.

The digitalization of my thesis aims to preserve two-generational lineages of stories, memories and narratives. It is meant for diverse readers and future generations that might relate to concepts of diaspora, intergenerational trauma, and silent memories.

1.3 Methodology

I research trauma diaspora and intergenerational trauma through two methods. The first is interviews and the second is through textual analysis of photographs or what I will refer to as *imagetext*. Storytelling as verbal knowledge and documentation is under-researched and is often overlooked. I follow Walter Benjamin's footsteps in allowing storytelling to serve as a didactic message to the past, present and future. The second way is through photography. Through photography, I can look into trauma and disrupt identity, memory and cultural stability by adding text to the still image, for example, through interviews conducted with family members. I will use quotations and snippets of the stories behind an image. This can be a helpful way to track lived experiences of my ancestors through movement and explore how I have inherited their lived experiences as a post-memory.

The trauma I explore through interviews and photography aims to navigate the subsequent consequences of trauma left and the ways photography can represent personal memory and social history. In my research, I look into lived narratives to reveal the concealed dynamics of social relations projected in photographs and their connection to significant historical movements in Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the 1950s-2000s. My research aims to understand the conditions surrounding Egyptian family members living in the Middle East and migrating to Canada, their livelihood trajectories, and how the camera was used as a tool for documentation and representation in foreign spaces. I will be using philosophical theories and anthropological literature to analyze literature writers and photography critics such as Roland Barthes, Marianne Hirsch, Karen Strassler, and Stefania Pandolfo.

I will conduct open-ended interviews with three family members- my mother, father, and grandfather using the Zoom platform due to COVID-19 in-person restrictions. The discussions took three months, from September to November 2021, and focused on using photographs as a point of reference to lived experiences and stories. The research methodology collected 39 hours of data through interviews and textual analysis of *imagetext*. I interviewed family members on various topics that reveal relevant background information and in-depth issues such as migration, transnational

identities, lived experiences, ancestral history, and education in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The questions I asked were an opportunity to understand the role of family photographs in documenting lived experiences of Middle Eastern families through diaspora and different historical moments. I will include quotes and snippets of conversations to add relevant information and subjective realities of my family's experiences. In doing so, I hope that what is learned from this study will help us understand the role of visual and cultural material as part of identity, belonging and social history throughout the diaspora.

Looking into the photographs, I use image texts and textual analysis of the imagery and the narratives I listen to by my family members. Through textual analysis, I aim to analyze social semiotics present in my conversations with my family and connect it to the role of photography in social and political culture. The written component with the visual provides rich information on the way pictures contribute to social and cultural context. It also allows for a deeper understanding of the content discussed. I will be conducting content analysis from the data collected to identify and analyze specific themes from my interviews to reveal the meanings behind narratives to possibly expose the conscious self and the unconscious that remains hidden. Given the small number of participants, my content analysis is qualitative. I focus on qualitative methodology because it can build a bridge between the memories of our parents and grandparents and lessen the fragmented perception that exists in many migrant children's understandings of their identity. Furthermore, it can help to explore the emotions and affects of our parent's grandparents and better understand the whys behind what they do and why they act in a certain way.

My research's strength is its subjectivity as it delves deep into personal emotions and affect. Similar to Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, it looks deeper into the role of visual imagery in invoking memories, and embodied affects. Another strength is that my participants were my family members and through the conversations and interviews I conducted I was able to create a timeline and connect generational forms of care and trauma across both my grandparents and parents' constant movement. In my position as a researcher and their daughter or granddaughter puts me in a

challenging situation which is also another strength as it helps bridge the generational gaps among intergenerational experiences. It was hard for me to ask certain questions that explore topics of traumatic or grief instances such as socio-political revolutions or the loss of a loved one- such as Anna, my grandmother. I decided to do this research because I would look at my family photographs for years, question the capture of particular moments in images, and wonder about my ancestral identity.

1.4 Literature Review

In this thesis, I examine the lived experiences of my family migrating from Egypt to Saudi Arabia and eventually to Canada to reflect and foster a dialogue on the forms of care and trauma that might have been produced by migration and different forms of colonialism in Egypt. I aim to explore acquiring a better life through photography as an evidentiary of constant family movement from one country to another to gain social and financial stability. To examine this acquisition, I look to track lived experiences through photography as an evidentiary of '*having been there*' (Barthes, 1980). Reverting to the roots of lived experiences, memories, culture, and subjectivity from the 1950s to 2000s can reveal the connection between identity and belonging in juxtaposition to lived experiences. The narratives that I could investigate by discussing family photographs are also important as they can identify the ways visual and cultural imagery play a role in the representation of the past.

I also investigate how forms of trauma are inherited via migrant children via family mechanisms. I think as migrant children inherit forms of trauma via family dynamics through the ideological identities of what constitutes a family. An ideology that at times can act as an enmeshment of familial identities and then the other aspect of how migrant children inherit trauma is through the form of post memory, that is the traumatic memories of their ancestors through their own investment into that collective identity. I draw from the work of Roland Barthes in examining the photograph and what it entails for the referent. Barthes discusses in *Camera Lucida* the tension between personal pictures and the voice of knowledge or *Scientia*. Barthes mentions that when we think of an image that we love, we see only the referent and the desired object. Rather than critically

thinking about what it represents anthropologically or sociologically (Barthes, 1980). Barthes was aware of this through his search for the meaning behind photography. Similar to Barthes's conundrum, I found myself also in one. In 2020, at the start of the second wave in Mississauga, I had hung up on my wall childhood family pictures as a confirmation of my identity and to give me a sense of belonging among isolation and social upheaval.

I did not expect to be confronted by a loud voice questioning my intention behind hanging family pictures. An intention that reasserted the familial identity and acted as a confirmation of integration and identity. It juxtaposes the emotions and wounds that the photographs revealed and the dystonic crisis it caused in me. They were from two separate existences—or, as Barthes explains, when glancing through a magazine, an image drove him to pause and reflect on it. The picture he viewed was “derived from the co-presence of two discontinuous elements, heterogeneous in that they did not belong to the same world” but existed together (Barthes, 1980. p.22). I started diving deeper into that wound and questioning my identity and what I knew of it. I realized that what I learned about my identity was coping mechanisms inherited from my family's post-memory. Post-memory is a term discussed by Marianne Hirsch in *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997). In short, I was confronted by an identity based on social family mechanisms and integration established by the lived experiences and memories of my family's lives in Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Following Barthes's personal and subjective discussion of family photographs, I started resisting the reductionist desire to formulate an objective analysis of family photographs. I decided to look for the ways imagery plays a role in our lives. Barthes exhibits how photography consists of “three practices: to do, undergo, to look” (Barthes, 1980, p.9). By examining photography through both the *operator* and *spectator* in a photograph's *spectrum*. I can identify the familial gaze of my family—the *spectator*- by looking at the photography and discussing the image and the *operator* who took it. And the spectrum is the referent of the captured family member in the photograph.

Barthes discusses the spectrum as a reminder of death in images- or “the return of the dead” (Barthes, 1980, p.9). He talks of the spectrum's transformation of the image from a subject into an object.

Where the subject being photographed cannot escape their transformation into an object. It invariably causes “a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes imposture” (Barthes, 1980, p.13). Looking back on my pictures, I identify with the sensation of loss and inauthenticity. I have this sense of inauthenticity because of the lack of identification of what it means to be an Egyptian from a very young age, I felt as a foreigner in my trips to Egypt from Saudi Arabia as a kid. Personally, I do not feel that we are what we lost. To me, I identify as homeless or ambiguous. Barthes describes how the photograph transforms us and how a subject transform as they become an image. He states, "I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object” (Barthes, 1980, p.14). This transformation results in a *specter*. A *specter* represents the lively subject’s death as they become a material object (Barthes, 1980). I follow Barthes’s interest in photography as a *spectator* in exploring images of my family. I look at the photo archives for sentimental reasons; I want to explore them through their wounds and affects. As Barthes states, “I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think” (1980, p.21).

By studying the photographs and looking in my research, I aim to examine them as a part of the process of understanding photography in visual culture—by looking at their composition and their dual or opposite elements. Barthes called it *studium*- a general study of imagery (1980). Yet another element that exists in images is *punctum*- that which breaks or punctuates the *studium* itself. He explains punctum as an “element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (Barthes, 1980. p.26). It is essentially the mark or bruise that an image leaves on you. An image that bruises and causes intense emotion can even propel people into action. An example of a *punctum* in imagery is Alan Kurdi- the drowned Syrian boy on a beach in Turkey in 2015. The *punctum* here is his death becoming an icon and a representation of the cruelty of displacement, war and the innocent lives taken by an overwhelmingly traumatic event.

Marianne Hirsch describes ‘post memory’ as the memories, personal, collective and cultural trauma that the following generation inherits from their previous family members (Hirsch, 1997). The memories that the next generations inherit are not of their own and are remembered only by stories, photographs, and behaviour (Hirsch, 1997). Hirsch describes that post-memory is an imaginary investment that risks the displacement of one’s story. Growing up with overwhelming inherited memories of trauma- familial, social or political can replace one’s birth, voice and narrative with those traumatic lived experiences. Despite these lived experiences being in the past, they affect the present (Hirsch, 1997). Hirsch describes the vivid memories of imaging a war she had not witnessed- but her parents and grandparents did. It is this imaginative investment and projection of memories that are not our own that I aim to explore in my research. Hirsch describes in an interview the term- post-memory as the recollection of memories that are not her own- were not all unique. It was part of a collective unconscious shared by many children of Holocaust survivors. All share an affiliative memory formed by a traumatic history. This history inheritance has affected their lived experiences more deeply than their memories (Hirsch, 2005). It is a form of historical memory and abandonment of a generation’s memory to make space for a historical one.

Karen Strassler, in *Refracted Visions*, investigates the historical use of photography in Indonesia and relates it to the colonial era. The book focuses on amateur photography, identity photographs, familial photography and the role of political leaders in images as well. I find the most interesting about Strassler’s analysis of visual images is how she draws on Roland Barthes and John Tagg to discuss the diversity of images in a socio-cultural sense. Consequently, I will draw on Strassler’s work as she analyzes image that includes the conversion of the colonial-era landscape, identity, and studio backdrop photos.

Strassler not only investigates the role of visual anthropology but also combines ethnographic research with archival history. Throughout my chapters, specifically in Chapter 3, I incorporate archives to draw on the Egyptian revolutions' role in identity and race politics. I am analyzing the role of visual images in documenting colonial histories and conflicts, such as the bombardment of

Alexandria. I also connect the shifting of images about corporeality and aesthetics throughout my family's photo archives.

This thesis situates visual anthropology among the representation of an Egyptian family in constant movement. My writing style shifts towards the imagistic nature of remembrance and memories. The images I include here are to enhance the aspect of remembering a *zekra*, thoughts, and *ihzas* (affect). I am thinking with and through the images I inherited, it that sense, these images carry diverse pursuits that are all represented across this thesis. This pursuit comes forward through unexpected revelations about my families' experiences that moves away from the 'dogmatic Image of thought' as I move away from representations that are fixated on the image rather than on the affective and non-conceptual forms of expression. One of those expressions is silence for example, and the short blurbs present at the back of images. The reason why I think that the form of *zekrayat* present in the images is a code to the affective experience of wanting to document, and preserve a memory. It gives us a hint of life and the contingencies of the everyday life for Gedo. The *zekra* written on the back of the image becomes a message with a code. A code that speaks of what have been and its significance. To me, the *zekra* was an invitation to open Pandora's box so to say. I use the idiom Pandora's box because that was how it was perceived of doing at the start by my family members. What I mean by pandora's box is the secrets of the past that remained in an imaginative box, awaiting to be opened to represent not only what is unknown but what is hidden as well.

In that realm, Andrés Romero (2015) in the "Image as Method" symposium, talks about the forms that images take, which at times, it goes beyond the 'image' itself. This is something that has been explored in anthropology of image and memories as well. Lisa Stevenson looks at memory-image and dream-image as well as sonic-image in *Life Besides Itself*. They remind us of the imagistic aspect of knowing and learning about the past, memories remembered through the acts of feeling and thoughts. That is the *ihzas* (affect). Images are analyzed through visualization as well as their placement. In this thesis, I situate anthropology of photography among my family. The photo archives that I inherited allow me to place imagery in a way where it can become an active element

in conversations, I have with my family members. Conversations in which photographs seem to demand embodied responses and emotional affects. It is by investigating the role of photography through the context within and around it. What did my family members do with those objects- did they exchange them as gifts in the form of *zekra*, or preserved in albums, hanged on the walls or kept in plastic bags. This is something that many visual anthropologists have questioned and investigated. How is it that photographs as objects are used? What kind of embodied responses and affects do they elicit? (Edwards, 2012). In “Objects of Affect: Photography Beyond the Image”, Kopytoff (1986) argues that images can not only be analyzed from their particular time. Instead, they should also be looked at continuously across temporality and spatiality (cited by Edwards, 2012).

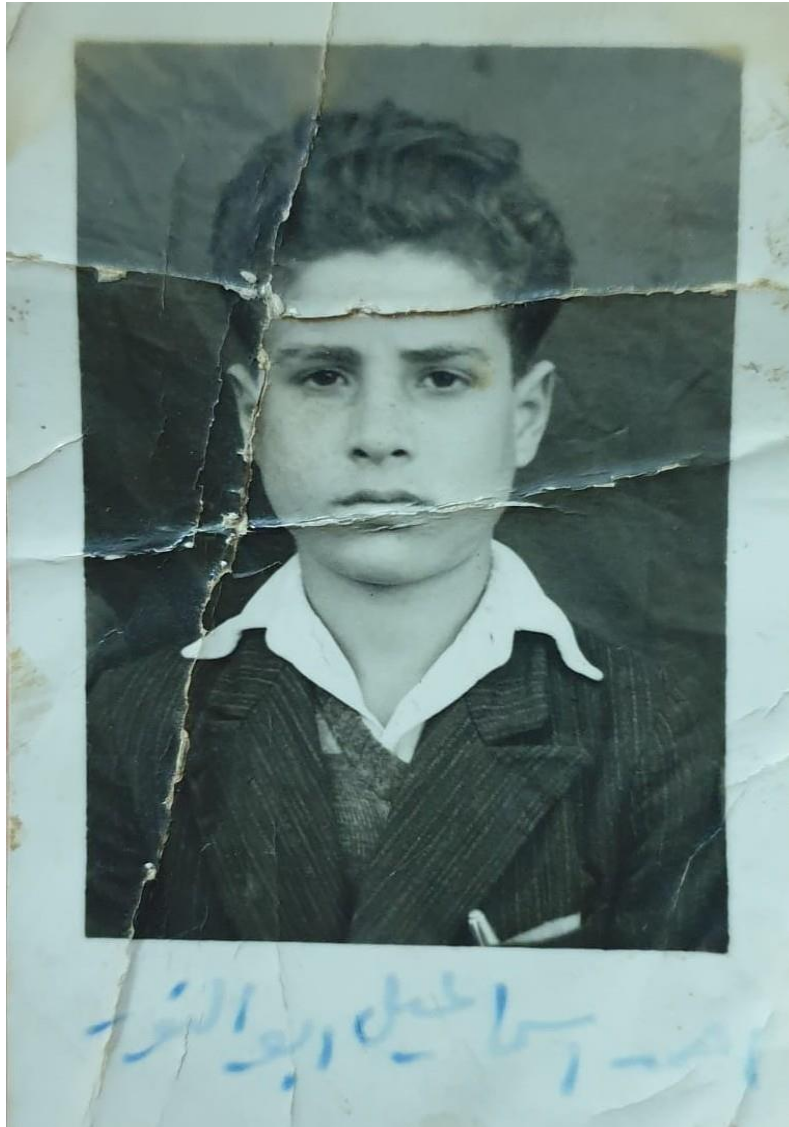
1.5 Research Questions

The research questions I ask are the following:

- 1) What role do family photographs play, and to what extent do they affect cultural and identity belonging? What are the intentions behind photo documentation?
- 2) What role do narratives or storytelling play in affiliative memory for post-war generations?
- 3) How does a photo insert itself into a heterogeneous or ideal familial representation? What do they reveal about family identity, and what do they hide?
- 4) How are these relations affected by gender, nationality, class, and ethnic community?
- 5) Why do we create family images and representations? What is its significance?
- 6) What role did the camera play in my parents’ and grandparents’ lives?
- 7) What modes of narratives are present in storytelling? What are the forms of care and trauma reproduced in storytelling and photography?

Chapter 2: Documentation

2.1 : Family Secrets



An old photograph of my grandfather as a ten-year-Old; circa 1942

When I initially asked Gedo, my grandfather, to become one of my participants, he was skeptical of my research's purpose. Being his granddaughter did not make much of a difference for him, if not alerted him more. When I asked him, "what are his fears?" His response started with a "*Ba'olik eh.*" The phrase *Ba'olik eh* can have several meanings in the Egyptian Arabic

dialect. The tone is what determines its meaning. His reply expressed not wanting to talk about Egyptian politics or history. I could sense a slight protest when I started expressing that he was free to talk about other things and could only discuss his family photographs with me. Our initial conversation remotely ended on an argumentative point; he expressed anger with my digging up the past. I was overwhelmed with emotions, mainly confusion and sadness, reflective on the reasons and tracing back our conversation on how and why it had gone wrong in the first place.

I realized something in my conversations with my family members: not wanting to remember the past is also a desire and a want to forget it. To forget how it has maimed them as individuals and their collective memory. The collective memory I talk about here is the history of the past. My grandfather was born in 1932; he had lived through the major historical events that have shaped Egypt's current post-modern and post-colonial state. His denial to remember and mention the past, specifically around the 1952 Free Officer's Revolution, had become something I often fantasize about. Similar to Edward Said (1999) in *Out of Place*, I started to fantasize as a way to escape our argument. I had started looking at the old photographs from the 1950s and early 1960s when he was a young adult. In a way, my escape from the forms of trauma and care I had experienced as a child, a ten-year-old girl, in Damanhur was connected to my "fantasy-filled" witnessing of the old photographs of my grandfather and other family members. What I had invested imaginatively in those images was the opportunity to escape the current reality in Egypt as a kid, surrounded by walls. "Surrounded by four walls" is an important Egyptian idiom that signified the kind of paroxysm I had felt as a child in Damanhur and now as a 25-year-old in Canada during COVID-19. Still, "surrounded by four walls," trapped and released from their spell.

The possible denying of an answer to my question was not a protest of my initiative but a protest against the risk of exposing oneself to painful memories. A past Gedo is well aware of. A history that had presumably passed and was now locked away. So why bother? Open up Pandora's box and risk

revealing emotions that are too painful. It was a form of surrender to let go of control and mask what might emerge from our temperamental affects. I could sense from his body language that the act of remembering the past was difficult for him to talk about and trace.

After this initial interaction, I questioned my intentions behind my research project. I was now faced with inner questions about the reality of my research project if it had any meaning, and the ethical harm I might instill in digging up the past. I use the proverb “digging up the past” to initiate two subjective modes of thinking, discussing and reflecting in my project. That is, to remember what no longer exists is to risk revving it once again. This was a disjuncture I found in exploring my family’s history through photographs. It isn't easy to talk about, expressed through non-verbal communication, and reflects the need to be seen, heard, and understood.

At the beginning of my project, I had the ambition to trace Egyptian history and the forms of care and trauma reproduced across intergenerational migration in my family. In juxtaposition, I realize that the project took control of my findings along the way. This encounter had replaced my goal of reconstructing the past. Instead, to rediscover my present and how it relates to the past. A history that I did not fully know nor have experienced but felt enmeshed and intertwined into it for the longest time. It sometimes felt that this past was not completely mine to reveal, and it was not mine to tell, as I did not have recollection nor memories of what had been. In addition, the history of the past belonged more so to my family. I found myself jumping through boundaries that exist in blind spots, unaware of them; I was struck with stories of the past and words in Arabic that I was not familiar with in my lived experiences. I started observing the multiplicities of lived experiences, the tensions around myself and my family members—the living in the present while questioning the past and learning from it.

Gedo becomes the main focus of my project as he acts as the paradigmatic and generative participant in my project’s research. He allowed me to dissect pictures, read the *mozakerat* written on the back of images and look at the past’s aesthetic and socio-political marks while reflecting on Egypt’s current postmodern temporality and spatiality. Gedo has also lived through many socio-

political uprisings and histories. The details of our conversations are shaped by his subjective experiences and remain in the background of photo-testimonies. I tell his story more than my father's or mother's; he was born in a small village in *Tanta* with his stepmother and father. His mother died shortly after his birth; he has only one picture of himself as a ten-year-old child that he keeps hidden in plastic bags in his dining room's chest. These chests, along with the dining room table and master bedroom, were built by my paternal grandfather as a gift for him and my maternal grandmother as newlyweds. My mother and father always spoke of the creativity and innovation in these sets. The walnut-coloured wood table with curved legs was accentuated with emerald green stripes that ran along its frame. Growing up, I always had felt that these sets were unique during family gatherings, and it had left a mark on me as it was a memory that I inherited rather than experienced or knew of. I never met my paternal grandfather as he passed away young. The architectural aesthetic of the dining room table was a punctum, determined by my familial and cultural memory. However, similar to Art Spiegelman's memory, it was a "delayed, indirect, secondary" (Hirsch, 1997). It was a post-memory and a physical material that my paternal grandfather had left behind.

2.2 Friendship

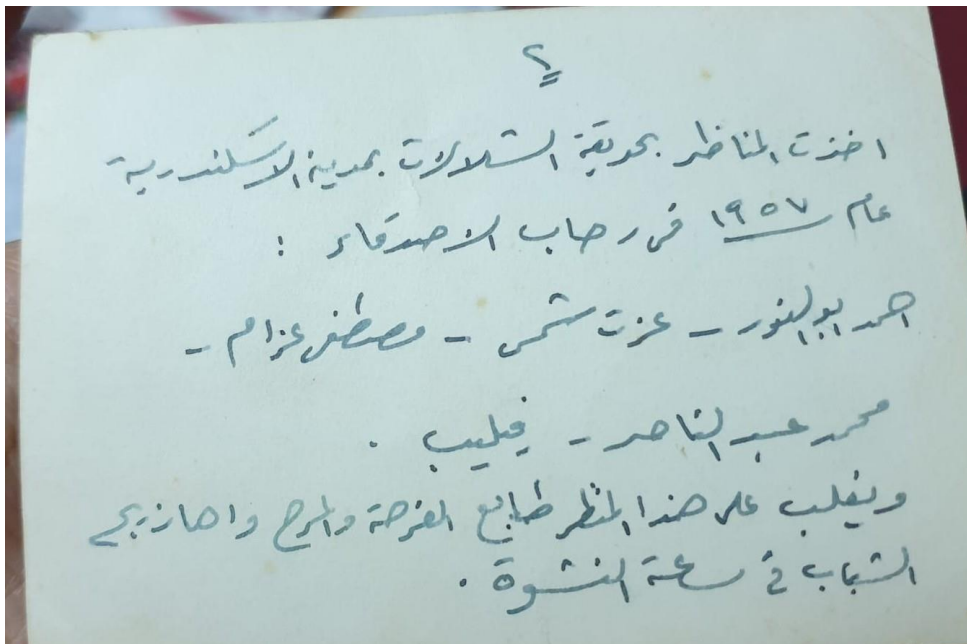


Gedo on the far left with his friends at the University of Alexandria; circa 1962

“Those are my colleagues in university,” my grandfather told me as he ruffled through a pile of images placed in plastic bags. He had brought with him 2 to 3 plastic bags with old images that belonged to him to show me.

As Gedo shuffled through more of his private photograph collection, I saw a glimpse of happiness in his eyes but also a sense of sadness. He started pointing to pictures and said, “This was in Assuit, and this was in Damanhur, and this was in the University.” Gedo was first attracted to his pre-marriage images; to him, it was also part of his family, identity and sense of belonging. The pictures he shared illustrated different aspects of modernity and spatial changes in juxtaposition to cultural homogeneity of the attire, aesthetics and the cultural heterogeneity of idiosyncratic identity and complex reality. The complex reality speaks to how present-day Egypt looks very familiar to past Egypt. The background of many of the pictures he shared with me gives me a sense of identity and belonging to not only a culture but also a community that spoke of Egypt and what it meant to be

a young Egyptian man with his friends in the 1960s. Photography was trending in Egypt in the 1960s. Gedo's friend in university has taken photography as a hobby and a small business, taking pictures of his friends and other people. He had a small studio in his house where "he would take the film to a photographer's studio to print the pictures." It was him that took the pictures of Gedo and his friends in Dairut and Manfalut in the governorate of Asyut. Those photographs were not the usual images that would be hung or placed in an album, but they held a special place in my grandfather's life. When I had asked what these photographs meant to him, he mentioned them as "*zekra*," a memory- and the camera as a means of documenting a memory to be forgotten across the years; they were evidence of what has been, of the lives he momentarily shared everyday experiences. All that was left behind were fading photographs with a written *zekra*, a small passage of writing dated with names and locations at the back of it.



A Zekra on the back of an image; circa 1957

This *zekra* is often found written at the back of friendship images. These image-text documentaries represented my grandfather's part in a history that co-exists with postmodern Egypt. I would be perplexed by the background static poses of my grandfather and his friends. The handwriting on its back represented an effort not to forget but eventually will be forgotten. It translates to "I captured the natural scenery of the waterfall in the city of Alexandria circa 1957 among friends."

I started asking questions with Gedo about these image-text frames I noticed. As he looked upon one of the friendship images, I asked, "what do you think about these small blurts on the back of the pictures?". The following conversation emerged.

G: yea, it is a documentation of a memory, a *zekra*.

R: Was it usual to write a *zekra* on the back of pictures?

G: We wanted to remember so that we would document our day. But of course, there were some things that I did not think I would forget, but now I did forget them.”



*Gedo on the far right with his friends and his nephew singing and dancing;
circa 1962*

R: But in the old days, cameras were big, were they expensive?

G: no, it was not expensive. But not anyone could afford it, and not everyone could get one.

R: So, who could buy them?

G: Anyone who had the financial ability, of course. R: So where was this picture taken?

G: This was at the borders of Damanhur. There was a garden after that, the gate of Alexandria on the way towards Damanhur, and it was me, my colleagues and my nephew. So, we stopped among the field and took a picture. And we started dancing and singing. We were happy among water, greenery and beautiful faces. Haha! We had a regular camera, and we took

pictures.

I decided to include these short excerpts from my conversations with my grandfather to elicit two things I noticed: the oscillation between the act of physical remembrance and, second, the emotional memorial. To remember how one once felt is subjective and can be manipulated, whereas the physical aspect of memory can be lost; in that way, photographs are symbolic of death- of being a *memento mori*. The *zekra* is the physical aspect or material creation/manifestation of a memory embedded into an image or a frame. The camera is the medium in which the *zekra* is produced. The subjective memory is complex and can easily fade away, and it can act as a fragment of our past and present complexity. What stands out in the above image is the background, the space in which the picture is taken. The natural scenery has become somewhat of a foreign object in contemporary Egypt. It is essentially the aspect for Gedo in which he “can’t take *it* in,” similar to Epstein in Hirsch’s book *Family Frames*. It became the “lieux de mémoire” for my grandfather, a collective memory shared among his friends to visit nature across Egypt becomes “sites of remembrance, what Pierre Nora has termed *lieux de mémoire*” (Hirsch, 1997, p.22).

The event becomes bound by emotional affect and identity, across life and death, through time and space “enveloped in a Mobius strip of the immutable and the mobile” (Hirsch, 1997, p.22). When my grandfather realized that he did indeed forget, he could remember once again through the *zekra* blurt at the back of the image. There was a brief moment of mocking of the present when compared to the past as he says, “We were happy among water, greenery and beautiful faces. Haha!”. The laughter here is to what has been, what could have been and what is in the presentation of contemporary times.

2.3 Post Memories

In September 2020, I initially hung family pictures in my room above my desk. The intent behind this act was to remind me where I came from- a reaffirmation of identity. With the start of the first lockdown, the restriction of public spaces and the shift of in-person learning into solely online, I found myself gazing into these images. Looking into these ghostly remnants of the past, I felt perplexed. I was perplexed by the iconography of my photo smiling and holding onto my favourite stuffed toy as a child. Yet, these images provoked memories long suppressed, rather than remembering my Egyptian identity. I was reminded of the forms of trauma and care I had endured due to constant movement, adaptation, and insecurity.

The forms of trauma and care ultimately enmeshed together because of the generational trauma inherited by Egyptians from colonialism, not only the British but of the Ottoman as well. It is also of the history of silence in Egypt. The matter of silenced speech is linked to the freedom of speech and the freedom of the individual. And as Lazili has once explained in an interview “there is no freedom of speech in a society where one has no control over oneself.” (2021). Yet, the reason why I look into trauma and care as an enmeshment in this project is due to my findings. For example, photography was used a tool for instilling care through family documentation and an affirmation of existence in a family who constantly travelled between two countries (that is Saudi Arabia and Egypt). The camera was also used to represent and focus on the good memories, that is to inspire the individual memory to become a collective shared memory across temporality.

I found myself attached to memories that were not mine but felt like they belonged to me. My sense of belonging to these images was due to the rhetoric and narratives I inherited psychologically from my family members. It is narratives that were reproduced intergenerationally due to years of social injustice, trauma and injustice that were spoken off

throughout my childhood—becoming not only a post-memory that is imaginative but felt deeply in my own embodied responses.

Photographs are the only objective part of this research, as it is quite literally an object. What makes it so interesting is the subjectivity and embodied affect attached to and around it. The narratives are stories that parallel my parents' and grandparents' recollection of traumatic events and what essentially have transformed into the "image."

The spatiality and temporality of these narratives were attached to my memories of the past and the empty presence I was feeling. Like Henri Raczymow, I felt an eternal sense of loss—an identity loss and an inner conundrum of wanting to identify, label and categorize myself and forgetting the reality of (be)longing for that identity. It was a numinous affect, one that I could not escape from nor suppress. These photographs had become the medium, and the remainder of that sense of loss and inheritance of traumas and care enmeshed. For the longest time, I had felt that I should be eternally grateful for my positionality and situation as a child of immigrants in Canada. I had thought that I had no right to speak about what was troubling me. I "was caught in the abyss," as Raczymow (1994) would describe it. I was caught between my recollection and the narrative I was brought up with about my own identity, my Egyptian background. Behaviours about who I am collectively and culturally were attached to me profoundly that for the longest time, it is all that I could see. It constituted who I was, even though it was a projection of a sense of loss my ancestors' had faced, yet, it was essential to be part of that loss, to trauma bond and invest in that imaginary sense of identity and rhetoric.

As Hirsch puts it, "They are the leftovers, the fragmentary sources and building blocks, shot through with holes, of the work on the post-memory" (1997: p.17). Inside, these images are moments captured and frozen in time and space, and it becomes a timeless past that evokes an imaginary identity. To me, the images reflected a distorted sense of history, and the image's narrative contradicted the memory I had of them. Yet, it reflected a sense of rhetoric that was

representative of the post-memory I had inherited from my ancestors. I mean that photographs also have their post-memory attached to them that displaces or contorts the story behind them. Only by adding text or investigating the story behind them can we bridge closer what cannot be bridged- that is, the collective memory juxtaposed with idiosyncratic recollection.

Aesthetics in old images constitute a fetishized representation of what has been, and they can encapsulate an imaginary ideal—an ideal no reality could uphold. Especially when it comes to familial representation and ties, the images are deceitful in what they can represent. Images are not always documentative of what has been, but instead of what appears to be. They can transform the subject into an object; in a way, images become posed and ingenuine (Barthes, 1980). Yet, reality is also infused with the imaginary, psychoanalysis investigates the historical through understanding the form of subject in an individuated subject but in relation to transgenerational traumas. Karima Lazili, in *Colonial Trauma*, accounts for the psychic and social-political effects of colonialism in Algeria (2021) Lazili (2021) is able to draw on historical material and psychoanalysis to discuss the ways in which colonialism has left its marks on contemporary postcolonial individuals. The trauma that is inherited here talks of feelings of abandonment and injustice among places of care and communities. The French colonization of Algeria had imposed new names on people and land that consequently severed people's ties with their communities and places of support and care. In her investigation with patients, they talked of being aware of and reminded of colonization- despite not experiencing it. This is where reality is enmeshed with the imaginary historical. Where social revolutions emerge such as the Hirak movement in Algeria started as a need for freedom of speech while also consolidating it (Lazili, 2021). It is also a reminder of not forgetting the past, the movement is influenced by social media and imagery as well through the use of the hashtag “Mansinach” (we have not forgotten).

In a similar manner, I look into my families' images of the past as an individual who has been experiencing real and imaginative trauma that are a product of displacement and

colonialism. Images to me are the medium in which I am able to better reorganize the basis of my affect, but also eventually the embodied affect of my family members. Images and post-memory are oppositional to one another. Images are two-dimensional and inanimate objects, whereas post-memory is a fantasized image, an imaginative memory in which one has immersed and invested themselves. It can reflect forms of care and trauma inherited from a family member's trauma. It becomes an embedded lesson "never to forget" what has been. Whether the "what has been" is also experienced by the following generations or not. I will discuss the forms of trauma and care in the lived experience in juxtaposition with the fetishization that is embedded into imagery. Then I will move towards the imaginative investment present in the absence of imagery.

Chapter 3: Imagescapes

"As I pursued my investigation, nagging questions lingered in my mind. I was preplexed"

(Slaney, 2003, p.xiii).

3.1 Modernity

I had asked my mother about missing photographs of a house they have lived in Saudi Arabia as a young child with her siblings, my grandfather, and my now passed grandmother. My mother initiated the conversation about the different landscapes she lived in as a child and how they affected her identity. One space came to her as we spoke, an apartment they had stayed in for one year on a mountain in Hautat Sudair north of Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. Sudair is also known for its mountainous landscape. I asked my mother what the building was made of; as I asked her, she got up in a hurry and told me, "Oh, I am not sure; let me ask Gedo." As she approached him and asked him, "baba, what was the house made of in Hautat Sudair?". Gedo replied with a smirk, "it was a house. It was a house with three levels."

I had tried earlier to look for the landscapes they had settled in to imagine the past reality they stayed in, and all I could find were old traditional Saudi houses that were historically made of a sun-dried mud mixture. I asked my mother, "Is this how the apartment you lived in looked like?". She

said, “no, it was different” moving the camera to Gedo, she asked him, “how did the apartment look like?”

My grandfather moved in 1978 to Saudi Arabia amidst the booming oil wealth and economy. The Saudi government had started investing in social services programs- one of them included housing. They started building houses for their citizens to have for free to support Saudi Arabia’s urbanization and modernization. My grandparent’s migration to Saudi Arabia is among hundreds of thousands of migrants that have also left their home country for a better life in terms of financial stability.

My grandfather replied, “it was made of old stones.” My mother nodded and said, “yes, you know Raghad, these old Saudi bricks?” I replied, “I am not sure. Do you have an image that resembles it?” She mentioned that they never took pictures of the place because of their short one-year stay there.

I asked my mother, “You stayed there only for a year, but there are no pictures of either you or your family in this apartment; why did you not take pictures?”. She replies, “I am not sure why we did not take any pictures in this apartment in the mountains despite being a very nice one, and it was made of bricks, and it was one of the very first apartments in the region.”

My mother had remembered her stay at the apartment as a platonic family romance where connections were formed, where she lived in a beautiful apartment with breathtaking views. She continues, “Raghad! The pictures we took in this apartment are somehow lost.” I asked, “why are they lost? Where did they go?”.

She stated, “I remember one day where we took pictures in that apartment with Uncle Anas. You will find these pictures either with us in Canada or with uncle Anas- a friend of baba and mama. Whom they considered as their brother- for us, they loved us dearly! They used to treat us as their own children. Moreover, baba and mama also treat their children as their own.” As my mother spoke about this loss of images, I imagined what these images could or would look like and what uncle Anas would look like. How their attire and surroundings would appear in the image- now displaced

similar to the displacement of my identity. Post-memory functions to occupy a gap that displaces one's reality. Photographs are definitive; they are an object. An imaginative investment is a psychological act of redefining what has been and could have been.

3.1 Modernity

I started thinking about the connection between what has been and what could have been. I discuss my findings in this final section of my chapter, "Imagetexts." I move on to my next chapter, "Imagescapes," where I connect my grandfather's temporary migration to Saudi Arabia from the 1970s to the 1980s to what could have been and the forms of care and trauma produced as a result of movement between the two countries, sense of belongings and identities. In 1952, after Gamal Abdel Nasser's coup d'etat on the previous ruling monarchy, Egypt had started to transform spatially, socially and politically. Arab socialism was dominating the socio-political economy of Egypt and many other nearing countries.

Throughout my conversations with my family, it had become clear that Gamal Abdel Nasser would be mentioned as the reason for the fall of Egypt. In some instances, he was mentioned briefly or hinted towards. Words were elusive at times when his name was brought up. There were boundaries there to be aware of. During this time, Egypt was an ongoing rapid transformation from being a monarchy and colonial state to being dominantly ruled by the army forces, also known as the Free Officers Movement. It was sometimes easier to talk about the Free Officers Movement and its agenda than talk of a particular member of this movement. I talked with my father about this rapid transition and the Arab-pan nationalism that started to take power. My father had told me, "Do you know who really screwed Egypt?" I assumed, "Gamal Abdel Nasser?" My dad replied with a short laugh, "yes!" My father seemed to be the only one without a silenced narrative, and he spoke his mind freely.

When I initially asked my grandfather if he could talk about the 1950s and the coup, he was resistant, and there was a prevalent form of unspoken silence. In certain instances, when I had asked my mother to speak about past topics, she would refer me to Gedo or ask Gedo. Gedo does not talk

about Egypt's uncertain times' politics and historical reality. Instead, he filters out that past reality from his narratives of what has been. My mother seeks Gedo's permission to open up the past wounds, and my father speaks his mind when and if he wants to. In this research, Gedo has taken on the role of the narrator of the past, present and future. I go first into details of his university life and white-collar years in Egypt, marriage, and eventually migration to Saudi Arabia. The present for Gedo and my other family members is quite different. At the time of this project, at the start of September 2021, my mother and father had travelled to Egypt to maintain familial ties with Gedo and other family members. My father eventually left to go back to Abu Dhabi at the end of September 2021.

The conversations and interactions I had with my father revealed the most about family history and often filled in the gaps in the silences between Gedo and my mother. However, the silences that were part of my grandfather's narrative should not be disregarded. They represent the forms of trauma and care reproduced through socio-political unrest, migration, left-behind or abandoned spaces, and the eventual return to those abandoned spaces.

3.2 Messianic Power

“Memory is both individual and collective as, in some of the work, private snapshots are superimposed into images of public historical events.” (Hirsch, 1999, p. 212).

In 1972, my grandparents moved from Egypt to Saudi Arabia shortly after many universities came to a halt due to the ‘Udwan at-Tulatiyy, also known as the Suez Canal war. The war occurred between Egypt, France, the United Kingdom and Israel during Gamal Abdel Nasser's regime. In the early 1950s, Egypt was going through unprecedented social unrest. However, the more I looked into Egypt's history, the fuller picture I had to understand my grandfather's hesitancy to talk about the past.

G: In 1956, there was a war “harb tholtheya,” otherwise known as the Suez Crisis, and education was stopped nationwide. Every school stopped working this year, and in reality, it was two years lost, not just one.

R: So, during this war, what did you do?

G: In this period, or this *zaman*, there were no governmental positions, and even university graduates had no available jobs, so the state made a competition for available nationwide jobs. So, we said, " OK, if we graduate, we will sit on the street? Why not apply? Why not take a job and continue education while jobs and we won in the completion and it was not only me, but it was also other colleagues as well? Moreover, we got jobs all around the country. My position was in the ministry of finance. Moreover, I went to Assuit as a part of the job, which was far from Alexandria; of course, I had to attend lectures, but there was no time to do both, and at the time, professors rarely used books; the courses were lecture focused. So that is it, and there were no books. So, of course, I left the university this year to work, and after this year, I relocated to Damanhur. Moreover, from Damanhur, near Alexandria, I was able to continue my education.

Ultimately, as I discussed the universities coming to a standstill with my grandfather, and the reasons behind the war, he made it very clear that he was not going to talk politics, and I respected it. I thought that if I could look further into the history of Egypt and learn about it independently, it could help give me a complete picture of what had happened to instill a form of trauma and silence that is not allowed to be expressed. However, in a way, it was elusive research that proved to be an enormously long history of Egypt's Ottoman and British colonial power. My father, in particular, always mentioned Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalistic sentiment that eventually led Egypt to a dictator oppressive regime that continues until contemporary times.

On the other hand, my mother did not speak of Egypt politically. She focused on my grandfather's post-secondary education and how it came to a temporary halt, replied, "I do not know about that; you would have to ask Gedo," yet continued to give me a detailed history of Egypt's socio-political unrest. My mother's response in giving me a detailed explanation of socio-political unrest of Egypt tells me her interest and imaginative investment in Egypt despite having lived in diaspora most of her life and has no active plans of moving back to her distant home- that feels as if it is the past despite being in the present. I say her home in Egypt being in the past is due to her own

attitude towards Egypt as if it is a distant past. As if the past is not in a interconnected relation with the present.

This coupled with my lack of knowledge of Egypt's socio-historical past and how it contributed to its reality. I often sift through historical books that spoke of Egypt's political history and its relationship with the Turkish aristocratic power that founded Egypt's modern-day classism issue. I would access the AUC Rare Books and Special Collections Digitals Library daily. Along with online resources that talked about Egyptian history and remote interviews to understand Egypt's social history. The AUC Digital Library proved to be of utmost importance as it provided me with a visual representation of Egypt and its background history.

As I looked into the hundreds of thousands of rare books and collections about Egypt's archaeological, antiquity, literature and much more resources, I started to have a complete picture of what had been and how it came to shape Egypt. As Benjamin would call "*Jetztzeit*," that is what comes to alert us to past mistakes by travelling through time to "change the character" of *their* day (Silverman, 2015, p.8). The past image reveals to us what has been and what currently is- hoping to break the cycle of oppression or past mistakes.

One quote in particular From Silverman's (2015) book, *The History of Photography, Part 1*, that had stayed with me and gave me the force to continue in times of sadness and disappointment is: "If, we, however, we ignore a previous generation's warning., we doom it, as well as ourselves. It is because of the reversibility and reciprocity of this relationship that the past has a "claim" on our weak messianic power" (p.8).

The messianic power is a concept that Walter Benjamin uses in his 1931 *Theses On The Philosophy of History*, that "we have been endowed with a weak messianic power to which the past has a claim." This claim communicates what has been and what comes back to "haunt." This haunting is very different from the one of spirits and ghostly remnants. I will further discuss Chapters 5 and 6 talk about this "haunting," but what I mean here is that this messianic power comes back to claim us for what will have become a missed possibility or an unrealized potential. The past comes

back to “claim” us with a seductive appeal rather than a lingering phantasm of a ghost. It is a subjective haunting that requires a special attunement on an unconscious level to be expressed.

Benjamin in *Illuminations* (1969) states “There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply. Historical materialists are aware of that.” (p.263).

What I find the most interesting about Martel’s reading of Kafka and Benjamin is the messianic power in the profane social and historic power. Franz Kafka’s concept of the coming of the messiah; that will arrive when it is too late. The notion of hope in the past for Benjamin seem relevant for the underlying embodied responses from my family members towards life in Egypt and having to migrate.

My grandparents alongside my parents had to migrate from Egypt out of the impossibility of staying. The economic agony of life in Egypt made it easier for my family to decide to leave Egypt behind. I use the word behind because that is how it feels for my mother and father. At times, Gedo regrets ever leaving Saudi Arabia to go back to Egypt. Even though my parents visit Egypt to stay physically connected with family members, they feel that Egypt’s contemporary spaces are foreign, and somewhat abandoned. The abandonment here is both a feeling of leaving a nostalgic space behind and being abandoned by these same spaces long before moving.

In the conversation I had with my family members while also reading Walter Benjamin's migration and being a refugee as well as *Knot of the Soul* by Stefania Pandolfo; I found myself writing this poem.

From one fragment to another,
 A symptom that bears witness to war,
 Bearing witness to violence
 What does it mean to bear witness to a crime?
 Committed against you
 Constantly in the realm of fighting the real and imaginary
 Looped onto its violence and enduring its trauma
 A pain that feels so real, but isn't physical
 An attachment made impossible
 A penumbra of pain, wronging, and fear

....

I can see the shadows,
 So, does not that mean that there is still light?
 A hope? Perhaps to end that pain that encumbers my existence
 Or is my agony part of my imaginary existence?
 Am I to accept it? Or deny it?
 I wonder sometimes,
 What it means to accept wrongdoings?
 An *Ibtilā'*, an ordeal
 A paradigm of decisions

Kafka's popular quote states, "The messiah will come only when he is no longer necessary; he will come only on the day after his arrival; he will come, not on the last day, but the very last."

Similarly, I could not ignore how the prophetic but late arrival of the Messiah comes to give us the space (i.e. hope) to do the necessary work needed for redemption, but I cannot help but share the fleeting affect of such hope.

This is a reminder of the “what comes after” in social revolutions. For example, a revolution that I think was one of the first revolutions against colonialism, both against the Ottoman and British, is the ‘Urabi revolution against the Khedive Tewfik and the British-French colonial hold of Egypt in the mid-1800s. Ahmed ‘Urabi, an officer in the Egyptian army, becomes the first political and military leader in Egypt who comes from the “*fellahin*” class and is of deep skin tone; the Khedive Tawfik immediately discriminates against him for not being of Circassian or Turkish ethnicity. The Turkish aristocratic and foreign power force discriminated against his “*fellahin*” class and “*Arab*” race.

Ahmed ‘Urabi led the ‘Urabi revolt with the anthem “Misr Lil Misryeen,” “Egypt for Egyptians,” calling against the discrimination Egyptian citizens face in Egypt. I am stating that after a long history of oppression of the “*fellahin*” class, this was a chance for ‘Urabi to create “sideways” communities. He did create a military force to fight this oppression. To free “us”- the *fellahin* from oppression, only for the battle to be lost. I write “us” here as a form of representing a distant past of my identity- one that was often kept secret and hidden (that is, being a *fellah*-coming from the farmer’s class). It appears to be where my grandfather’s class was before “moving out” at the age of ten before having to move- made a refuge in his own country. To seek better education and a better life, it seemed that the past comes back to make “us” understand the lived reality enmeshed in the imaginary past that is very real for my grandfather, my family, and many others. It also represents my grandfather’s silence in politics and my post-memory inheritance.

The Messiah arrives, only decades late, and hope is left in the past and for the past. As Kafka would say, “Oh, there is hope, an infinite amount of hope, just not for us.”

In short, this past carries a “messianic power,” which comes back to the present to “claim” the paradigm of embodied responses and affects between contemporary generations and the previous one.

This messianic power that “claims” me is the moment I learnt about the bombing of Alexandria by British troops, which has essentially triggered the ‘Urabi revolt, come back to connect me to the profane work of redemption and “*Jetztzeit*.” That is not to wait for a “Messiah” to do the necessary work but rather to take on the heavy task of redemption- I would argue that this work of allowing hope to guide us in the projects we create is redemption. That redemption also reminds me of decolonization and the question of decolonization. As Benjamin states in *Illuminations* (1969), “Only for the sake of the hopeless ones have we been given hope” (p.356).

This hope that Benjamin speaks of is the hope “we”- in my case would be the children of migrants who have been given hope by those who came before us– transferred onto us not only through our ancestral heritage but also through a messianic direction that propels us to the historical

happenings of the past that comes together in “a flash with the now to form a constellation” – to bring us to the present (Silverman, 2015, p.8).



The Bombardment of Alexandria- Source Credit: AUC Rare Books and Special Collections Digital Library- 1882

After the bombardment of Alexandria in 1882 and the ‘Urabi Revolt emerged against the Khedive Tewfik and the British conquest of Egypt. Ahmed ‘Urabi eventually lost Tel el-Kebir’s battle and ended up arrested and incarcerated to death- before his sentence was changed to exile from Egypt. To me, his story of revolt against discriminatory contemporary Egypt is also a story of hope. The bridge between my grandfather’s silence of Egypt and the ‘Urabi revolution is that a sense of defeat and hope is continuously present. Moreover, taking action only hurts us more. Sometimes, the common phrase “*ba’olik eh*” means that what you are doing is useless/not important/wrong. It is

both a pessimistic and a protective statement that emerged from my grandfather's lips when I first proposed to him my project.

From my grandfather's silence, I can only sense and inherit the forms of trauma and care he had endured in Egypt both as a young orphan child from the "*fellahin*" class to his post-secondary education and ultimately to his migration from Egypt to Saudi Arabia. This constant movement of seeking a better life was to leave behind the classism that existed in every corner of Egyptian life. When the topic of migration is brought up to Gedo, he always states, "The best days in my life were spent in Saudi Arabia."

3.3 Silence and Redemption

In the following chapter, I will share conversations I had with my grandfather and mother that contain brief moments of silence. Chapter 5 will discuss my mother's experience with depression as a young adult, newly graduated with a bachelor's in commerce, and a newly married woman. I recognize my mother's melancholic affect from my childhood in Saudi Arabia. I am introducing these brief moments of silence into my investigation of the forms of care and trauma produced through displacement, social unrest and its role on familial and identity ties because silence can be read and unread in the transmission of socio-political trauma intergenerationally.

Aytak Akbari, a humanities professor at McMaster University, looks into the forms of silences as a language rather than avoid a gap that needs to be bridged or filled with words. She also took on a project where she looked into her own and other familial silences, looking into Chilean, Haitian and Iranian refugees who settled in Canada in the 1980s. In this project, I aim to include untranslatable silences to be read as a form of pause- that is, to stop and reflect, to reimagine as the reader disconnected and connected from my family's forms of silence. Think about the narratives produced via our conversations and how God is constantly connected to them. A phrase I grew up often hearing was, "It is only Allah who knows what is in one's heart." I include this phrase as a signifier of why silence invokes a sense of connection to God, to faith, yet, it also signifies an untranslatable affirmation of embodied affect- in context to trauma and politics. It also affirms the

limits of human knowledge in the opacity of the heart and the “divine” external of human relations and politics.

Another aspect that I think is worth mentioning in this project is the replacement of staying silent on a topic by opposing to speak about it. This form of silence is not confused with being “silenced” or “silent” about it; for example, in chapter 1, the opening conversation between Gedo and I on creating this project. The mentioning of Egyptian politics and revolutions, there was a strong effect or feeling (*ihsas*) in the Arabophone context that is not to be ignored or dismissed. The senses, the psychic energy, atmosphere, and embodied responses are all part of these conversations. While seemingly invisible in their written context, they are not separated from the memories and affect (*ihsas*) that come together to represent familial communication concerning migration and the social or collective history of witnessing and experiencing life across the diaspora.

The redemption section in this project speaks of a specific affect brought up and revealed through the conversations I raised among my family. It is not separated from my academic premises nor the personalized aspect of my relationship and ties to my family and studies. It demonstrates the affective ways that history has and always comes back to “claim” us- therefore, the past is never entirely ‘in the past.’ The role of bringing these narratives and affects is to allow for redemption. The redemption I speak of represents Walter Benjamin’s description in *The Angel of History* to work to both reveal the past and how it contributed to the present and recognize human nature and come to life with its contradictions. I want to clarify that God becomes a form of transcendence to such contradictions in my conversations with my family, especially on morality and what is and is not ethical. Talking to God, mentioning God, and having faith in God are not separated from the forms of silence or the inauspicious affect my family members came to have in dealing with memories and trauma.

Yet, I propose that transcendence is not separated from the process of redemption as it works to work with and perhaps balance the skepticism of the human experience. Redemption through God’s existence and having faith- not hope in this project are the imaginative affect of

constantly disrupting, refocusing, and reimagining oneself in juxtaposition with the incorrigible deviant nature of humans.

Chapter 4 Marriage

4.1 Introduction

My maternal grandfather like many who grew up in rural areas of Egypt had a difficult childhood. It did not help that his mother passed away during his birth and that his father died a decade later. In those ten years, my grandfather was raised by a stepmother whom he loved dearly with two half-siblings, one half-sister, one half-brother.

G: Here look, this is my family, this is my father, my stepmother, my sister, and my brother.

R: Wow, this is so cool, this is your brother, so where are you?

G: I don't remember.



Gedo's family, his siblings, father on the right, and step mother on the left.

Circa 1942

As I held this image in my hands, I could feel its fragility and how figuratively old it was. After all, this image was Gedo's only documentation of his family before leaving it behind to pursue a different life from his siblings and relatives. Shortly after his father's death, he lived with his uncle

in the city of Tanta for middle school and then eventually in Alexandria. His story of how he came to decide to get an education was because of his uncle Abdelfattah's push to make him get an education. As my mother would say, “his uncle Abdelfattah was a very kind man; when he saw how smart my dad was, he almost fought with him because he wanted Gedo to leave the rural life behind and better himself.” Rather than allowing my grandfather’s siblings to pressure him to work in the fields with them. My grandfather had decided to leave everything behind and go to the city to learn.

This was one of the very first steps that allowed for the journey of my grandfather's university life in Alexandria, then moving to Luxor to work for a year in a government position before settling momentarily in Damanhur to get married and moving to Saudi Arabia in pursuit of financial stability. It all compiles with my grandmother’s decision, which has contributed immensely to allowing my mother and father to move out of Egypt to Saudi Arabia once again, eventually then United Arab of Emirates and finally to Canada.

Unfortunately, my grandmother is not alive to tell her story and perspective on many of the memories and *zekerayot*, the plural form of *zakra*. This chapter wants to explicitly discuss the movement history of three generations of my Egyptian family. The oldest generation is my grandfather’s, the second generation is my parents, and the third generation is my perspective which will be included in different areas of this project.

M: One time, I asked my dad, baba, if there were some things that you could have done but did not do? Why? He said to me that your grandmother did not have post-secondary education, which limited her vision of what “we” can accomplish. But I also think that her upbringing environment made her limit herself.

R: Yea, Anna did not permit herself to dream.

M: Yea, that is true, and she could not have another dream as well. Because she saw this as dangerous, as if you might hurt yourself, I do not know why, but she loved us a lot at the same time.

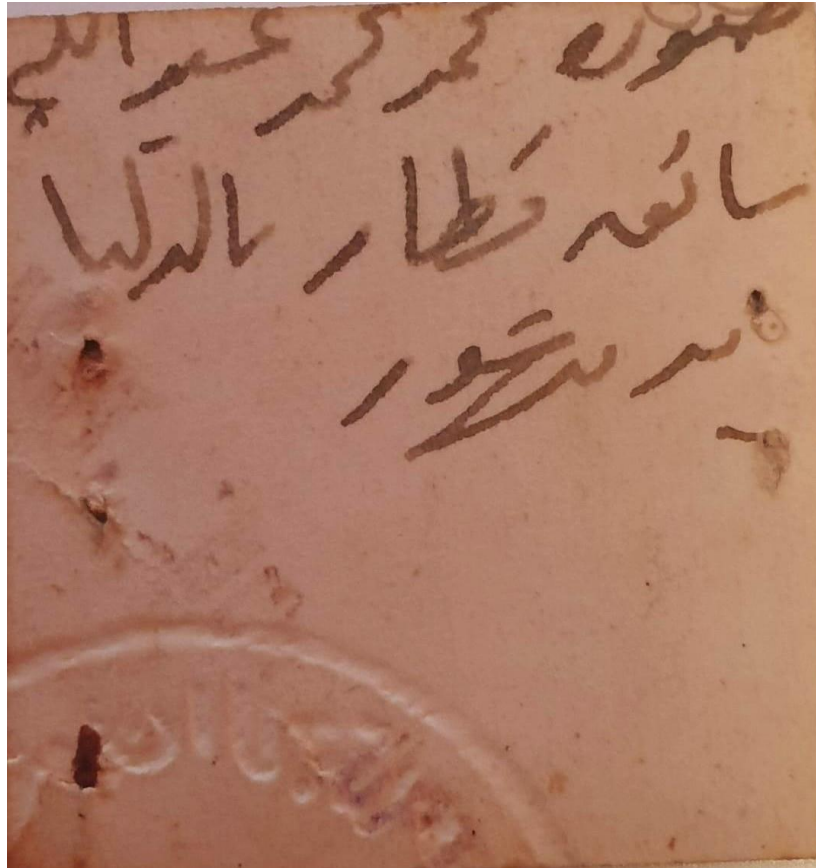
R: I think I know why she did not have someone who is like Uncle Abdelfattah that can go to the extent of fighting with Gedo to tell him to go, go to dream. Pursue a different life.

M: yea, but also my mother had simple dreams as well. She just wanted a house to live in and sit on a balcony in the morning and stop at that. She did not understand that we or myself and I were different, and I think dreams differ from one person to another.

Life was becoming increasingly tricky after my grandfather's marriage to my grandmother in Egypt in 1962. Across four years, 1962-1966, my grandparents had moved residence three times in Egypt before migrating to Saudi Arabia. From 1962 to 1963, they resided one year in a building in the Shobra district in front of the train railway station in Damanhur. When I asked my mother about this apartment, she told me, "I did not know my parents lived there," which is reasonable given that she was not born yet. From 1963 to 1964, they lived in one of the buildings/houses owned by their maternal great-grandfather.



My maternal great grandfather; circa late 1940s- early 1950s



Written on the back of the photograph is his full name: Mohammed Mohammad Abdullah. The train operator in Damanhur train station. Circa 1920

R: How many houses did my maternal grandmother's family own?

G: They had two buildings/houses. We went to one of your grandmother's family homes and when they wanted to sell the house, we went to your father's mother house until we immigrated to Saudi Arabia.

4.2 Life in Egypt in the 1960s

They soon left in 1965 as they had their son, my uncle, and my mother and had to move to a more accommodating space. Gedo explained, "I left after one year because God gave us a child so we went to another residence and because my wife was an employee and money was tight.

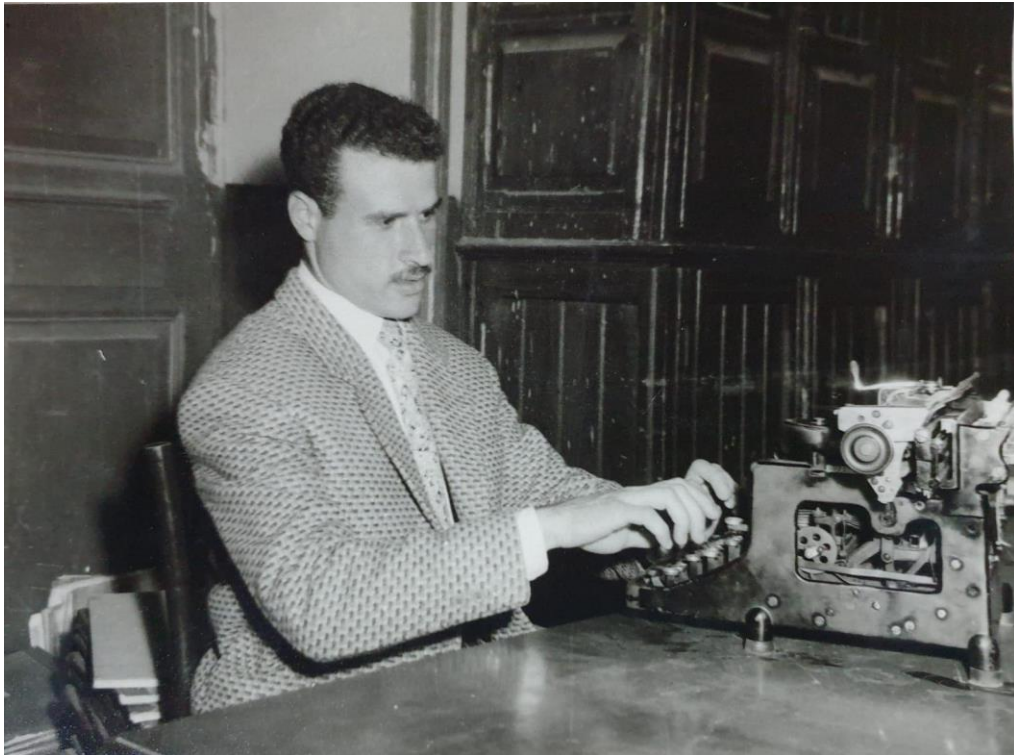
We went to her sister's house and lived there for 10 years."



My mother on the right as a child, Anna, my grandmother in the center and my uncle as a child on the left. Circa 1964

The reasoning behind leaving for Saudi Arabia from my grandfather and my mother's perspective is multi-fold; the main reasoning is that my grandmother was able to secure a better teaching position in Saudi Arabia with a better wage. Even though my grandfather did not have a job yet in Saudi Arabia, they both agreed to migrate and allocate their current life to a new unknown territory for a better life and for the financial security it would bring them as a family. My

grandfather was able to get a job shortly after in Saudi Arabia as an accountant for a government organization for families in need. The position he accepted would have been a service worker. However, upon realizing the organization's manager of my grandfather's expertise and skill with numbers and typewriters, which were back then a new technological tool in Saudi Arabia, he was then re-assigned to the accountant position.



My grandfather typing on a typewriter- circa 1962

G: Here take a look at this image of me on the typewriter.

R: Oh, you were working here?

G: No of course not, I was pretending to type for the camera, haha!

R: Haha! How old were you here?

G: I was 28 years old



My grandfather in the centre, his left hand reaching for the telephone, as his right hand is placed on the shoulder of a colleague. Circa 1960.

4.3 Work in Saudi Arabia

When I first looked at the image, what caught my attention the most was my grandfather's display of affection on his colleague's shoulder as others stood erect. There is an immediate sense of friendship between the two. The off-centre position of my grandfather and his friend attracts the eye and opposes it as my grandfather's suit is of interesting, dotted pattern that breaks the silent apathy of the image. Then my eyes go to the utmost left, where a stern look is "looking back at me." This look makes me wonder why he has such a stern look, and the white of his chemise does not seem to help with his stern gaze. I felt the need to stand up straight and conserve my affect by looking at the image. However, looking back at my grandfather's familial look and affectionate disposition of his hand on his colleague allows me to relax. Not to mention, this stern expression is further broken by the man second on the right, who peculiarly and sarcastically holds the phone to his ear as he

smiles back at the camera. I think this is one of my favourite images of my grandfather because there is a feeling of being in “the Office” and having to work and allowing space for amusing poses as the picture is captured and becomes a *zakra*.

In this section, I will discuss my grandfather’s job, their attire, and my mother’s new Arabic dialect. Overall, this section will be brief on life in Saudi Arabia. Despite my grandparent’s initial trepidations about life in Saudi Arabia as foreigners, my grandfather and mother often speak fondly of their time there.



Gedo in the traditional Saudi attire. Circa 1978

R: Can you tell me more about Saudi attire?

G: I wore the Saudi outfit when employed in the office I worked in. *Kan zaman* was a brand-new office, and of course, I had been in Saudi for 3 or 5 years in the picture. Everyone wore a Saudi outfit. It was airy and lightweight because it was so hot, but in this picture, I wore the whole outfit for the picture because my colleagues here are real Saudis, and they told me to wear it and to be like a Saudi.

R: Yes, you look nice.

G: So, I wore this Saudi outfit, and I sat on the desk and then they took this picture.

R: I see

G: This one is from my family. Moreover, this was when we went to Saudi Arabia and bought a radio. Or, a television, I mean, and it was a newly developed city. It was on top of a mountain, and the area was called Hawtah Sudayr



Another picture of, Gedo, my grandfather in traditional Saudi attire; circa 1980s

My grandfather had worked in Saudi Arabia for ten years, and he has nothing but fond memories there and maybe a slight regret of not staying there longer. My grandfather refers to it as “El-Ayam el helwa,” similar to the phrase “the good old days.” I had started to interview Gedo about his lived experiences at his work, and I wanted to learn more about how he could use his post-secondary education and work experience from Egypt in Saudi Arabia. The following is a conversation between me, Gedo and my mother. I chose to leave it here full as it gives the whole experience of understanding in depth the relationship between Gedo and his colleagues and overall, his lived experience in Saudi Arabia.

G: I was a great worker, and my supervisor would revise my investigative reports and find no mistakes. Moreover, as it is, it was transferred to the minister. And my supervisor approved it or disproved it and took the final decision. *Kan zaman!* that is why I tell you to do this or not do that because I have experience writing reports and research.

M: then why work did you do in Saudi Arabia, dad?

G: Well, my position's title was a social researcher; however, when they found that I excelled in accounting, they transferred me to the financial department. I overlooked the budget department and logged in daily, and the office was part of the social affairs.

R: Ok, did you ever work as a social researcher?

G: No, I did not. Because the desk was newly opened, and I happened to be there at the perfect time. There was not even furniture yet, and he used to open the desk and guard it was the guard. So, I got to know the principal and told him about my career history, and I was honest that I had never worked as a social researcher, but of course, I had some research experience from college. When I was in college, I would go outside to conduct interviews and research and report drafts. However, like work experience, I had more experience as an investigator and some in accounting. He asked me you know accounting. I said yes! And you know how to use a typewriter? I said yes. So, we agreed that I would overlook the department's budget and work in this area. And yes! I did a great job. The budget for the department was five million riyals per year.

R: That would have been considered a big budget back then.

G: Yea, *ayam zaman* in 1970s.

R: What kind of services did this department provide for citizens?

G: research and support for people in need, loans and debt forgiveness. They helped many marginalized groups.

R: It sounds like you worked for a non-profit government organization.

G: They gave people in need around 2000 plus per month. Yea, I mean they also provided them with free housing accommodation. The government would also build houses for them at public expense.

Plus, further assistance. For example, they would give 50000 Riyal as collective assistance. So, it was a house and further assistance and assistance and car, and if you had a son, they would build a house for your son near the main family house.

R: So, it sounds like the government was sponsoring their expenses?

G: Yes, in the beginning, the nation sponsored their Saudi citizen's expenses and *mashallah*.

R: Were you in the *kefala* system?

G: Anna was on the *kefala* system, and I was her spouse and male companion (*mehram*). She was a principal at a school, and when I went there, I found this job.

M: Women were forbidden to travel alone.

G: And they took my passport and gave me residency in exchange. The residency was renewed every year, and when I wanted to travel, I took my passport and then gave it back when I returned.

R: Did they ever take your passport?

G: No, because they knew I was with Anna and had to take a vacation leave with her.

M: They loved mama and baba.

G: They loved me a lot, and I stayed ten years, and the government's ministry respected and admired me. The first year in the office job, I was sitting on my guard, and there was no one else. I knew what the government's ministry looked like, but I acted as if I did not know him as he approached us. He was my connection when I applied for this job, and he signed the approval of my job, but he did not know me. I acted as if I did not know him. Moreover, he acted as if I was someone that needed a favour and then he asked me where the employees were? And I replied that they were in the field. Then, he ask me, are you Egyptian? I said yes, I am Egyptian. Then he asked where the principal supervisor is; I told him he went to Riyadh. He asked how he could go to Riyadh without my approval? He kept asking about my job and whatnot. Then he told me are you cheap or what? No tea or coffee? I told him I did not know how to make tea or coffee, and the problem was that the guard at this time dipped out. (Haha). It was only me then; after half an hour, the guard returned, and after that, I told him to make coffee for the guests, and they drank the coffee and did not tell me who they were or anything. But they looked at the office and asked questions. Moreover, I know who they are! And the general manager is from the same area as he is, and he told me about him. And his

brother is also my colleague, so I know who he is. I know. I know. And I swear to God, they went and said the best office nationwide is my office. It was in a report. The best office nationwide is in Hosn Sudair (in the Najd area). So, when I had to leave after ten years, this minister tried to make me stay and told me I would give him the nationality. Stay. I told him my son was going to university, and I had to be there for him. And my daughter is older now, and I must leave. This was my mistake, though; I should have stayed. My principal supervisor kept begging me to stay, introduced me to connections, and told me you are better here than back home (*"fe baladak"*). He told me here; we love you. We consider you one of us. In your country, you will not be appreciated as much as here. And they were right. Until I booked my ticket, they kept telling me to stay. Come on, man, we will give you the nationality and give your children the nationality. But in my mind.

-Brief silence-

he told me you have been here ten years and now you know our customs and traditions and you speak in our dialect.

R: Yeah, there are some pictures of you in their attire.

G: Yes, I wore the Saudi attire and everything. I was Saudi.

-Brief silence-

G: But it was the best days. The best days of my life was in Saudi Arabia. -Silence- because it was an easy and comfortable life, there was no tribulations of the soul. Everything went by God's will. And so on.

R: Even though it was migration?

G: Yea because I had my wife and children. What more do I want? And my wife and children are comfortable. From every aspect they are comfortable. The princes themselves of the region would take your grandmother, Anna, to sit with their wives and Anna would walk with them and talk. One time with this person. One time with this woman. Anna and your mother. Your mother would finish her homework and go with her.

Gedo's embodied response towards his images in Saudi Arabia is quite different from his affective relationship to his university years or images in Egypt during the late 1940 to the late 1950s. There is an affect of "having to become an adult." There is a form of maturity and aging associated with Saudi Arabia. Having a family situates him in a different affect than before. Migration for Gedo was to ease the pressures and the many responsibilities attached to caring for a family. Saudi Arabia acted as a gateway utopia for my grandfather (and my mother- but that will be discussed in the coming chapters).

The question of migration is complex; on the one hand, Gedo wishes to go back home to Egypt but is faced with the reality of life in Egypt. For him, Saudi Arabia offered him "no tribulations of the soul," where everything went by God's will in a seamless matter. A heaven of sorts. He is faced with a choice that would have impacted future generations when I reflect on it. I would have been a Saudi female rather than an Egyptian born in Saudi Arabia. Alternatively, I would not have existed. The point is that in this past moment, my grandfather was thinking of his children's future in Saudi Arabia. Despite there being tension in his current embodied response. I think he did what his children needed more than his needs or wants. There is a sacrifice of self while also surrendering oneself to God's will.

There is also a sense of longing and a creation of a new identity while abandoning another identity. An identity that was very much there and real. The real is enmeshed with the imaginary future, present and past. The imaginary future is my grandfather's critical decision and vision of what it is to become. The imaginary past is the memorial past, the longing to have an "easy" life- left behind driving current tensions with the present affect.

4.4 Pilgrimage

As they settled in Saudi Arabia, my grandparents performed the *hajj* several times. In the 1980s, it was much easier for individuals to perform the *hajj* as there were no visas required to enter Mecca, and there was no timeline period allowed for the performance of *the hajj*. This topic was unclear to me, as I remember performing *hajj* years ago when I was 11 years old and had no recollection of the process itself. So, I started to ask my mother to tell me more about the process itself. “For example, today, if an individual has already performed *hajj*, you would have to wait five years to perform it again.” my mother said. I asked, “why?” she replied, “because there is such a huge demand nowadays to perform it that this is the only way they can regulate it.”

R: I want to discuss when you went to perform the pilgrimage with you, who did you go with?

M: I don't remember exactly. Which time?

R: I am talking about when your sister was born?

M: They were family colleagues and friends, one of them were Palestinian. And other family colleagues. We went several times.

R: For *hajj*? So, you performed *hajj*, how many times?

M: Maybe six times, because *zaman* it was so easy, there was no visas and there was no limit. It was also empty mecca was empty compared to now. It was very different than today.



Gedo on the right, with a family friend carrying my aunt. To the left is my uncle.

Circa 1977

G: Cameras were not allowed in Mecca back then inside the haram, (around the Ka'aba.

R: So how did you take this picture?

G: We sneaked it in, haha.

M: That is true we would hide it and take pictures

R: Why did you want to take pictures?

G: For the *zekera*

The pilgrimage marked a significant event for Gedo and his family as Muslim Egyptians. “Back then, it was not as accessible for non-Saudi residents as it is today. So, it was a great opportunity and a privilege for us to be able to do *hajj*,” my mother tells me. The *hajj* is one of the five pillars of Islam- following fasting, alms giving, prayer and faith. From my conversations with my mother and Gedo, I was able to better understand the roles performing pilgrimage had on them as Muslim Egyptians in diaspora. To them it was to allow for a purification of their sins, and to be able to be on *el tariq el-mostaqem* or the right path. You can see from the image above, with Gedo and his friend in a prayer pose, the significance of showcasing this *araba*, or connection to God at the Mina which is a holy place. It reinforces the embodied affect of being close and connected to God.



An old picture of Al-Ka'aba in Mecca. Circa 1977

I also wanted to ask my mother the same question, to which she answered more than a *zekera* but also for documentation purposes. Gedo's interest in documentation and photography marked a significant activity for him spiritually, visually, and mentally. It was an opportunity for him to use a modern tool to document a place of faith, where one is "near to God" and "document his children and family."

The following passage is a conversation between me and my mother to ask her about her experience performing pilgrimage at the age of twelve. I situate our conversation around the documentation of the Ka'aba.

R: Why do you think Gedo wanted to take pictures of the *hajj* and Mecca?

M: Because we knew it was a special moment, and he wanted to document our years back then. *Subhan Allah*, for example, to get the Zamzam water, we would go down the stairs near the Ka'aba itself- underground. There would be a large sink for women and men- segregated to wash and drink

before prayer for *wudu* (cleansing ritual) and drinking. However, now this is not present, and it is gone. Another thing, for example, is the Ottoman poles that surrounded the Ka'aba that Saudi Arabia wanted to remove but could not. They wanted to remove it to expand the area, I think.

Gedo was there with his family performing pilgrimage and memorializing his visitation permanent to Mecca. Despite there being a ban on photographing the mosque and Ka'aba area at the time, Gedo and his son would climb over surrounding areas to take a bird view image of Mecca and move away from surrounding security's vision. Here is a picture that shows a rare view of Mecca before modern-day sky-high buildings. The space was also much smaller in 1986 compared to contemporary times.

The *hajj* is a collective experience for Muslims, but it is also a personal and individualistic for each Muslim performing it. I do not want to miss the point that for my grandfather and mother, the acts of circumambulation of the Ka'aba in Mecca, running between El-Safa and Marwa rocks, drinking the Zamzam water and so on all had symbolic meanings and stories of significance for my mother especially. For example, the Safa and Marwa rocks represent the mountains that were once there, and their attachment to Hajar's commitment to her son in harsh circumstances. There is a reiteration here of the duties of the family or more specifically the mother and her belief in God. The act of running is paralleled here with my grandparents *hijra* or migration from Egypt to Saudi Arabia to offer a better life for their children while also maintaining closeness to God.

Chapter 5: Celebrations

5.1 Lost Maternity

I had showed my mother a picture of her young adult self-standing nearby a river, leaning over a metal railing arm-crossed with a faint smile and looking off to the side surrounded by chairs. A chair that has pieces of opera and other French pastries is placed on the right side of the image. I asked her to tell me more about this picture.



My mother in a restaurant in Damanhur circa 1987

My mother said, "I was in my first-year university here. It was a party for a girlfriend or a male friend. It was a mixed party of females and males; I told my parents; my mother disagreed, but my father told me to do it. My mother considered these bad manners. However, I did not have anything in my mind. I considered them my siblings. We were four females and four males. We knew one another from the university, and they used to take the transport with us from Damanhur to Alexandria. We had something called section, the section is taught by teaching assistants in Damanhur, but the lecture itself was in Alexandria university." I had asked her where this restaurant was and if it still exists in Damanhur.

She replied, "Damanhur university was not open yet; Damanhur university opened in 1980. In my days, it was not here. We were in a building that is now a police building. It was a villa for a rich person that was taken from him, and it was reconstructed, and the building was used as sections for our courses and taught by teaching assistants. Of course, I was a bit sad because my mother did not approve- even though my dad approved. This was in the district of Mahmodia where our old house lay." Next, she talked about where this club existed, and the conversation had started to shift toward the affects of growing up as a female in a conservative household under her mother's rules. "Behind it was the destroyed fishing club, but I was not happy because my parents were not happy, and I did not like to disappoint them. Yea, but I considered them as my brothers. I liked them because one of them had English-translated stories that were expensive back then, and another had great notes. I was not a fast writer in lectures. one used to teach me accounting, so I learned a lot from them, but my mother thought I would be her- to love or flirt with male friends, but I was not like this. I had platonic feelings only."

I started to think about the maternal force that my grandmother had on my mother and me as her grandchild. I started to reflect on Marianne Hirsch's narrative of the unconscious optics and how Weem's familial *imagetext*, "Family Pictures and Stories," tells the idealistic story of her own family of origin: her mother, her father, her sisters and so on. Weem's images captured my attention in context with my mother's image because it shows a disconnect between the idealistic family narrative that is carefully constructed and the falling mask that seeks to run away from this narrative and break open its pretense. Weem's narrative in Hirsch's book, *Family Frames* (1997), also showcases the familial look.

In a way, I also feel that I am taking on the role of posing these *image texts* and the narratives to present them to the public eye. This image of my mother reveals a narrative of relationships and young adulthood, and it showcases independence and abandonment as my mother develops her sense of self and desires. However, when I look at this image, I feel a sense of closed off-ness and one-ness; I want to see more of the space surrounding my mother. It almost feels like the image is of a bystander as my mother evades the familial look towards the camera. The camera captures my mother's essence at the time but leaves us without reconciliation of what is around the bystander in the picture. The conversation I had with my mother is essentially the reconstruction of what has been. In this image, you could sense the restraint of my mother's body into directing our gaze away from her- a sense of distancing- that is, to keep attention away from her- it is a form of masking that appeals to her mother's disapproving seemingly "there" gaze.

R: Why do you think that your mother thought that?

M: It is just her way of thinking. When she saw baba, she fell in love with him, and she thought I would be the same way, and I was not like that.

R: So, if she fell in love with Gedo and got married, why do you think she does not want this for you?

M: Well, this is the thing that confuses me. I did not know that she saw baba and loved him, and when I had you guys in Alexandria, I knew this when I was older.

5.2 Consanguinity

I will talk here about my parent's marriage in 1992. My father is considered a cousin to my mother, and my maternal grandmother, Anna, would have been his aunt and his mother-in-law. I wanted to discuss the role of having close ties with family members with my mother. My mother had described that while she was close with family members, it was a good relationship. At times, some family members, particularly her aunts, would critique everything she did.

M: They used to critique you on everything and in your face; you know when you critique everything in someone's face, they use to say, "you are fat today, your cooking is bad, you are the ugliest among your siblings, you are dirty," this was their way "go brush your hair" you cut your hair? Imagine hearing that every day: is there a girl in her right mind that would cut her hair?" imagine hearing that every day. That makes me a strong person, but it was hurtful. In our family, this was considered normal.

This conversation reveals how family members predispose critique and negative attitudes toward other family members through the right to look. The right to look I speak of here is borrowed from Mirzoeff's term, right to look, and how visibility allows forms of authority and power to occur 'naturally'. In my family's case, it would be the enmeshment of connections and boundaries (Mirzoeff, 2011). It is deemed 'normal' to scapegoat or deems the right to critique. It also reveals the particularities in which social and cultural partitions. These looks are inflected within the familial gaze of racial, class, and sexual differences (Hirsch, 1997).

M: Our whole family treated one another that way.

R: But I do not understand. Is it not your aunt, my father's mother as well?

M: The other woman who would tell me this was my other aunt.

R: Rahma or who?

M: No, Insherah, may she rest in peace.

R: But I noticed that they wore different clothes than you, why?

M: Yes, because they were more affluent than us, they married men from Cairo, and he worked in the construction of buildings, and he was involved in the city council in Cairo. Moreover, he had many connections. But he was a tough person because he was arrogant. His family would also mistreat aunt Insherah and her family. So, Hassan, you know Eman, your dad's sister, her husband was his brother. He was kind in terms of not bullying or demeaning other people. However, aunt Insherah was a great woman; she lacked only in this field; even my other aunts were great.

My mother's struggle with her aunt and the culture of 'people talking' or critiquing her was not separate from what she had wanted to achieve. When shortly after my mother married my father, the topic of migration was also critiqued. As a result, it significantly impacted the support my mother would feel she had or did not have. It resulted in her getting depressed years later after migrating to Saudi Arabia as a married woman with my father. My mother also speaks of lost chances and her ability to create new opportunities for herself in opposition to "people talk," which is related to classism deeply intertwined in her lived experiences as a young adult in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The following conversation speaks of her time in Saudi Arabia from the late 1990s to the early 2000s.

R: Could you repeat what you mean by that? Do you mean that now you know that you had depression, but back then, you did not? Could you expand on this topic?

M: I mean that I had depression at times, but I did not know that I had depression. I had just graduated and wanted to work, and then I got married and travelled to Saudi Arabia

R: You wanted to work in Egypt?

M: In Egypt and [in Damanhur], I got a job in the electricity government, but my mother and father did not tell me. They hid the job offer from me. I knew after five years, for example. I missed this opportunity; I would have accepted the job if I had known. Alternatively, I put it on hold for vacation and returned to it. So, they. But I did not know that I would have had security for my career, not only as a mother. Therefore, I tried to do projects in Saudi Arabia because I wanted to have...

-Brief Silence-

R: To have a sense of agency?

M: Exactly!

R: But of course, the job you took on was different from your degree

M: Not exactly, I loved working with children, and at first, I gave courses, but I discovered that I love children very much, and I did not want to have another child of my own. After you, I decided that I did not want another child. I thought two was more than enough for me. I thought that my way of raising you guys was right! That is what I thought! After that, I wondered how I could have more children in my life? So, my job as a daycare childcare worker gave me much satisfaction. Except maybe in the last three years, I had become tired of the talk.

R: What do you mean by the talk?

M: From the ongoing talk and gossip of how the Dr. leaves his wife to work as a nanny.

R: People talk?

M: Yes, but you should not care! You had to confront all of this, but I had grown tired of it after a while. Moreover, I started seeing you getting affected as well emotionally. After your father completed his MRCP, I decided that I was shutting down this daycare! However, it gave me satisfaction for seven years; I loved it! And I was very successful in it, and everyone was saying, I wish she would accept my child in her daycare! However, I had rules and categories for whom to accept. I did not take anyone. But yeah, I had a business that I grew and loved.

R: And it was profitable?

M: Yes, it was profitable, and it gave us financial stability....but those last two years were exhausting because people were close-minded. I always considered myself a visionary- I was thinking about the big picture in twenty years. And they were thinking about the present moment. So, for them to understand my thought process...and also, it used to bother your father. And they were very confrontational with him- as if I was doing something wrong. So, me and him, yes, we used to ignore it, but in the end, I grew tired. So, when he got the MRCP, I said yes! I will close it now as I am on

the successful path.

R: So, the completion of the MRCP was your link to migrating to the west?

M: exactly, I, from the very first moment in Saudi Arabia, I told him [my father] to let us migrate. When your sister was one year old, he told me I did not have money; how would we go there? And migrate? I told him that as everyone migrates, we will figure it out. Of course, I wish he had listened to me; it would have mattered a lot. But he was scared and rejected it. Then I was like, ok. Then he was pursuing his MRCP, and I entered you and your sister into English schools because I had this in my mind and at first, I thought we were going to go to Europe or England or New Zealand. But, after that, Canada came, so I said, "God's blessing."

R: So, who made you think of Canada or what event made you consider Canada?

M: I had a client who was a Palestinian-Jordanian mother from the daycare; she told me I am submitting a migration application to Canada; why don't you apply as well? Her husband applied; I think he was an accountant or teacher, and he got rejected, but they told her that if she had applied, they would have accepted the application. Why? Because she was a nurse. And they needed nurses, but I think he was a teacher, and they did not need teachers. But she told me we were applying again, and this was the last year when I closed the daycare, and after that, I did not see her. I kept telling your father, apply to it and forget. In our last year in Saudi Arabia, he started asking how to apply. Until we migrated to Emirates, he went to their branch in Emirates. When we went and stayed in the "Al-Manzel" hotel, I told him to go to them.

R: Really?

M: Yes, so he went to them. They met him in a hotel, and they took some documents from us and then told us to come.

R: Because my father is a doctor?

M: Yes, because he is a doctor, and you were in English schools.

R: So, migrating to Abu Dhabi after was the crossing link? The bridge to migrating to Canada?

M: Exactly! It helped us migrate to Canada and lessened our culture shock.

R: It might have been a shock to immediately migrate from Saudi Arabia to Canada. Yes, I agree with you; I remember the racism and classism that I endured in Abu Dhabi more than anything I experienced in Canada.

M: Exactly! Saudi Arabia was a good place for you as children; I would take you to the compound to play in parks and...

R: yes, I remember, and hajj too

M: and I used to introduce you to people in the upper classes.

R: Yeah..

I found myself pausing for a moment in our conversation to process everything said and remember memories of my childhood and upbringing- dispersed across three countries, three different places of significance. At the start of pursuing this thesis, I felt a sense of fragmentation, leaving several different parts of myself in so many places. Places that feel so foreign to me in the present have shaped my identity, affect, and ultimately who I am and what I do.

5.3 Wedding Scapes and Familial Ties

“In the name of God, the merciful and compassionate. On the occasion of reading Al-Fatihah. 19/01/1990. Corresponding to Friday”- Gedo

This short blurb lies on the inside of my parent’s wedding album. The recitation of Surat Al-Fatihah represents a new form of tie to be formed- one of marriage. Surat Al-Fatihah religiously symbolizes blessing a new phase or beginning in life- often read at the start of wedding proposals. Here, Surat Al-Fatihah symbolizes an invisible form of contract and a familial tie.

Gedo often reiterates the importance of *selat el Rahim* and family ties. It is essential to maintain them despite distance and diaspora. I asked how life in Damanhur after their return in the 1980s, and his response focused on love and maintaining familial ties. Connect oneself with cousins and other family members to create a sense of home and belonging and maintain one’s connection to God. Gedo replied, “Everyone treated one another with love. Everyone was treated with love and familial ties, and *selat el Rahim* was solid. Every week, everyone visited one another between families...the ties between relatives and friends and people you know are the most important thing.”

I had started to look through my family’s photo archives to pull out some photographs I found interesting to discuss with my parents and grandfather. But, as I had started shuffling through the images in the vintage floral album, I noticed a pattern of images—a repetition of poses throughout the album. I was intrigued. I had always had this photo album in our house’s bookcase displayed behind the glass as I passed by the flex room’s staircase. I continually glanced at the bookshelf where all our albums were placed. In that moment of passage, I had nagging questions that lingered in my mind. I always thought of how they looked, occasionally opening them and displaying the pictures on the couch to look at them as they looked back at me.

The gazes present in the photographs and the role of the camera in my life. I often looked at these old family photo archives due to my lack of childhood photographs. During the early years of my childhood, the video recorder was gaining popularity, and as a result, I video recorded most of my childhood. Yet, the recordings were lost through constant movement from Alexandria to Saudi Arabia and eventually to Canada. The cam recorder was left behind with the tapes forever misplaced, undiscovered and without any personal interest in looking for them.

I am not aware if it was a conscious decision to seek myself in familial photographs, but I wanted to look for the family look or gaze. Marianne Hirsch (1997), in *The Familial Gaze and Family Frames*, proposes the concept of a “familial gaze” as “modes of questioning, resistance, and contestation” (p.7).

I was projecting my own need of existence among the family, to be included in that familial posing, acts of affection and gaze towards the camera. Like what Hirsch (1999) mentions in *Family Frames*, I was looking towards the familial mythology, where I can seek “an image to live up to,” an image that can include my existence and shape “the desire of the individual living in a social group” (p.8). This is what rose a *punctum* in me as I looked through my parent’s wedding images. The *punctum* here is the lack of documentation of my childhood and the spatial scapes that surrounding my family members that I remember from childhood.



Gedo in the middle getting a kiss from my father and mother- circa 1990

The kiss on the cheek by my mother and father on my maternal grandfather signifies a familial tie- a knot or what my mother and Gedo would describe as “*tarabot*.” This tie seems to elicit the proposal of a wedding, a photographic contract that elicited new beginnings and newly constructed ties between the two families. It was, of course, an ideal, a myth, and “this myth or image— whatever its content may be for a specific group— dominates lived reality” (p.9). I placed myself as the spectator of the image and explored the myth and reality of what has been. Even though I was posed and perfected with my mother’s wedding dress and my father’s suit, the images I looked into were resisted with images of children yawning or distracted by food or other family members.

The relationship between the ideal and real can be complicated; it is not just a myth or an illusion where we wish to situate ourselves in. It also shapes the conditions of reality and participates in constructing the familial myth that Marianne Hirsch (1997) talks is the familial myth in the picture above is broken or resisted through a brief moment of unmasking. As the mask of the subject is removed in certain instances, I start to see myself in my mother's presence, the landscape, and the glass bottles on a dining table.



My mother and father in the centre of a dining room table surrounded with guests and food; circa 1990

Here is my mother on her engagement day, or what would be the reading of Surat Al-Fatiha, dressed in a white dress with a pearl headpiece that shows off her seventies-inspired updo standing in front of a wallpaper landscape of western pine trees during the fall season. The reciting of Surat Al-Fatiha here is crucial because it represents a new beginning and a new formation of *sela* or tie between two families. It is often recited at beginning moments, such as in the inauguration of a new social bond- most commonly a kinship tie.

Another aspect that stood out to me in this photo collection was the background wall. It was similar to Karen Strassler's chapter "Landscapes of Imagination" in *Refracted Visions; the wallpaper is out of place in juxtaposition with the engagement's attire and the outdoor landscape with the indoor dining table. It almost looks like a picnic, a foreshadowing of the future, an eerie foreshadowing of what my family and many other new migrants would do to stay connected to their identity and heritage through picnics in parks in Mississauga and Toronto.*

As I gaze into these images, I see myself in bits and pieces, fragmented through my grandparent's place in Damanhur, where the above image takes place, and the continuation of familial ideological ties that continued for generations. I remember this same wallpaper from my childhood, which I thought was quiet, unprepossessing, and crowded in the indoor living area. I also remember the glass soda bottles and how my family and I would drink at celebratory events and later collect them to give them to uncle Rifaat's store to get a discount for the next batch. When I had asked my parents about this wallpaper in my grandparent's apartment, my father described it as "This landscape in the background. And that "it was simply a wallpaper." My father started "*kan zaman*, that is in the past it was a huge poster that came in pieces, and it was a fashion to put them on the wall... but of course, after a while, when it was no longer a trend, people removed it and painted normally." I started to reflect on his use of the word *kan zaman* and the association of the wallpaper with fashion." So, I asked him: "where do you think this fashion emerged from?"

The reason behind my question is that I had found an unrevealed and left behind story on material possession that would affect the spaces and the celebration scapes. I could not remove myself from the juxtaposition of the brown leaves and pine wood in the background of my family's gathering. I have looked at this image throughout the years, and I have had many questions. Who are these people, and what is their relationship to my parents? After all, I could only recognize a few family members, my uncle on the left beside my father, his face hidden from the camera's eye. How was life in the 90s in Egypt? And what about their relationship? At this moment, my mother looked toward my father and past him as if talking to someone behind him. All these questions emerged as I investigated the photographs from this day.

Chapter 6: Haunting

6.1 Family Mythology

Family mythology is a term I am using to describe the intermix of post-memory, a transformed *zakra*, and family secrets. Through their combination, it becomes a myth. A myth is felt like a tale or a story separated from lived reality in the following generations. Another aspect of this myth is how Western modernity has embraced positivist historiography in the sense that we have violently inherited an objective sense of the past. This is of course valid, and it is not incorrect per se, however, it obstructs the revelation of the messiness of reality. In that sense, the myth becomes something that we can no longer question or talk about. During our study of the photographs, my father told me that his mother had told him as a child that her paternal second great-grandfather was Sudanese. All that my parents knew of him was that he was an orphan migrating from Sudan to Egypt.

The following conversation emerged because of this finding:

R: Did you guys ever consider asking more about your family's history?

B: One time, I asked my father about what comes after Awad in our full name, and he told me firmly, do not ask these questions. So, it was taboo for me to ask these questions.

We laughed for a moment. But my mother's silence struck me as well, other than the apparent denial of knowledge about the past and familial history. When I was told this information, I reflected on the history of Egypt as a *Sultanate*. But it altered the way I was studying and looking at the photographs, specifically those where my great maternal grandfather was present. The information had left a non-imagistic *punctum* in me, and I reflected on my grandmother's attitude towards their identity as Egyptians. Both my grandmothers were sisters and had told this information to their children (my mother and father). I reflected on why I was not told until my inquiry into old family photographs. It is not that my parents had kept it a secret, but it had become family mythology, a tale lost to lack of information and documentation. This tale seemed so foreign and far in the past. My mind could only fantasize about what he looked like, his life, and what had caused him to migrate from Sudan to Egypt. Similar to Edward Said's in *Out of Place* (1999), "meandering" and "fantasy-filled traversal" on his short walk on El-Zamalek Street from the school to home and vice versa was now reflected in my mind. As Said (1999) describes, "What I cherished in those dawdling walks was the opportunity to elaborate on the scanty material offered me" (p.37).

I was dwindling with the limited information I was given; the only difference is that it was more of a mental walk, and it was an affect that lingered in my *studium* of old family images. The importance of inheriting these photographs is the only evidence and history I have of familial

history- without them, the oral stories I would have heard would act as a myth. The inheritance of my parent's inheritance of their second great grandfather and how it acts more like a distant history that does not seem to be accurate but is. With no other information or documentation on who my third great-grandfather was or did. I turned back to images.

Barthes (1980) explains, "I believe the word exists in Latin: it is *studium*, which does not mean, at least not immediately, 'study,' but application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity. It is by *studium* that I am interested in so many photographs..." (p. 26). During this project's *studium*, I started looking into my grandmother's images from a different perspective, one who looked at the Sudanese side of my family. This is where I stumbled into one image in particular: the engagement of my grandmother and grandfather in 1962.



Gedo in the middle receiving a kiss on the cheek by my great grandmother- behind him in the center is my great grandfather; circa 1962.

The image I chose to attach here caught my attention for different reasons, the first being where they were located. This image, in particular, was not in my possession; instead, they were with Gedo, my grandfather, placed in a plastic bag. This bag was hidden in one of his chest armoires in his bedroom. When I had asked him why he had placed them in a bag instead of a photobook- he said the bags preserve them just as well. I could not help but wonder.

When was the last time he had taken them out? When I asked, he mentioned that this was probably the first time in over twenty years. I could sense how painful it was for him to look back and reminisce about that day- with my grandmother no longer being alive. It was hard for him to talk about, but a faint smile lingered in his expression while shuffling from one image to the next. Gedo looking at *the kiss* photographs, started to laugh and talk about the presence of people in the image.

G: Look, your grandmother's mother; yeah, this would be your great-grandmother. Behind us here is your paternal grandfather, your dad's father. And right next to him is your maternal great-grandfather. Yeah.

R: And who is next to my maternal grandfather?

G: Who?

R: This person, right here. Smiling at you.

G: Oh, I do not know; it is a family relative.

R: Yeah, and next to you here would be Anna

G: Yes. That is Anna.

After my conversation with Gedo, I went to show my father this picture. The image has my paternal grandfather, Gedo Ibrahim and my great grandfather beside him, Gedo Mohammad, which is rare. It also connects generations. They are also paternal grandfathers that I had never met, as they passed before I was born.

B: Did you see him? He was a young lad, and he was naughty and behind him smiling.

R: Yes, your dad looked thrilled; I do not see much of your dad in our pictures; did he have many pics?

B: No, he has many pictures of him, but unfortunately, it is not with us. My dad used to wear many suits as a young man. Do you know past actors? He would wear a black and white lined suit that actors would wear. And it was expensive and handmade. People who were actors would wear it, and *Zaman* people were chicer.

R: Who is behind him?

B: This is Gedo Mohammad; this is so rare

R: No, I mean the person behind Gedo, do you know them?

B: Tsk, (nods-no), by the way, it is so rare to find a picture of Gedo Mohammad; I have never seen pics of him, except one time at my uncle's.

R: Yea, Gedo hides these pictures

B: Did you take them?

R: No, of course not,

B: Why?

R: Because these pictures mean a lot to Gedo, he hides them away for a reason. But I asked him whether he had looked at them before, and he said no, so I think he does not look at them often, yet it is essential to him differently.

B: Yeah, did you see him with the typewriter?

R: Yeah, he told me that he was posing for the picture and not working. When I asked him more about it, he said they told him to pose as such.

B: Yeah, it is evident that the *kiss* is for the picture.

R: Yeah, that is true. But also, Gedo does not speak on certain things, and there are moments when he is silent or changes the topic.

B: Hmm, but these pictures are so rare.

R: Yeah, but I feel that pictures have no meanings if you don't attach a meaning to them or talk about them. It is an unanimated object, the only quality it might possess is the one you put on it.

B: Do you feel that you did not get enough information?

R: Yeah, a little bit

B: Well, it is what it is.

My father's brusque response reflects how the image can speak or have "meanings" without captions attached. His affective response is that some images incline the spectator to understand their meaning through the way it is framed or captured. In *Frames of War*, Judith Butler discusses the "meanings" images have. The media portrays the forms of images as "grievable" lives (Butler, 2009). The notion of framing lives, especially when it comes to politicizing human lives. Which lives are categorized and deemed grievable, and which lives are not deemed as grievable? It speaks of the hierarchy placed on human lives and its connection to racism, human rights, war, and our precarious hold on life (Butler, 2009). Butler (2009) states, "To say that a life is injurable... is to underscore not only the finitude of a life... but also its precariousness" (p.13). In our conversations, the main aim behind my questions about the past, whether historical, personal or political, was that I wanted to understand in what sense Egyptian lives are recognized? I borrow Butler's term of "recognizing" versus "apprehending" a life. Butler (2009) describes that "recognition is the stronger term" as it acknowledges the life it speaks of.

In contrast, apprehension is vaguer and implies a marking or a categorizing of life without full cognition. Apprehension then becomes a way of knowing without acquiring the knowledge behind this affect of sensing and perceiving (Butler, 2009). Personally, this was my affective response before conducting this research of knowledge. I had apprehended the so-called reality of living in Egypt as an Egyptian, which is still attached to recognition norms. However, I never felt that my family's lives in Egypt were recognized.

This aspect of which lives are deemed recognizable to be worth grieving operates according to the social norms of recognition. It creates the “recognized” subject; Butler (2009) discusses the precariousness of lives and how images can evoke specific meanings through their framing. At the end of the conversation, my father's response indicates knowledge of reality and a recognition of it. He understood the framing of the picture taken and, in a way, found my comment on “pictures having no meanings alone” frustrating. He was able to recognize the image, and the image was able to recognize him; there was an act of reciprocity. In contrast, I am disconnected from his familial look towards the image and tie that connects him to the recognition and knowledge of his father’s and my maternal grandfather’s wedding picture. I cannot but apprehend the image, I have knowledge of who appears in the image and the event, but I do not recognize my paternal grandfather or the *sela*, tie, that connects the family members.

Regarding the Pain of Others, Susan Sontag discusses how images without context or captions can be misinterpreted and used for propaganda (2003). Images are naturally objective; however, they are constantly captured from the point of view (Sontag, 2003). For example, images taken in war and often used by the media are saturated with shock, suffering, and human lives' maiming. Sontag (2003) states, “The hunt for more dramatic (as they are often described) images drives the photographic enterprise and is part of the normality of a culture in which shock has become a leading stimulus of consumption and source of value.” (p.20). The media contextualizes the imagery displayed and produces an effect that impacts you. This reminds me of the image of the death of Alan Kurdi and how the media used to show the horrors of migration and displacement of refugees escaping the civil war in Syria. Sontag (2003) further discusses the “image—of an agony, of ruin—is an unavoidable feature of our camera-mediated knowledge of war.” (p.21). The image gives insight on what is often called a memory or a *zekra* but sometimes the memory is not about remembering at all, rather how it creates a stipulation that leaves a wound or a stipulation that locks a story in the mind.

My perspective in “if you do not attach a meaning to them (photographs) or talk about them. It is an unanimated object; the only quality it might possess is the one you put on it.” It is similar to Sontag’s description of how imagery is always captured with a point of view and can be used in war media to invoke emotions and a strong affect. Sontag raises a vital concern of responsibility and authority like Butler with ethics; however, Sontag approaches the question of authority and responsibility from the perspective of the self rather than the image itself. For example, how our privileges are connected in one way or another to other people's suffering. In that sense, images become a *memento mori*, a symbolic representation of a nation’s collective memory. At the same time, Butler questions the affective responses to which specific lives are deemed “grievable” and how modern warfare represents other lives as uncertain or precarious in terms of grief. Butler views the frame in which photographs are situated as advancing certain rhetoric, especially when it comes to war imagery.

In comparison, Sontag focuses more on the context used in understanding the photographs used in war. Both authors bring interesting perspectives that showcase the tension between an image’s subjectivity and objectivity- how to interpret an image? What kind of roles do images play in our affective response? Do we share a sense of authority and responsibility when looking at images?

6.2 Education, Class and Dignity

In November, I called my mother and father to discuss familial ties and their role in our family. As well as I started reading images, and it was only through rereading them that I realized there are some periodic gaps where there seem to be no images at all. The missing period was when my mother and grandmother returned to Egypt after Saudi Arabia for two years before returning to Saudi Arabia. I started to transcribe my data and realized this was also missing. Thus, I went to ask my mother about this period when there were no images. In the 1980s, my grandmother was able to come back momentarily to Egypt and started working as a teacher in a middle school called Salah El-din. Salah El-din was a co-joined school that offered day and night shifts. My mother attended the day shift but in the second year of their stay in Egypt. The first school she went to was Al-Karamah.

I remember talking to my mother about this briefly. She has discussed how this two-year period has shaped her life in Egypt. The main takeaway from our conversation from this period is that it was the first time in her life that she realized the difference between Saudi Arabia and Egypt. In Egypt, there was more diversity and more complicated class, history, and arts, and the question of privilege started to come into the picture for her. In Saudi Arabia, she was always given special attention for her identity and difference. These stories of admiration were confirmed by interviews conducted between Gedo and my mother on how she was given the freedom to be her childhood self by playing in the gardens with the children of the local Prince in Hautet Bin Tamim. When I asked them what the prince's name was, both Gedo and my mother could not remember. All that I could find in digital archives connected the Banu Tamim tribe as settling in Riyadh, and the majority of locals who lived in Hautet Bin Tamim are from the Banu Tamim tribe.

From the conversations, I had seemed to indicate a longing for their time in Saudi Arabia. There is also a sense of privilege that has passed and will never be endured again. Gedo often told me how Saudi Arabia at the time still did not go through a period of industrialization or modernization. Despite that, he too felt admired and respected for having come from Egypt, a comparatively modern country to Saudi Arabia at the time. Both reflect on narratives of being appreciated for their background identity as Egyptians in Saudi Arabia. This country gave rise to ancient civilizations, modernity, and cosmopolitan history than Egypt- which, as Gedo bluntly puts it, “discards its sons.” Now that my mother has returned to Egypt ten years later, in 1983, she was forced to face the unprivileged reality that many Egyptians go through daily. Things such as access to food were different in Egypt than in Saudi Arabia.

As my mother explained, “In the house we lived in and rented in Saudi Arabia, the owner lived right behind us in a bigger house, and he had his land, with a big land that animals and produce. They even had chickens, but Saudis at the time did not eat them, and they only consumed their eggs. So, the owner gave my dad a section of his land to plant arugula, onions, garlic, parsley, and the owner's land had tomatoes and such and we would eat from. Did they take our money? No, they

never took money for this food. They were so hospitable and great. They also always supplied us with their meat. To the extent that Gedo would hang them with rope to dry because there were no fridges back then. So, the owner and locals supplied the dates, milk, and meat.”

Grocery was something that my mother never really had to do in Saudi Arabia. In Egypt, my mother learned the struggle of carrying groceries from local street vendors and walking in the burning sun or rainy weather of Damanhur. My grandfather had stayed in Saudi Arabia for a year before returning to Egypt and then returning to Saudi Arabia again. My mother was now more Saudi than an Egyptian and had to fit back into the Egyptian modes of living. At the time, my mother only spoke Arabic in a Saudi dialect. The Saudi Arabic dialect symbolized her difference, and her dialect was discriminated against rather than appreciated or acknowledged.

If anything, she was an outcast, under-appreciated and stuck out like a sore thumb among girls who dressed and acted differently. Yet, it was a period of realization for my mother. My mother now reflects on these years as lessons to be learned. The lesson that she often talks about is learning how to be resilient and survive. There was a sense of pretending to (be)long in a place that was supposed to be home but was not quite right for her.

Hearing my mother’s story reminded me of Edward Said as a young boy in a privileged school, walking around bored out of his mind, yet through the Gezira club incident, he is informed of his ‘Arab’-ness. Despite being in Zamalek, a privileged area in Cairo and his father’s American citizenship, Said is not immune to instances of racialization. It is not enough because he is an ‘Arab.’

In a strange comparison, the school my mother first attended in her middle school year, Al-Karamah, seemed to focus on transforming and shifting the Egyptian identity to fit the Anglo-Egyptian identity. For example, many of the girls who attended the school had already spoken English, Arabic and French from their childhood because they attended Catholic schools, more accurately, Franciscan elementary schools. Whereas my mother only spoke and excelled in Arabic. My mother stated, “look, Raghad, the girls in Al-Karamah, yea; they already knew English and French because they were in preschool and elementary school that taught them these languages, so

many already knew French and English. Their parents also attended these Catholic schools and continued to raise them in a tri-lingual environment.”

My mother’s difference seemed to hold her closer to the Arab identity than the Anglo-Egyptian one, which was a conflict. She also describes it as a ‘lesson to be learned’ - a phase in her life that made her stronger. Similarly, Edward Said grew up attending an English school. The thought of teachers as only being English was the norm; this was something that my mother had to recognize the question of identity and shapeshift her own identity to fit the ones at Al-Karamah. However, Al-Karamah, unlike Said’s Gezira Preparatory School (GPS), was a public school in Damanhur, not in El-Zamalek, Cairo. Yet, there are remnants of the past that haunt my mother’s experience in 1983. As my father overhears the conversation between my mother and me, he interrupts us and says, “By the way, Al-Karamah in Arabic means “Dignity.” I found my father’s remark interesting, a recognition of the name that is important as it dignifies much of the Arabic culture that focuses on morals and dignity. But also, from an educational standpoint, it represents getting respect from being educated. To have a dignity that establishes your autonomy as a person to act accordingly to a self-acquired predicament of morals, education, and respect. Duwell et al. (2014) summarizes’ Immanuel Kant’s remarks on morality and dignity to reflect an intrinsic value where all people, regardless of race or social rank, are worth equality and dignity. Yet, this romantic outlook on human dignity and morality is not the reality for many human beings when their race and identity become politicized the moment they are born.

My father’s comment is a statement that indicates the importance of the word “dignity” in an Egyptian context. For those who speak and understand Arabic, his statement acts as a philosophical interruption to allow you, the listener, and the reader to stop and reflect on how the word “Karamah” elicits certain freedom and autonomy through an education. The school reflected the Anglo-Egyptian identity, one where Egyptians were de-dignified because of Egypt’s colonial and postcolonial reality. Yet, I cannot deny the reality of “gaining” dignity and respect through education, languages, and simply being articulate. After all, my parents and my grandparents have focused on leaving behind

their “undignified” past. Where in reality, this past comes back to “claim” us through the complexity of discrimination, belonging and identity.

Going back to Said as a young boy, he is faced with the question of race, and from that Gezira club moment, his life is shaped as he internalizes the discrimination he faces. It also talks about how the question of race and privilege is rarely discussed in a Middle Eastern family or context. It is not that the question of being a person of colour is not recognized, but it is not acknowledged in terms of discrimination or prejudice. I remember my grandmother, Anna. Anna is not her real name but rather an indication of her being a grandmother, like Nana or Nonna. Anna never really recognized her brown skin as an indication of her Sudanese ancestral lineage; in reality, I do not think I remember her mentioning it. She often made remarks that indicated that fairer skin tones were more “beautiful” despite being of dark skin. Although I never agreed with her, my mother had dismissed Anna’s internalized classism and racist remarks because it was not of significance or relevance to her being. Not because it did not, but because my mother had decided not to “let it affect her.” That was her resilience.

When brought to question, my grandmother would reappropriate these questions of race or classism by pretending to be in a higher class or denying her skin colour or Gedo’s “*fellah*” class origin. In a way, by shapeshifting through Egypt's complex and intersectional hierarchies. Anna was a survivor to fit into the different societal and political norms against her in many ways. She recognized that rebelling against them was futile and dangerous for her and her loved ones from an early age. The following is an excerpt of the conversation between me and my mother on the two middle schools she attended in Egypt upon her return from Saudi Arabia in 1983.

R: How old were you when you returned to Egypt?

M: I was in grade seven, so maybe I was eleven years old.

R: And which school did you attend in Egypt?

M: I went to two schools. One is called Al-Karamah, and the other one is Salah-Eldin.

R: Both of them were public and private schools?

M: Public, in my generation, there was no private school, and in high school, those who entered private meant that they were bad students.

R: In Al-Karamah, you mentioned that they were high class?

M: In Al-Karamah, I realized that there were higher in class than us and had extracurricular activities and played sports.

R: So basically, similar to schools here in Canada

M: It was a bizarre thing, and it stuck with me over the years. Unfortunately, my family and I did not discuss these things, so after when I was older, I started to understand them.

R: And do you think this affected your way of thinking for us as your children?

M: Yes, that is right. For example, when your sister was in Arabic school in preschool, I noticed that the education was terrible, making me investigate international schools in Al-Hasah. Everyone around us would say hey, you guys will pay to teach girls. What is the use of this? This is a waste of money for girls meant for marriage. And this made me stay my ground. Another thing I realized when I came to Egypt is that you can get books that are stories for children. And that was not in Saudi Arabia, my dad told me oral stories, but stories from his post-secondary English stories, and they were boring. So, when I went to Egypt, I found Arabic- stories. I loved it. And heh! (sarcastically) my mother did not like that because she saw it as a waste of my time

R: Why did Anna see it as a waste of time?

M: Mama saw anything other than educational books as a waste of time, and that was just her way of thinking; she did not see hobbies as an innate need for development. That is why I allowed you to develop your hobbies further.

R: Why do you think she was like that?

M: Anna had many hobbies; by the way, she would do them as well, but she thought that she

would excel in my education by removing any distractions from my life. Even though in Saudi Arabia, I had friends and hobbies, and I excelled.

R: That is interesting, what changed?

M: I think when she came back to Egypt, she saw how Egypt has transformed a lot, before leaving Egypt to go to Saudi Arabia, she wore regular clothes and so on. Then when she came back to Egypt, she had a veil and was more pious. As well as, Egypt had started to change culturally as well, so her fear started creeping in a lot more, she was trying to control that fear through us.

R: Ok going back, what did Anna worked in Egypt at the time?

M: She worked at Salah-El din and I was in El-Karamah, I was in Salah El-din, I was alone, I was different in this school so I did not fit in even though I was good in school. I liked it but at the same time, I could not fit it. In grade six when I went to Salah El-din co-joined with another school. They had a day shift and a night shift. I liked this more because I fit in and my mother was a teaching director of Arabic and religion studies,

R: Is that why she was strict?

M: No, no the religion part was from her background experience from Saudi Arabia, she was not that strict or anything, some people are stricter. So in Egypt, in these two years when we stayed in Egypt..

R: Wait so you stayed in Egypt in the 5th and 6th grade before going back to Egypt?

M: Yes

R: Wait, but I have never seen any pictures of this period of time..

M: Yeah, we did not take any pictures.

R: Is that because Gedo was the capturer? Oh my, that is funny, when I ask Gedo to talk about his role in taking pictures, he always dismisses it as an unimportant aspect and focuses on family ties, university life and *zekra* instead.

M: Haha, yea.

Shortly, after the conversation ended with my mother, I started to realize that the camera was the capturer tool of the *zekra* for my grandfather, that is the memory. Once he was able to capture it and transform it to a material object of emotional significance, he was able to hang it or keep it hidden away from children- to preserve it. It was a form of affective material that he kept and protected, he mentioned how important these images are because they represent “forgotten memories”. There is also a supplemental parallel here of the image being an image similar to how writing is to speech. My role in this search and investigation into the familial and personal stories I heard from my parents and Gedo was to go beyond the conventional aspect of documentation. To invent new ways, to expose the unconscious optics of migration, and social revolutions in relation to identity across temporality and spatiality. Rather than rely on images by themselves to show me the story of my grandparent’s life, I wanted to look deeper and find key themes among the images captured and also allow space to talk about the “abandoned” *zekryat* that is abandoned memories. Why were not certain moments captured, despite never forgetting them? If there was a camera on hand, why were not they captured and framed like the rest?

What I was looking for was also the resistance to discuss certain topics as it becomes a way of contesting my construction of rewriting the present by revisiting the past. Marianne Hirsch (1997) mentions reading, rereading and misreading images as an active form of intervention, as they allow the reader to revisit certain images and stories where the “familial gaze is filtered and refracted and thus a conversation of the gaze itself” (p.193).

....

M: You know baba (Gedo) spent most of his life away from family to have a better life, so now that he is Egypt, he wishes that he could have built a house not in the city as the one we currently have in Damanhur but in the rural areas where his relatives live.

I could not help but notice the cycle of repetitions and similarities between my life and my mother in her childhood to teenage years. How my grandfather was physically distant from his

family due to diaspora, and eventually, my father would be as well. His nostalgic need to reconnect with his ancestral past and go back to where his family is. And the tension to reside near them as they give them a sense of comfort and belonging. I can only assume that the social isolation of COVID-19 has increased the sense of wanting to leave the city life behind and return to one's roots. I wanted to discuss my mother's experience in high school in Egypt after her second return from Saudi Arabia in the 1980s.

R: What was your high school experience like?

M: It was not a pleasant experience for me because after I came back the second time from Saudi Arabia to Egypt. It was a public school in an affluent district during the first and second years so people would wear things, and I would wear something different and ugly. They had their hair done in salons, and they had these tailored socks, and I had something different. So, I was a kid compared to young ladies. I wore things that made me look older. I always had my hair in braids. So, you know Raghad, I was not too fond of this school, girls would tease me because of what I wore, and I wore conservative dark clothes as I did in Saudi Arabia, and they made fun of me for it.

R: Why did not you wear colourful clothes?

M: I could not. My mother...by the way, it was not her fault, my mother had just come back from Saudi Arabia, and it was two different countries, so she forgot how Egyptian people dressed and made me wear things the same things in Saudi Arabia. Of course, I did not wear an Abaya in Egypt as I did in Saudi Arabia. And I did not protest. She also had three children, and she cooked and cleaned by herself. She carried the whole house alone. My father was in Saudi Arabia at the time. So, there was no space for conversations. So, I faced bullying and kept silent about it and of course, this impeded my success in school. In the third year, my dad noticed that, so he came back from Saudi Arabia and took me out and changed my school. So that healed me and made me like the new school.

R: This is when you already transferred to the new school?

M: Yes.

R: Yeah, that is interesting.

M: Of course, this has allowed me to build resilience and not be naive. I am not broken down quickly.

Hirsch (1999) talks of “an act of adoption and an act of faith determined by an idea, an image of family,” which is represented through the “familial look” exchanged in images (p.83); For example, the "familial look" in my mother's case would be one of misplaced anger. The family is given the imaginative right to critique to maintain a familial ideology of what constitutes an excellent nuclear family. From my project, I am reminded of the present history before I existed. As I spoke to my mother and grandfather about familial ties and the role of imagery in maintaining and documenting this familial connection, I realized that my mother did not know much about her own parent’s history. Another aspect I discovered is that when she had started to form her own family, only then she was able to decide whom to cut ties with and whom to keep. This is connected to the question of what our ancestral lineage looked like or who was her great grandfather because the familial ties that were maintained while strongly formed were superficial, so it remains a mystery which my second great grandfather was. When I asked my mother why she did not know much about her parents’ lives, her response revealed the forms of boundaries present between her generation and theirs. It was simply too taboo to talk about certain things with family members. An example of this is familial names and their stories which I will discuss later in this chapter.

The following section will discuss the histories of family names about social class and mobility. And the denial of speaking of the past- specifically the past that is not documented. Everything I have included in this project focuses on visual representation and narrative analysis, yet I will speak of the roles of names in the next. I will reveal how nicknames have come to be and their relationship to classism, identity, and prestige.

6.2 (Be)longing

In constructing this collection of “family” photographs with lived experiences and narratives of exclusion, fitting in, migration, friendships, and memories, I wanted to bring together the notion of longing for a place to call home. Strassler (2011), in chapter one of her book, *Refracted Visions*, speaks of how photographers were able to consciously situate themselves and their identity/nationality in a global competition. Through this global virtual involvement, they could sustain their transnational affiliations (p.37). In a way, their involvement as Chinese Indonesian focused on Indonesia as the country of participation. Thus, representation was not juxtaposed with their national identity or transnational sense of belonging. This is significant to my project because, similarly, my mother and father, having migrated from Egypt to other countries, have permanently established ties back “home.” These ties I speak of belong to their display of Egyptian ornaments in our family house in Canada. They are shown in the oriental rugs, Nefertiti busts, and hieroglyphic Egyptian papyrus paper posters. Yet, with this display of “Egyptian” heritage, the items displayed around our house connect us back to Egypt in many ways. The first way it connects us is that it represents the workers in Egypt who produce knock-off Pharaoh statues to appeal to the international tourist market. As Egypt historically has relied heavily on tourism, the object itself has a possessed memory- a haunting of some sort that is forever attached to it. The second way, an obvious one, is that it displays an Egyptian affiliation influenced by both “tradition and authenticity,” as Strassler discusses in her book. I use the nuanced term “haunting” when it comes to affective responses to (be)longing due to the unparalleled sense of identifying with a distant ethnic past that at times might not connect the individual affectively anywhere on the map. Seemingly “homeless,” as Edward Said would describe himself in *Out of Place*. Also, having a homeless identity is ambivalent, but at times, it feels as though you never actually belong.

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It could be described as “roaming around” as a metaphorical ghost haunting different phantasmic spaces. This haunting can be applied to generations of migrant families who never actually lived in their country of “origin.” They can recognize their background identity but cannot always form a split identity of being both- of course; this can occur. But the haunting aspect talks about a roaming identity. One that cannot be categorized. And that is the one I fit in and with which my mother, at times, identifies. For my mother, she identifies with having both a split and a roaming identity in Egypt because she feels that she belongs more to the Gulf. Her childhood was spent in Saudi Arabia, and Egypt is a distant identity to her. Canada for my mother was the form of care for us (her children), as she repeated, “I wanted to migrate to Canada to offer you a better life and education.”

As I contrast my family album pictures with the images that Strassler displays in *Refracted Visions*, I cannot help but perceive the similarities and discontinuities between past Egypt and present Egypt. It has also allowed for a re-reading of images of my passed grandmother as a possible space for reimagining. I started placing all the photographs I had of her in a linear timeline in terms of dates. I started to get a sense of what she did and what she wore; it was as if through these images, I was able to watch my grandmother's participation in trends and the commodification of culture- such as her trip to Luxor.

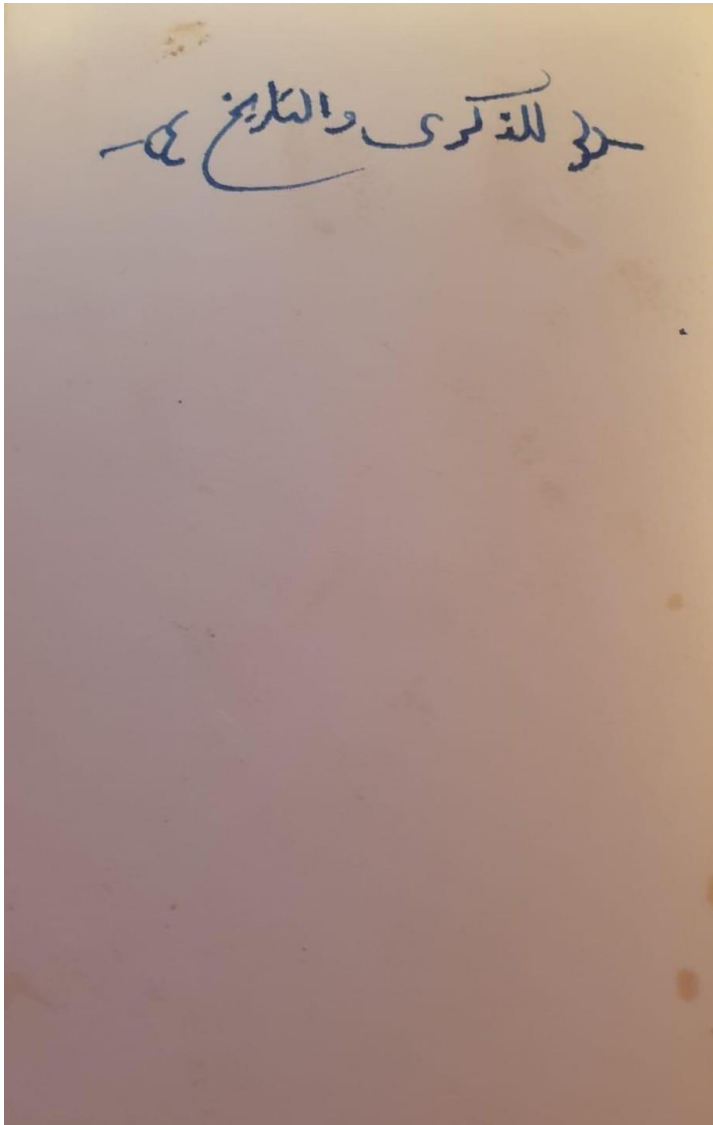
I observed her fashion sense, the aesthetics, and the pose. They were all now being situated in a timeless "present-as-past." That is looking at the past through visual imagery while being situated in the present and thinking about how the past relates to the present. A term that I will borrow and build on from Strassler. What I mean by this is that my grandmother participated in what was a modern commodification of culture. It was difficult yet elaborate to analyze my grandmother's images against one another as I reorganized them and placed them in a new and modern photo album. The challenging and elaborate aspect is the process of reading the images. At times, I would exhibit a form of detachment to observing them versus when I would "look" or "gaze" at them through a familial look that is representative of the tie that connects me to her. That tie is not only a symbol of a family tie but also one of the cultural and religious bonds- a *sela*.

Marianne Hirsch (1999) speaks of making, reading, and writing of and about pictures as forms of feminist resistance. She states, "When we intervene in the ideological scripts determining our own lives, I would like to maintain, we also intervene politically." (p.215). I can speak of how this project came to be a defining form of recognition of lives but also a form of agency that I hope to counteract the forms of trauma that came to be in ways much more significant than family secrets or migration. It is also an investigation of how post-memory becomes an imaginary investment for children of migrant and displaced communities—specifically, ones who have traditionally been subject to marginalization.



My grandmother next to a statue of the goddess Sekhmet. Circa 1952

In this image, the punctum for me is how my grandmother, Anna, stands with a soft smile in her school uniform next to the goddess Sekhmet, befriending her and resting her arm on her lap casually. My grandmother is wearing her uniform, reflecting the period in which this picture had taken of her. My grandmother, according to my mother and my grandfather, attended a teaching institution that would have replaced post-secondary education and acted as a diploma. This teaching institution is a secondary education but specializes in teaching as it prepares young girls to become teachers as young adults.



The back of the above image, written is the following “for the zekra (memory) and history”

Now to speak of what exactly attracts me to this picture is more of so the connection between a past and present in the image itself as it appears to be frozen in time by itself only to be brought into the present again. Sekhmet as a goddess, is known to have contradictions in her power. Both act as a healer and a warrior- capable of killing the entire humanity. Yet, she is limited by her human- ness traits. In the mythical story of Sekhmet, she becomes a tool of vengeance by the Sun God, Ra, as he orders her to punish those who do not wish to follow him. As she goes on her mission to punish them, she becomes even more truculent and kills almost all of humanity. The only way to limit her aggression was for the Sun God, Ra, to dye beer with hematite to represent blood.

Mistaking it for blood, she drinks it and gets drunk. As a result, she could no longer use her powers to kill the rest of humanity. Shortly, in ancient Egyptian life, rituals that commemorate her being are celebrated that act as a form of remembrance of both life and death- disease and health. This story is a myth, yet it contains several parables that are both ironic and familiar to the contradictions we face daily when looking at the past and present.

However, the parable in my grandmother's photograph is the mirroring of Sekhmet's unbreakable will to do what she wants- no matter the extent. Her love was immense- yet so was her punishment when we (her grandchildren) did something we should not have done. She was there for her sisters in illness and death. The memories I have of her are her focus on familial ties and the importance of family- that was something that she wanted us- that is, her surviving family members to remember and honour despite being apart physically.

My grandmother was the first and only daughter among her eleven other siblings to be educated- she had ten sisters and one brother. She had the will to study at a time when women in Damanhur and among her community did not "need" to educate themselves. But, from conversations with my mother and grandfather, it was something that she wanted to do for herself- it would also grant her the opportunity to travel as she would gain this opportunity through school and other work-related trips—something she has always wanted to do. The only effect of belonging I have felt like

an Egyptian Canadian born in Saudi Arabia is in my grandmother's arms. Despite feeling at times smothered by her protective and possessive nature. It was the only sense of natural belonging that I have felt. I can come to terms with my grandmother's death through this project. This thesis also aims to recreate a synthetic affect of belonging among family members separated due to diaspora yet connected through familial ties that are constantly being renewed and rewritten- similar to the process of reading images and analyzing narratives. It is subjective yet collective in that belonging for people in the diaspora is constantly being remade and rewritten like an image being copied or captured and shared in today's modern age.

6.3 Names and Nicknames

The following conversation follows the conversation I shared earlier, under section 6.1. After initially telling my father about the evasion of specific topics, my father had processed what I had told him before, differing from something he had noticed in his lived experience in Egypt both in childhood and young adulthood.

R: Yeah, I do not want to push him.

B: Older people are like that sometimes.

R: I also fear for my grandfather's mental health

B: Yea, you can see the effects of isolation in older folks. For Egyptian people, when you get older, you start to suffer.

R: Even Gedo, when I talked to him about pics, it is not that he has a weak memory, but there is a different dynamic when I talk to him about the pictures versus when he speaks to his great-nephew. For example, I showed him a picture of himself with friends, and he said no, that is not me; that is my friends. And then it was only when looking at the *mozekera* written behind was he able to say yes, yes, that is me. I do not think he has forgotten, but instead, he wants to forget. Maybe the past passed too quickly, and there is a form of silence there.

B: Ok, you should talk about this because it is a finding or a discovery.

R: Yea, especially I noticed with narratives, there are certain words mentioned, for example, when he refers to Anna, he says look at your grandmother, not my wife. It is a comment related to me more than him, but to me, it also signifies self-distancing from her death.

B: Look, Gedo and Besa, after the age of 50, only started calling one another by *hajj* and *hajja*. Maybe 55, like your mother's age.

R: I see but is it not that because they performed *hajj*?

B: No, so what? You performed *hajj*. It is unrelated, and it might have a tie, but I do not understand it.

R: I feel like they call older people *hajj* or *hajja* in traditional areas for respect.

B: Yes, this is a formal label. You can ask them what the reason behind this is. You can also take this information from me as if you would get the same information from him. He always called her Besa or Anna, never her name, and she would call him a different name Abu Singher; I do not know what this means. Ok? And after that, maybe when I was engaged to your mother, they started calling one another *hajj* and *hajja*. Married couples should not start calling each other like that.

R: Interesting

B: Imagine you are married to someone and then after a while, you call each other Mr. and Mrs. And so on. It does not work.

R: What I find interesting is how Gedo shifts how he refers to my grandmother, at first as Besa, then your grandmother and Anna.

B: I think your grandmother is ordinary, and he is connecting you to her. R: Yea, maybe... My father is not fond of the nicknames reproduced through the tradition, which is separate from the performance of the *hajj*, which is the pilgrimage that Muslims are obliged to perform, if they could, in their lifetime. It was a topic that he believed I should look deeper into, and while I agreed with him that it was an exciting revelation. I found myself looking at nicknames and names from a different point of perspective—for example, my grandmother's legal name, Raisa. When I was a child in Egypt, I had started to wonder about her real name, as back then, all I heard was either Besa or Anna

or *hajja*. I remember asking her what her real name was, and similar to my father's experience when inquiring about his family name, I was dismissed. However, the way I was dismissed for it was maybe more lenient than my father's experience.

Nonetheless, it was something you did not talk about or discuss throughout this project and the process of looking into relevant literature and reading about the history of classism in Egypt. I am, perhaps, proposing that names, my family names seem to have been altered and transformed to hide the past from revealing itself in the present.

I asked my parents recently why the name of my maternal grandmother and my great-grandmother were never spoken of. My grandmother thought of her name as 'old' and thought her mother's name as "*baladi*." The word *baladi* is challenging to translate, but it represents a person's connection to back home or a locality. There seems to be a pattern of moving away, almost abandoning one's "home" not in comfort but rather in class. The word *baladi* is often used to label individuals or objects in Egypt as a lower social class. This aspect is also connected to the account of social mobility as an intergenerational form of trauma reproduced from colonialism. It is also a form of care created because of moving from the lifeworld of the *fellahin* towards one that can liberate issues of classism from individuals.

I moved on from my conversation with my father to his relationship with his parents.

R: How was our relationship with your parents?

B: It was good

R: I mean, did you know personal information about your parents?

B: Yea

R: Ok, where was your dad from?

B: I do not know.

R: You just said that you knew personal information.

B: I do not know, *kan zaman*. It was taboo to ask for this kind of information.

R: Haha, okay.

B: For example, one time I was curious about my name... so I asked him after the name Ahmad what is the next name? he told me, be quiet, do not ask.

R: Haha.

B: I kept quiet and thought he probably does not know either.

R: Yea, he might have got embarrassed. So, you do not know except your great-grandfather's name.

-Brief Silence-

B: Yes.

R: But they were from Egypt or another place.

B: Yea, they were from Damanhur; no one migrated out of the Damanhur. R: No one came from other places, like Turkey?

B: Turkey, what? No one even came from Tanta. In Damanhur, everyone married one another.

R: How did your father marry your mother?

B: I do not know; I only know that my dad gave her the *mahr* (In Islam, *mahr* is the obligation) and then took it later to buy wood and make our house's furniture.

R: Really?

B: Yea

R: And she was ok with that?

B: Yea, of course, it was expected, and I knew about this story through conversation. But my dad created one-of-a-kind furniture; it was the best kind of wood.

-Brief Silence-

R: So that is all you know?

B: Yeah, but one thing about my dad is that he knew how to read and write, and his handwriting was nice. He and Gedo would spend Friday evenings reading articles together, maybe Mohammad Hussein's work; I do not remember exactly; it was the "Al-Ahram" journal. It was a long article, like 10,000 words. He was brilliant, but what was his educational background? I do not know. And he was an entrepreneur, and when we were 24 years old, he opened up his shop, and his uncle used to work for him. My dad's uncle's name was Hamada, and he was older than my dad on my mother's side. He never got married; he was an eclectic person. I think he was an atheist. He never really prayed. He never married for no reason. And he would work by the day, and he could have opened his shop, but he did not do that. He would work a week and take the second week off if he had the money. *Kan zaman* (in the old days) was this way in Egypt. This was just how it was.

R: Yea, but I find that this can still exist in present-day Egypt.

B: But they were needed, *zaman*. This means that if he wanted to go to work, he could go to work. But nowadays, if he leaves work, he might not find it when he returns.

R: Yeah.

From my conversation with my father, I learned more about the family dynamic and the past. My paternal grandfather, Ibrahim, whom I have never met, realized that, in a way, my dad was not interested in creating narratives about love or familial ties. Instead, he talks about what he witnessed separated from affective subjectivity. I approached the topic of the name indirectly with my grandfather, and I started to talk about what concerned him the most in his younger years about his family. My mother had interjected midway through our conversation to add to the topic.

R: What was the thing that gave you stress in terms of the family?

G: Ah, when the *hajja* fell ill, she had to undergo surgery on her thyroid glands and electrical therapy and radiation therapy. It was 5- or 6-years typical day; we would travel to Alexandria and Cairo, which gave me much stress. Her health.

R: In terms of your children?

G: No nothing, they were, *alhamdulillah* (thank God),

independent.

M: When we were children, did you worry about us?

G: No, you were all good. The children were well behaved and looked out for themselves. They were on *el-tareeq al-mostakem* (the right path). This made me feel good that they were on *el-tareeq al-mostakem*.

I have decided throughout my project not to conceptualize Islam under one chapter but rather to keep it in the ways it emerges in our conversations, naturally present and not separate. Hence, I have left Islamic terms in the conversations to elicit the essence of connecting God and bringing God into the conversations. Gedo's use of Islamic terms also elicits his pious perspective on the past and his desire to maintain a closeness to God. Even in his reference to his children's path, he connects them to *el-tareeq al-mostakem*, invoking a sense of the proper passage as he reflects on the past in the present moment. When he refers to Anna, my grandmother and his wife, he uses the name *hajja*, and when I asked him why he uses that term, he chuckled and non-verbally expressed it in a way that this is how it is. I shrug with a soft smile that speaks to maybe my naive question and curiosity while also reflecting the futility of the question itself. The *tariq* or path is also an image of mobility, mobility of right movement that can lead to opportunities that assist the individual. Here, the path becomes a form of care for individuals and families in the diaspora. My mother continued further to ask Gedo questions on the topic of nicknames.

M: Did you have any nicknames for your wife or children?

G: No, I did not have any nicknames, but for the *hajja*, may she rest in peace; we called her Besa. After this conversation, my mother changed the topic to what appeared to be a new memory that she remembered and wanted to discuss, which connects to familial connection and Gedo as a father.

M: Look, Raghad! That is true; mashallah never worried about us, maybe unlike mama. No, he trusted us and our choices and, in his discipline, he always listened to us and respected us. He never said a bad word to us, and when I reflect, he was a fantastic father. I wish that my mother was

like him as well. It would have mattered a lot. But baba was very caring, and he was different from the fathers in his generation. I remember we often went out for walks and went to beaches. When I was sad, he would give me love and support; when I was sick, Raghad! He told me to go to bed and would make cinnamon tea, and he was very caring. His words were minimal, but his actions with us were full of support when I needed him, Raghad! I would go to him directly. Maybe unlike my siblings, my siblings went to my mother. But I went for him for guidance, and we would talk about it...Baba also always asked us what we would like to have for drinks and food when we were outside. Be aware that this was unlike any father in his generation. He asked me what I would like, and he always asked, and this was something no one did back then, so he was a very modern person and different than anyone else. Impressive, to be honest. Now you have reminded me of nice *zekreyat*.

The conversations I had with my mother, father, and grandfather all speak to different memories, occasions and what they saw to be of significance. For example, my mother's discussion of Gedo as a father seemed to be a distant memory, a *zakra*, that she wanted to remember but had forgotten until I had triggered it with my inquisition. Gedo's interest in showing me pictures of his life that he hides was a surprise to me- only revealed to me once I was recognized as an adult. He hides these images because of their utmost significance- only for his eye. The topic of familial connection and ties, *selat el-rahim*, that both Gedo and my mother discuss. In contrast to my father's recall of the past and affect towards nicknames and the past itself.

Conclusion

The initial trajectory of this project was to look into my family's photo archives across the diaspora. I introduced the participants, who are also family members, through visual representation. I wanted to investigate the forms of care and trauma that emerge in my own families' lived experiences and silences in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Gedo, my maternal grandfather, is the center of this thesis because he has lived through much Egyptian history and has the most knowledge of Egypt. My mother offers an exciting perspective on Egypt, which is different from Gedo, and she discusses

Saudi Arabia as her childhood home more than Egypt. At times, my parents did not know much of the information I sought to know. They have offered deep insight into how photography acts as a documentary tool. But the ways photographs are hidden, fragmented, and remembered. This thesis is essentially a narrative regarding my family's affective responses to old photographs while discovering my family's history. I am also narrating this history through and across an old photo archive.

Without these photographs, this project would not have been as insightful as it is now. As Barthes (1980) describes, "What the photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially." (p.4). When I would get lost in the several long pages of transcriptions, I would use the photograph as a point of reference. It took me back to the "occasion," this occasion to which the picture referred, whether it was my mother, my father or my grandmother. It always pointed to their corporality. Through these conversations and an investigation into what these pictures mean or represent, I was able to reveal the role of the past, the practices, the secrets, the politics, and the familial ties that I write of in this project.

It is not the photograph that we see, as "a photograph is always invisible" (Barthes, 1980, p.6). The photograph is always of the past; I believe it is essential to situate the photograph in context with its past and reflect the present moment. I tried to connect this through the messianic power these pictures exert on our present. The claim I speak of and the lost sense of hope often resemble Gedo's attitude towards the past and somewhat in the present, which leads to the future.

Both hope and the "claim" of the past in our present are not linear. Instead, it is like a Turing machine operating on an infinite memory tape that embarks on coding, transforming, and manipulating strings of ones and zeros in the hope of finding the 'answer' to our problem. It is much more complicated to state the obvious that we are not computers or algorithms; we are humans with personal affects and contradictions that are seemingly always there. That is perhaps the answer to my main research question. What forms of trauma and care were reproduced due to diaspora? And what

role do photographs play in all of this? Being in the diaspora is a better alternative to living in Egypt with my family. Yet, it is bittersweet because it puts familial ties into tension or makes it harder to maintain *selat el-rahim*. It also gives a different form of tension; the family ties for individuals not in the diaspora might also be fraught as *selat el-rahim* is not necessarily linear for people still in Egypt or individuals who do not migrate.

The form of care that this project has developed for my family is a space to have conversations that otherwise might have never occurred. It revealed hidden or repressed information to ‘us’ (my family and me). The photographs are now viewed from a different perspective, while some remain lost or hidden- neither hung nor placed in photo albums. They still have acted as a tool to reimagine what could have been and what has been.

However, there remains some mystery to our family ‘tree’ or our family names. Nothing is known about my great-grandparents other than their names and job position. I shared in this project two of the surviving pictures of my great maternal grandfather, Mohammad, who was a train operator during the Anglo-Egyptian era. My father always speaks of stories he heard of him, working on a train with British superiors, how they liked him and thought of him as an intelligent man. The same goes for my paternal grandfather, Ibrahim, whom I have never met, only heard stories of him. Furniture that remains in Egypt is not abandoned but preserved to the extent that it is almost ornamental. His creations have survived him, and for that, I appreciate him. This process of hearing stories and imagining a life that I have not witnessed is a form of post-memory. In the case of my passed grandfathers, it was like a fantasy. Imagine how my paternal grandfather, Gedo Ibrahim, would work on creating wood furniture, imagining how he would discuss the “El-Ahram” journal with my maternal grandfather. The latter contributed so much to this project.

I want to conclude by talking about how narrating my family history has helped me better understand my affective response to the photographs I had in my possession. This project helped with the post-memory I had invested myself in during my childhood. The feeling of alienation and fragmentations I had felt at the start of this project- two years ago is as vibrant as it once was. One

could say this project gave me closure, and I also think it did the same for some of my family members. It enabled the emergence of a sense of agency and force that I could not have imagined before and can only describe as fate, circumstance- being there in the right moment of time and space. I wanted to gain access to social belonging, and it was my affects on the pandemic that led me to look at family images in a different light. Haunted by my old family photograph's "*punctum*" and "claim" on me, I am forever grateful for the *zekeryat* (memories) that I have embarked on in this project. I also want to acknowledge the privilege of inheriting these photo archives and albums and I realize that no everyone has this privilege and for that I am forever grateful.

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